

**Alex and Dan Fedoryka (Scythian)**

**Oral History Interview**

*Interviewed by Mark Coltrain*

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*Wilkes Community College*

*Wilkesboro, North Carolina*

*Project - MerleFest Oral Histories*

Mark Coltrain (00:00):

... hit record, and just to establish some context, we are here at MerleFest. It's April 28, 2022. And if you would, please, each state your name, um, and the band that you perform with.

Alex Fedoryka (00:14):

Alex Fedoryka. I perform with Scythian.

Dan Fedoryka (00:18):

And my name is Dan Fedoryka, and I perform with Alex.

Mark Coltrain (00:22):

Great. Thank you.

Dan Fedoryka (00:22):

Exactly.

Mark Coltrain (00:23):

Um, so we have a list of questions here. Um, and we'll just kind of go down the list. I may ask a follow-up question, um, as we go, so, um, we appreciate getting your time today. So, um, we'll start with the first one. What is your favorite memory of MerleFest, or the Watson family?

Dan Fedoryka (00:40):

Oh, that's a tough question. There's just so many awesome memories here.

Alex Fedoryka (00:45):

We've been here, this is our 15th time, or 15 times in a row. Um, so I was flooded with memories as I was driving into the grounds today. Um, of just the friends that you make over the years, and the music you've seen that influences, uh, that become part of our map, part of our musical story. Uh, but I have to think that it... we always have to drive by that entrance gate to the festival, and uh, we have to think that's the way we kind of got into the kitchen window as a band.

Dan Fedoryka (01:20):

(laughs) Yeah. It was called the Welcome Stage, and that was the first year. John [inaudible 00:01:25] was the booker at the time, and um, I talked to him for a while, and you know, after like maybe two or three conversations, he's like, "Listen, we're totally booked up. If you want to, you can just play the opening gate. As people are walking up, just say, welcome to MerleFest, every three minutes or so. Uh, we have no hotels. You can camp in my, in my yard at my house." He lives up in the mountains, and we're like, you know what, let's just try it. He said, "I'll give you one slot on the open mic stage at 10:30 AM on Friday." So we're like oh man, that's not a very good slot, but we'll take it. Uh, I hope everyone's awake. But remember, it's funny that this year's headliner is Old Crow Medicine Show. And they were headlining the Thursday night that year on the Watson [Stage].

Alex Fedoryka (02:17):

That's right.

Dan Fedoryka (02:17):

And so that was the, the night before our Friday morning open mics uh, stage.

Alex Fedoryka (02:22):

So, we would do these welcome sets, I think it was four sets a day for four days. And we'd play for maybe 45 minutes, and we'd welcome people, but, it was that night we went to go see Old Crow, um, and uh, Dan had a great idea. At the end of it, everyone had to wait for their buses, right? And so we said, hey, everybody's, they have nowhere to go. Let's grab our instruments. And we just did a bootleg set. Right in front of those lines to get back on to the buses to get out of... they had nowhere to go. The most captive audience you could possibly have.

Dan Fedoryka (02:57):

The definition of an ambush.

Alex Fedoryka (02:58):

Oh, it was great. It was funny because we just, you know, we rolled up there, we pulled up a folding table, and plopped it down on the gravel, and just started making noise. We play, we play a mix of Irish, Appalachian, and Eastern European. My brother and I are from, our parents are from Ukraine. And so we just started just doing a rowdy set. For all those people who had nowhere to go. And uh, had some stickers and you know, just stuck people with our stickers and uh, uh, and on that Friday set, we had a bunch of people come out. And we would have thought, you know, that nobody would have been there at 10:30 in the morning, but we didn't understand at that point yet what a MerleFest, MerleFest crowd really is.

(03:43):

It's about the music. It's about taking chances, and, um, really being welcoming to bands that are just starting out. We had our own specific sound. We thought maybe, as an Irish-focused band, what are we doing at MerleFest, but John said hey, you should come out and play. But the way that the audience, the crowd came, and became so responsive and said no, we heard you. To just really play your music, we want to hear it. That was the, the main impression I had when I first came to MerleFest. I couldn't believe the receptivity that the people at MerleFest have, uh... that...

