

Featuring

SAM BUSH
MICHAEL CLEVELAND
BILLY CONTRERAS
JERRY DOUGLAS
STUART DUNCAN
DAVID GRISMAN
SIERRA HULL
CODY KILBY
PAUL KOWERT
ANDY LEFTWICH
DOMINICK LESLIE
ROYAL MASAT
EDGAR MEYER
NOAM PIKELNY
MARK SCHATZ
BILLY STRINGS
BRYAN SUTTON
CHRIS THILE
TONY TRISCHKA
MOLLY TUTTLE



Disc A

- 1 **Vertigo** *Featuring Sam Bush, Stuart Duncan, Edgar Meyer, and Bryan Sutton*
- 2 **The Old North Woods**
- 3 **Slippery Eel** *Featuring Billy Strings and Chris Thile*
- 4 **Hug Point** *Featuring Sierra Hull and Molly Tuttle*
- 5 **Boulderdash** *Featuring Tony Trischka and Noam Pikelny*
- 6 **Our Little Secret**
- 7 **Round Rock** *Featuring Michael Cleveland and Jerry Douglas*
- 8 **Baptist Pumpkin Farm**
- 9 **Charm School** *Featuring Billy Strings and Chris Thile*

Disc B

- 1 **Strider** *Featuring Sierra Hull and Molly Tuttle*
- 2 **This Old Road** *Featuring David Grisman and Billy Strings*
- 3 **Us Chickens**
- 4 **Sour Grapes**
- 5 **Hunky Dory** (A Fiddle Tune Medley: Dankworth, Tweedledum, Flies in the Buttermilk, Tweedledee, Tweener, The Brooding Fowl)
- 6 **Tentacle Dragon (Revenge of the)** *Featuring Billy Strings*
- 7 **Bum's Rush** *Featuring Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Stuart Duncan, Edgar Meyer, and Bryan Sutton*
- 8 **Hunter's Moon**
- 9 **Wheels Up** *Featuring Sierra Hull and Molly Tuttle*
- 10 **Psalm 136** *Featuring Chris Thile*

Banjo on all tracks: Béla Fleck

Produced by Béla Fleck

All songs written by Béla Fleck/Fleck Music, c/o Downtown DMP Songs (BMI), except "Psalm 136" –Béla Fleck & Chris Thile, Chris Thile Music/Kobalt Songs Music Publishing (ASCAP)

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Disc A

Vertigo Sam Bush: mandolin; Stuart Duncan: fiddle; Edgar Meyer: bass; Bryan Sutton: guitar.

The Old North Woods Michael Cleveland, Stuart Duncan, and Andy Leftwich: triple fiddles; Jerry Douglas: dobro; Cody Kilby: guitar; Paul Kowert: bass; Dominick Leslie: mandolin.

Slippery Eel Billy Contreras: fiddle; Royal Masat: bass; Billy Strings: guitar; Chris Thile: mandolin.

Hug Point Sierra Hull: mandolin; Andy Leftwich: fiddle; Mark Schatz: bass; Molly Tuttle: guitar.

Boulderdash Jerry Douglas: dobro; Stuart Duncan: fiddle; David Grisman: mandolin; Mark Schatz: bass; Billy Strings: guitar; Tony Trischka and Noam Pikelnny: guest banjos.

Our Little Secret Sam Bush: mandolin; Billy Contreras: fiddle; Jerry Douglas: dobro; Edgar Meyer: bass; Bryan Sutton: guitar.

Round Rock Michael Cleveland: fiddle; Jerry Douglas: dobro; Cody Kilby: guitar; Paul Kowert: bass; Dominick Leslie: mandolin.

Baptist Pumpkin Farm Michael Cleveland and Stuart Duncan: fiddles; Paul Kowert: bass; Cody Kilby: guitar; Dominick Leslie: mandolin.

Charm School Billy Contreras: fiddle; Royal Masat: bass; Billy Strings: guitar; Chris Thile: mandolin.

Disc B

Strider Sierra Hull: mandolin; Andy Leftwich: fiddle; Mark Schatz: bass; Molly Tuttle: guitar.

This Old Road Jerry Douglas: dobro; Stuart Duncan: fiddle; David Grisman: mandolin; Mark Schatz: bass; Billy Strings: guitar.

