

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS

ROOM 223: THE BLUE MOON RAMBLERS

The Sunday Night House Band of the Diamond Belle Saloon

Now...

The Blue Moon Ramblers are principally comprised of six Durango-area musicians and singers, who have been performing professionally for over four decades. Collectively, the band is known for being the Sunday Night house band of the Diamond Belle Saloon at the Strater Hotel in Durango, Colorado. The group has performed in various configurations for the “Strater Family” nearly 1,900 times. George on 5-string banjo, and Red on fiddle are the co-founders of the band, and together they are the only musicians to perform at every single Durango Meltdown.

George was influenced by urban folk artists and New Grass styles, primarily Eddie Adcock who is considered the “Father of ‘New Grass’ music”; Red was influenced by the Outlaws and Highwaymen and the fretless sounds emanating from the pedal steel guitar, (Red would like to be a dobro player, too, when his fingers wear out...), Glenn brings his smooth bass playing from a deep resumé of performing with national acts, both on stage and in the recording studio, and was an original member of the Left Over Salmon band, and Jenny brings her wealth of experience



Seated L to R: Red, George. Standing L to R: , Jenny, Joel, Moana, and Glenn.

“ALUMNI”

The musicians, entertainers, and contributors to the Blue Moon Ramblers’ Sunday evening experience, with some notes about these wonderful supporters of what the Ramblers are so proud to have brought as part of the Strater Family, as the band is now approaching 4 decades of Sunday nights at the Diamond Belle Saloon. The experience is about all these on the list who are part of the Blue Moon Ramblers “alumni.”

George Usinowicz BANJO
Co-founder with Red Greer — 35 years performing at The Diamond Belle

Glenn Keefe BASS
Current member with nearly 20 years — plays with National Acts

Steve Williams BASS
1st Bass player, a.k.a. LJM-Large Jovial Man

Lech Usinowicz BASS
Classical symphony player and former Nashville recorded bassist with The Hot Strings

Buck Rhodes BASS
Sarcastic and humorous bassist

Jimmy Barnes BASS
Texas bass player with booming vocals

Lane Folson BASS
Long time local bass player from family of Durango pioneers

Jeff Hibschman BASS/GUITAR
Multi-instrumentalist

J.J. Monroe DOBRO
Unique 7-string dobro, pedal steel, lap steel, Hawaiian steel guitar player

D.C. Duncan DRUMS
Used George’s banjo head to play along on Foggy Mountain Breakdown



For more information about this and other named rooms, visit strater.com | 970.247.4431

and outstanding singing and guitar playing based on playing as a folk artist in the Durango area since 1973. Red's wife, Moana, has fulfilled her dream to sing leads and harmonies to songs that she listened to for years, and is now a wonderful contributing member of the band. Joel Denman from Denver came in during the Pandemic to help fill in where needed, as a singer, arranger, and multi-instrumentalist on mandolin, guitar and fiddle, and is now a regular member of the group.

When Red was 9 years old, and first heard Doug Kershaw, the Cajun Fiddler at Fort Lewis College, he wanted and got a violin. At 14, Red needed a full-size violin, and Ernie Blasingame, owner of La Plata Violin, had one for \$365.00. Red earned the money to buy it by bucking hay bales for 3 cents a bale — yep, that was over 12,000 bales! George bought his banjo from John Duffy, the famous mandolinist for the bluegrass band Seldom Scene at John's shop in Alexandria, Virginia, paying \$650.00 for a classic Gibson Mastertone in 1972, without a case, while remodeling old ship Captains' homes on the Potomac River. To buy the banjo he ate eggs and potatoes for virtually every meal for over a month. Jenny grew up in Shenandoah, Iowa, and came to Durango in 1973 as a solo artist with roots embedded in folk music. and now plays with a variety of bands and genres.

The Blue Moon Ramblers perform their signature arrangements with their bluegrass instruments, playing many different genres and styles of music that each member enjoys to bring to this collective experience.

AND THEN...

