

THE MARK NEWTON BAND

Mark Newton



Mark Newton may not have been a household name to fans of roots/acoustic music a few years ago, but the release of his first solo CD in 1998, *Living a Dream*, and its subsequent success, went a long way toward "re-introducing" this bluegrass veteran to the public. Originally from Paducah, Ky., Mark Newton was born into a musical family. Mark's father played mandolin, guitar and fiddle and his mother was an accomplished pianist, so it was no surprise that Mark took to music as well, first appearing on stage at the age of fourteen. The family moved to Fredericksburg, Va. in 1960 where Mark was lucky enough to grow up surrounded by a culture rich in music. The DC area of Virginia in the mid-60's was a booming scene for festivals, and Mark took advantage of this by traveling every weekend to take in shows.

In the mid 80's Mark joined the Virginia Squires, a band that was on the leading edge of groups that were developing a style known as "contemporary" bluegrass. Mark was the lead guitarist and singer for the Squires which also included future bluegrass stars, Rickie Simpkins, Sammy Shelor and Ronnie Simpkins. According to Mark, "We weren't necessarily trying to create a sound that would be labeled as contemporary bluegrass. All of us grew up with traditional roots, so we tried to find the balance between what was honest and true and music that was influencing our generation (Rock'n'Roll for example) to create an identity." The Squires released five albums, four of which were on the Rebel label; *Mountains and Memories*, *I'm Working My Way*, *Hard Times and Heartaches*, and *Variations*. All five albums were met with critical acclaim, and established the group as one of the most innovative forces in modern bluegrass.

A full decade after the Squires disbanded, Mark took about a 5 year hiatus from the music business. In his words, "I'd been clipping along at pretty good pace. I'd always been in groups that were fairly successful. When the Squires disbanded, it was the first time I'd been on my own . . . and I really didn't know what to do." Once Mark had taken some time to reflect, he began coming up with ideas for the future. Living in Fredericksburg there were a tremendous amount of players, so Mark had plenty of opportunities to get out and perform. He recorded a live record with Larry Stephenson, Bill Emerson and David Parmley which helped to ignite the spark for him to go forward and put together his own band. Mark decided that the time had come for his first solo outing. The result was 1998's *Living a Dream* CD (Rebel), which paired him with and paid homage to, some of his biggest musical influences.

While cutting *Living a Dream*, Mark came up with the concept for *Follow me back to the Fold* ~ his tribute to women in bluegrass. This project has become one of Mark's most widely recognized accomplishments. "The idea came to me because I did this whole album [*Living a Dream*] and afterward realized that there was not one woman on it", recalls Mark. "It was an oversight . . . and I realized there have been a lot of women who have personally impacted me, starting back with Gloria Belle, and I felt I needed to do something about that." The album became a landmark project for bluegrass, and a personal milestone for Mark Newton, capturing IBMA's Recorded Event of the Year Award in 2001.

In 2004, Mark Newton made the decision to relocate from Fredericksburg, VA to Nashville, Tenn. According to Mark, "I felt like I'd reached a point where I wasn't growing musically, and needed a change". Mark made the move because he felt that Nashville will be a place where he can learn and grow artistically while tapping into the pulse of the music business. With a new location and band in place, Mark is excited about embarking into this new chapter of his life.

Clay Hess



Joining the Mark Newton Band on guitar is Clay Hess from Athens, Ohio. He's recognized as one of the premier flat-pick guitarists in bluegrass music.

Clay was 9 when he first heard live bluegrass at the Lake Snowden Bluegrass Festival in Albany, Ohio. Clay's parents and his older brother played traditional country music, so he originally began learning classic country. Clay credits his older brother as a big influence on his desire to play guitar, though his brother stopped playing around the time Clay started.

His first professional gig came twelve years later at Dollywood theme park where he spent the summer performing with the group True Blue. In July of '92 Clay left Dollywood to return to Ohio. He was working in construction, when Ricky Skaggs called and asked him to fill the guitar slot for Kentucky Thunder. Oddly enough, Clay had just about quit playing between his time at Dollywood and Ricky's call. He spent the next three years performing with Kentucky Thunder. While Clay was part of the band, the IBMA (International Bluegrass Music Association) awarded Kentucky Thunder their Instrumental Band of the Year Award for both 1999 and 2000. Clay was also awarded a Grammy for his participation in Soldier of the Cross by Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder.

Mark Newton is quick to point out that he's one of the most natural gifted musicians that we have in bluegrass, and inspires me from an artistic standpoint. Though Clay largely considers himself a bluegrass player, his influence's do range outside of bluegrass and include players such as Stevie Ray Vaughan, Charlie Parker and Leon Rhodes.

A recent accomplishment for Clay has been the creation of the Clay Hess D-18 signature model guitars by CF Martin.

Beth Lawrence



Beth Lawrence was born and raised in southern Wisconsin town of Kenosha. Introduced to bluegrass by her father, Beth has been playing bass for over ten years. From early age, she performed with her family's band, "The Lawrence Family." Though bass is her main instrument, Beth studied classical piano and clarinet as a child. Her musical interests lead her to attend the University of Wisconsin, Parkside, pursuing a degree in choir directing and voice. Though Beth grew up geographically far from the South, she lists one of her main influences as J.D. Crowe and the New South, evident in her style of bass playing.

Andy Ball



Working with the Mark Newton Band on Mandolin is Andy Ball. Andy comes to us from Detroit, Michigan where he was born and raised. Although bluegrass is not necessarily native to that part of the country, Andy is a third generation southern transplant whose roots are in southeastern Kentucky .

Andy grew up working with various bluegrass and country bands in the Detroit area, primarily with his family band "The Richard Ball Family." He also grew up playing with Pete Goble, one of the premiere songwriters in Bluegrass music and attributes a lot of his musical knowledge to the 'Pete Goble School of Bluegrass.' Andy has also worked in the past with the Mike O'Reilly/Dick Smith Band, Paul Williams and the Victory Trio, Stanley Brothers legend Bill Napier, and has performed with J.D. Crowe.

Andy is also finishing up his undergraduate degree in Philosophy at the University of Detroit and plans on doing graduate study at Virginia Tech. His long range goals are to finish a law degree and a PhD in political theory.

John Wheat



Playing banjo, guitar, and mandolin with the Mark Newton Band is John Wheat. Originally from Terre Haute, Indiana, John began playing banjo in his early teens after the discovery of a copy of "The Foggy Mountain Jamboree" Flat and Scruggs LP that his dad had bought in 1958. Shortly after this inspiration, John's Dad traded 50 bales of hay for his first banjo, a plastic rimmed harmony.

John's first professional musical experiences involved playing contests throughout the Midwestern United States. By 24, John had acquired greater than 40 regional, state, and national competition titles. It was through entrance in the National Banjo Contest in Winfield, Kansas that John met Bela Fleck, who shortly thereafter allowed John the opportunity for formal study with him. John has also had the opportunity to perform/record with Pat Cloud, Special Consensus, Alison Krauss, Wild and Blue, Clay Hess, Tilford Hayes, Bobby Helms, Johnny Paycheck, and Element, to name a few. John's banjo influences include Earl Scruggs, J.D. Crowe, Terry Baucom, Pat Cloud, Bela Fleck, and Brent Mason.

John is currently a full-time student pursuing a degree in medicine. His medical interests include rural specialty practices, trauma-neuro surgery, and cardiothoracic surgery



Hillbilly Hemingway (produced by Carl Jackson) is The Mark Newton Band's latest release! Go to www.MarkNewtonBand.com for reviews, tour dates and more!

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