



VOICES IN THE HALL: SAM BUSH (PART 2)

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER Welcome to Voices in the Hall, presented by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. I'm Peter Cooper. Today: Part 2 of my chat with the man often called the father of Newgrass music, Sam Bush.

When we last heard from Sam, he was telling us about getting his buddy, Emmylou Harris, to dance with the Father of Bluegrass music, Bill Monroe.

SAM BUSH Yeah and it was really. That too was a really great moment. A few wonderful moments. We did three nights in a row, and it was videotaped also so it was the first time I'd ever been involved where you, at the end of the night we changed out of the stage clothes, they took them to the cleaners and brought them back to us the next day for continuity, wear the same thing three days in a row. And so Emmy was really into buck dancing at the time. I mean she'd have taps on her boots as we walked through airports because that's the only way she could get her tap boots to the gig.

And so one of the things that I thought would be a unique thing is to ask Bill Monroe if he would come and dance with her because he was a professional dancer at one point I understand as a young man. Well he loved Emmylou. Heck yeah he came to dance with her! One of the nights Bill actually came off and grabbed his heart and took a glycerin pill.

But one of the great things that happened. So Bill Monroe's there. And this was back when the best recording truck in America was brought down, the Record Plant Mobile Truck. My friend Kooster McAllister owned it. And so you got the record plant truck out in the alley. And of course now that's back in the big reels of tape that you need to change a tape reel, and it takes a few minutes. So the word came to us on stage, "We need to change the tape reels. Can you and Bill Monroe play a duet?" Wow!

And he didn't have his mandolin with him so I handed him mine. And I played John Randall Stuart's mandolin, a little flat iron mandolin. And we did a duet of Bill playing his tune "Southern Flavor." And while I was on that stage, I mean just like a wave of chill came over me that I realized I was. I was living in something I would have dreamt about doing. I was living a dream at that moment.

PETER COOPER On the very state where the man created the music.

SAM BUSH I never dreamed that I would play mandolin duet with Bill on that stage. But maybe I would be his guitar player or his fiddle player in his band. But to play with Bill Monroe on the Ryman stage.

PETER COOPER How was your hair that night?



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SAM BUSH Long, long. So as we were getting dressed for the show, hairdressers are there. Rick A. [?] the hairdresser, and he's making my hair look better. And Bill Monroe leaned his head in the door and looked at Rick A. [?] and goes, "Now I've got some scissors if you need them."

So I came to know that people like Bill Monroe or Jethro Burns from Homer and Jethro or John Duffy with the Country Gentlemen, if they liked you, they're going to butt you around. They're not goanna come up put their arm around you and go, "Hey little buddy. How are you?" No. They're going to butt you around and make fun of you and stuff. So I came to appreciate if Bill would make fun of me sometimes.

"Heavy Traffic Ahead" – Bill Monroe (Essential/Sony/BMG)

PETER COOPER "Heavy Traffic Ahead," by Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, a band that included crucial innovators Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt. What a band. And what a song, which was born out of Monroe's pride in always getting to the gig on time.

Now Sam, like Lester and Earl, you were a band guy and a sideman. What gave you the gumption to go off and do your own thing and become Sam Bush, the solo guy?

SAM BUSH Well yeah. Because that's..

PETER COOPER Mr. entertainment.

SAM BUSH That's a different thing because I love the camaraderie of a band. I mean many times it's you know. If you just go out and play solo shows you can play instruments, you can do it. I said, "Well that holds no interest. I mean the joy of music is playing with other people. I can't think of anything to play if I'm not playing with other people!" So when the New Grass Boys ended, then of course Emmy for five years. And in playing with her, she was a good vocal coach too for me because early in band life she would say a few little things. But she was like, "You know you can soften up. You're singing so loud. If you soften up you can increase your range. I think you can increase your range and soften up." Not to mention she needed me to blend better and not sing as loud.

And I love seeing in harmony. I love singing baritone. That's my favorite thing to do is sing in baritone as a singer. And so anyway she influenced me about that. And I also realized that in the 18 years in New Grass Revival, of course we love to hit everybody as hard as we could all the time, smack. And that came from playing loud bars acoustically, playing at festivals that you don't really have a relief point right. Well in playing five years with the Nash Ramblers, of course Emmy sings these beautiful slower songs you know. So I learned from playing with her that it's that the audience needs a



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chance to breathe too in the show. So about show pacing and what she would go through and working with her voice and. So learned that from Emmylou.

And then after that, as it would happen, Béla and the Flecktones were a trio now.

PETER COOPER This is Béla Fleck, your former New Grass Revival band member.

SAM BUSH Yes. Reel me in. So yeah. Bela Fleck of course after the New Grass Revival had gone on to start the Flecktones and was doing well in the world of pop and jazz. And they had been a quartet for a number of years. Now they were down to a trio with Bela on banjo, Vic Wooten on bass, Roy Wooten future man on drums, electronic drums. And so now, as they have had a band a few years, now he is looking to give the audience a little something different. So he's looking to bring in a fourth wheel to places they've been. Asked if I was interested. Yeah, I wasn't do anything.