Us Chickens Sam Bush: mandolin; Jerry Douglas: dobro; Stuart Duncan: fiddle; Edgar Meyer: bass; Billy Strings: guitar.

Sour Grapes Michael Cleveland: fiddle; Sierra Hull and Dominick Leslie: mandolins; Cody Kilby: guitar; Paul Kowert: bass.

Hunky Dory Béla Fleck: cello banjo; Stuart Duncan: fiddle; Jerry Douglas: dobro; David Grisman: mandolin; Edgar Meyer and Mark Schatz: basses; Tony Trischka: guest banjo.

Tentacle Dragon (Revenge of the) Sam Bush: mandolin; Jerry Douglas: dobro; Stuart Duncan: fiddle; Mark Schatz: bass; Billy Strings: guitar.

Bum's Rush Sam Bush: mandolin; Jerry Douglas: dobro; Stuart Duncan: fiddle; Edgar Meyer: bass; Bryan Sutton: guitar.

Hunter's Moon Michael Cleveland and Stuart Duncan: fiddles; Jerry Douglas: dobro; Paul Kowert: bass; Cody Kilby: guitar; Dominick Leslie: mandolin.

Wheels Up Sierra Hull: mandolin; Andy Leftwich: fiddle; Mark Schatz: bass; Molly Tuttle: guitar.

Psalm 136 Chris Thile: mandoli

My Bluegrass Heart

HI FOLKS and welcome to *My Bluegrass Heart*. I think of this project as the third chapter in a trilogy which began with 1988's *Drive*, and continued with *Bluegrass Sessions* in 1999.

These two albums featured a core band that included Sam Bush, Tony Rice, Jerry Douglas, Stuart Duncan, and Mark Schatz. Mark O'Connor and Peter Rowan were our special guests for *Drive*. On *Bluegrass Sessions* some 11 years later, John Hartford, Vassar Clements and Earl Scruggs were our special guests. All three of them sadly are gone today.

We recently lost Tony Rice, at the time of this writing. The loss was immense and began quite a while before his untimely death, as he struggled with performing and recording due to health concerns, eventually dropping out of the scene completely. If I may be selfish for a moment here, this left me in a bit of a pickle. You see, Tony Rice was the only guitarist I had met who could make it possible for me to play bluegrass in the way I wanted to. His remarkable ensemble playing allowed me (and really all of us) to spontaneously do things that were impossible in other circumstances, which is why we all considered it a very special occasion any time Tony was present to perform or record. I do want to say it wasn't just Tony, it took everyone, but his impact on the musicians he played with was magical and profound.

As the years since *Bluegrass Sessions* began to pile on top of each other and grow into decades, I began to amass compositions that were consciously and unconsciously designed for this band. And as Tony became less available due to his health issues, I began to wonder if that chapter of my bluegrass life had now closed.

Time passed and other interesting changes had been happening on our bluegrass scene. A whole slew of new players had emerged, highly influenced by the movement that John Hartford, Sam Bush, Tony Rice, David Grisman, Jerry Douglas, Tony Trischka, Bill Keith, and so many other great players had pioneered. There were a whole lot more amazing cats of all ages that I never remember there being, in all my years of bluegrass awareness.

And it was towards the end of 2019 that I started getting that itch. Partly it was spurred on by a health issue that had emerged with our baby boy, Theo. He had a very close call, life and death, really... and I didn't want to

be going anywhere on the road. For some reason, when I should have been recovering from the trauma of all of that, I suddenly really wanted to make a bluegrass recording. I can't explain it. Perhaps it was an escape, or maybe I just wanted some control and to touch base with my emotional center; to make some honest music surrounded by musical friends, record it at home, and not go anywhere. And I had all these tunes that I was afraid I would forget about, or I'd die, or whatever, and they would be lost. They were burning a hole in my pocket, as they say.

So now... how was I gonna do this with no Tony Rice? Maybe it was time to embrace the present, and get more familiar with some of the bright new lights in our bluegrass galaxy.



First I set up a "jam/rehearsal" with some of my favorites whom I'd never really gotten to play much with—Paul Kowert, Michael Cleveland, Dominick Leslie, and Cody Kilby. Cody had a unique something that brought back some of the feeling of playing with Tony, and there was a particular way he could drive a band, but all the guys were amazing.