Dan Fedoryka (04:23):

I think it came, it came from Doc. I mean Doc really took bands under his wing. Like you know, Old Crow, no one would book Old Crow in the early days, until Doc did. Um, and, it was kind of a crazy story that, that one morning like we had four or 500 people showed up to our open mic set. It was right there in the plaza. And, uh, we're like, how did this happen? Uh, but it wasn't until about seven years later, it was about three years after Doc passed on, that LeeAnn, one of the, the head of the artist's transportation, told me that um, Doc had heard about our ambush set the night before, and he wanted to hear what we were about. So he had LeeAnn drive him behind the stage where we were playing at 10:30 in the morning. And he went and he caught a couple of our songs, and he was like, "Oh, man these boys are lots of fun." And then just drove on.

(05:15):

But when I found that you know, three years after he died, that that's what had happened, it was to me one of the biggest honors. But Doc, that's how serious that Doc took instilling music in the next generation. But he would keep his ear to the ground. What's the... what are people buzzing about? And he would actually go take the time, uh, to go, you know, hear them play. And encourage them. But that to me is the kind of a MerleFest memory that you will just never forget as a young artist, you know, that Doc came to hear us play. What?

Alex Fedoryka (05:45):

Yeah, you get somebody who has sort of stratospheric greatness. Celebrity, right? Um, and oftentimes he would associate with people that you know, would come in on their big buses, and they they get on the stage, off stage and you don't see them. But the way that Doc as so available and present, and, and like Dan said, interested in, in people that may not fit the mold. And we did kind of consider ourselves misfits to a degree because we weren't coming from a pure bluegrass-

Mark Coltrain (06:14):

Sure.

Alex Fedoryka (06:14):

... background. But, um, I guess that's sort of Doc was the spirit of bluegrass plus, they would say. And, um, that was, that, that really made a deep impression on me, and just sort of... I guess a good lesson on what the point of music is that it was, it was always about the music for Doc, and it wasn't, you know, some things can cloud that journey as you get fame, you get money, and all that. But to Doc, it was just, you could tell, it was so purehearted for him, you know, despite the fact that he was a legend. But the way that he could be receptive and open and encouraging, that, that was very, that had a very deep impression on us as a band just starting out.

(06:57):

And I tell you that, we carried that with us when we went to other places. A confidence that said you know, these people believe in us, so the MerleFest audience has encouraged us in what we were doing, and we'll keep doing that, not feeling that we have to conform to a specific sound. I think Doc was probably the main reason for that that spirit here at MerleFest.

Mark Coltrain (07:16):

Right. Two follow-up questions for you all about that. As I was, as you were talking, um, a couple of things popped in my mind. How did you first hear about MerleFest and you know, why, what brought you here in the first place? Um, and I'll ask the second one in just a moment.

Dan Fedoryka (07:30):

Um, at the time our drummer was from Charlotte. And he'd grown up going to MerleFest. And he said, "Guys, there's this festival in North Carolina. We have to get in there." And, you know the idea of driving from DC to, to the Charlotte area, unpaid, to pay for four days, and sleep in a tent in someone's yard, uh, didn't seem very appealing at the time. But he was like, "No. Just trust me. We have to do this." And, I mean like we just literally, we did it just taking his word for it. We had no idea what we were about to encounter. Um, and like I said, it completely changed the trajectory of our musical careers. I'm thinking about what I have to add to Alex is that the fact that it's bluegrass plus. Uh, there's you know, in any genre there tends to be the purists, and a lot of people would be like threatened by letting people that aren't strict bluegrass into a bluegrass festival.

(08:27):

I think it kind of um, it kind of illustrated Doc's, uh, belief in the attractiveness of the tradition that he came from. Um, and it was his way of keeping the tradition alive because he just was confident. If we get these plus people in, it's not the bluegrass people aren't going to walk away liking the plus more, it's the plus people that are going to walk away, finding out that they actually love bluegrass. And, that's what happened to us. You know, we were kind of on the fringe. All of a sudden we wanted to get more steeped in this tradition, and it really changed our sound.

Mark Coltrain (09:01):

Okay. Thank you. And when did you first meet Doc? Do you remember that?

Dan Fedoryka (09:06):

It was that... so we, we did not meet him that first year. Even though he came and heard us play. Uh, well it was crazy. B Townes came out. Uh, at the very last day because they'd heard about us. We did a couple... one time it started pouring and we found everyone under a tent. So we stood up on a table in the tent, and then we did another renegade set. So, B came out to meet us and he said, "I just really liked your proactive nature. Well there's a lot of buzz about you boys." And then the next year we started the festival on, um, the main stage. The very first set. So you go from playing on, uh, the Welcome Stage to kicking off the festival on the Watson...

