

The Cornell Corner

by Ed and Lee Cornell

HE SEZ:

Even though I am by nature an easy going, let the leaves fall where they may, quiet and unassuming gentle fellow, I will have to put my oar into the murky water, as it were, concerning Bluegrass music and what constitutes it. Generally, one would agree that songs such as *The Ballad of Jed Clampett*, *Dueling Banjos*, *Rocky Top*, *Blue Moon of Kentucky*, (written by Bill Monroe but also made very famous by Elvis Presley) are REAL Bluegrass songs. Stuff like *Michael Row the Boat Ashore*, *Tom Dooley*, *This Land is Your Land* are FOLK songs. Tunes such as *I Walk the Line*, *Okie From Muskogee*, *Honky Tonk Angels* are COUNTRY songs. Any farther than that I will not go, even though I have heard many of these played and sung at so-called Bluegrass events and jam sessions. I even sing and play quite a few folk and country tunes myself at Bluegrass jams, although I try to avoid what could be considered the more flagrant of country and/or folk songs.

If the Northern Illinois Bluegrass Association is running and sponsoring a jam or open stage, providing the facility, paying the cost of renting it or whatever, and are the recipients of the donations from those attending, they certainly are well within their respective rights to ask that the singers and jammers play and show respect to the music that the Association is promoting and supporting. It's kind of like you go to visit a friend at his home and he has a couple of "house rules" (maybe like take off your shoes at the door) that you are not normally accustomed to.

We are fortunate to have a fairly large number of places in the Northern Illinois area to which we can go to play acoustic music. If the Northern Illinois Bluegrass Association is asking for the playing of Bluegrass Music at a Bluegrass Music Association sponsored event, it is only common courtesy that we players should honor this reasonable request.

—Old Ed

She sez:

Since I am an Administrative Assistant to the Prezette and chief proofreader (when both of our e-mails work), I got to read the discussion about the amount of

"bluegrass" that NIBA should "allow"??? or promote. It actually had the earmarks of a Cornell "spirited discussion". (By the way, the Cornell family motto is: "Shut up, No, you shut up".)

Reja correctly pointed out that NIBA can't "allow" anything at privately organized jams and, even at Sugar Grove, NIBA tries to have some variation in the music. I went back to my files and looked for the definition of bluegrass that was published in a previous issue of the newsletter, and I quote:

When I told my non-musician friends that Ed was involved with bluegrass, they asked what exactly bluegrass was. I said it was the Beverly Hillbillies theme song and Dueling Banjos (which were the only mainstream bluegrass songs I knew of). I have since become so much more knowledgeable and can now say that it is "all acoustic" [unless a person plays an electric bass, which seems to be okay]. I decided to check out the definition, and being a computer geekette (that is a lady geek), I naturally went to Dictionary.com:

Bluegrass is: *A type of folk music that originated in the southern United States, typically played on banjos and guitars and characterized by rapid tempos and jazzlike improvisation*

Folk is: *Music originating among the common people of a nation or region and spread about or passed down orally, often with considerable variation*

Country is: *Popular music based on the folk style of the southern rural United States or on the music of cowboys in the American West.*

I also decided to look under "Bluegrass" in Ed's old "real" dictionary, 9 3/4 pounds of definitions - The Random House Dictionary of the English Language-the unabridged edition, copyright 1971. According to the Random House Dictionary, bluegrass is:

"...Country music that is polyphonic in character and is played on unamplified stringed instruments, with emphasis esp. on the solo banjo."

None of these definitions is exactly as precise as DNA testing so it will be very hard to determine exactly what NIBA is

promoting too much or too little of. I remember hearing "Lady of Spain" at a professional bluegrass concert and I am pretty sure that is not a bluegrass, country or folk song.

I think you should go to a whole lot of different events that have "acoustic" music. If you like the music that they play there or it is music that you enjoy jamming to, then you can go back. If you don't, then you can look for other events.

Since one of the important functions of the Northern Illinois BLUEGRASS Association is to promote bluegrass, it would seem hard to imagine that they could promote it **too** much. I suppose some very precise person could do a study of the songs played at different events and analyze exactly how close they are to being "bluegrass" but it would seem to better to spend time listening to and/or playing the music.

By the way, congratulations to Prezette Reja and the 2007 NIBA board members. Reja and the other board members have done a fabulous job, especially with the newsletter.

COMMERCIAL:

When I was doing the newsletter, I told potential writers that they could mention personal non musical items in their articles as a reward for writing the article. Reja, being a charming and popular editor, has no need for those kinds of bribes, since she has a huge number of people willing to write articles. She did say that since I did the newsletter for three years, she would allow me to mention the gift gallery that two of my friends have opened in Mount Prospect. These two women formed a craft group about two years ago and I was invited to be one of their artists. About a month ago, they opened an actual store on Northwest Highway in Mount Prospect: Brie's Gift Gallery at 874 East Northwest Highway. They are next to the Joseph John Salon, in a building with a red awning. The phone number is 847-577-5228. They are closed on Sunday and Monday. Their website is: <http://www.briesgiftgallery.com/>

If you need holiday gifts and are in the area, please stop in. Tell them you read about the store in the NIBA newsletter. Thank you.

Volunteers still needed for the holiday party! There are still openings available in all areas. Haven't signed up yet? Come on, you know you want to! Contact Annie at 630-466-1074 or annie@nibaweb.org.

THIS SPACE FOR RENT