Anyway, they all learned a little pile of my tunes and we got together. And I was thrilled—wow, what a cool band. I need to record with this gang! Then I got a certain buyer's remorse, if you will. Why wasn't I recording with Sam, Jerry, Stuart, Mark Schatz, even if Tony couldn't do it? I had always loved playing with Bryan Sutton in that context. He wasn't Tony but he sure was Bryan! He could bring a lot of things that Tony couldn't, to tell the truth. I remember a chat with my partner, Abigail Washburn, where I bent her ear about my quandary and she said, "Maybe this is the project where you do both."

Hmnn... My first reaction was—no—my albums are always a band, that's where the cohesiveness comes from. It had been my point of view for a long time. But as I thought about it, I realized there were so many great players now that I could explore the new bluegrass continuum on this album, and the fact that it was all music written for bluegrass instrumentation would be the defining factor. I ran into Billy Strings one day at a festival, and we hit it off. So, late one night he came over to jam and I discovered what all the shouting was about. I knew he had done some things with David Grisman, and I also knew David was gonna be touring with Del McCoury and I saw a hole in their schedule. Maybe David would participate in something with Billy since

they had a relationship? I loved the idea of putting Billy with Chris Thile; it seemed like too cool a combination to miss and I thought they'd both dig it. Billy's bassist, Royal Masat, is also someone I'd also heard a lot about and he brought a very different sensibility to the things he played on. Thile brought up Billy Contreras, who I didn't know too much about. But, he was the icing on the cake for a band that could do some very complex and precise things with a lot of drive, sprinkled with a touch of wild abandon, which they all had in spades.

When it came to dobro there has always only been one guy for me. Jerry Douglas continues to define the instrument, and although there are now some truly incredible state-of-the-art dobro players on the scene, I wanted Jerry to fill the whole dobro seat.

I also hoped to convince Edgar Meyer to play a part on this project, and I was thrilled when he agreed to be involved. His talents are self evident, and unique.

A year or so back, I'd had a thought about doing some shows with Sierra Hull and Molly Tuttle, and we got together to jam. (Mostly I was thinking they'd be amazing together without me!) But, later in the recording of the album it became clear to me that I was propagating the boys club, while there were female players who were just as good. Even though I already had more than an album's worth of music recorded, we did an awesome session with Molly, Sierra, and a couple of dudes—Mark Schatz and Andy Leftwich—cutting three more tunes.

I've long been impressed by Andy Leftwich's fiddling, but somehow we rarely seemed to end up in the same place. Well it finally happened and while together I got him to add a nearly impossible, super high register third part for a triple fiddle blast on "The Old North Woods."

Back when I was in New Grass Revival, we were playing in Mole Lake, WI, at a festival up there. As we pulled into the backstage in our dilapidated bread truck, who should walk up but Bill Monroe, the Father of Bluegrass. He had two ladies in tow and he had his mandolin out. He stepped on board the truck and played a tune for us. "I call it 'The Old North Woods,'" he'd said. "Because we were driving up here and looking out of the window, and I was thinking... there's no telling how long these woods have been out here."

I've appropriated the title for an old Monroe style mandolin tune of mine (which has no resemblance to the lost tune he played for us).

It was important to me to include my teacher, Tony Trischka, who opened the doors of the banjo world to me back in the 1970's, as well as my student, Noam Pikelnny (for a minute or two), who may be my teacher by the time I finish writing these notes.

Pretty soon I started to see this project as an exploration of the current bluegrass world, and a gathering of a certain segment of the tribe. I must say that there are many fantastic players who I love that I just couldn't include this time, for space considerations.

At a certain point it occurred to me that Tony Rice might dig hearing this continuation of his own musical offerings, and I resolved to ask him if he'd consider writing notes for the album. This was also a strategy to try to get him to listen to it, because I thought it would make him proud to hear his impact on the bluegrass guitar world. All the guitarists on this album owe

an immense debt to Tony—but thankfully—none of them are Tony Rice imitators. They have each found their own unique voices, building on Tony's offerings.

It hit us all like a ton of bricks when we lost Tony.

