

About the Nashville Bluegrass Band

A digital version of this text is available online at www.nashvillebluegrassband.net/media

With two Grammy Award-winning albums and two Entertainer of the Year honors from the International Bluegrass Music Association, four time IBMA Vocal Group of the Year, the **Nashville Bluegrass Band**, is no stranger to acclaim from critics and fans alike. The band's personnel are sought-after, first-call studio musicians, known for a superior level of creativity and a commitment to traditional music styles. Collectively and singularly, the members of NBB have virtually defined the modern bluegrass sound.

Nashville Bluegrass Band was initially formed to accompany **Minnie Pearl** and **Vernon Oxford** on a 1984 Grand Ole Opry package tour. Three original members are still in the group — **Alan O'Bryant** (banjo), **Pat Enright** (guitar), and **Mike Compton** (mandolin) — though Compton left for twelve years, replaced by **Roland White** until Compton rejoined at the end of 2000. Award-winning fiddler **Stuart Duncan** has been a band member since 1985. Only the bass slot has seen any turnover; its current seat is held by talented **Andy Todd**, who came on board in 2005.

NBB celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2004 with the release of its sixth Grammy-nominated album, *Twenty Year Blues*. As if on cue, in 2006 the Nashville Bluegrass Band was invited to the White House by President George W. Bush to entertain in honor of visiting president of China, **Hu Jintao**. It was a very special honor for NBB as well — twenty years earlier, NBB had been the first bluegrass band ever to be permitted play in the People's Republic of China. NBB concerts have since spanned the globe, with performances in Egypt, Brazil, Crete, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Qatar, The Azores, Iraq, Israel, Denmark, Germany, France, Ireland, Switzerland, Turkey, Japan, Italy, Spain and England.

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Although Nashville Bluegrass Band can be as traditional sounding as any pioneering bluegrass band, the group's repertoire has always been extremely varied, laced with blues compositions and songs from African-American gospel tradition. Two of NBB's eleven albums feature the legendary black gospel quartet **Fairfield Four**. All albums offer powerful bluegrass gospel numbers with that same incredible five-part-harmony style.

Throughout the years, NBB has toured and performed with both traditional and contemporary artists such as **Earl Scruggs**, **Doc Watson**, **Alison Krauss & Union Station**, **Lyle Lovett** and **Mary Chapin Carpenter**, including a sold-out concert with the Fairfield Four at famed Carnegie Hall in New York City. The band has recorded with **Peter Rowan**, **Maura O'Connell**, **Jerry Douglas**, **Bernadette Peters** and **Clint Black**, appeared on the **Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's** *Will The Circle Be Unbroken Vol. III* and collaborated with **Johnny Cash** on the film soundtrack *Dead Man Walking*. Well known both inside and outside bluegrass circles, NBB performed for rockers **R.E.M.** at a private party and played **Wynonna Judd's** wedding reception. NBB is also one of the few bluegrass bands to have videos in heavy rotation on the **CMT Network**.

NBB broke new ground in the spring of 2001 by performing with the **Nashville Chamber Orchestra** on classical violinist **Conni Elisor**'s composition for the group, *Whiskey Before Breakfast: Partitas for Chamber Orchestra and String Band*. The collaboration took place at three concerts in Music City, and was taped for broadcast on National Public Radio. This adventure is again one example of NBB's willingness to experiment and expand conventional musical boundaries.

The biggest break of all came in 2002, when NBB lead singer Pat Enright became one of the voices of the **Soggy Bottom Boys**, the fictional old-time trio led onscreen by George Clooney in the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Alan O'Bryant, Mike Compton and Stuart Duncan appeared on the film's Platinum soundtrack and NBB began performing as a core element of the "Down From the Mountain" tour. The following year, Stuart Duncan's fiddling was featured throughout the soundtrack of *Cold Mountain* and again, NBB became an integral part of the "Great High Mountain" tour which featured music from both movies.