Alex Fedoryka (09:42):

And it was incredible kind of a vote of confidence in the festival, saying-

Mark Coltrain (09:47):

Absolutely.

Alex Fedoryka (09:48):

... you know, we ratify and encourage you boys to keep doing what you're doing. And as a young band, to have that honor was just... wow.

Dan Fedoryka (09:56):

You look over there and you see the two rocking chairs on the side stage, you know? That's where I got to meet Doc. I met him several times. Uh, I think the volunteers were so, um, cognizant of what an honor it would be to meet him. I think a lot of people went extra, the extra yard to make sure that we got to meet him. And so I met him and his wife the first year that they were on the Watson stage, and I think, uh, there's like two or three other times that we got to chat a little bit backstage, and uh, it was just kind of this amazing thing that... it was almost like we fell into a storybook because you never thought you'd

actually get to meet the legends. And it was right about that time that Levon Helm from The Band was there that you know, that same year.

Mark Coltrain (10:36):

Mm-hmm.

Dan Fedoryka (10:37):

Got to meet him, and we're like, wow, like I never thought I could actually experience living history.

Mark Coltrain (10:45):

Mm-hmm.

Dan Fedoryka (10:45):

And, um, that really had a deep impact on me.

Mark Coltrain (10:48):

Great. Thank you both. Um, so, I feel like you've touched on this a little bit in some of what you've said, but why do you think MerleFest is a homecoming with fans and musicians?

Alex Fedoryka (11:00):

Yeah, I would say that it does, you really get, you can go back to just Doc is the font of that. He's the spirit of it, but I think that um, I think it was just the way that Doc... I think he projected that just... It starts with you know, when you sat and just watched Doc play, and you saw his set, it was just such a sense of camaraderie, and he was just... how many songs... how many times did he play these songs, you know? It was just a way that it was, it was such a joy in the music itself. And I think people wanted to be around that. I mean there's something very special about that. That there was something, a rawness that



this is the, this is the way and the reason music should be played. He created an actual a family environment that it's... and I think that was his gift. That was just the genius Doc.

(11:54):

And so I think people, um, you know, and then his greats that, that they kind of rallied around him for the tragic circumstances that MerleFest started. I mean, these people, but they sense that already at that point, and I think that um, I think that it just kind of cascaded outwards.

Mark Coltrain (12:11):

Mm-hmm.

Alex Fedoryka (12:12):

From the musicians that wanted to be there because, to go back to what Dan was saying, you see so many musicians. These greats that come to the festival, and there's a sort of disarming way that they even carry themselves, backstage and up front, you know. There's these boundaries that Doc really just melted the boundaries that can sometimes be artificially created. And, and I understand. They... sometimes it makes it necessary for strong boundaries. But there's something about MerleFest, having played a bunch of other festivals, that those were relaxed. Because it was about the music, and, and it, and it, you know, and the great thing I feel that since Doc's passing, I do still feel that that that tradition carries on. And I think a lot of it does have to do with the fact that the fans have come to resonate with that.

(12:59):

And it flows back to now, the new bands that come in. That maybe never had a chance to meet Doc. I think that the fans carry that spirit, and there's sort of a frequency, a hum, that's been now passed on, and, and now we're talking multiple generations where, uh, it comes back now to the new bands that from the audience. And so it's, it's, it's, I, I think it's really a unique thing, and it's a beautiful thing to be sort of on the receiving now and of that same story. I feel like that uh, first probably projected from stage.

Mark Coltrain (13:32):

Right. Thank you. Thank you. Anything to add?

Dan Fedoryka (13:34):

Yeah, definitely. I think that, that, um, the sense of ownership that the fans and the volunteers have. I see themselves as hosts, not as fans. Um, kind of creates these unique opportunities, especially for younger kids to interact with artists that they feel very inspired by. Like I remember the um, first year we were on the Watson Stage. That night Zac Brown was headlining. And he said, "I've been coming here since I was 14 years old. And it was always my dream to somehow one day be on this stage. And it happens tonight." And you know, he was a 14-year-old that got to experience in like... and ourselves, like this weekend at the, at the little kid's village, there's a band that was like such fans of ours, but they're performing. They're siblings. They're called Pickin' Thistles.

Mark Coltrain (14:22):

Mm-hmm.

Dan Fedoryka (14:23):

Uh, but they're performing, and at some point we inspired them because we just relate to them, you know. And it's so easy to relate to people at MerleFest as people.

