

Crooked Road more taken

Heritage music with roots in Appalachia
is gaining fans, and comes to UCSB

By Ted Mills

NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

Highway 58 runs from Roanoke, Va., deep through Appalachia, ending in the Cumberland Mountains. Maybe it's the air, or the rural views, or the close-knit communities, but this 253-mile highway has acted as a greenhouse for heritage music.

On Sunday, this "Crooked Road" will stretch out to the West Coast, bringing a selection of the finest traditional-folk acts to UCSB's Campbell Hall for a down-home music party.

While other forms of traditional American art are in danger of dying out, the combo of bluegrass, Appalachian ballads and mountain gospel, along with an assortment of other sub-genres, continues to grow.

It's no struggle to get kids into learning the music of their grandparents — there are schools and workshops and camps and much more. And the hottest acts on the traditional scene are young, some still school-age.

Coming to Campbell Hall is a selection both new — the fiery bluegrass players No Speed Limit — and, well, if not old, experienced — banjo virtuoso Sammy Shelor and fiddle players Kirk Sutphin and Eddie Bond. Cross-

ing the generational line is family string band The Whitetop Mountain Band. The event has been put together by the National Council for the Traditional Arts, a private nonprofit.

One of the youngest performers of the evening will be Elizabeth LaPrelle, who has resuscitated the art of the Appalachian ballad, often singing these sad songs of loves and lives lost a cappella.

"I liked that these songs were sad," says LaPrelle, who started learning the classics when she was in kindergarten from her mother. "I liked the story. I liked the sound and its simplicity."

At 11, LaPrelle's parents were taking her to fiddlers conventions, where she sang, backed by her mother on harmony and her uncle on guitar. But even better was performing alone.

"A cappella is easier," she says. "I'm not screwing something up for the musicians. And I've never had a problem being loud enough."

A talent scout recommended her to an Augusta, Ga., workshop for ballad singing called Vocal Week. Here, she learned ballad history and broadened her repertoire. By 2005 she was singing on "A Prairie Home Companion,"

and this year she has returned to Vocal Week, but as an instructor.

"Elizabeth is great, and she's going to sing in my set," says Wayne Henderson, the guitar luthier who is spending more and more time away from the workshop as a touring musician.

Henderson's guitars fetch up to \$25,000 on eBay and in Christie's auctions, and take a long time to fashion. Even Eric Clapton had to wait 10 years to get his delivered. But Henderson plays a wicked lick in his three-finger style, and has toured the world. He loves that a younger generation is breathing life into the genre.

"They're all so good and so young," he says. "Not a geezer like me. We didn't have any of these opportunities when we were that age."

As he sets out with the others on the Crooked Road tour, he doesn't seem to mind that once again his work orders will back up, this time for 17 days. For Henderson, the chance to play trumps everything else.

"We're just tickled to death to come see you," he says in a kindly Virginia twang. "And we're excited to pick for you." ■

TO-DOINGS: UCSB shivers with intriguing sounds this week: *Music from the Crooked Road: Mountain Music of Virginia*, a touring revue of Appalachian goodies, at Campbell Hall on Sunday;



COURTESY OF UCSB ARTS & LECTURES

Wayne Henderson, above, is more than just a world-class guitar luthier, he's also an acclaimed player.

IN CONCERT

MUSIC FROM THE CROOKED ROAD

When: 7 p.m. Sunday

Where: Campbell Hall, UCSB campus

Tickets: \$35 general,

\$19 UCSB students

Information: 893-3535,

www.artsandlectures.ucsb.edu