

BLUE RIDGE LIVING

FILM PREMIERE

A Great American Tapestry

Latest project from Center for Cultural Preservation explores traditional mountain music

By Seán Patrick Smith
Times-News Correspondent

The fruits of a six-year project are almost ready to be enjoyed, as the latest documentary from the Center for Cultural Preservation is finalized ahead of its world premiere.

“A Great American Tapestry: The Many Strands of Mountain Music” is the latest film from the inquisitive mind and passionate heart of filmmaker David Weintraub, executive director of the Center for Cultural Preservation. This new documentary takes an exhaustive look at the multicultural influences of the music of the Southern

Want to go?

What: Premiere of “A Great American Tapestry: The Many Strands of Mountain Music”
When: 7 p.m. Thursday
Where: Blue Ridge Community College, Bo Thomas Auditorium
How much: \$10
Information and tickets: saveculture.org

Appalachian mountains.

“(This music) has become the music America comes home to because it reflects the American tapestry, including music from the British Isles, Germany, France, African-American traditions and Cherokee culture,” said Weintraub. “Our new film tells this story through the musicians, historians and elders who have spent their lives breathing



Director David Weintraub interviewing Jerry Wolfe, tribal elder of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, for the documentary “A Great American Tapestry: The Many Strands of Mountain Music,” to premiere Thursday at Blue Ridge Community College. [PHOTO PROVIDED.]

new life into old songs.”

“A Great American Tapestry” will be presented at 7 p.m. Thursday at Bo Thomas Auditorium at Blue Ridge Community College.

Tickets are \$10 each and available at saveculture.org. In case you miss the Hendersonville premiere,

See TAPESTRY, E4

E4 Sunday, June 18, 2017 | Times-News

TAPESTRY

Continued from E1

specials screenings with live music are planned for June 29 at Asheville’s Fine Arts Theatre and June 30 at White Horse Black Mountain in Black Mountain.

Live musical performances will kick off

the evening and will include renowned ballad singer Sheila Kay Adams, fiddling phenom Rhiannon Ramsey with her group Rhiannon & the Relics, and the up-and-coming traditional Gothic roots performer Amythyst Kiah—all are featured in the film.

Other musicians featured in the film include ballad singers

Bobby McMillon and Joe Penland, among many others. Ballad singer Donna Ray Norton, who hails from Sodom Laurel (also known as Revere) in Madison County, is also among the vocalists performing in the film.

“Appalachian music is my heritage; it’s like home to me,” said Norton. “It represents all of my ancestors and what

the family is all about.” Although she grew up surrounded by mountain music, it took a senior year project for Norton to be “really amazed by my family’s gift ... And when I realized this is a dying art form, if I didn’t sing, it would fade away. I want this to continue.”

Featured musicologists and musicians include David Hold and Doug Orr. The voices and music of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, including founders Rhiannon Giddens, Dom Flemons and Justin Robinson, help reveal the nearly lost black string musical tradition that predates blues and jazz.

A key player in the film is Phil Jamison, a Warren Wilson College professor who teaches traditional Appalachian music and dance. Jamison lends academic gravitas to the narrative, especially with the African-American influence on mountain music. “Appalachian music was not just transplanted from Northern Europe and the British Isles,” said Jamison. “It evolved over hundreds of years. At the core of it is dance music, primarily featuring the fiddle and banjo. It is a blending of European and African traditions.”

Weintraub’s passion for mountain music goes back to his own childhood. “My mom was active in the Folk Revival movement in the 1960s,” he said. “She played folk music and played these old ballads. Yet, years later after moving to western North Carolina, I heard these same songs here in the hills of Madison County and elsewhere.”

The quality and texture of the music, combined with its persistence in mountain cultural traditions,



Sheila Kay Adams will perform live along with other musicians featured in “A Great American Tapestry: The Many Strands of Mountain Music,” the latest documentary from the Center for Cultural Preservation, to premiere Thursday at Blue Ridge Community College. [PHOTO PROVIDED.]

held such power for Weintraub that he felt compelled to explore its roots.

“As I started the film, I followed the narrative I had always heard: the music of the Appalachians came with Scots-Irish immigrants from the British Isles who settled in western North Carolina,” said Weintraub. “What I discovered, and what makes this film different, is that hidden in plain sight is all the other elements that come together to make mountain music.”

What Weintraub uncovered along the way to tell this fascinating story encompasses such elements as the banjo (brought to America by enslaved Africans), 19th century minstrel shows and wagon medicine shows, traditional ballad singing paired with harmonies, and even Cherokee Indian dance influences on English country dancing.

“When you look in-depth at the history of this music, you realize there is a place for everybody in it; it’s not just one culture,” Weintraub said. “This

music reflects the culture it comes from and is derived from the melting pot of the mountains of western North Carolina.”

Weintraub sees “cultural context” as the key theme of his latest film. “The better we understand the history of place and culture, the better we understand where we have gone off the path,” he said. “If you know your history, you know where you are. Music in culture and history is our GPS. It is permanent in our minds and has the potential of bringing us home.”

“Themes of cultural context are at the heart of the work of the Center for Cultural Preservation,” added Weintraub. “We are always looking at and trying to find our roots. We want links to the past, and when we understand the vibrancy and variety of these links, it becomes a powerful experience. We understand that we are all together, and are all part of this variegated tapestry.”

To learn more and purchase tickets visit saveculture.org.

Enjoy performances as
captivating
as the view.

BREVARD MUSIC CENTER
SUMMER INSTITUTE & FESTIVAL

Summer Music Festival
June-August 2016

DON'T MISS OPENING WEEKEND!

FRIDAY JUNE 23, 6:00PM	OPENING NIGHT: BEETHOVEN 5
SATURDAY JUNE 24, 7:30PM	LEE ANN WOMACK with special guest Sarah Siskind & Sunliner featuring Jeff Sipe
SUNDAY JUNE 25, 3:00PM	PETRUSHKA conducted by Keith Lockhart
TUESDAY JUNE 27, 7:30PM	RICKY SKAGGS WITH ORCHESTRA*

Visit our website for a list of all 80 performances.
* Produced in collaboration with Mountain Song Productions.

Keith Lockhart
Artistic Director

brevardmusic.org | (828) 862-2105 | Tickets start at \$15