The members of Nashville Bluegrass Band came together in Nashville from all points on the compass: Mike Compton is from Mississippi, Pat Enright from Indiana, Alan O'Bryant hails from North Carolina, Stuart Duncan was born in California, and Andy Todd is a Tennessee native. These gifted musicians have joined together under a name that salutes their adopted hometown to create an unmatched all-American sound. Nashville Bluegrass Band's talents have been celebrated, literally, around the world, but the band's appeal is as basic as a small-town general store.

~ March 2008



ALBUMS

1985	My Native Home	ROUNDER
1987	The Nashville Bluegrass Band Album: Idletime	ROUNDER
1987	To Be His Child	ROUNDER
1988	New Moon Rising *	SUGAR HILL
1990	The Boys Are Back in Town *	SUGAR HILL
1991	Home of the Blues *	SUGAR HILL
1993	Waitin' for the Hard Times to Go **	SUGAR HILL
1995	Unleashed **	SUGAR HILL
1998	American Beauty *	SUGAR HILL
2004	Twenty Year Blues *	SUGAR HILL
2007	Nashville Bluegrass Band: The Best Of The Sugar Hill Years	SUGAR HILL

* Grammy Nominee ** Grammy Winner

DETAILS OF ALL ALBUMS (INCLUDING LINER NOTES) APPEAR ONLINE AT
www.nashvillebluegrassband.net/discography

PHOTOS

VARIOUS SIZES AND FILE TYPES OF BOTH COLOR AND BLACK-AND-WHITE
NBB PUBLICITY PHOTOS ARE AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD AT

www.nashvillebluegrassband.net/media



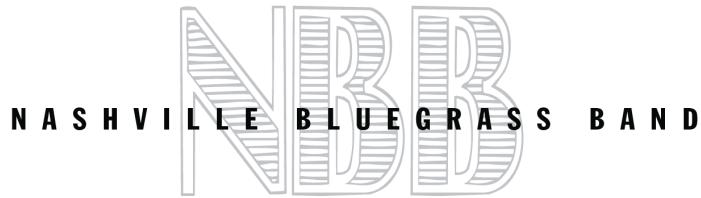
NBB AWARDS & ACCOLADES

- 1988 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **GRAMMY nomination: Best Bluegrass Album** / *New Moon Rising* with Peter Rowan
Alan O'Bryant, songwriter > **PLATINUM ALBUM** / Trio / *Those Memories of You*
- 1990 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **GRAMMY nomination: Best Bluegrass Album** / *The Boys Are Back In Town*
Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Vocal Group of the Year**
Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Fiddler of the Year**
- 1991 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **GRAMMY nomination: Best Bluegrass Album** / *Home Of The Blues*
Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Vocal Group of the Year**
Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Fiddler of the Year**
- 1992 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Vocal Group of the Year**
Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Entertainer of the Year**
Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Song of the Year** / *Blue Train* (by Dave Allen, from *Home Of The Blues*)
Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Fiddler of the Year**
Alan O'Bryant > **IBMA Recorded Event of the Year** / *Slide Rule* / Jerry Douglas
- 1993 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **INDY AWARD: Best Bluegrass Album** / *Waitin' For The Hard Times To Go*
Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Vocal Group of the Year**
Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Entertainer of the Year**
Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Fiddler of the Year**
Stuart Duncan (backed by NBB) > **IBMA Instrumental Album of the Year** / *Stuart Duncan*
- 1994 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **GRAMMY AWARD: Best Bluegrass Album** / *Waitin' For The Hard Times To Go*
Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Fiddler of the Year**
- 1995 Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Fiddler of the Year**