Mark Coltrain (14:32):

Yeah.

Dan Fedoryka (14:33):

And, like my brother says if that um, the kind of you know, almost that the fame that's created through pop, pop culture disappears. It melts away here. And it's just all about the music. It's about... it's kind of

remembering. It's a real roots festival in the way you kind of remember what music was about. It was about bringing people together and create magic moments.

Mark Coltrain (14:55):

Sure. Great. Thank you. Um, so, I think um, you've already answered the third question. Um, so talking about how you got involved with MerleFest, and your first performance, or performances, um, but I would like you to expand please, on the third part of this question, how it impacted your musical careers. You said that it really helped you, or propelled you. So can you talk a little bit about that?

Alex Fedoryka (15:17):

Sure. I think that, A, in to ways for me, um, I feel. A was, what we were doing, it, it just, it encouraged us, it ratified us to not necessarily have to seek a mainstream path in order to feel as though... or that's what we needed to do in order to make ourselves, or our career viable, you know? So, it was encouraging us, because we were doing, we were doing, we were coming more from an Irish tradition, but it was, you know, fiddle tunes, very high-energy stuff.

Mark Coltrain (15:54):

Mm-hmm.

Alex Fedoryka (15:55):

Similar to the Appalachian stuff, but, um, and we were also doing a mix of our Eastern European heritage that we grew up with. And uh, it was so much encouragement to keep doing that. We want to hear what your story is. And so um, we never really decided you know, we're going to keep expressing sort of our story, which was growing up in the Shenandoah Valley. Uh, being introduced to Irish music, but at the same time uh, having, uh, first generation Ukrainian you know, upbringing, where we just had the culture

permeating our lives when we were growing up. And that's ended up being what the story we were saying.

(16:33):

But in some ways in a commercial sense, that was, it could have been perceived as disjointed. But we come here and they say keep doing it. And that's 15 years ago, our, we decided to keep on that path, and um, and I'm glad that we did. But at the same time, like Dan was saying, we got introduced to a lot of Americana, a lot of these legends that maybe we weren't coming from that tradition per se. Our set became, had influences as Americana, Cajun, you know.

Mark Coltrain (17:06):

Mm-hmm.

Alex Fedoryka (17:07):

That's become part of our sort of catalog of music that we now write, so it's definitely influenced songwriting, and so-

Dan Fedoryka (17:16):

And it's, even our moniker for what our, our music is about.

Mark Coltrain (17:20):

Mm-hmm.

Dan Fedoryka (17:20):

They're like what genre are you? And that's when we kind of to get paralyzed because we're like we're so all over the board because of various influences, uh, but we just started saying we're old time, good time.

Mark Coltrain (17:30):

Mm-hmm.

Dan Fedoryka (17:32):

And if it gets you moving, and it's old-time then we'll play it.

Mark Coltrain (17:37):

Right.

Dan Fedoryka (17:37):

Um, I think that definitely was huge for our career, but also um, just playing at MerleFest opened so many doors. We were just predominantly a Celtic band until that point. As soon as we started plying MerleFest, uh, all these other festivals started being interested in us. Venues all across the state of North Carolina, and I would, you know, confident in saying that North Carolina is our strongest state. And also just seeing on the East coast, a lot of the Irish pubs, Irish festivals, it was more kind of a heritage thing. But here in North Carolina, to see, to play to a dance tent that's full of like 14 to 25-year-olds that are losing their minds to your music. It was like wait, this actually rocks. Um, and it really put wind in our sails to kind of keep on doing what we were doing.

Mark Coltrain (18:31):

Mm-hmm.

Alex Fedoryka (18:32):

It's a living tradition, really here at [inaudible 00:18:34] so, yeah.

Mark Coltrain (18:35):

Great.

Alex Fedoryka (18:35):

Yeah, you were right. MerleFest professionally on just on that level alone can open doors. It's got such a great reputation among buyers across the country, and there's such a respect for it. The fact that we've been playing here for 15 years, it's just, it carries a bit of weight that that's in itself in the profession will open a lot of locked doors for us.

Mark Coltrain (18:57):

Have you ever missed a year since 2007? Or have you, uh, you perform?

Alex Fedoryka (19:01):

I mean, unless it was Covid.

Mark Coltrain (19:03):

Yeah good point, yeah. Good point.

Alex Fedoryka (19:03):

That's the only one we missed. But honestly after we've played every year since that first uh, set to welcome stage on the gravel and that the first weekend we played it, but yeah.

