

**Jerry Douglas**

**Oral History Interview**

*Interviewed by Mark Coltrain*

*April 30, 2022*

*Wilkes Community College*

*Wilkesboro, North Carolina*

*Project - MerleFest Oral Histories*

Mark Coltrain (00:00):

And it is April 30th, 2022. I, um, am here with Jerry Douglas, um, and, uh, we are on the campus of Wilkes Community College at MerleFest. Um, so Mr. Douglas, will you just start off by telling, for anyone who might not know who you are, telling them a little bit about y- yourself and your music.

Jerry Douglas (00:21):

Okay, my name is Jerry Douglas. I'm, uh, originally from Northeast Ohio, uh, Warren, Ohio and, uh, started playing bluegrass music. Was probably the first thing, first music I ever heard, was probably bluegrass music, and it was probably Flatt and Scruggs.

Mark Coltrain (00:41):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (00:42):

Uh, but, uh, my father had a bluegrass band, so I grew up hearing the music live and watching his band, uh, work up songs, arrangements, and do things like that, you know, that, uh, something that really came, um, became im-, very important to me later in life becau-, as a record producer, as an arranger, and all these kind of things, you know, I kinda got a, uh, a- a good view of that way early in life, what it's like, you know, how you do this kinda thing.

(01:13):

But- but, uh, but I play the dobro guitar. A dobro guitar is a, is a ... Dobro, first of all, is a shortened name for Dopyera brothers, who immigrated to the United States in the early '20s and, uh, first thing they did was create the National Steel Guitar in Chicago. And they moved from there to California and started building wooden-bodied, uh, instruments of the same kind and- and at the sa-, and at this same period there was a Hawaiian music craze running through the country because Hawaii had just been adopted as, you know, a foreign, our territory for us, uh, mu- much like Puerto Rico is I guess.-

Mark Coltrain (02:01):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (02:02):

... but, uh, it was before Hawaii was a state, way before. But there was this huge craze for the music going through the, through this whole country, and people were, guys were going door-to-door selling, selling little kids Hawaiian, uh, guitar lessons, and they'd give you this little guitar, and then they'd come back every week and give you another lesson.

(02:23):

But, uh, dobro is played flat and it's got a s-, uh, hubcap on the top of it. (laughs) If you think of, uh, Dire Straits, "Brothers in Arms," I tell people to think about that, that's the metal version, I play the wooden version. And, uh, so I've been playing that since I was 11 years old, so I'm 66 almost. In a month-

Mark Coltrain (02:48):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (02:48):

... I'll be 66, so I've been playin' for, um, 50 years.

Mark Coltrain (02:53):

Great, thank you. Yeah, I've- I've done a little bit of research myself being a blues fan, and there, that- that, well there's a lot of cross-thread,-

Jerry Douglas (02:59):

Mm-hmm.

Mark Coltrain (03:00):

... with the Hawaiian, you know, guitar and blues mu-, um, blues musicians-

Jerry Douglas (03:03):

Yeah.

Mark Coltrain (03:03):

... back in the '20s and '30s.

Jerry Douglas (03:04):

Yeah, that's why, uh, the, a lot of the blues players took-

Mark Coltrain (03:07):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (03:08):

... dobro guitars because they were loud enough, didn't, their voice didn't cover up their guitar-

Mark Coltrain (03:11):

Right-

Jerry Douglas (03:11):

... so much.

Mark Coltrain (03:11):

... yeah.

Jerry Douglas (03:12):

Yeah, [inaudible 00:03:13].

Mark Coltrain (03:13):

Thank you, thank you for that. Um, so, in terms of our questions, um, c-, if you have one, can you share a favorite memory or two of the festival, or the Watson family, or both?

Jerry Douglas (03:29):

Probably both. I'm ... I was friends with Doc Watson before the festival, we had met, we had played on stages together. And, you know, the first time I ever heard Doc Watson, though, was on a Flatt and Scruggs record of course, "Strictly Instrumental," and- and Doc just blew everyone's mind. And I was a little kid and- and I just thought, "Oh my goodness, wouldn't it be wonderful to play with that guy someday," and I finally got a chance to, you know, and, uh, he became a good friend of mine, uh, and, uh ...

(04:05):

But there is some, so many ... You know one of my favorite memories of, I'll just say with Doc, and it- it didn't happen here because we were on the road, but we had, this festival did exist at that point. But there was a r-, there was a book called, um, In the Country of Country and they did an article on, they wrote a whole, a whole chapter on Doc Watson and I got to read that to Doc, uh-

Mark Coltrain (04:33):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (04:33):

... after the book came out. We were backstage waiting to go on and I read the whole chapter to Doc and asked him, I says, "You know, just making sure, is this right, you said this?"

Mark Coltrain (04:43):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (04:44):

Is this true, you said this," you know, and he said, "Yup, that's right, that's right." He said, "If I'd a been a car mechanic, I would have, I would have put in just as much labor, and work, and time as I do with this guitar." And he said, "I would've tried to be the best car mechanic I could be-

Mark Coltrain (04:59):

(laughs) Great.