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- 1996 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **GRAMMY AWARD: Best Bluegrass Album** / *Unleashed*
Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Fiddler of the Year**
- 1997 Alan O'Bryant, Pat Enright, Mike Compton, Stuart Duncan > **GRAMMY AWARD: Best Bluegrass Album** / *True Life Blues: The Songs of Bill Monroe*
Alan O'Bryant, Pat Enright, Mike Compton, Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Album of the Year** / *True Life Blues: The Songs of Bill Monroe*
Alan O'Bryant, Pat Enright, Mike Compton, Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Recorded Event of the Year** / *True Life Blues: The Songs of Bill Monroe*
- 1999 Alan O'Bryant > **IBMA Instrumental Album of the Year** / *Bound to Ride* / Jim Mills
- 2000 Alan O'Bryant > **IBMA Album of the Year** / *The Grass is Blue* / Dolly Parton
- 2001 Pat Enright, Mike Compton, Stuart Duncan > **PLATINUM ALBUM** / *O Brother Where Art Thou?*
Pat Enright, Mike Compton, Stuart Duncan > **GRAMMY AWARD: Album of the Year** / *O Brother Where Art Thou?*
Pat Enright, Mike Compton, Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Album of the Year** / *O Brother Where Art Thou?*
Pat Enright > **GRAMMY AWARD: Best Country Compilation with Vocals** / *Man of Constant Sorrow*
Pat Enright > **IBMA Song of the Year** / *Man of Constant Sorrow*
Pat Enright > **MTV MOVIE AWARD nomination: Best Music Moment** / *Man of Constant Sorrow*
Alan O'Bryant > **IBMA Instrumental Album of the Year** / *Knee Deep In Bluegrass: The Acutab Sessions*
Alan O'Bryant > **GRAMMY AWARD: Best Bluegrass Album** / *The Grass is Blue* / Dolly Parton
- 2002 Mike Compton, Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Album of the Year** / *Down from the Mountain*
- 2003 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Recorded Event of the Year** / *Will The Circle Be Unbroken Vol. III* / Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
- 2004 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **IBMA Recorded Event of the Year** / *Livin', Lovin', Losin': Songs of the Louvin Brothers*
Alan O'Bryant, producer > **DOVE AWARD: Bluegrass Album of the Year** / *Wonderous Love* / Blue Highway
Alan O'Bryant, producer > **IBMA Gospel Recorded Performance of the Year** / *Wonderous Love* / Blue Highway
- 2005 Nashville Bluegrass Band > **GRAMMY nomination Best Bluegrass Album** / *Twenty Year Blues*
Stuart Duncan > **IBMA Fiddler of the Year**



QUOTES

"All the qualities of classic bluegrass — drive, precision, and most important, soul. Exquisite harmonies."

~ Washington Post

"...a band which stands comparison to the very best... vocal harmonies, instrumental work, band cohesiveness, arrangements and material — this band has all the bases covered... master musicians... a hair-prickling joyful noise."

~ Bluegrass Unlimited

"From traditional to progressive bluegrass, Nashville Bluegrass Band can play it all."

~ Daniel Durchholz, St. Louis Today

"Stylistically, this band fits my perception of acoustic music closer than any other band I can think of. The Nashville Bluegrass Band is just incredible. I've never wavered in my love of playing with these guys. Throughout the years, it's always been just plain good."

~ Stuart Duncan

"Country Music isn't about music, it's about selling tires. People who work in tall buildings and stare at computer screens need to listen to this music, because it speaks to our essence and reconnects us to the earth."

~ Alan O'Bryant

"It's no fun being a concert promoter, I can tell anybody that," said Mr. Steele, 38. "It was real rough for me emotionally. When I first called the booking agent for the Nashville Bluegrass Band, I was so scared. I thought you had to be the president of the USA to book the Nashville Bluegrass Band. I kept picking up the phone, then putting it down, dialing half the numbers and putting it down. My wife finally yelled, 'Just do it!'"

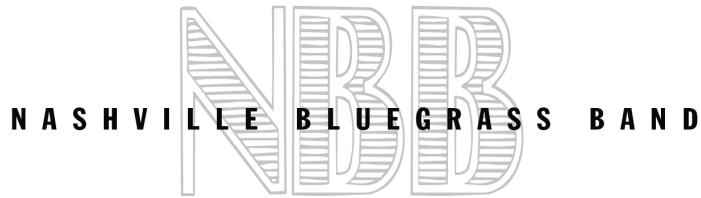
~ Robbie Steele, farmer, quoted in the New York Times, May 1997

"Thank you for lending your time and talent at the White House. Your wonderful performance helped to welcome President Hu and Madame Liu and make the event special for all of our guests."

