

# LYONS: A MUSICAL MECCA

by Brian Eyster – writer, webmaster, musician and evangelist for the Lyons music scene

***“In the past decade, Lyons has emerged as the great bluegrass Mecca of the West.” – Denver Post, 2007.***

Wandering into Oskar Blues for the Tuesday night bluegrass jam can be overwhelming: there’s a Grammy-winning musician at that table; there’s the head of a national booking agency standing by the window; there are several touring musicians trading licks in that corner; over there is an award-winning instrument builder; standing in the hallway is one of the area’s top recording studio engineers; and wait, there’s your new next-door neighbor playing a... banjo.

The high-profile music venues – Planet Bluegrass and Oskar Blues – may receive most of the public attention. But the real musical treasure of Lyons is behind the scenes: the vibrant community of touring musicians, recording artists, music business executives, and neighbors who share a passion for music of all kinds.

Unlike the highly competitive scenes in many major cities, the Lyons music community is uniformly welcoming. Musicians come together weekly for jam sessions – bluegrass, blues, and rock – at Oskar Blues, on front porches, in the parks and in living rooms. Says Grammy-winning dobro player (and longtime Lyons resident), Sally Van Meter “it’s like the East Village of New York, when all the poets were living there in the ‘60s. It almost has that feel because of this great connection we all have.”

Lyons musicians and residents volunteer their time and expertise to produce intimate community-oriented concerts, dances, and charity performances in local halls and in their own homes. This free sharing of resources helps cultivate a supportive community, one that attracts new music professionals to town nearly every month.

With its mission to “serve the local Lyons community and expand the reach of its music across the earth” Redstone Radio streams music from Lyons musicians and the music they love. A local transmitter is in the works to put Lyons music on the local airwaves.

Lyons is also a town of devoted amateurs who place a high value on music in the community. Members of the town Board of Trustees are musicians, as are many local business owners. A lively music discussion is equally likely at the coffee shop or the bike shop. The Chamber of Commerce presents a Welcome Basket to new neighbors who sign up online. Among the many bounties is a pair of tickets to one of the summer music festivals at Planet Bluegrass, a surefire way to introduce them to the music community.

Lyons residents take great pride in music education, with many freelance music teachers working throughout town. The Lyons high school music program shares the pride and its music director was named one of the state’s top teachers by Denver’s 9News.

***With venues ranging from intimate house concerts to world-renowned music festivals ,Lyons has hosted an impressive array of performers – from bluegrass to blues, folk to rock ‘n roll, Grammy winning songwriters to virtuosic instrumentalists, including.....***

***KT Tunstall; Kris Kristofferson; Alison Krauss & Union Station; Chris Isaak; Ani DiFranco; Yonder Mountain String Band; Emmylou Harris; Ray LaMontagne; Norah Jones; Doc Watson; Nanci Griffith; Arlo Guthrie; Natalie MacMaster; Earl Scruggs; Joan***

Baez; Bruce Hornsby; Susan Tedeschi; Del McCoury Band; Joan Osborne; Richie Havens; Indigo Girls; Randy Newman; Missy Higgins; John Prine; Kasey Chambers; Pinetop Perkins; Sam Bush & David Grisman; Gillian Welch; Nickel Creek; John Hartford; Rosanne Cash; Warren Haynes; Ricky Skaggs; John Paul Jones; David Crosby; Tim O'Brien...many, many more.

**Finding Live Music in Lyons:** for blues aficionados Lyons indoor music scene begins with Oskar Blues, a venue Rolling Stone magazine called “the hottest place to be on a Saturday night in Colorado.” Oskar Blues presents live local and national touring bands four nights a week, along with the area’s best bluegrass jam (Tuesday nights), monthly tribute nights, and occasional concerts from local high school jazz bands.

On the east end of town the Outlaw Saloon offers karaoke and occasional live country and rock bands. Andrea’s Homestead Café presents acoustic singer-songwriters and piano music on the weekends. Bluegrass and folk artists perform in distinctive community settings, thanks to two volunteer-run organizations. High Street Concerts presents monthly concerts at Rogers Hall; Backbeat Concerts extends the musical possibilities with eclectic acoustic music at the Lyons Community Church. For a more intimate experience, several residents open their living rooms up to the public for acoustic house concerts from touring singer-songwriters. Meanwhile, The Stone Cup presents occasional acoustic concerts in its cozy café setting.

Live music, for many, means the energy and camaraderie of organized dances. The Lyons Old-Time Community Dance brings together live bands and professional dance callers during the winter months, while the Red Rock Ramblers attracts dancers, callers, and callers from around the nation every Saturday night during the summer months. Come summer, the music moves outdoors as thousands of Festivarians travel to Lyons for the world-renowned festivals on the Planet Bluegrass Ranch – RockyGrass (late-July) and the Rocky Mountain Folks Festival (mid-August). Many musicians arrive a full week before the festivals to take part in one of the week-long music workshops – The RockyGrass Academy and The Song School. The Vasquez Stage in Sandstone Park hosts free concerts throughout the summer, including the Concerts in the Park series on Thursday evenings.