Even though he had been kind of gone for a long time already due to his reclusive lifestyle, his death compounded and finalized a huge loss.

And there was another enormous loss in my musical world. My musical hero, mentor, and more recently, dear friend Chick Corea had passed unexpectedly. In the year before he left us, I told him about what I was working on. I even asked for his blessing on the title, which was cabbaged from his great 1976 record *My Spanish Heart*, which I loved. Although Chick was actually Italian and not of Spanish heritage, Spanish music was close to the center of who he was as a musician, and you could hear it in everything he did. He found a second home outside of jazz and was revered by Latin musicians and fans. He and I even won a Latin Grammy together.

My own experience of being a person from the outside who had found his home in another cultural musical family mirrored Chick's. Here I was, a New York City kid with no family ties to folk music or bluegrass who discovered his identity in the bluegrass community. I would venture that you can hear bluegrass in everything I do, whether or not I intend it, similar to the Spanish influence in Chick's music.

So I asked for his blessing to use the title *My Bluegrass Heart*.

And he laughed and gave me that blessing.

I'd like to thank all the incredible musicians who brought their talents to bear on this project.

And I'd like to dedicate the album to Tony Rice and Chick Corea.

Béla Fleck
March 2021

FOR THE SOUND FREAKS

My Bluegrass Heart was recorded at 96 k 32 bit, transferred to analog 30 inch half inch ATR, and re-digitized at 192k 24 bit. Why? Because we could! It made the delivery quality 44.1k 16 bit sound way better. And in the future there can be high def versions.

For *My Bluegrass Heart* banjo tabs go to BélaFleck.com.

BÉLA FLECK

MY BLUEGRASS HEART

Credits

Mastered by Ted Jensen at Sterling Sound, Nashville, TN

Mixed by Béla Fleck in Nashville, TN

Engineered by Richard Battaglia & Béla Fleck

Management: David Bendett, Artists Inc, artistsinc@aol.com, and
Noelle Panepento, Associate Manager, noelle.panepento@gmail.com

Booking: Jamie Ziefert, The Kurland Agency, jamie@thekurlandagency.com

Sam Bush appears courtesy of Samandalynn Records | Michael Cleveland & Molly Tuttle appear courtesy of Compass Records | David Grisman appears courtesy of Acoustic Disc | Sierra Hull appears courtesy of Sweet Juni Records | Chris Thile appears courtesy of Nonesuch Records.

“Psalm 136” (traditional) Arranged by Béla Fleck and Chris Thile

Artwork and photography by William Matthews

Design by Hans Teensma | impressinc.com

Thank Yous

David Hirshland and our new friends at Renew Records/BMG, David Bendett and Noelle Panepento, Carla Parisi, Adam Moore, Kate Knobloch—team yes! Lawyer wing of the team: Elliot Groffman, Ira Friedman, Richard Battaglia for enabling my crazy recording plans into reality, friendship, and knowing when to help and when to leave me to my obsessions, Chuck Ainlay for mix notes and helping me land the final version, also Ted Jensen, Chris Grainger, Dan Mallice, Roger Allen Nichols, and Dave Sinko. Thanks for putting up with my convoluted second-guessing process! Chris Mara and everyone at Welcome to 1979, also many thanks. Richard Dodd for ongoing great counsel and many years of excellent mastering.

To Peter Frampton and Darren Hurst for letting us print the mixes on the incredible sounding ATR half inch tape machine at your studio. Gary Paczosa and Garth Fundis for the loan of some very special old mics, and to Willy Matthews for his insightful and beautiful paintings and photography.

Mix notes: Richard Battaglia, Sierra Hull, Mark Schatz, Cody Kilby, Bryan Sutton, Gary Paczosa, Richard Dodd, Chuck Ainlay and Kai Welch. These folks all listened closely to the album and gave me their honest impressions, feedback, and sometimes some very detailed notes. They have all made the final version way better and I really appreciate the help!

To the Downtown Music Group, GHS, Goldtone Banjos, the folks at RME, Mark Horowitz, my family, all of em! DCS, who make the amazing Bartok, for top quality headphone monitoring. To Woody Platt, Josie Hoggard and all the folks who make my Blue Ridge Banjo Camp such an awesome yearly event.

And always, Abigail, Juno and Theo.

—*B. F.*