

GUEST EDITORIAL

International Bluegrass Music Association

By David Freeman

We just recently returned from a very successful Trade Show and Fan Fest put on by the IBMA, [in late September] and would like to comment on what we feel has become a very significant and worthwhile event.

Organizing an association of bluegrass musicians and fans is a rather mind-boggling task, due to the highly individualistic (if not stubborn) nature of many of the people involved, plus the fact that they are scattered all over the globe now—frankly, we were skeptical that it could ever be pulled off. But I would venture to say that everyone who attended the 3rd annual meeting of the IBMA group at Owensboro, Kentucky, in September left there feeling that we now have a cohesive, solid organization that will only get stronger in the next few years. The current board members of IBMA are a sensible, well-spoken group, and lots of good ideas were expressed on

how all of us can help preserve and promote the music in a realistic way that will preserve the integrity of this form of music. There is strength in numbers: specifically, by working together we will achieve more and better jobs for bluegrass musicians, better representation of the music on TV and radio, a trust fund for bluegrass performers (already implemented), [Editor's Note: Actually the fund is for all bluegrass professionals; not just musicians] and in short better and more intelligent treatment of the music in the media.

The setting for the meeting, on the Ohio river at Owensboro, Kentucky, is an attractive one, and due to the excellent support of the local powers-that-be, some impressive building work has started that will soon house a

museum and IBMA offices as well as a local convention center.

We mention all this because IBMA membership is open to all: fans as well as artists, DJs, promoters, etc. We have always felt that it would be great to have one annual event that just about everyone in bluegrass would attend—this year's turnout was just about that (there was an awesome display of well-known and new talent in the Fan Fest and the more intimate artist showcases), and we have a definite feeling that very few people in the business will feel they can afford to miss next year's event.

Those deeply involved in bluegrass can write for membership information to: IBMA, 326 St. Elizabeth St., Owensboro, KY 42301.

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AND BRAVOS TO ART MENIUS—IBMA

First off, congratulations are in order. The IBMA Convention seemed like a roaring success. Every aspect of it from the artist showcases to the trade exhibits to the workshops was first-rate. You're to be commended for the effort you have put into realizing this vision.

I came to IBMA to observe, to interview artists, to support IBMA, and to meet some of the people I'd done business with over the phone, but never seen in person. That last item is most important. If the IBMA served no other function than to help bring people together, solidifying personal and business relationships among artists, media, record companies, promoters and agents, it would still be worth it. Your IBMA Convention is critical to building the community.

I noticed there was some disagreement as to what audience bluegrass should be targeting, and the dusty old question "what is real bluegrass and what isn't" was raising its head. Some promoters said yuppie audiences and eclectic music were the wave of the future; others were steadfast in defending traditional styles. But arguing this is an unproductive waste of time, and I really don't think most IBMA members will get caught up in it.

The IBMA should be an organization for all points of view. There is no need for people

to agree on everything in order to have a productive business association.

I have seen, in other industries, the benefits that can be obtained by working together for the good of all. Approximately 500 exhibitors come together with buyers from thousands of music stores at the annual NAMM (National Association Of Music Merchants) trade show.

Some of these people come from bluegrass music stores, others represent traditional band instrument enterprises, still others are big music chain stores selling 1000's of electric guitars each year at blow-out prices. But they all benefit by having an organization that provides them with technical assistance and services ranging from group insurance, to accounting help, to sales seminars. And they benefit from having a trade show where buyers and sellers meet, make friends, make deals, and trade information.

Our publisher here at GPI once told me he had four goals for this company. He said he felt that as publishers we should try to:

- 1) Make A Contribution—We ought to give something of value to the world of music.
- 2) Be Fair—We should treat our suppliers, employers, and everyone we deal with fairly.

3) Be Sustainable—We should try to be profitable so that next year we'll still be around.

4) Have Fun—If it's no fun for everyone involved, then what's the point of it?

I think these goals fit the IBMA pretty well, too. The people involved in it want to make a contribution—if money was the only motivator in their lives, they'd do something else. IBMA members also want the business to be ethical and equitable—they want to make a profit and stay in business, and they know for sure that music is fun.

The IBMA's task is to "market" bluegrass—that's clear in the organization's name. It's not there to redefine it, or preserve it (there is already an organization for that), but expand the market for it. And, based on this trade show you're doing just that. Bravo.

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