Back in the late 1980's, the Diamond Belle Saloon decided to help the honky-tonk piano players by providing them a night off, and chose Sunday nights. Patrick Dressen was instrumental, (figuratively and literally), to bring his folk and bluegrass guitar and singing to initiate what would become a folk music night. He was joined by an excellent banjo player, Steve Johnson, who also was a columnist for the Durango Herald. George Usinowicz was a banjo player in town since 1973, and heard Patrick playing one night and asked if he could bring his banjo in, as he was familiar with Patrick's repertoire. They formed a duo when Steve moved on, and soon afterwards, in 1988, Steve Williams, a giant of a man with a giant of a bass, stood in the doorway of the swinging doors to the Saloon, and came in and said that he knew all the songs, too.

Patrick, George and Steve played as a trio, naming themselves the "Marmot Mudflaps — recycled roadkill." (A Marmot is an alpine animal that looks like a groundhog, and has a unique musical "whistle." Local high altitude hikers and climbers seem to get a kick out of these large, furry creatures.)

Swinging into the 1990's, the Mudflaps went to (3) Telluride Bluegrass Festivals' Band Contests where they placed into the Finals each time. Musicians were added, and Marlon (Red) Greer, an original founder of the Blue Moon Ramblers along with George, and an extraordinary young

Red Greer FIDDLE

Co-founder with George — Three decades performing at The Diamond Belle

Jana Jae FIDDLE

National Fiddle Hall of Fame

Carson Park FIDDLE

The Hot Strings fiddler, Rocky Mtn. Fiddle Champion

Tom Demer FIDDLE

Dallas Symphony Orchestra viola player

Nick Kendall FIDDLE

World class international Violinist and educator

Rusty Charpentier FIDDLE

Vermont fiddle and music teacher

Dennon Jones FIDDLE Durango

schools music teacher and Be FRANK instructor

Jenny Winegardner

GUITAR/BASS

With Red and George, part of original-incredible vocalist

Joel Denman

GUITAR/MANDOLIN

Multi-instrumentalist and current member and arranger

Patrick Dressen

GUITAR/MANDOLIN

Started the Sunday night opportunity to relieve the Piano players

Ron Koss GUITAR/BASS Non-

stop entertainer and funny guy

Chris Unfug GUITAR

Grateful Dead anyone?

Bob Rea GUITAR

Fabulous Nashville reording artist — songs for the "Workingman"

Donny Johnson GUITAR

Classic country and old-time western singer

Peter Neds GUITAR

George's favorite guitar player

Mario Dobbs GUITAR Colorado

Countri Music Assn. Instrumentalist of the Year-2021

Joel Ratcheff GUITAR

Bar-D Wranglers' bassist, extraordinary entertainer



fiddler in his own right, joined in, as well as J.J. Monroe, a dobro player with a unique 7-String instrument, (which is extremely rare and like an acoustic steel guitar), joined in. J.J. had played with Glen Campbell, Charlie Pride, and even on Hawaiian steel guitar with the legendary Don Ho. After the festival, Patrick's band "Heart and Soul" played the Diamond Belle for a short while, and then the Blue Moon Ramblers began a 3-plus decades run, performing every Sunday night since.



Red and George

Durango local musicians would come in and play. Hootenany's, kind of like jam sessions with lots of singing, were somewhat popular throughout the country, and many evenings one could say they went to a hootenanny in Durango. Several musicians stayed for months or years or ultimately, even decades. Buck Rhodes and Jimmy Barnes were a couple of bass players who enjoyed long stints with the early Ramblers.

George had played in a band with Jenny Winegardner in the 1970's, and loved the power of her vocals and song selections. She became what would continue for decades to be one of the triumvirate core of the Ramblers, along with George and Red, performing with her guitar, and later even on bass.

When the Durango Bluegrass Meltdown began, George had always wanted Peter Neds, a magnificent guitar player, to be added to the group. Pete would go on to play with the band for nearly a decade. Pete also played with other outstanding musicians in the area, as well as with the famous folk singer and songwriter Hoyt Axton and his band. Pete had a band called "Movin' On," and, well, they did. Jenny was musical-instrumentally versatile and played bass for years with the Ramblers.

