

Beginning bluegrass players gather for a monthly jam session at the store, while mandolinist George Thompson keeps an eye on his fingering.



SCOTT RATHBURN / For The Times

Bluegrass Haven

■ Blue Ridge Pickin' Parlor in Canoga Park offers fiddlers and guitarists from near and far a lot more than lessons and equipment.

By JAMES E. FOWLER TIMES STAFF WRITER

lessons.

very Tuesday about 5 p.m. for the last four years, Ann Cyran has made the long drive from her home in Torrance, up the San Diego Freeway to Canoga Park.

Cyran endures the nearly two-hour trek during rush-hour traffic to take her 11-year-old daughter Liz to the Blue Ridge Pickin' Parlor for bluegrass fiddle and guitar

"It seems kind of silly to keep going up there to someone who's not into that type of music," Ann Cyran said. "But, there are not a lot of places to take lessons in bluegrass fiddle around here."

Rick Barrett, 45, has been driving from Redondo Beach to the Canoga Park store twice a month for the last six years.

"I bought a banjo for \$10," Barrett said. "I tried to teach myself, but I couldn't. I started taking lessons, started going to festivals and camping out, and it's great. It's kind of addicting."

The Blue Ridge Pickin' Parlor is not the biggest or most prestigious music store in the San Fernando Valley. But the unassuming storefront on Saticoy Street is not without distinction. It is one of just a few Southern California music stores to specialize in bluegrass music, and as such, it has become an



Danielle Fish, 6, watches the jam session's leader, while her father, Daniel, strums.

unofficial center for the area's bluegrass music community.

Bluegrass music has a strong following in California as evidenced by the thousands of people who attend the dozen or so festivals held each year in the state. This pickin' fellowship resembles a large extended family that moves from festival to festival during the spring and summer—camping out and playing

music. Bluegrass festivals are unique in that most people bring their own instruments to jam with other players, and there is always as much playing going on in the audience as there is on stage.

Besides providing music lessons to almost 200 students weekly and selling instruments and musical accessories, the Blue Ridge Pickin' Parlor promotes festivals, workshops and concerts, holds jam sessions and is a general information clearinghouse for bluegrass fans.

The store was opened in 1976 by Ken Tennesen, a Los Angeles police officer and bluegrass guitarist. Tennesen needed music teachers who could teach the bluegrass style of playing. He called on Frank Javorsek, the mandolin player in a bluegrass band called Hot Off the Press.

Tennesen and then became a son-in-law. Javorsek met Tennesen's daughter, Tammy, at the store, and later married her. Tennesen, who has since retired from the Los Angeles Police Department, sold the store to the Javorseks in the early 1980s so that he could concentrate on the security business.

Frank Javorsek said that from the beginning, Tennesen envisioned the pickin' parlor as more than just a store. Tennesen would rent the room above the store's original location on Reseda Boulevard in Tarzana to stage concerts, including one featuring bluegrass pioneer Bill Monroe.

"We always had in mind to do more than just sell strings and give lessons," Javorsek said.

"Bluegrass is not given the opportunity to be heard in the major media—the exposure of bluegrass is very limited," Javorsek said. "Public radio, festivals and word of mouth are the ways the gospel of bluegrass is spread."

The pickin' parlor's clientele ranges from Please see LESSONS, 4

Where and When

Location: Blue Ridge Pickin' Parlor, 20246 Saticoy St., Canoga Park.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Monday-Thursday; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Friday-Saturday.

Price: \$14 for most 30-minute lessons.

Jam sessions: Twice a month during the winter, once a month during the summer; call for schedule.

Call: (818) 700-8288.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Joshua Borisoff, 9, right, listens as shop owner Frank Javorsek instructs a group. Players of varying ages take part in jam sessions.





SCOTT RATHBURN / For The Times

ESSONS

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eginning students and top-notch rofessionals to internationally nown musicians. For people onded by a love for bluegrass nusic, the store is a home away rom home.

Barrett, who owns a Studebaker estoration business in Los Alamios, likes the atmosphere of the

"It's not like going into Guitar enter." Barrett said. "It's all coustic. There's a coffeepot. I get here an hour and a half before my esson and jam with some of the ther students. It's a long drive, ut it's worth it."