Jerry Douglas (05:01):

... and, um, now I'm trying to be the best guitar player I can be."

Mark Coltrain (05:04):

Oh what a great story, yeah, huh.

Jerry Douglas (05:06):

But, you know, that's, that, that'll never leave me. But- but I was friends with- with- with Rosa Lee, such a sweet- sweet woman and it ... Um, so many times looked over, been off stage and looked over to the r-, to my right and Rosa Lee would be sitting in one of those rocking chairs over there-

Mark Coltrain (05:24):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (05:25):

... and just smile, just give you that smile, you know, it just melts you. Uh, and my ... And this was the first festival that I could bring my family to.

Mark Coltrain (05:34):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (05:35):

And I have, I have four children and they've all been here at various ages from four to grown, you know. And, uh, I've always, uh, I have memories of- of, you know, my son, Patrick, as a little blonde-haired kid with his bat, his baseball cap on backwards running around, and taking this, and, you know, Del McCoury grabbing him up or somethin' and we'd take a picture, you know, and we just, yeah. And now Patrick is, uh, works at the, at the, uh- uh, he's the head of, uh, video and- and photography for Opryland Productions, so he does all the Circle Three stuff that-

Mark Coltrain (06:15):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (06:15):

... happens at the Opry, so he's ... And he knows so many people that come in there-

Mark Coltrain (06:20):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (06:20):

... you know. And- and, um, and just raising my kids up in this, in this music, in this business, yeah, this was the first place we would come every year to, uh, and this is where you found out who had more kids.

Mark Coltrain (06:33):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (06:34):

How many more kids you got? Uh, I'm- I'm- I'm almost afraid to ask you, are you still married-

Mark Coltrain (06:39):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (06:40):

... you know, those, kind of, questions, because it was the first, uh, first time we'd meet in the-

Mark Coltrain (06:44):

Yeah-

Jerry Douglas (06:44):

... new year-

Mark Coltrain (06:44):

... yeah.

Jerry Douglas (06:45):

... and get out and play like this, and it was, it made this festival really special. That ... Uh- uh, it was always the first stop-

Mark Coltrain (06:52):

Yeah.



Jerry Douglas (06:53):

... of the, of- of the big, of the big trail for the-

Mark Coltrain (06:57):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (06:57):

... summer.

Mark Coltrain (06:57):

Yeah, great, thank you for that. And that is a perfect lead into the next question. And maybe you've already answered, I don't know, but I'll ask anyway. Why do you think it is a homecoming or a family reunion, um, for both the fans and the musicians?

Jerry Douglas (07:09):

Yeah, but I'm, I did touch on that. I mean, it's the first place we see each other and we, you know, there's a new baby, there's a, you know, a- a- a new bus, there's a new band member, there's a new ... You know, there was all these things and we ... This is the first place we get to check up on each other and see how everybody's wintered. (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (07:30):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (07:31):

Yeah. But it- it is ... That's what makes this festival very- very special is to, it- it, that it is the first-

Mark Coltrain (07:39):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (07:39):

... it's the first of the year.

Mark Coltrain (07:41):

Do you feel like that happened organically or do you think Doc had some sense of that when- when this started, like, that- that might happen?

Jerry Douglas (07:49):

Well he may have, he may have had some- some idea about how that, you know, that this is, this is part of, this is a, uh, such a part of renewal-

Mark Coltrain (07:58):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (07:58):

... every year.

Mark Coltrain (07:58):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (07:59):

This time of year, this is when this- this- this country and this- this, uh, the background for the stage, and this whole area goes from gray to green, you know-

Mark Coltrain (08:11):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (08:11):

... and all the buds come out, and everybody's sinuses go crazy-

Mark Coltrain (08:16):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (08:16):

... and- and, uh ... But it's- it's, uh, it's a beautiful place and, uh, and- and, uh, I can't help but, you know, take my hat off to B Townes for all the work that he did with Doc in the first, in the first, you know, from the first mention of something happening here for Merle, for the, for the, uh, you know, for the- the, uh, garden for the blind. That's why we all came here in the first place was to, because we all knew Merle, and Doc, and we wanted to do something, anything. It was, we didn't know what to do, so this is what we did.

Mark Coltrain (08:52):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (08:52):

And- and it's- it's become, you know, I think, so much more, uh, than they ever thought-

Mark Coltrain (09:00):

Sure.

Jerry Douglas (09:00):

... could have ever dreamed.

Mark Coltrain (09:01):

Yeah, you're- you're perfectly seguing into every question, thank you, that is awesome. Um, so-

Jerry Douglas (09:07):

I'm not trying.

Mark Coltrain (09:07):

Uh, no- no- no-

Jerry Douglas (09:07):

(laughs)

Mark Coltrain (09:08):

... I know, but this is, this is great, so you're making my job easier. Um, can you talk a little bit about, um- um, that first year and, kind of, how you got involved with the festival? I mean, it sounds like you, uh, you had a great relationship with- with the Watsons, uh, beforehand, but ...

