

A Tribute to Master Artist Cliff Bryan

Missouri Folk Arts Program

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Once again, we must share sad news: Old-time fiddler Cliff Bryan of West Plains died last night (March 12, 2017), and we at the Missouri Folk Arts Program are going to miss him especially.

When we (Lisa Higgins and Debbie Bailey) took over as the MFAP team just over 17 years ago, our very first site visit to a Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program team was with Cliff and his apprentice, the late Don Buedel. We all met at Cliff and Sue Bryan's place in Pomona, in the kitchen of the farm house long in Cliff's family. We had donuts, coffee, good conversation, and even better music. Just days later, the Bryans sold the farm to retire and moved to West Plains, where Cliff, friends, and apprentices spent many an hour playing old-time music in a new kitchen.

Cliff told us how he learned to play at age 14 on a fiddle his dad got "by trade." A neighbor repaired the fiddle for 25 cents, and Cliff said "after I had that fiddle, nothing stopped me." He played regularly at dances as a young man, and especially sought out Charlie Hiler, a local fiddler and friend who taught Cliff a regional "short-bow" style. Later, Cliff couldn't play as often while he worked to raise his family, but came back to fiddling again, especially in retirement when he was able to play music every day.



Since his first apprenticeship in 2000 with Don Buedel, Cliff went on to teach five more apprentices in TAAP, our long-time project funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and Missouri Arts Council. From 2001 - 2017, Cliff taught Amanda Case; Jessica Collins; Rachel Reynolds Luster; Virginia Harden; and, most recently, Joel Hinds. Over the years, we've invited Cliff and friends to play at various venues, like the Missouri Capitol, Current River State Park, and Roaring River State Park, where audiences always enjoyed the music, almost as much as Cliff. He also often played at the Old-Time Music, Ozark Heritage Festival in West Plains, as well as at weekly music jams. He particularly liked having friends over to play in the kitchen, which he said "has a great sound."

We will all miss Cliff, his music, and his friendship. Luckily, Jim Nelson had the foresight to record Cliff playing some favorite tunes; "Got A Little Home to Go To" is available from Voyager Records. Here at the office, we're more than a little sad to know that we won't pick up the phone and hear his voice: "It's Cliff!"

Our sincere condolences to Sue Bryan, his whole family, and all his friends. Rest in peace, Cliff. We were so glad to know you.

Cliff's family has posted an obituary here: https://www.westplainsdailyquill.net/obituaries/article_4e6d7f36-08f7-11e7-ab1d-f357d952065e.html