Byron Berline, a renowned bluegrass fiddler who has recorded with the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, the Byrds and Emmy Lou Harris, among others, said he goes to the Blue Ridge Pickin' Parlor "quite a bit."

"There are very few places that deal directly with the bluegrass community," Berline said. "One thing about the Blue Ridge is that they teach and they also have a repair shop."

Herb Pedersen is a member of the Desert Rose Band, which has been named the Academy of Country Music's Touring Band of the Year for the last three years.

Pedersen is a veteran of the Los Angeles music scene who has recorded with Linda Ronstadt, Diana Ross, Kenny Rogers and Stephen Stills, among others. He said the pickin' parlor is "like the Ash Grove was in the 1960s. It's a mecca for all the acoustic artists of the time. It's not a showcase, but they do put on shows."

Fiddler Phil Salazar, leader of the Ventura-based band the Acousticats, said the Blue Ridge Pickin' Parlor is one of only a half a dozen or so music stores in Southern California that specialize in acoustic music and instruments. Salazar also detects a religious fervor surrounding the pickin' par-

"It's like a foundation for the bluegrass community," Salazar said. "Frank is like a guru for the bluegrass people in Los Angeles."

Javorsek said the bluegrass style of music is constantly redefining

"It's like old-time string music," he said. "But some of the best bluegrass now also has elements of blues and rock as well."

Bluegrass is easily recognized by its acoustic instrumentation; bluegrass is played on guitar, fivestring banjo, mandolin, fiddle and string bass. Sometimes a dobro, a guitar with an aluminum resonator cone and fretted with a metal slide,

Bluegrass was born at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville in the late 1940s. At a time when other country artists were incorporating electric instruments into their permandolinist Bill formances. Monroe formed an all-acoustic band that is considered the prototypal bluegrass band.

Besides Monroe, the band featured Earl Scruggs on five-string banjo and Lester Flatt on guitar. In honor of his Kentucky roots, Monroe called his band the Bluegrass Boys, hence the name bluegrass, Javorsek said.

"They just blew people away," Javorsek said. "Their music was described as country music in overdrive."

The Blue Ridge Pickin' Parlor holds jam sessions twice a month, and both beginners and professionals can sit in. It has promoted concerts and performance workshops featuring professional bluegrass musicians such as Byron Berline, Don Crary, Alan Mundy David Grissman and, since 1986, has sponsored the Follows Camp Family Bluegrass Festival in San Gabriel Canyon north of Azusa twice a year.

Javorsek also attends about a half a dozen other festivals in

California each year, bringing with him a virtual mini-store, with instruments, books, strings, picks and other accessories. In his effort to spread the word, he even hosts the "Bluegrass Express" program on KCSN-FM at 8 a.m. Saturdays.

Besides serving as a warm, family style meeting place, a clearinghouse for jobs and a source of general information, the store acts as a point of sale for books, cassettes and CDs produced by local and internationally known bluegrass artists.

"A lot of people ask me where they can get bluegrass records, and I tell them they have them there," Berline said.

The Witcher Brothers Band is a professional bluegrass band that performs throughout Southern California. Granada Hills resident Dennis Witcher, 45, and his son, Gabe, front the band. Fourteenyear-old Gabe has been a winner in the advanced fiddle category at the Topanga Banjo and Fiddle Contest the last three years. The Witcher Brothers' cassette album, "Family Ties," is on sale at the Blueridge, alongside work produced by Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, Lester Flatt, Byron Berline, the Acousticats and others.

"The Blue Ridge has been great for us; Frank is very supportive," said Dennis Witcher, an aerospace engineer by day. "He's a great referral and we get work through

Javorsek said he does not play professionally anymore since the store and the festivals take up a lot of his time. He said he and Tammy are not getting rich but they're making a living from the business.

He is sometimes tempted to try to make the music store less specialized, to try to appeal to a wider audience by bringing in electric instruments or by catering to the rock or mainstream country crowd. It's a temptation he has resisted.

"We've found our niche," he said.



10AM TO 6PM FOR VENDORS INFORMATION CALL (818) 891-0983

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