And then, you know, even thinking back to your first performance or performances here, can you share a little bit about that?

Jerry Douglas (09:27):

Yeah, I mean, it's, kind of, funny, um, uh, I came here with New Grass Revival. I played with them the night before in Green Acres, uh, a little place out- outside of, and over in western Carolina, and, uh, it- it was a, just a wild crazy club, you know? You go in, there were sofas and all these kind of things and it- it just a wild place and ... But I went that weekend, uh, I knew we were coming here, and I was invited to be here. And so I just went with them to Green Acres and we just had this wild- wild night the night before and when, then we come rolling into here in their, in their converted bread truck-

Mark Coltrain (10:06):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (10:06):

... it's a bus, you know. (laughs) We come rolling in here, and all fall out of it, and get up on stage, and T- Tony, uh, Tony was here, Tony Rice was here, and Chet Atkins, who, and Earl Scruggs, and Marty Stuart, and Grandpa Jones, and I think, was Duane Eddy here too?

Mark Coltrain (10:28):

I'm not sure.

Jerry Douglas (10:29):

I'm not sure about Duane.

Mark Coltrain (10:29):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (10:30):

Somebody was playing, somebody was playing a big hollow body electric-

Mark Coltrain (10:34):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (10:34):

... but I don't remember who that was. But it was amazing to all, for all of us to be standing up there at the same time, you know. And I'm thinking about where I was the night before which was just, like, the opposite of where I am right now. This just feels like church.

Mark Coltrain (10:46):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (10:47):

Uh, we ... The audience wasn't that big, but it- it- it showed promise, you know, and that's all they wanted, that's all they wanted. We were all, kind of, just, kind of, uh, rolled up in here for free and- and did- did the thing. And, uh, had fun playing, I played with everybody that day. I, uh, I don't think there was anybody that, um- um, went up on the stage that I didn't play with that day. It was, uh, it was the same for everybody.

Mark Coltrain (11:13):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (11:14):

We- we were all happy to see each other, it was a bunch of friends and-

Mark Coltrain (11:18):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (11:19):

... we come together for one of the best reasons, you know, possible, so it was a win-win situation for everybody.

Mark Coltrain (11:26):

Yeah, thank you. So, um, what makes performing here special year after year and why do you keep coming back year after year?

Jerry Douglas (11:36):

This- this is, this place is just in my blood now. Um, as long as I can perform, I hope to come back here and play at this festival and in, uh ... You know, it's- it's, we've ... When I came here, I was, you know, 30 years old and now I'm 66 years old, so it's, uh, it- it's a, we've grown up here and this is, sort of, like, we're, like, salmon. We, uh, we- we- (laughs) we don't come back here to die, but w-, (laughs) but we come back to the pl-, to a place that- that is- is, um, feels safe, and secure, and we know, uh, what to expect, and we know that everyone is gonna treat us with the utmost care and- and- and friendship, and- and- and then we, and then on top of all of that, we get to s-, we get to see each other, and talk, and have conversations that we haven't been able to have, you know, in a year, maybe.

(12:40):

We- we usually s-, uh, see each other here, then we'll see each other in Telluride, then we'll see each other at RockyGrass, (laughs) or Strawberry and, you know, it- it goes on like that. But those are giant festivals, those are huge festivals, you know, festivals that- that pull in, you know, 75,000 to, you know, 100,000 people-

Mark Coltrain (13:01):

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Jerry Douglas (13:03):

... a weekend. And a lot of people see you and it's a, it's- it's a, it's a huge card to have in your ... Uh, it's a, it's a great arrow to have in your quiver-

Mark Coltrain (13:12):

Huh.

Jerry Douglas (13:12):

... I'll say that.

Mark Coltrain (13:13):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (13:13):

It's, uh, it's a g- good calling card, it's a, it's a, if you played MerleFe- ... MerleFest is, you know, some people aspire to just, to just get on the MerleFest stage one time and that's it, that- that'll be it for them-



Mark Coltrain (13:27):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (13:27):

... they don't care. But it's just, you know, it's that's kind of place to everybody that comes here, after they see the shows and everything, uh- uh, you know. I can imagine kids, you know, watching us play and- and just thinking, you know, "I want to be up there someday." And I think that's what brings us back here-

Mark Coltrain (13:46):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (13:47):

... 'cause we- we see our own children growin' up here, because it's that kind of place we can bring them. And, uh, the families, you know, rotate in and out. (laughs) Buses, musicians, you know-

Mark Coltrain (14:03):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (14:03):

... fads, trends, hair styles-

Mark Coltrain (14:06):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (14:06):

... oh my God. I hope no one does a hair style, uh-

Mark Coltrain (14:10):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (14:10):

... uh- uh- uh, mashup for me-

Mark Coltrain (14:13):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (14:14):

... 'cause, uh, I had 'em all. And, uh, but we just, we all went, we all went through so much and then we grew up, uh, but we grew up here.