Dan Fedoryka (19:13):

We've literally seen kids grow up.

Mark Coltrain (19:16):

Yeah.

Dan Fedoryka (19:17):

Right in front of us. And...

Alex Fedoryka (19:18):

Yeah, it was...

Dan Fedoryka (19:19):

We grew up as a band here, we just took care of little baby Dan when we came here and now-

Alex Fedoryka (19:22):

Oh yeah. Absolutely.

Dan Fedoryka (19:23):

... he's so grown up.

Mark Coltrain (19:24):

How about that?

Alex Fedoryka (19:25):

It was the 28th anniversary was the year we played. I guess they're about to celebrate their-

Mark Coltrain (19:28):

35th.

Alex Fedoryka (19:29):

35th Yeah. So-

Mark Coltrain (19:30):

It's wild.

Alex Fedoryka (19:31):

So, 10 years ago.

Mark Coltrain (19:32):

How about that? Hmm.

Alex Fedoryka (19:33):

(laughs)

Mark Coltrain (19:34):

Um, so, are there any um, oh I'm skipping ahead, excuse me. Uh, and I think this is a nice lead-in to this question is what makes performing here special? And I feel like you've touched on this, but why have you returned year after year? Why have you played every year, except for the Covid years?

Dan Fedoryka (19:53):

Oh. I mean, it is such a well-run festival. Like you get taken care of like family here. Um, just, even right away, in the first year before we were officially even a band, we started becoming family. The way that the volunteers, the artist transportation they take you back. They, they tell you all the legends. Like this happened here, or like... you kind of get sucked into that world, tradition, of what's happening here at the festival. Um, and that just, how everyone that is here is a music-lover. And a lot of festivals like you know, if you're doing the traditional festivals, they may there because they're Irish, and they like Irish stuff, or you know, there's a dog show, with Irish hounds, and they're there for that. Or like, but like at



Irish festivals, there's just all different reasons for coming to an Irish festival. But it's very clear as soon as we started playing here. There was one reason why everyone was here.

(20:51):

And, it's like when you go to that for the first time, it's like experiencing something like, the energy flow and the music that you've never experienced, coming from the audience. Because for us, the audience is such a huge part of the show, that the back and forth is basically how our shows end up with everybody jumping around and dancing. But here it's such a, almost like magnified level of appreciation. And also, people know their stuff here. So unless it's intimidating, but it's another thing. It's just very deliberating. If, if they affirm you, you know you did a good job.

(21:28):

And so there's something about that every year that... it kind, it comes at a good time of the year. It's right when festival season starts. So you leave here rejuvenated and also re-inspired. If you'll see a band and you're like wow, I just, I want to play guitar like that guy. Or, or just write beautiful music. And um... so that's, that is for me personally, that's what goes through my mind.

Mark Coltrain (21:50):

Do you all remember the point where you said, okay, we're blocking this off every year, and we're going to plan to come to this. So was there a point in time when that sort of, when that clicked and you said we're going to make this an annual thing each year.

Dan Fedoryka (22:00):

I mean, I think it may have been probably um, I mean we were blown away the first weekend. We would have loved to come back at any chance. And then, like the official way of saying, the second year, I forgot, I think we just said to ourselves we're just going to clear this weekend because it was a sense of... I don't know you just feel like you're there with... it's like a family reunion. On a band level because we

were not only you know, making friends with volunteers and you know, patrons, but also other bands were jumping in. Like the second year we played like were jumping in on our sets. And we would say, oh would you want to like play with us?

(22:43):

And like we'll jump in and play with you, that this, this, that. Horn players would just say hey, I play horns, you know, you want to be... yeah. Oh this is so much fun, like collaborative sense of bands, and making friends with people like your, they're are your peers. We're all traveling. And uh, it was, it was almost like a sense of going to camp. And you see your friends and you start seeing them like, a lot of the same bands do come back. So, I, you know, it very quickly, very early on, it was just that, you know, it was just, this is it. We're not going anywhere, right?

(23:20):

We'd always follow, uh, um, what if I say, listen, we're here. We want to play as many times as possible. So just, we're willing to play two, three sets a day. Seven or eight times for a weekend. I mean, it's like, we're here to play. And they would take us up on it. And quickly, I mean we just, we had so much fun running from stage to stage. And I think when you play that much, as well, you get more contact points. So, we became more friends with more volunteers at a faster pace. Other bands will come back for one day, or come back two years later, but we were always just saying just book us away. Book us away. And I think we've quickly became friends with buyers and volunteers and other bands in a way that would have been a little slower.