So to go from Emmylou Harris and the Nash Ramblers, an acoustic, some people call it bluegrass, I consider it just an acoustic country band and a vocal group at that, to an electric heavy improvisational band like the Flecktones. I hadn't I hadn't been jamming out improvisational-wise on my instruments in the five years. That's what was different.

And so. Boy. So I actually played I think in the year of '95 played 86 shows with the Flecktones. So it was a good amount of work. And through the thinking about how I now wanted to sing more and gotten my appetite whetted for improvising with the Flecktones, I was ready to do it. I was ready to try it. Realizing that you're old enough to make your own mistakes. And so it was, I guess what, 1996 I started making records under my name for the first time which shouldn't have seemed like a big deal but it is, the first time you do it or just getting out of the band. I love the comfort of a band, the camaraderie of the band. We win together we lose together.

PETER COOPER It also helped bring you a new fan base, or bring new kinds of music fans into your sphere.

SAM BUSH Oh absolutely. And I knew I couldn't just try to play New Grass Revival music songs or just to that audience that I'd been. It's an interesting thing that 30 years ago I didn't want to be referred to as a bluegrass musician because I felt like that was sort of a limiting word. And it can be. And it's interesting, Louise Scruggs and Lynn, my wife, once had a talk where Mrs. Scruggs said to Lynn "Sam and Earl are not bluegrass. That's a very limiting word." And she's right about that because I don't just play bluegrass. But now you know so many things have changed in the last 30 years. And I am really happy that bluegrass is a respectable word. And people know it takes a certain amount of musicianship to play that music. So in that way, now if you want to call me a bluegrass musician I say thanks.



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PETER COOPER You recorded a song called "Bowling Green." What was that about?

SAM BUSH Well it's actually, it's about my parents love of music, specifically my father's love of fiddle playing. It all got started when John Randall Stuart. Now, we called him Randy back in the Nash Ramblers but...

PETER COOPER He changed his name a few times.

SAM BUSH A few times. I was part of that problem, but...

PETER COOPER He was a young pup when he was in the Nash Ramblers. And singing high.

SAM BUSH He was 21 when we first started the band. And he and I became the best pals then.

PETER COOPER For folks who don't know him, he's become also a remarkable producer, and has produced some wonderful stuff on Dierks Bentley...

SAM BUSH Great songwriter.

PETER COOPER Great songwriter.

SAM BUSH He and Bill Anderson wrote "Whiskey Lullaby," one of the best songs I think I've ever heard. But yeah, it's about my parents love of music, and specifically my father's love of fiddle. And it got started when John Randall come over one day and he goes "I think I've got a first verse here written." And he sang the song, and it's about my parents. And well that teared me right up right on the spot. And I went, "Holy snakes!" And so we started writing it and talking about it. We realized we could also make it one of these things where you incorporate fiddle tunes in it as the instrumental turnarounds.

One of the tunes we used is "Soldiers Joy." And my dad's favorite tune in life was a fiddle tune in the key of C, "Tennessee Wagner." I mean, well he loved any tune in C. If it was C, he loved it. But loved the "Wagner." And so the lyrics say, "He loved to saw the Wagner, the one from Tennessee." And the reason we said that is because with the way the Texas fiddlers play the "Wagner," they put in an extra chord that Southerners don't do, and my dad said, "I don't want that 'Texas Wagner,' I want 'Tennessee Wagner.'" And we'd say, "He loved to saw the Wagner, the one from Tennessee. A little 'Soldier's Joy.' He called it 'Payday in the Army.'" So that would be my dad. He loved the tune "Soldier's Joy" too. And he played that on fiddle.

But whenever somebody'd say, "Oh, let's do Soldier's Joy," and my dad'd go "Payday in Army! That's the only Soldier's Joy, is payday." And so that. But that song kind of



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sounds like it's an old time tune that I'm missing Bowling Green or waxing poetic. That just, I don't know why but Randy and I realized that that's what the chorus needed to say. And there's even a part in the lyric where it talks about, "We'd often plow tobacco in the hottest part in June," and we did. And you know it was like the Walton's. We didn't have a little tractor that you have, a special little tractor for plowing tobacco. We couldn't afford that. So we had a horse. My job was to ride the horse. My dad's job was to push that plow in the ground all day.

And we'd come in so hot, and we'd play a couple of fiddle tunes. And then I remember him play little. How do we do it? First he'd eat. And of course the midday meal for farmers is dinner. It's called dinner, it's not lunch. Supper is dinner. But any rate, we'd come in for dinner. And he'd play a tune or two. And then I remember him laying down, of course we didn't, there is no air conditioning in our house, laying down in front of a fan for like, it'd be a hundred degrees outside, laying down in front of a fan for like a half an hour. And then he'd go out and work again until you know 8:00 p.m. So really. But yeah, he loved to saw "The Wagner."