Mark Coltrain (14:24):

Hm, thank you. Um, did the festival, performing here, year after year, impact your career in any way, yeah.

Jerry Douglas (14:30):

I'm sure it did. I mean this is a, also a very, uh, good place to network, you know, and, uh, record deals are struck here and met. I struck a managerial deal here, uh, on a handshake that lasted until, you know, I lost the fellow.

(14:48):

But, um- um, yeah, it has. I mean, to- to belong to the, belong to the MerleFest family, uh, and it definitely does add a- a link to the chain.

Mark Coltrain (15:04):

Gotcha, thank you. Um, are there any particular rituals or traditions that you do around this time of year, either leading up to the festival, during, or after?

Jerry Douglas (15:15):

Well the trip in here is beautiful. Um, uh, I like to drive here from Nashville. I had to fly last night, but I- I tried getting a ride with everybody in the van, but they all had somebody with them, they wouldn't bring me. So- (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (15:29):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (15:29):

... so I flew in, and my tour manager picked me up last night at the airport in Charlotte and brought me in. But the drive in here, you know, coming through the ... From Nashville, coming- coming toward the Cumberland Plateau and then, uh, going down through the gorge past- past Knoxville and through the gorge is where you- you get, you get that feeling that you're- you're a very, uh, s-, you're a very small thing here. And then it doesn't let up, it, uh, it the- the beau-, the beauty just keeps coming, you know, it's- it's just the Smoky Mountains, and you pass through that, get down on the other side of the Smokies, and- and then fall into the Piedmont, you know? It's- it's a very geographical place.

(16:12):

And, uh, I- I just li-, I like the drive, all the, yeah, all the pretty flowers in the middle of the road. I mean, I'm a musician, I'm on the road all the time, I travel mostly at night.

Mark Coltrain (16:25):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (16:26):

But when I can see what the country, what this country of ours looks like, it's, uh, it's amazing, it's amazing what all we have here and just open your eyes once in a while. But this, the- the drive over here and then into- into a s-, into an area that was once, uh, the furniture capital, furniture maker capital of the world, you know, and- and everything that's happened since, you know, uh, um, businesses falling out and- and then- then COVID hits us. Um, it hasn't been easy on the area, it's impacted the area.

Mark Coltrain (17:00):

Sure.

Jerry Douglas (17:00):

But, you know what, the people that show up, everybody I've talked to today, they have a huge smile on their face and they were happy to be here, and, uh, I- I- I was just as happy to see them. It's, uh, it's, uh, it's even. It's, uh, it's, uh, it's- it's ... This festival gives us a chance to have a really good conversation with the people who are out there listening to us all the time, with the fans-

Mark Coltrain (17:24):

Right.

Jerry Douglas (17:25):

... whatever you want to call. Kind of don't like to call them fans, it's, uh, always seemed like a weird term to me. But, um-

Mark Coltrain (17:31):

You're the second person that said that, actually, um-

Jerry Douglas (17:33):

Really?

Mark Coltrain (17:34):

Yes.

Jerry Douglas (17:34):

Well, it- it i-, uh, but, uh, it, uh, really is. I- I d-, uh- uh, so many of them are friends, you know? They walk away as- as a friend, you know, uh, and ... But this business is also, uh, there's also the- the other, the flip side of that is, uh, is you might meet somebody who you just, like, you know, s-, all of a sudden there's sparks, I mean not in a, any relationship kind of way.

(18:03):

It's just, like, any interest, you might hit a common interest just in going, just in passing, and you might su-, stand there and talk with that person for five minutes straight about that, and have the greatest conversation about that, and then you'll never see them again, and that's- that's the flip side of all of that. I mean, we do that every day-

Mark Coltrain (18:22):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (18:22):

... you know, and- and, uh, that's ... I don't like that, you know, I- I- I would like for those things to continue, but they don't, they just can't.

Mark Coltrain (18:31):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (18:31):

And that's the, that's- that's the one, that's the one of the only negative things about being a traveling musician.

(18:37):

Um, but, uh, I've gone, I've veered completely off subject.

Mark Coltrain (18:43):

That is okay, that is-

Jerry Douglas (18:44):

(laughs)

Mark Coltrain (18:44):

... okay, I'm okay with that. Um, so, um, you mentioned, uh, earlier in your response to that question, you mentioned COVID-

Jerry Douglas (18:50):

Hm.

Mark Coltrain (18:51):

... and that has come up a little bit in- in these interviews and I'm, kind of, curious to hear the year, I guess it was, it would've have been 2020. Did you ... That- that weekend that you would have been here, did you do anything that weekend to commemorate not being at MerleFest or ... And there's some people ... Uh, one person mentioned that, I forget the- the person who organized a Zoom, sort of, event. Well did you participate in that? Okay.