There was a period of about two years when Rod Barker, the owner of the Strater Hotel, had a second-story cocktail/wine/musical "joint" called "The Nest" across the street from the Saloon, and the Blue Moon Ramblers filled Thursday nights with their repertoire. It was certainly

Ron Koss and Chris Unfug of "A Fool and his Money" brought their act into the Diamond Belle along with George, and the three of them briefly started as the "Polish Quartet", but one night someone shouted out "Hey, what's your name?" and Ron the comedian spontaneously replied, "The Blue Moon Ramblers." And that's how the band was named.

The Blue Moon Ramblers were more like an experience than an experiment, as several

Gary Cook GUITAR

3-time National Flatpickin' guitar champion. Bar-D Wranglers

David Smith GUITAR

Smooth Carolina-based singer and guitarist

Ralph Dinosaur GUITAR

Rock 'n Roll extraordinaire

Dustin Burley GUITAR

Strater performer folk singer and guitarist

Tommy Beuten GUITAR

The "Legend" for Durango electric guitar players and master of country songs

Jared Payne GUITAR

Rocky Mountain flat-picking guitar champion from The Hot Strings

Andy Yoman GUITAR

Flat-picking bluegrass pickin' and singin'

Greg Ryder GUITAR

The Strater Family's long-performing western & folk singer, Barker family favorite

Kevin Trainor GUITAR *Original member of Blues Travelers and as original an entertainer as they come*

Gary Watkins GUITAR

50 years in Durango with Beatles, folk, and the best Rock 'n Roll band

Chuck Glass GUITAR

Plays guitars "perfectly" and builds 'em too

John Herndon GUITAR

Founder of Telluride Bluegrass Festival and guitar virtuoso

Ellis Miller GUITAR

Super fast picker with vast repertoire

Odis Sykes GUITAR

Traditional country singer and player

Kevin Dwyer GUITAR

Great player and singer

Jon Baumgartner GUITAR

Corn-fed Iowa guitar virtuoso

Betsy Clark GUITAR

Miss Fun and Laughter, "Blue Bayou" her favorite song

Karen Mason GUITAR

Texas songstress visiting annually

Hal Lott BASS

Photographer & Marketing Guru



more classy than the Diamond Belle! It was kind of like a “Speakeasy” without the need to have a password to go and enjoy your cocktails.

Some words on the Diamond Belle: During their three and a half decades performing there on Sunday nights, George shares that the band witnessed an environment and cultures that are only history now, but not myths he insists. “The smoke from tobacco was always heavy in the bar,” George said. “I would go home after the gig, and just from the second-hand smoke, I couldn’t sleep. The nicotine racing through my blood kept my head and bloodstream buzzing my brain and my whole body!”

“It was a great cowboy bar, which had so many locals.” George continued. “Fights were not uncommon, some serious and some hilarious as drinking was a lot looser before law enforcement seriously and correctly clamped down on excess consumption. During the old days of the Durango Fiesta weekend, cowboys would sometimes come into the Saloon after the parade, on their horses! Dogs were brought in often, and they were not Service Dogs. Thirty years ago, we witnessed dancing on the bar, and a few women who unabashedly opened their blouses. Hootin’ and hollerin’ was heard back then, heck, I haven’t heard that for years. One time, a drunken cowboy was up in the balcony and yelled to his mates below to ‘catch him.’ His friends(?) lined up double-file and held their arms out, but when he jumped, they pulled their arms back and let him hit the floor in a full-frontal layout. Ouch!”

The Ramblers are a continuing tradition of Sunday night music, with a mixture of country, western, folk, bluegrass, blues, newgrass — pretty much a new genre of music falling under an umbrella title of “Americana Music.” (The Ramblers even played a Jazz Festival at the old Trimble Hot Springs, now the Durango Hot Springs. Jazz?!?)

AND THE PRESENT AND BEYOND...

George, Red, Jenny, Moana, Glenn, and Joel are the core musicians now. This will change, too, over time. And always for the better!

Visitors from around the world are entertained with some songs that are familiar to them in their own states and even international countries, where American music has spread. It is all too common that the Blue Moon Ramblers surprise their listeners. Here’s a message that the band shared in a text after a listener had come up to the bandstand to tell the band who he was....

