

State Fair Masters

Traditional Arts Indiana and the Indiana State Fair wish to recognize individuals for their mastery of a particular tradition and for their dedication to sharing their knowledge at the fair, year after year. These men and women give generously of themselves by exhibiting, demonstrating, or performing at county and state fairs. They are well known by neighbors and friends in home communities for a particular skill and for their commitment to passing their excellence on to others. To learn more about the State Fair Masters, please visit:

traditionalartsindiana.org/programs/indiana-state-fair/state-fair-masters/



Traditional Arts Indiana Presents The 2017 Indiana State Fair Master



Bill Bailey

Master Washboard & Spoon Player
Entertainment Coordinator
for the Pioneer Village



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MATHERS MUSEUM OF WORLD CULTURES



Bill Bailey: Master washboard & spoon player

I never expected that the music would go so well... I had organized things before on mass scale, but the State Fair is special—for the citizens of Indiana it is home. I have been so lucky. ~ Bill Bailey

A fixture at the Indiana State Fair for many years, Bill Bailey coordinates the entertainment in the Pioneer Village, inviting musicians, storytellers, and other entertainers from around the state to perform on the village's two rustic stages. His relationship with the fair began in 1991, when he played percussion with a band in the village—but Bill is no ordinary percussionist. A self-proclaimed “idiot-phonist,” he makes his rhythmic music with spoons, washboards, and a variety of other everyday items.

Bill played percussion throughout his school years, but sold his drums when he went to college, remaining “music-less” for a while. Then in 1976, a couple that played old-time music moved next door, and he was inspired to try his hand at mandolin, guitar, and harmonica—yet percussion kept calling to him. He picked up the spoons, and eventually began tapping out his syncopated rhythms on a washboard and other resonate objects such as a wooden shoe, triangles, and horse shoes. Before long, Bill was playing multiple styles of music including old-time, blues, and jug band. In 1991, he played with a couple of bands performing at the fair's Pioneer Village. He was hooked, and each year, he continued to play.

In 2003, Gerry Gray, the original music coordinator for the village, chose Bill as her replacement. He continued to book the old-time and dulcimer music that had been featured at the fair since the 1970s, but he also expanded the program to include a greater variety of traditional music and other forms of entertainment. One successful program that he helped develop was a tribute to the WLS National Barn Dance, which featured the music and theatrical routines of the popular radio show in the early 20th Century. For six years, large audiences came to see this reenactment show.

Besides his work at the Indiana State Fair, Bill serves as a musical ambassador for the Columbus Washboard Company, the last manufacturer of hand-built washboards in North America. Bill paints and outfits their boards, transforming them into musical instruments. The company sells dozens of Bill's musical boards, which they ship all over the world. Each year, Bill also travels to Ohio to perform at their Washboard Music Festival to promote this unique musical genre.

Today, in addition to his own musical pursuits, Bill continues to coordinate the entertainment at the Pioneer Village. From old-time country, bluegrass, gospel, and blues, to storytelling and fiddling contests, the stages at the village help create a nostalgic atmosphere where fairgoers can escape the pressures of contemporary life. And while he makes sure the Pioneer Village stage shows run smoothly, visitors can still find Bill Bailey tapping out his upbeat rhythms and entertaining audiences.



Learn more about Bill Bailey at:
traditionalartsindiana.org/2017-state-fair-master-bill-bailey/
or [youtube.com/watch?v=jYK8-TLkNCU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYK8-TLkNCU)
or scan the code to access the link.