Jerry Douglas (19:13):

Yeah, um, when COVID struck, uh, you know, it was so (laughs) ... The first festival, you know, of the year, we knew was not gonna happen and that was really sad. But then somebody came up with the idea, let's do a Zoom of the festival and anybody can, like, um, we'll show this later, we'll show this Zoom of everybody playin' together, or talking to, at least talking to each other. At least we'll bring up the subject of MerleFest and we'll- we'll-have our own little MerleFest even though we can't get together this year, let's do the best we can-

Mark Coltrain (19:47):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (19:47):

... with what we had to work with, and at that time Zoom was it.

(19:51):

And, uh, so we worked on, we worked on that. I do remember Zoo-, doing that and quite a few festivals did it, because there was no festival that year. I mean, we were shut down as musicians. We- we were completely shut down, could not play to an audience, didn't matter how big it was. And that, uh, and that lasted for about a year and a half.

(20:12):

And, uh, but I have a studio, so I was able to work from the studio and I did, I did some, uh- uh, some, uh- uh, Facebook, uh, Instagram, uh, Flux Fridays I called them.

Mark Coltrain (20:32):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (20:33):

And I would come on, I would, I would come on live onto those every Friday at about 1:00 or somethin' like that and- and play for half an hour, just talk, and play, and clown, be a clown, and- and just, you know. And I did that all the way through, I did it from March to December-

Mark Coltrain (20:55):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (20:56):

... and then I started running out of things to do. (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (20:58):

(laughs)



Jerry Douglas (20:59):

And- and- and by then everything was shifting as well, you know, the whole world was, stopped turning.

Mark Coltrain (21:05):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (21:05):

And, uh, and so I had, I was able to work, so I- I did probably 40, 50 records while, durin-

Mark Coltrain (21:12):

Uh-

Jerry Douglas (21:12):

... COVID-

Mark Coltrain (21:12):

... yeah.

Jerry Douglas (21:13):

... and just locked in my studio doing everything myself and sending them back out, and knowing now they're records.

Mark Coltrain (21:19):

Right.

Jerry Douglas (21:19):

Uh, but it was a, it was a tough period and- and knowin' that, you know, um, MerleFest was the first casualty for us and that's a big one-

Mark Coltrain (21:29):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (21:30):

... that's a very big one. And, uh, and it also, uh, it's big, uh, in monet-, mon-, financially, you know?

Mark Coltrain (21:36):

Sure.

Jerry Douglas (21:36):

Some bands who was, this was their big deal, I mean this was, they were bringing out their new band and we're gonna bring it out, we're just gonna wow the audience with it, boom COVID ca-, uh, canceled-

Mark Coltrain (21:49):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (21:49):

... you know, all your dreams, and hopes, and everything. You've-

Mark Coltrain (21:51):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (21:52):

... been dashed. I hope not, you know, I hope everybody hung on, got-

Mark Coltrain (21:56):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (21:56):

... better- (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (21:56):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (21:57):

... and they're here now-

Mark Coltrain (21:58):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (21:58):

... and they're doing even better than they thought they would.

Mark Coltrain (21:59):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (22:01):

But, you know, it was, it was tough, it it was tough for musicians and, uh, it's still tough-

Mark Coltrain (22:05):

Sure.

Jerry Douglas (22:05):

... it's still tough, and we're all, you know, this year is really, kind of, like, you know, here we are at MerleFest, real MerleF-, real MerleFest-

Mark Coltrain (22:17):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (22:17):

... and we're doing what we did in 2018 from-

Mark Coltrain (22:18):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (22:18):

... 1998?

Mark Coltrain (22:20):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (22:21):

Wow.

Mark Coltrain (22:22):

Yeah- yeah, thank you. Um, uh, we've ... I've certainly gotten some sense of this, as you've been talking, but can you, just again, describe your, um, uh, your relationship with Doc and the festival, sort of that- that- that, sort of that relationship and how has it evolved, I guess, over the years as well?

Jerry Douglas (22:39):

Well, I heard first, uh, you know, I heard Doc Watson first on a Flatt and Scruggs record-

Mark Coltrain (22:43):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (22:43):

... I mentioned that before.

Mark Coltrain (22:45):

Yup.

Jerry Douglas (22:48):

And, uh- uh, and I- I met Doc ... Uh, the first time I met Doc, he and Merle were playing at a place called Smithville, Virginia, and it was one of the hottest stages any of us have ever been on, because it had a sheet, it had a tin roof, and it was about 108 in the shade. And I remember Doc out there just sweating, you know, and he'd take that one arm up and, his forearm, and wipe his, wipe his brow, and bring his, bring his pick back down and start right into another song. And I can't ... It- it ... nothing bothered him and Merle too.

(23:23):

And then I met Merle backstage. Doc did a couple by himself and I walked up on the back of the stage and there was Merle, and we sat and we stood there and talked, you know, while dir-, and while Doc was out doing his thing, and what a nice guy. And Merle f, Merle was a, Merle was a really nice fellow. We were just talking a while ago, Merle was 37 when he died, you know, and- and then I was, you know ... Uh, then I think, uh, if I think about that, you know, I was 37 here. I- I turned 37 here.