Mark Coltrain (24:05):

Someone that we ran into today, referred to you all as the hardest working band at MerleFest. So how would you respond to that? Is that, you feel like that's an accurate statement? Based on what I'm hearing, it sounds like you are. You know, you're jumping in the audience-

Dan Fedoryka (24:16):

I guess, if you call it work.

Mark Coltrain (24:18):

Yeah.

Dan Fedoryka (24:19):

It's hard to call it work though, because it's like once you talk to somebody backstage, and they've seen us a few times, and say, "Oh they're working you a lot this weekend, and-" But then he was like... unless you want to call it work. And I can't... let's be honest, it's not work. We're still lucky to be able to play, and uh, you never think of it that way. But we do have quite a few sets. We got a kid's set, we got a like..

Alex Fedoryka (24:40):

Yeah. Two or three sets a day, so...

Dan Fedoryka (24:42):

We just, we'll do four stages, or... The first year, we did seven different stages.

Mark Coltrain (24:49):

Oh.

Dan Fedoryka (24:49):

That was work, that year. But it was great. Within our first year, we had seven stages, so after the first year, a lot of people had seen us. But... Also it's just a vote of confidence. Like in our, I think it was our fourth year, they asked us to host the late-night jam.

Mark Coltrain (25:04):

Mm-hmm.

Dan Fedoryka (25:04):

Like, we were just playing at the opening gates. This is our fourth time here, and we're hosting the late-night jam, so I have to tell Zac Brown what to do. I'm like, okay, this is normal. Uh... but that to us was just such a vote of confidence. Um, which for a young, independent band... we're not like on a big record label on, uh, we've always just been independent because we, because we wanted to do our own music. I mean, it was, it's almost indescribable to tell you what that does for a band like us. Um, to believe in ourselves, and, and, after that, we just can't miss. We'll do whatever it takes to be back here.

Mark Coltrain (25:45):

Yeah. Great. Thank you both. Um, so are there any particular rituals or traditions that you do around this time of year? Around the festival?

Dan Fedoryka (25:52):

Either leading up to or right after?

Mark Coltrain (25:54):

That's unique to the MerleFest experience?

Dan Fedoryka (25:57):

Oh yeah. We definitely every MerleFest, um, we get a big like, double bump-out bus, um and we go backstage. It's so we can have all of our friends come on the bus. And that's the only festival we ever do that. We had a bus for years, um, but then when diesel goes out over \$5.00 a gallon.

Mark Coltrain (26:20):

Yeah.

Dan Fedoryka (26:20):

It's just not a good idea. Um, but, but for MerleFest, that's our, that's our thing that we do. Because it kind of becomes that place where we can host, and can kind of always like get the one-on-one time uh, with the people that it, sometimes it's hard when you're just on a car or whatever. So our way of saying thank you. So we just stock up on goodies, um...

Alex Fedoryka (26:40):

Yeah, and we, and then that's a place for us to go be with some of the volunteers that we've made friends with. And now, at this point, it's friendships now that you're coming back to. And we bring our family members down. Our extended family members will come down, uh, other bands we get up, and sometimes if we collaborate, we get up on the bus and we have jam sessions, and... so it's really the only festival that we do that. That's that's a very, we'll be here, we try to be here for four days, and just kind of park and create a like a little bit, a mini, mini city for our, ourselves to be able to have a place where we can just, you know, be friends. You know, meet, get out with our friends that we don't see, you know, during the course of the year, but yeah, that's, no other festival do we do something like that.

Mark Coltrain (27:24):

Right. Thank you. You've graduated to seniors almost, now.

Alex Fedoryka (27:27):

Yeah (laughs)

Dan Fedoryka (27:27):

(laughs) [inaudible 00:27:29]

Mark Coltrain (27:29):

Yeah. So um, can you describe your relationship with Doc a little bit more? You talked a little bit about meeting him, um, in those earlier years, um, and sort of a follow-up to that could be do you remember the first festival you performed after he died, and what was that like?

Dan Fedoryka (27:47):

I remember where I was the day he died.

Mark Coltrain (27:49):

Okay.