~ President George W. Bush, May 2006

"Who wouldn't want twenty more years of this?"

~ Jerome Clark, Bluegrass Works



REVIEW

The Herald-Dispatch, January 2007

MUSIC: Nashville Bluegrass Band, King Wilkie to perform in January in Hamlin

By Derek Halsey

HAMLIN, W.Va. -- Three musicians who helped to bring the music of the movie "O Brother, Where Art Thou" to life will be playing in Hamlin, W.Va., as a part of the award-winning Nashville Bluegrass Band. The concert, also featuring King Wilkie, will take place at the Lincoln County High School auditorium. The show will be the third installment in the Lincoln County Friends of the Arts concert series.

The Nashville Bluegrass Band has been around for more than 20 years and has won the International Bluegrass Music Association's (IBMA) coveted Entertainer of the Year award twice. They have also won the IBMA Vocal Group of the Year award twice, as well as a couple of Grammy awards. The members of the band include Alan O'Bryant on banjo and vocals, Pat Enright on guitar and vocals, Andy Todd on bass, Mike Compton on mandolin and vocals, and Stuart Duncan on fiddle.

Duncan, Compton and Enright all contributed music for the movie "O Brother, Where Art Thou," as well as the subsequent soundtrack album that went on to sell more than 7 million copies. That CD gave bluegrass, old-time string and American roots music in general a huge boost in popularity, which continues today. The NBB as a whole also performed on the "O Brother"-themed Down From The Mountain tour that sold out venues all across the country.

All of the members of the band are known for their instrumental prowess. Duncan, for instance, has won the IBMA Fiddler of the Year award an astounding eight times. He is also a highly sought after session player.

Compton is an original member of the NBB, and is known as one of the premier Bill Monroe-style mandolin players in the music world. He is a sought-after instructor as well as session player. Compton is no stranger to West Virginia. He left the NBB for a while in the 1990s, and went on to play in the late John Hartford's band. Hartford was a big fan of the blind West Virginia fiddler, the late Ed Haley.

Haley was born in Logan County and eventually moved up to the Tri-State area to record and perform before dying in Ashland in 1951. Rounder Records has put many of Haley's

recordings on CD, and Hartford played Haley's version of "Man Of Constant Sorrow" in the Down From The Mountain concert movie. To this day, Compton uses the old recordings of Haley and his wife Martha Ella, who played the mandolin, to help teach his students.

"I'm into Ed Haley now thanks to John," says Compton. "I started using Ed and Ella as part of my teaching because their early style of music, with Ella backing up Ed, is a real informative way for me to show how rhythm plays a part in melody, whether they be a master, beginner, or anything in-between. The way she breaks it down, it makes it really easy for them to understand what I am talking about. It is a step above rhythm, as it is more or less a rhythmic version of the melody, except with chords."

Compton also made an impromptu appearance at the Appalachian String Band Festival one year with Hartford, the annual old time music get-together at Camp Washington-Carver in Clifftop, W.Va. That year, Hartford managed to get the music purists a little riled up.

"It was the year that he brought his tour bus up there and had about half of the festival mad because he drove it up there," says Compton, laughing. "They were fussing about him burning so much fuel with his generator. They ended up giving him an extension cord so he could plug it in and not make any racket."

"The old timers were complaining, and part of it was the generator, but the other part of it was that the purists were aggravated that his transportation wasn't humble enough, I think. He told me, he says, 'I've had a bunch of rusted out and ragged old cars. Now I can come up here and be comfortable. The heck with them guys.' They thought he was flaunting it a little too much. Finally, he was more and more accepted because he was really championing the cause to get old time (music) more recognized."