(23:57):

And so what, you know, that- that's an odd place to go, but it's just a, uh- uh, he should have been here too, you know? He should have been here too, just, too, you know, maybe none of this would have even happened if it hadn't been for him and- and whatever, what happened, but he should have been here with us. He would have ha-, he would have been hangin' in here with, havin' a great time with everybody. You know, he's just like us, he's just- just like us, yeah.

Mark Coltrain (24:24):

Yeah, I asked that of a, of a s-, another musician, um, sort of, what the ... Uh, since you, uh, knew him fairly well, what do you think he would've thought of all this, Merle, what do you think he would've thought, because this is certainly ... I think, like, um, you alluded to this earlier, this is, sort of, uh, organically grown beyond a lot of peoples' ... They wouldn't, they wouldn't have expected this in 1988, right, what- what we have today.

Jerry Douglas (24:43):

No, we were just trying to build, we were just trying to pay for our garden, that's all, and it turned into all these buildings and- and, uh, you know, the- the, uh, this beautiful campus. But,

uh, yeah, I think if Merle was here, he would be laughing his ass off. He'd be, he ... If he, if he could see what's going on here and- and, you know, knowing that this was started all about him and his- his daddy wanting to, um, make, create this garden, uh, I think Merle would think it- it- it ... I- I don't, I don't think he would think it was funny, I think he would be, I think it would really be a cheerful thing. I think it would be a great thing for him. He- he, uh, he would, love the idea, you know? Maybe ... He's done so much for people who never met him, you know-

Mark Coltrain (25:31):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (25:31):

... and, uh, that's pretty good-

Mark Coltrain (25:35):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (25:35):

... pretty good when you can, when you can, uh-

Mark Coltrain (25:38):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (25:38):

... put on an event like this and make so many people happy, change so many peoples' lives, and, uh, give them somethin' to do to take their minds off of all the stuff that we endure day in and

day out, and the news, and all this crazy stuff, you know, to come here and just forget all about it, just go to, come, a completely nice, your safe spot-

Mark Coltrain (26:02):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (26:02):

... you know? And, if he, uh, he knowing that, he would be extremely happy.

Mark Coltrain (26:08):

When ... I want to circle back to Doc for a second. Um, do you remember the last festival that Doc performed at and do you remember the festival after, first festival after Doc's death, and can you share about each of those experiences, if there's anything that stands out at, um, to you about those- those times.

Jerry Douglas (26:25):

The last year that Doc was here, we all played as much as we could with him. We- we- we just, kind of, made a pact we would do that and- and- and we did every chance we got. And he was on stage all the time, you- you couldn't get rid of him. And I don't know if he knew, I don't know what- what was goin' on, but, uh, or maybe he wasn't going to, he was going to retire, I don't know.

(26:52):

But when I came back here the next year knowing Doc wasn't gonna be here, it was different. Uh, it- it felt different to me, that I wasn't going to see Doc Watson. When I pulled up in the back stage area, I wasn't going to see that, uh- uh- uh, Scott Rouse, and Dr. Rouse, and helping Doc,



uh, Watson get to his room in the back, uh, back- back of the stage where he'll, he held court all day (laughs) long. It was great.

(27:25):

I remember taking James Taylor back there to meet him, because I thought, this is the only chance that they're gonna have.

Mark Coltrain (27:31):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (27:31):

And- and, uh, I just introduced them, watched them shake hands, and then I left, you know, let these guys talk. And, uh, they ... Because I'm sure James owed so much to- to- to Doc and he was able to tell him. And they had played together, I think, once before, but not in a situation like this.

(27:54):

And- and, uh, it's- it's, that's another thing it is, it's great for us, uh, for all of us that- that have been here so many times, to introduce people to Doc and that year we couldn't do it, couldn't do it, Doc-

Mark Coltrain (28:09):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (28:09):

... wasn't there. It changed everything. Uh, I mean the festival went on just the same, just as it is today, but, man, uh, I miss, I miss it. You know, I sit out, I'd be out there on stage playing, there'd be a whole line of us playing, and Doc would say, "Take it, Jerry," and I didn't even know he, uh, I didn't even know that he knew I was there, you know?

Mark Coltrain (28:34):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (28:35):

I found out later that T. Michael was given him hints, but-

Mark Coltrain (28:37):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (28:38):

... but, uh, to me it was amazing. I'd just be doing nothing, you know, and all of a sudden I hear Doc say, "Take it, Jerry," (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (28:43):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (28:43):

... just like, "Oh my God, (laughs) okay, I'll do it, I'll do whatever you ask." And- and one time, Doc would, Doc and I did, uh, a, uh, j-, a 501 jeans commercial, Levi-

Mark Coltrain (28:57):

Oh.

Jerry Douglas (28:57):

... commercial together.

Mark Coltrain (28:57):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (28:58):

And, uh, Doc flew in to Nashville. And I went to Nashville to pick him up.

Mark Coltrain (29:04):

Uh-huh.

Jerry Douglas (29:04):

I had never led a blind person before.