Dan Fedoryka (27:50):

Um, I was walking across Montana, and uh, so I'm just like singing the song Shady Grove to myself and I just remember dusk, and then uh, and then we lit the fire, and then I, I just taught everybody the song, and I told them that Doc had passed, and we all sang it, uh, in his honor, and I... I still pray for him all the time because just you know, prayers of gratitude and um, and you know if I'm driving, very often you just put on driving music to keep you awake, and on those days where it's like sunny, in a field, in a field, and it's the hills of Virginia, I'll just put on, you know, Doc, you know, the greatest hits or whatever, just let it go. And uh, I'll just will think fondly about him and everything he's created and... that's, so that's that was to me like, I mean I never got to know him very well. We came here in the year, 28th year, and probably the fourth, fifth year, I mean, we came back when he was...

Mark Coltrain (28:50):

Yeah.

Dan Fedoryka (28:50):

... he was already just, you know, he was very present to you when he was there, but he didn't want to get involved too much. So, I, I can't say that I had any opportunity to play with him. Um, but just the few times that I met him, he was just so present, so kind, and, you know, we were very cognizant that everything we received was basically kind of a growth of his spirit. Um...

Alex Fedoryka (29:16):

Yeah, I didn't, I wouldn't say I had a relationship with him, but there's a way that he carried himself that I, you know, that was, you know, I, I, I was um, very impressed. Found him to be like a very honorable man and a, who was at the same time a legendary musician. I was like, I like that example to me of somebody who is um, just, you know he doesn't use it for you know, for an occasion to be rude, or mean. I mean, like he could, he could be just a... the way he carried himself was like that is something I want to be. I admire that and no matter what happens, always be gracious every morning. If, you know, in, in, in any kind of circumstance. That to me, is like he became very present to me and how I want to carry myself, no matter what level of success we got. I always want to be available and gracious when you know, in any environment and look, everybody wants to talk to Doc but it didn't matter. He didn't get tired of it. He was, he was up in age and everything. Always a gracious man. I'd say that's, you know, a man who's that respected as a musician, and such a legend. All the things he's done. All the people he's seen, all the famous people he's played with. To take the time to just always be good. I mean, that, he's, in that sense I would say he's kind of stayed with me, he had a deep impressions. Kind of stayed with me in my career, you know. I have to say I'm not to his levels, but, but it didn't matter. I said that's what I want to be regardless. So I, I, I always have thought that was a good lesson to me to see him in action, you know.

Mark Coltrain (30:45):

Great. Thank you both. Um, so is there anything else you'd like to share about the festival or the Watson family that we haven't discussed?

Alex Fedoryka (30:55):

Oh man, so much, so much. I was just driving in to the grounds and it was just the, the feeling became very powerful for me. I, I, like almost an emotional feeling of just... how many people have I met? How many, you know, stories have I heard, or how many memories and... it's a, it just comes, it just comes washing over you, you know, on so many different levels and, and the, the different paths, and the different years. But there's one consistent thing that has always been there for us, has been MerleFest.

Mark Coltrain (31:28):

Mm-hmm.

Alex Fedoryka (31:30):

A place we can come back to, because we live a very transient life. Um, and that can be exciting, but it can be hard. And there's no way that sometimes, you don't have the things, the memories don't latch on to things that it might typically for somebody, be for somebody who stays in one place for a long time. But MerleFest, I realize in a very powerful sense, MerleFest has become that place for me, you know, where, I don't know. I just felt very grateful and thankful for it, and um, I don't know. And, and, and anywhere I walk, anywhere I go, and it's just a different memory is like piled on to a different memory, a different memory that... It's, it's almost like the closest thing you have to home as a traveling musician. I would say that in a real sense, I came through here, just this feeling of home, and... I was very thankful because I think that's not the given. You know, you don't necessarily have that as a traveling musician.

(32:23):

In a lot of ways I think I would say if you come here just for one day and you leave, you know, people love it, but like you don't get the sense to be feel like you're part of the MerleFest family. And I feel, I, I, like we've been welcomed.



Dan Fedoryka (32:33):

I feel like that's the main thing, is that we, we were welcomed. And we come from a very um, being Ukrainian first generation immigrants, we, we had a very strong sense of uh, culture and tradition, and our grandparents all lived with us until they died. There was a certain, uh, cognizance of how natural this was, and what an opportunity it was. So I am thankful that we did not waste that. Right away we knew that this was something different. And that, you know, Lillie Brewer, she donated the Cabin Stage. She, um, her daughter had us play her 95th birthday, I think, party. So we just Skyped in for that. And I got to know Lillie, and she's a part, from the very beginning, of, of MerleFest. She changed her will, so she, um, willed us a little songbook.