From George to the Ramblers in September 2022

We were all warmed by a guy who stood by the downstairs door, critically observing us for a whole set, and then finding out he was the United States Navy Band Arranger, and he complimented us on our balance, our vast repertoire, our harmonies, taste, instrumentation – it just simply made us feel like \$1 million, coming from a real professional musician. He said we “checked all his Arranger’s boxes.”

Delia Bell SINGER

Joni Mitchell style singer

Neil Nielson GUITAR

Plays from the heart

Jeff Johnson GUITAR/BANJO

*Multi-instrumentalist with beautiful voice.
RR Train General Manager*

Lou Giulotti GUITAR/BANJO

Could play anything with distinction

Tom Klema

GUITAR/MANDOLIN

River rafting bum and fine folk song performer

Bob ? HARMONICA

Added some ‘reeds’

Josiah Payne MANDOLIN

National Mandolinist Award winner

Patrick Storen MANDOLIN

Happiest musician on the planet

Mike Mixtor MANDOLIN

*Solid drummer who played mandolin
rythym like a metronome*

Adam Swanson PIANO

*World class all around pianist, plays
traditional honky-tonk at The Diamonde Belle*

Moana Greer SINGER

*Clean, fresh Blue Moon Ramblers’ singer,
can hulu to our songs*

Lisa Blue SINGER

Popular Durango female singer

Gary Pennington

CONCERT HALL

*FLC Community Concert Hall Director
Supporter of the Ramblers for decades*

Scott Henning SOUND MAN

Audio support magician

Doug Eagle SOUND MAN

*Durango Bluegrass Meltdown audio
engineer*

Scott Scooter Smith

SOUND MAN

Blue Moon Ramblers’ recording engineer

BeFRANK

*Foundation students who perform with
the band Friends*

**Many children from the audience
who Red has let play his fiddle**



The Blue Moon Ramblers

At The Strater Hotel's Diamond Belle Saloon

There is a special magic coming into the Diamond Belle Saloon on a snowy Sunday night and immediately feeling the ambiance of the saloon... the flocked wallpaper, the ceiling's decor, aged-oak bar, waitresses in gaiters, familiar saloon chatter, bar glasses tinkling, and the naked lady painting above the saloon entrance. Adding to this magic, one also senses the familiar and joyous harmony of the Blue Moon Ramblers.

We vacationed here in March of 1994 and on a Sunday evening wandered into the "Belle" for dinner. Early on, we discovered the Ramblers and heard two of our favorite songs... "Night Rider's Lament" and "Fox on the Run." We turned to each other and said, "We love this area and this is a sign! We're moving here!" We moved to Durango in 1996 and have been enjoying this fabulous region and the Blue Moon Ramblers ever since. Our attraction to the Blue Moon Ramblers runs deep. They are extremely talented, perform with tight harmony and solid instrumentation, and have delivered, since their founding, a vast repertoire of music ranging from bluegrass-to-classics-to-jazz.

We've grown to love the individuals in the band. George Usinowicz delights us with his John Hartford banjo riffs, Earl Scruggs' "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," and Cab Calloway oldies on the guitar. Red Greer, an absolute master on the fiddle, amazes with bluegrass classics and ends the band's evening with "The Orange Blossom Special," done in an ever-upbeat tempo guided by brilliant Glen Keefe on bass.

Jenny Winegardner's "Fly Me to the Moon" special request, along with her original compositions, makes our hearts soar like hawks! Recent talent additions Moana Greer on vocals and Joel Denman on mandolin and fiddle, amaze us! Joel performing "Ashokan's Farewell" on the fiddle with Red... takes one's breath away!

The Blue Moon Ramblers were founded by George Usinowicz over three decades ago. They have performed Sunday nights at the Diamond Belle Saloon nearly 1,900 times since then. Over the years, more than 50 musicians have participated in the Rambler's magic... all guided by George's love for music and history.

We have grown to love each Rambler for their talent and humanity... we have met a myriad of vacationers and locals who agree with us!

Our prayer for the Strater Hotel's Diamond Belle Saloon in Durango, Colorado is that the spirit of Louis L'Amour in room 222 continues to hear the honky-tonk piano and The Blue Moon Ramblers well into the next century and forever!

— Tom Williams and wife Nancy
Durango, Colorado, 2023