Mark Coltrain (29:08):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (29:09):

And, uh, ask Sam Bush about his.

Mark Coltrain (29:12):

He told me yesterday.

Jerry Douglas (29:13):

Did he?

Mark Coltrain (29:13):

Yes-

Jerry Douglas (29:14):

(laughs)

Mark Coltrain (29:14):

... he did. He told me that story-

Jerry Douglas (29:15):

(laughs)

Mark Coltrain (29:15):

... yeah.

Jerry Douglas (29:17):

Well I didn't do that.

Mark Coltrain (29:17):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (29:18):

I didn't walk him into anything, but he-

Mark Coltrain (29:20):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (29:20):

... he, uh, you know, we're- we're just goofy musicians, you know? But we're leading this icon around in the airport and then take him out, put him in the car, and he said, "Where can I get a good cheeseburger?"

Mark Coltrain (29:32):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (29:33):

And I took him to the best cheeseburger place I could think of, Brown's Diner in Nashville, Tennessee. So, it's a, just a little hole in the wall, but it's what Doc would like. I'd, you know-

Mark Coltrain (29:46):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (29:47):

... this would take him back to 1950-

Mark Coltrain (29:49):

Yeah-

Jerry Douglas (29:49):

... you know? (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (29:49):

... yeah.

Jerry Douglas (29:50):

And he loved it. He had it all over him-

Mark Coltrain (29:53):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (29:54):

... he had it all over his face and he, but he- he cleaned it all up. And, uh, we- we did the jeans commercial the next day, and- and by then B. had driven him, and he took over the, getting him from place to place- (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (30:08):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (30:09):

... 'cause Zach and I did the hotel room and made sure he knew where everything was and, of course, he did.

Mark Coltrain (30:14):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (30:14):

And, uh, it was, it was a thrilling experience though-

Mark Coltrain (30:18):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (30:18):

... I could tell you if- if you've never done it, uh, you know, much less be, it'd be Doc Watson.

(laughs) But, uh, yeah, the- the ... I felt like, I felt like part of the family too. I- I- I went, I went to dinner one time, uh, with, uh, Earl Scruggs and- and Doc and I'd never seen anybody eat so fast-

Mark Coltrain (30:44):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (30:44):

... 'cause these guys are really old road dogs-

Mark Coltrain (30:48):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (30:48):

... I mean they could, they could get- get- get through a meal-

Mark Coltrain (30:51):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (30:52):

... quick because they gotta get back on the road.

Mark Coltrain (30:54):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (30:54):

So I'm just, like, uh, getting started, taking, like, the first bite of my sandwich and I see their plates are-

Mark Coltrain (30:59):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (30:59):

... empty. (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (30:59):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (31:03):

And, uh, okay, I'll just wrap this up. (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (31:05):

Oh yeah, that's funny, um, thank you for that.

Jerry Douglas (31:07):

But who gets to do that, you know-

Mark Coltrain (31:09):



Yeah- yeah.

Jerry Douglas (31:09):

... it's, like, charmed life-

Mark Coltrain (31:11):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (31:12):

... that's what I got.

Mark Coltrain (31:12):

Great, thank you, um, thank you for sharin' that.

(31:15):

Um, well we've reached the end. Uh- uh, the lo-, the final question is, basically is, you know, we've, you've shared a lot today. Is there anything else, um, relevant to the conversation or the theme of our questions that you want to- to share with us?

Jerry Douglas (31:28):

You know, I- I, only thing I can say, uh, is, and- and it's an, uh, observation over the years, and it, and once you gets past 10 it doesn't matter, you know, 30 is, yeah, just a number-

Mark Coltrain (31:45):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (31:45):

... because each- each one of the times I've been here has- has been its own, its own memory, but they're all stacked up and they're right now, and here I am at MerleFest again, so I'm makin' a new one.

(31:57):

But, uh, the festival, the way the fest-, this festival was run from the beginning, was a very- very well planned out thing and festivals aren't usually. Festivals are usually thrown together by four or five drunk guys in a band who decide-

Mark Coltrain (32:14):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (32:14):

... "Uh, hey, we should get a, we should start a festival. (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (32:17):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (32:17):

Does anybody have any money?"

Mark Coltrain (32:20):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (32:22):

Uh, but of course they don't. And- and, but, uh, the biggest festivals are, you know, uh, you know, they- they pull in sponsors. Like, this- this festival's always been smart, forward thinking, had a sponsor. You know, the- the different ones over the years and- and now there's- there's ones very good, and they're very, they're great, to the, to the, to the- the facility here, they're great to the festival.

(32:48):

And I think that's- that's ... What I take away from, uh, in the lar-, in the larger sense, in the business sense of all of this, this is one of the, um, most well run festivals in the world. A lot of volunteers here, but a lot of people who put a l-, other years in here who know how things work and how things don't work, and how to make things run smooth. How to grease the wheels, how to not be forceful with people, not- not have too much of a law enforcement, uh- uh, you know, you know, people, like, you're being watched and ever, you know, or anything like that. It doesn't, it, uh, there's no sense of anxiety about anything here, this is, and this is ... If you have anxiety, come to MerleFest, you'll never have it again.