(33:24):

And I'm like, where else does this happen? And...

Alex Fedoryka (33:29):

That's just one story.

Dan Fedoryka (33:29):

That's just one.

Alex Fedoryka (33:30):

There's many different people you do meet. And become... whether it's a volunteer, or patron, or somebody like, some of these crews working the backstage, and you know, we're kind of come part of each other's stories. We ask, they ask me questions about how is your sister doing? She hasn't been with the, she played with the band. Where's, well, she's at this... really sense that you're among friends, you know, so my own special place that as a, you know, it's, it's hard to find anchors in life when you're a traveling musician, but that's what MerleFest is.

Dan Fedoryka (34:03):

That's what Doc created, man. He's, it came from his spirit. And this is really, it's, it's almost an incarnation in that sense. Even though he's been gone. It's really our testament to him, in a sense he does go on, so you know, it's, in such a big way. Uh, and, you know, there's a few people that I continually pray for in my life. And they tend to be found... the few founders of the festivals that really, deeply impacted me. And, and I just feel that towards Doc, and well that's obvious, it's his mark in my heart, and obviously what is it music and memories, music moments and memories is the motto here. It's almost like yeah, how many [inaudible 00:34:43] other people can say the same?

Mark Coltrain (34:44):

Sure. And tell me more about this song that you were willed. Um-

Dan Fedoryka (34:48):

It was just like, it was a, it's a spiral-bound songbook. It was just you know, just good old-fashioned hymns and American songs. It was nothing special. Um, as far as like, it wasn't like an archive, and maybe these are old cuts that you can... it was just a book that she loved. Because she loved it, she wanted us to have it before she passed. And I was so touched, I was like, I can't believe this. Uh, I mean, yeah, it was, I was almost dumbfounded. That you would think of us, like-

Alex Fedoryka (35:23):

We become part of people's stories, you know, you're not just playing music from a stage, you, there's a, there, you start getting woven into that fabric where it like almost, the crowd, the volunteers, the performance. They become part of a, a, the tapestry on its own, you know. The separation gets blurred with MerleFest between those. And, and then MerleFest becomes its own very special kind of tapestry that, that tells its own story. I think that's very unique to me. I, I love that. I love every year coming back now for me, is, is sort of catching up with an old friends, you know. That's what it really is for us now.

Mark Coltrain (36:01):

Right, right. Thank you. Um, so one more question about the book. Do you all perform songs out of it, ever? Do you, or have you learned some of the songs out of the hymnbook, or some of them?

Dan Fedoryka (36:10):

No, I don't think we've sung that one, but-

Alex Fedoryka (36:13):

That's all we do is put some of Doc's stuff on our albums, you know, as tributes to Doc. Um, for sure, because I mean that was, you know, just, it was our way, so it's your own musical way of saying, tipping the hat saying thank you. You know? So we definitely put Doc's stuff on our albums.

Dan Fedoryka (36:29):

And it's pretty fun is like, when we do like, we'll just do some just regular old Doc's, uh, Doc songs, like you know, [singing] "You get a line, I get pole, honey...." You know, we'll just every once in a while throw that in as an encore, and whenever we're in this part of the country, but, it's just so fun, and like everybody just starts singing, and it's just like, you're like wow. I'm like, it's amazing to see, like-

Alex Fedoryka (36:51):

true culture happening you know.

Dan Fedoryka (36:53):

What a present part of everyone's consciousness he was. And I didn't grow up, I grew up near DC, it's a strong bluegrass area, but to see it like here, it's literally, this is a culture.

Mark Coltrain (37:06):

Yeah.

Dan Fedoryka (37:06):

Uh, and yeah, I think definitely at some point it would be cool to see if we put together a little album uh, and a tribute to Lillie, you know, and uh, it's... I don't know if we just had more time, I think. We're working on our third album in one year, right now. Um, just all different takes. But I think that's, that's kind of the one thing as we're touring. A little bit last... we used to be on 180 days a year. Now it's like 90 shows. Uh, between, no, 70 and 90 shows. We're actually getting into the studio more where we can do more classic albums and stuff like that. So, uh, definitely great idea.

Mark Coltrain (37:41):

Great. All right. Well thank you all for your time. Um-

Dan Fedoryka (37:43):

You got it.

Mark Coltrain (37:43):

Let's see...