The band will be joined by Rebel Records recording artists King Wilkie, which formed in 2002 in Charlottesville, Va. Two years later, they became the IBMA Emerging Artist of the Year. The band is a mix of the old and new, combining modern day sensibilities with a love for the forefathers of bluegrass music such as Bill Monroe.

In fact, the band named itself after Monroe's favorite horse. The members of the group include Jake Hopping, Abe Spear, John McDonald, Ted Pitney, Reid Burgess, and Nick Reeb. It is not often that you see a sextet of 20-something musicians performing in suit coats, but that is how they approach it. And, they are no strangers to the Tri-State area as the band has built up quite a local following with their yearly appearances at the Appalachian Uprising music festival held every June in Scottown, Ohio. The band spent the last half of 2006 recording a brand new album, which will be released later in the spring.

For the NBB, the performance that seems to mean the most to them is their yearly collaboration with the legendary Doc Watson at the Merlefest music festival in North Carolina. Every closing day of the festival, on Sunday morning, the band and the 82-year music great join together for an hour of wonderful old school mountain music.

"It's kind of turned into a tradition," says Compton. "We really enjoy doing that with Doc. I know I look forward to it every year. A lot of people would give their eye teeth to be able to get up there and do that with him. It's just a fun thing to do. It's rewarding. Like all of us, he's got to go sometime, and I'm happy to have the opportunity to get up there and play with him. It's a little bit intimidating, but Doc is a good guy and it is a real warm-feeling thing to do."



REVIEW

Bluegrass Works, August 2004

CD REVIEW: Nashville Bluegrass Band: Twenty Year Blues

By Jerome Clark

NASHVILLE, TN -- Twenty years on, the Nashville Bluegrass Band gives us the gift of this extraordinary recording - a richly rewarding collection of splendid songs and superior performances, the kind of album that even on first acquaintance feels as welcome as an old friend. The NBB captures the soul of bluegrass with a sound that seems at once traditional and eternal. This is music that could be dropped into any era and yet move any and all who hear it.

To start with, it's the material: sturdy, unflashy but built-to-last songs of the sort that as a musician you have to care enough to seek out. You didn't sit there complacently waiting for them to come to you, and you certainly don't hear them on everybody else's recordings. For example, there is the soul-stirring African-American spiritual "Hush (Somebody's Callin' My Name)," out of the song family that produced the more familiar "You're Gonna Need Somebody on Your Bond." There's "There's a Better Way," an affecting gospel ballad co-written by Niall Toner, known in his own country as the "father of Irish bluegrass." It has the sort of eerie resonance of "Ghost Riders in the Sky," though without sounding much like it.

Bill Dale's "The Luckiest Man Alive" is a strikingly unordinary treatment of its subject, the postwar life of a World War II veteran. If you have imagination enough and your knowledge of country music extends that far back, you might even conceive of it as a sequel to Ernest Tubb's classic "Rainbow at Midnight." Or maybe as a hopeful counterpart to Paul Siebel's bleak late-1960s song "Bride 1945." Whatever it is, it is one hell of a good tune, and it stands out even amid some pretty stiff competition here.

The NBB has an obvious taste for folk music in the old-fashioned sense. Mandolinist Mike Compton's "Pretty Red Lips" is a reworking of a traditional Southern song. "Sitting on Top of the World," the one standard NBB tackles, is from the early and influential black string band Mississippi Sheiks (incidentally a favorite of Bob Dylan's). Though credited to Jimmie

Rodgers and Shelly Lee Alley, "Gambling Barroom Blues" is an old folk ballad from the British Isles. In its original form a darkly comic lament concerning a rake's death from syphilis, in America it spawned quite different versions in white and black traditions, "Streets of Laredo" and "Tom Sherman's Barroom" (and more) in the former, "St. James Infirmary" and "Let Her Go, God Bless Her" (and more) in the latter. In common with many songs he recorded, "Gambling" came to Rodgers's attention, directly or indirectly, from the repertoire of black songsters.