But we'd come in there and we'd play a tune or two. And really it was kind of the way John Randall and I sat and discussed it. That's kind of what we wrote. Yeah, I ended up writing a tune about my parents love of music.

"Bowling Green" – Sam Bush (Storyman / Sugar Hill-Concord)

PETER COOPER "Bowling Green," about the Kentucky home that spurred many musical careers, including the one of today's guest on Voices in the Hall, Sam Bush.

Sam, you've done so much to expand bluegrass music, and you've become an elder statesman and a hero to folks like Sierra Hull, the young mandolin wizard who goes to puddles around you.

SAM BUSH Well I met Sierra when I think she was ten, nine or ten. And some kids you meet them, you have a feeling they're going to do well. And that's one of the things I'm most proud of Sierra about is that I don't think she'll ever stop learning. I've seen some youngsters take the applause too seriously too early and they don't continue to learn and improve. And I can see her improving her whole life.

PETER COOPER And speaking of learning and improving, I think you told me one time you had what I thought of as the most unique way of practicing, at least during the Summer times.

SAM BUSH Don't you do it too?

PETER COOPER I do now!



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SAM BUSH Yeah! Baseball! Well, I said. Now this is a sidebar story, but gosh 40 years ago, on the road with Vassar Clements. Where were we? We were somewhere. And Vassar's door, his hotel door, wasn't latched. And I could hear him playing. And I hear him play these real long notes, real long. And then all a sudden it would just be like real fast. And all of a sudden he would just go... just go down to. I walked in and he was watching a football game and he was playing a soundtrack to the game in terms of as they're huddling up and just walking around he's played slow stuff, and when the ball would be snapped and then he'd be watching the action he'd speed up his notes, he'd play all this stuff. And then when the play's over he'd go back to long notes again. So he was virtually playing the soundtrack.

Now I don't, I don't try to play a soundtrack for the baseball game. But it's just, I love to watch baseball and it's yeah, either a guitar or mandolin's usually in my hands. I mean if I'm by myself. I'm a very fortunate person in that my wife's a beautiful lady that is a great accountant and money manager that hates to shop and loves sports. So, boy! So if Lynn and I are watching it together I don't want to interfere with the announcer.

PETER COOPER So you just sit there sit there for nine innings and you're playing?

SAM BUSH Yeah, I mean it doesn't always go nine innings, but yeah. I mean it's just keeping my hands moving, because as I age that too needs to be done. You don't use them, they don't want to keep working.

PETER COOPER Sam Bush, thank you so much for being here on Voices in the Hall. It's great to have you in this museum, in a place that has Mr. Monroe's mandolin on display and so many other artifacts from folks that you knew and know and have played with and have contributed to their music. So it's always wonderful to have you in the building.

Oh boy, this is a surprise! Famed announcer, baseball broadcaster Harry Caray is...

SAM BUSH Holy cow! Look who's here! It's Peter Copper! Good lookin' songwriting newspaper man. You know I wish you'd put out that stinking cigar.

PETER COOPER Harry! Harry! It's just such a strange and wonderful thing to have you here. But I'm wondering if you could do a little goodbye for us and say thank you to the folks for listening to Voices in the Hall with Sam Bush.

SAM BUSH Hey! Welcome everybody! We want to thank you for listening to the Hall of Voices with the Bush guy. You know, one too many years ago I was as cokey as...what? Oh! we'll be back with the totals in just a moment. Right now here's Peter Scooper with more country and western news for you! Aye!



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“Take Me Out to the Ballgame” - Sam Bush (Howlin’ at the Moon/Sugar Hill)

PETER COOPER That was “Take Me Out to the Ballgame,” in my opinion, and I’m the host of the show so I get to state my opinion: “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” is the most American of all songs. We in this country have messed up a time or two, but we created the most perfect invention known to humankind when we came up with baseball. Now we Americans also did pretty well with country, jazz, hip-hop, the blues, and rock ‘n’ roll. We had zero to do with the pyramids or the wheel, but still.

Thanks for listening to Voices in the Hall, and thanks to my scheduled guest, the incredible Sam Bush, and to my surprise guest, from beyond the grave, Baseball Hall of Fame member Harry Caray, who once said, “If I have a day off during the baseball season, I’ll spend it at the ballpark.”

You can learn more about Sam Bush at our website VoicesInTheHall.org. And you can use the handle @VoicesInTheHall to find us and to follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. And if you don’t know about Harry Caray, you ought to google him.

Join us next time for Michael and Tonya Trotter, the War and Treaty. If you’re not familiar with their music, you ought to be. There’s a playlist on our website. Check it out.

Voices in the Hall is produced by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, in collaboration with Ben Manilla and Jennie Cataldo of BMP Audio. The show is recorded by Alan Stoker. I’m Peter Cooper. Thanks for listening. We invite you to visit the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee.