



JOHN CURRY/METROLAND

Richmond Ramblers Bluegrass Band performs

Members of the Richmond Ramblers Bluegrass Band who are performing at the music evening at the Gaia Java Coffee Company shop in Stittsville last Friday are, from left, Dale Cole on Banjo, John Estabrooks (behind) on mandolin, Kevin Richard on vocals and guitar, Steve Nauss (behind) on mouth organ, Mike Asselin on guitar and Kristin Grzegorek on bass guitar. The group even had some audience members up dancing in the aisle during the performance.

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Music evening becomes dance night as well

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Stittsville News

By [John Curry](#)

Last Friday evening, the Gaia Java Coffee Company shop not only was a music hall with its regular music evening but also became a dance hall as well as the evening ended with eight audience members dancing in the aisle as others in the audience rhythmic clapping along, all to the music of "Will the circle Be Unbroken," a tune done by many artists over the years including Johnny Cash.

And this performance-ending free-for-all dance which was punctuated with a giant audience cheer as the music concluded an evening of musical offerings by the Richmond-based Richmond Ramblers Bluegrass Band.

What a performance it was by the six-member group which features a banjo, a mandolin (sometimes two mandolins), a mouth organ, three guitars and vocals as they presented not only some well-known songs but also several originals such as "Going, Going Gone," "Risk" and "February Morning," all written by lead singer Kevin Richard.

Indeed, the final song and dance was not the only time that the music moved some to dance. A pair of dancers had also showed their moves in the aisle during an earlier song in the performance.

“Amie,” a popular college campus song in the 1970’s, was one of the songs done early in the performance by the Richmond Ramblers. This ode to an on-again, off-again relationship first appeared on the second album (1972) of the American country rock band Pure Prairie League and was issued as the group’s debut single in late 1974.

“Cousin May, “ a 1973 hit by the Canadian rock band Fludd, brought into the mix both banjo and mouth organ accompaniment while the banjo was also used on the Richmond Ramblers’ version of “Where Corn Don’t Grow,” a 1997 Top Ten country hit by Travis Tritt which had first been recorded by Waylon Jennings on a 1990 album.

The Richmond Ramblers followed up “Where Corn Don’t Grow” with the iconic song “(Down on the) Banks of the Ohio,” a song first recorded back in 1927 and over the years recorded by a wide range of singers including Pete Seeger, Johnny Cash, Arlo Guthrie and Olivia Newton-John, with Joan Baez’s 1959 recording perhaps the most renowned.

And a real show stopper in any performance, just like it was for the Richmond Ramblers last Friday, is John Denver’s signature song “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” which had the audience singing along and clapping in rhythm to the music. John Denver recorded this song on his 1971 breakout album and it became one of his most popular songs. Indeed, it is now the theme song for West Virginia University, no doubt because the song describes West Virginia as “almost heaven.”

After this John Denver song, the Richmond Ramblers launched into an oldie but goodie, namely “You Are My Sunshine,” first recorded in 1939 and since then covered by such artists as Gene Autry, Bing Crosby, Lawrence Welk, Nat King Cole, Johnny Cash and Andy Williams. It is now one of the state songs of Louisiana because it was recorded early on by Jimmie Davis, a former Louisiana state governor and country music singer.

Lots of applause followed the presentation of the instrumental tune “Duelling Banjos” which featured Dale Cole on the banjo and Mike Asselin on the guitar, reprising the scene from the famous 1972 movie “Deliverance” which saw the tune “Duelling Banjos” played by a city man on guitar along with a country boy playing a banjo.

The Richmond Ramblers led off the second half of their Friday music evening performance at the Gaia Java coffee shop with a rendition of “Foggy Mountain Breakdown,” a tune that has become a bluegrass standard. Written by American musician Earl Scruggs, it was first recorded back in 1949. Scruggs, of course, was the person who popularized a three-finger banjo picking style that is now known as the “Scruggs style” and that has become one of the defining characteristics of bluegrass music. Scruggs is well known for playing “The Ballad of Jed Clampett” theme on the Beverley Hillbillies TV show.

“Foggy Mountain Breakdown” is well known for being background music used in the 1967 movie “Bonnie & Clyde,” especially in the car chase scenes in the movie.

The Richmond Ramblers performed “Wagon Wheel,” another song which generated some rhythmic clapping in the audience. This song went platinum in 2013 for the American string band “Old Crow Medicine Show,” a group that has played a role in the current revival of banjo picking string bands playing Americana music.

The Richmond Ramblers Bluegrass Band began in 2009 when a poster at the local grocery store announced a search for “Bluegrass Pickers.” The group was formed, jamming in Dale Cole’s kitchen twice a week. The band has seen some change in membership over the years but it still plays regularly at local events, open mics and retirement homes, playing predominantly bluegrass music with a mix of classic country and, lately, some originals.

Members of the Richmond Ramblers Bluegrass Band who performed at the Gaia Java music evening last Friday were Kevin Richard, lead vocals and guitar; Mike Asselin, guitar; Kristin Grzegorek, bass guitar; Steve Nauss, mouth organ; John Estabrooks, mandolin; and Dale Cole, banjo and mandolin.

Gaia Java coffee shop owner Paul Jay, in announcing the band before its performance last Friday, declared that the Richmond Ramblers Bluegrass Band was the first part of the “Stittsville Bluegrass Festival” as the Backsliders bluegrass group was going to be performing on the very next Friday music evening this coming Friday, Sept. 25.

These Friday music evenings are held every Friday starting at 7 p.m. at the Gaia Java coffee shop at the Stittsville Shopping Centre (Shoppers Drug Mart plaza) on Stittsville Main Street in Stittsville. Admission is free and everyone is welcome although early arrival is recommended for the best seating.

Donations to help the performers with their expenses are welcome at these Friday music evenings.