Though not in fact an antique song, the John Hartford/Bill Monroe composition "Old Riverman" could easily pass for one. Too bad those two geniuses didn't do more writing together. "Tell Me Your Love Is Still True," of uncertain origin, harks back to 19th-Century heart songs, but NBB sets it to a gently, irresistibly swinging arrangement.

Yeah, these guys - meaning Compton, banjoist Alan O'Bryant, guitarist Pat Enright (who shares lead-vocal duties with Compton), fiddler Stuart Duncan, and bassist Dennis Crouch - are good. They can sing, they can play, and they grab up outstanding material when they find it. And sometimes, as on the Monroe instrumental "Crossing the Cumberland," they come scarily close to transporting you to another world. Who wouldn't want 20 more years of this?

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REVIEW

Bluegrass Now, December 2004

CD REVIEW: Nashville Bluegrass Band: Twenty Year Blues

NASHVILLE, TN -- Rare is the bluegrass band that celebrates its twentieth anniversary; rarer still is to have three original members along for the party, even if one has only just returned following an extended leave. While all endeavours have best before dates, there are few signs that the end of the Nashville Bluegrass Band is nigh. Let us hope the album title is not prophetic.

Two blues songs- "Travelin' Railroad Man Blues" and "Gambling Barroom Blues"- sung by Pat Enright in his venerable 'don't rush it, we'll get there'-style establish the atmospheric tone of Twenty Year Blues, the NBB's first album since 1998's American Beauty. "Luckiest Man Alive," also sung by Enright, further develops the bluesy quality of the disc. The best-dressed member of the band, the indomitable Mike Compton, has three leads including a most impressive a capella number "Hush (Somebody's Calling My Name);” perhaps paying homage to Down From The Mountain tour mates the Fairfield Four, Compton carries this old song to new heights with the capable harmonic interaction of his cohorts.

A loping rendition of "Sittin' On Top Of The World" is testament to the band's power as they freshen a standby that has been too frequently performed poorly on festival stages; bassist Dennis Crouch's mid-song break is a nice feature.

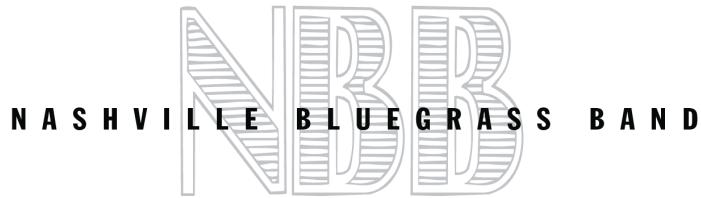
Alan O'Bryant's voice may not be as full as it was even ten years ago but it has aged with distinction. "There's A Better Way" should be a bluegrass hit as the song has all the necessary elements to be a chart topper- exceptional playing featuring tasteful breaks, comfortable singing, a memorable turnaround, and lyrics that convey depth in a straightforward manner.

Listening to this disc, one couldn't help noticing that only four songs feature harmony support, an oddity within bluegrass recordings. While this does detract from the vocal companionship one has come to expect from the band, the performances do not suffer from this lack of vocal collaboration.

One can guess Compton's inspiration for the seductive "Pretty Red Lips" and the Monroe catalogue is revisited for another instrumental, "Crossing the Cumberlands." Stuart Duncan's fiddle is prominently featured on these numbers and, as expected, his playing throughout leaves no question as to his prowess.

For those of us who continue to listen to bluegrass with our hearts, Nashville Bluegrass Band's Twenty Year Blues is no sad event; this is bluegrass created by masters and shapers of the genre.

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REVIEW

Nashville Tennessean, July 2001

Nashville Bluegrass Band

By Robert K. Oermann

NASHVILLE, TN -- America's coolest bluegrass band just got cooler. With its members performing on the wildly successful film soundtracks *O Brother Where Art Thou*, *Down from the Mountain* and with a scintillating new lineup, The Nashville Bluegrass Band has become the acoustic-music group to watch in the new millennium.