Mark Coltrain (33:34):

Yeah, that's a good point. I mean, and I and I wonder if that is, that family atmosphere, the lack of, you know, alcohol, things like that, if that contributes to that. I've, uh-

Jerry Douglas (33:42):

It could. I think, you know, the fact that Doc didn't drink. You know, Merle did, Doc didn't, Rosa Lee surely didn't. Uh, but- but they were Christian people who wanted, uh, a festival that reflected their- their, uh, the way they are, you know, reflect, was a reflection on them and, uh, I think they did a wonderful- wonderful job of it, because you don't see anybody out here, you

don't see fights. You don't see people, you know ... And part of that is because they're not forced, they don't feel forced in any way to do anything.

Mark Coltrain (34:17):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (34:18):

And it's, uh, just a big ol' family gathering and it has become that over the years, you know, with all these people, the different- different, (laughs) uh- uh, generations of, you know? I've met kids here that, you know, were kids of ... Their- their mother or father was a kid here too. (laughs)

Mark Coltrain (34:38):

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Jerry Douglas (34:40):

Yeah, that's so strange what-

Mark Coltrain (34:42):

That has come up-

Jerry Douglas (34:42):

That is-

Mark Coltrain (34:42):

... a lot though. Yeah, so that has come up a lot, sort of, people watching their kids grow up, and the kids of the kids have come, are coming, you know, so it's- it's, you know, that has certainly been a theme of, uh, a lot of these interviews.

Jerry Douglas (34:52):

Yeah, I've seen lots ... I know lots of kids here, and watched 'em grow up, and watched them have their own families now.

Mark Coltrain (34:58):

Hm.

Jerry Douglas (34:59):

It's a ... (laughs) I never thought I'd ever be talkin' about anything like that in my life, you know? I'm a musician, I'm, uh, just a rogue and- and, uh ... But, this is a, this is a very nice, peaceful, s-secure place-

Mark Coltrain (35:16):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (35:16):

... and, uh, and it's just- just a- a happy, a happy time.

Mark Coltrain (35:19):

Well considering the- the polarized world that we live in, it does, you're right, uh-

Jerry Douglas (35:23):

Uh, oh, yeah.

Mark Coltrain (35:23):

... you make a good point. It seems like, uh, this seems, like, almost-

Jerry Douglas (35:25):

Yeah.

Mark Coltrain (35:26):

... like a- a Garden of Eden away from, sort of, the crazy times, you know, that- that we find ourselves.

Jerry Douglas (35:30):

Well I always felt like that was our job as ... It's our job to take, to take 'em away from whatever it is that's just, you know, almost driven them here-

Mark Coltrain (35:41):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (35:41):

... you know? They couldn't stand it, and they get here, and they hope they're not gonna hear any, nobody, uh, you know, go into the, their political side or, you ... Again, sometimes, you know, this is a big place and this is a place where you- you can't do that.

Mark Coltrain (35:55):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (35:56):

You can't do that and ... God bless you if you're on the right side.

Mark Coltrain (36:00):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (36:01):

But, uh, you know, we're not, we're musicians, we're not politicians.

Mark Coltrain (36:06):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (36:06):

And we have our different forums where we can be politicians-

Mark Coltrain (36:09):

Sure.

Jerry Douglas (36:10):

... and, um, we get slammed for that too, though-

Mark Coltrain (36:12):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (36:12):

... you know? Go, just go play the dobro.

Mark Coltrain (36:14):

Right.

Jerry Douglas (36:15):

Yeah, shut up, play the dobro.

Mark Coltrain (36:15):

(laughs)

Jerry Douglas (36:16):

Well I have opinions, I'm a musician, so I have a place I can do that. And ... But, uh, this festival just feels good, it- it feels good out there, you know? It doesn't feel like there's any war going on, you know, that- that's just life or death-

Mark Coltrain (36:33):

Mm-hmm.

Jerry Douglas (36:34):

... anywhere else. It- it's, uh ... They're here for one reason, they're here- here to have fun and that fun is coming through, you know, uh, their ears-

Mark Coltrain (36:46):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (36:46):

... you know, and we're tryin' to give it to 'em.



Mark Coltrain (36:46):

Great.

Jerry Douglas (36:47):

We're just tryin' to take it, takin' all that away-

Mark Coltrain (36:48):

Yeah.

Jerry Douglas (36:48):

... for the time being.

Mark Coltrain (36:48):

Yeah- yeah-

Jerry Douglas (36:48):

Yeah.

Mark Coltrain (36:50):

... thank you, yeah, thank you for that.

(36:51):

Well that's it, um, thank you so much Mr. Douglas-

Jerry Douglas (36:53):

Yeah.

Mark Coltrain (36:54):

... let me stop recording and-

Jerry Douglas (36:55):

[inaudible 00:36:56]

Mark Coltrain (36:55):

... uh, so-