With two Grammy Awards, two Entertainer of the Year honors from the International Bluegrass Music Association and four wins as IBMA's Vocal Group of the Year, The Nashville Bluegrass Band is no stranger to acclaim. But as it heads into the production of its 10th album, the group is primed for still greater accomplishments.

"Change is good," says singer/banjo player Alan O'Bryant. "You're always looking for ways to reinvent yourself. We've always been interested in, 'What's next?' We do some of our old stuff whenever we perform, but really part of the reason for having this band is for whatever's coming next. And now we have that reinvention."

Last November, Gene Libbea, the group's bassist since 1990, decided to leave the band and move to Colorado. At the same time, mandolinist Roland White, also a member since 1990, announced that he was retiring from the road to concentrate on teaching, doing workshops and writing his book. Their replacements turned out to be so perfect that The Nashville Bluegrass Band never even missed a show during the transition.

Mike Compton was the group's original mandolin player, in 1984-90. When he left, Compton thought he was through with music. He put down his instrument and went to the Catskill Mountains to work in a ski lodge.

"Basically, I was miserable," he reports. "I realized that music was something I needed to do. I needed that outlet. So I moved back to Nashville and spent a lot of time figuring out how to play again, because I hadn't been doing it."

Between 1992 and 2000, Compton got back up to speed performing with The Sidemen, John Hartford and The Sullivans. He was reunited with NBB members Pat Enright and

Stuart Duncan when they recorded as “The Soggy Bottom Boys” for the O Brother Where Art Thou soundtrack. He’d never forgotten his days as a Nashville Bluegrass Band member, so when Alan O’Bryant called him about taking his mandolin slot back, Mike Compton didn’t hesitate for an instant. “With Mike back on board, I couldn’t imagine the new lineup not working,” comments Duncan. “I knew then that it would be fine.”

Libbea’s replacement was equally fortuitous. Like Compton, bassist Dennis Crouch has a link to the original NBB lineup. The group’s first bass player was Mark Hembree, in 1984-90. Hembree, it turns out, was an early mentor to Crouch. As a boy, Dennis Crouch had selected the upright bass as his instrument. But he had to stand on a chair to support the instrument, and his hands were too small to reach around its neck.

“Joining The Nashville Bluegrass Band is pretty strange for me,” Crouch reports. “Because I remember being 11 years old at a bluegrass festival in Salem, MO. Mark Hembree was playing bass for Bill Monroe there. I’d been playing, but my hands were small. Hembree took me aside and showed me these hand exercises and taught me how to spread my palms and fingers. So when I later saw he was a member of The Nashville Bluegrass Band, I paid attention. And I kept following the group when Gene Libbea replaced him.

“I respect Gene and regard him as a friend. When I heard he was moving to Colorado, I didn’t know whether he planned to stay in the group or not. But if his job was going to be up in the air, I wanted to be in line for it. That’s why I decided to call Alan O’Bryant and express my interest.”

In the twinkling of an eye, The Nashville Bluegrass Band was reconfigured to everyone’s delight. “There was not one moment of doubt or pessimism,” says Duncan. “We just charged on ahead. It’s sort of a reinvention, but on the other hand, it’s not really a huge change.”

“The first of November last year, it all came crashing down,” chuckles O’Bryant. “And now, The Nashville Bluegrass Band is back! And this is kind of a neat spin on ‘reinventing,’ to have Mike come back in and to have Dennis, who comes from a different place than our previous bass players.”

The “reinvented” group has already made headlines in Nashville. The group has been steadily appearing on The Grand Ole Opry in recent months. In the spring of 2001 the NBB took on the challenge of performing with Then Nashville Chamber Orchestra. Classical violinist Conní Elisor had composed a piece for the group that she titled “Whiskey Before Breakfast: Partitas for Chamber Orchestra and String Band.” The collaboration was performed at three concerts in Music City and taped for broadcast on National Public Radio.

“It was awkward at first, but it came together,” reports Enright. “In rehearsal, we had to draw chord charts. We had to memorize the piece and learn our cues. We’d never played with a conductor before, and that first show was real hard. After that, it got a lot easier. When everybody started to figure out the arrangements and actually began playing together, it started to come alive.”

That adventure is merely the latest example of the NBB’s willingness to experiment, to see “what’s next.” The group was initially formed to back Minnie Pearl and others on a 1984 package tour. But the NBB has also performed with Lyle Lovett and Mary Chapin Carpenter at a sold-out Carnegie Hall, and backed artists as diverse as Bernadette Peters and Clint Black in the studio. The group collaborated with

Johnny Cash on the movie soundtrack *Dead Man Walking*. R.E.M. once hired the band to play for a private party. The Nashville Bluegrass Band also provided tunes for Wynonna Judd's wedding reception. Although as classic-sounding as any bluegrass group alive, the NBB's repertoire is laced with blues tunes and songs from African-American gospel tradition, as well as material from the traditional bluegrass songbag. Irish singer Maura O'Connell and the black gospel quartet The Fairfield Four have both appeared on NBB recordings. The Nashville Bluegrass Band was the first bluegrass group to perform in the People's Republic of China. It has also staged concerts in Egypt, Brazil, Crete, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Qatar, The Azores, Iraq, and Israel, not to mention Denmark, Germany, France, Ireland, Switzerland, Turkey, Japan, Italy, Spain and England.

It is one of the few bluegrass bands that's had videos in heavy rotation on CMT. Its members are "on call" session musicians for Nashville's mainstream stars. Its nine albums have virtually defined a modern bluegrass sound.

The Nashville Bluegrass Band initially recorded in 1985 with the Enright/O'Bryant/Compton/Hembree lineup. That was the album *My Native Home*. Duncan joined in time to record the follow-up, 1986's *Idle Hour*. The gospel collection *To Be His Child* (1987) and the Peter Rowan collaboration *New Moon Rising* (1988) were also recorded with the Enright/O'Bryant/Compton/Duncan membership.

For 1990's *The Boys Are Back in Town*, Compton and Hembree were replaced by White and Libbea. This configuration of The Nashville Bluegrass Band continued through *Home of the Blues* (1990), *Waitin' For The Hard Times to Go* (1993), *Unleashed* (1995) and *American Beauty* (1998). The new/old lineup has now begun recording.

Along the journey, all five members have picked up individual accolades. Alan O'Bryant's song "Those Memories of You" was recorded by Linda Ronstadt, Dolly Parton and Emmylou Harris to become a chart-topping country hit. Pat Enright became the yodeling voice of Tim Blake Nelson in *O Brother Where Art Thou*. Mike Compton is a mainstay in the band that is on screen in *Down From The Mountain*. Stuart Duncan ruled as the IBMA's Fiddler of the Year for seven years, 1990-1996. He has also become a "first call" session musician, fiddling on discs by dozens of country superstars. Similarly, Dennis Crouch is now "the man to call" for upright bass by Nashville's record producers. He is also the substitute bass player in the Grand Ole Opry staff band.

"I could be a full-time session musician," says Duncan. "But it's such a moving thing to be able to play music live for people. Plus, in recording sessions I don't really get to play aggressive and hard, so this is more fun. I could take another job playing live with someone else if I wanted to. But I can't think of any other band where I would get to play so close to the way I like to play old-time music."

The band's members come from all points on the compass. Mike Compton is from Mississippi. Pat Enright is from Indiana. Alan O'Bryant hails from North Carolina. Stuart Duncan is from California. And Dennis Crouch is from Arkansas. They've joined together under a name that salutes their adopted hometown to create an all-American sound. Their talents have been celebrated, literally, around the world. But their appeal is as basic as a small-town general store.

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