

e Square festival returns



Dry Branch Fire Squad will perform at the Buisson Arts Center on Saturday and Sunday, and will also conduct several seminars over the weekend. (Submitted Photo)

Dry Branch Fire Squad is a bluegrass enigma

By Miriam Austin
The Nugget

Try to find out information about Ron Thomason's Dry Branch Fire Squad, and certain adjectives keep popping up: different, unique, intelligent, satirical, hysterical. Listen to the band's music, and you can see that it's true.

The band members' beautiful vocal harmonies are breathtaking; their instrumental abilities are downright amazing. Songs range from deeply moving to laugh-out-loud hysterical.

Dry Branch Fire Squad is a bluegrass enigma. And Ron Thomason bears full responsibility for that.

Thomason is something of an enigma himself, a man who has taught college-level English and Shakespeare classes, yet speaks as laid-back and hillbilly-ish as can be. In a story beginning with "They ain't never had no power," he'll mix tenses and

verbs, and still drop in a good dose of four- or five-syllable words and maybe a Shakespeare quote.

He evinces an unpretentious and cutting intelligence, distilling profound insights into their simplest form. He's worked as a teacher and a farmer, and embraces any adventure, from long-distance horse racing to mountain climbing.

All of these experiences and insights work their way into the music of Dry Branch Fire Squad, giving it a sound that is — well, unique and different.

Thomason hand-picks the songs the band performs, and has written many himself. A great many, Thomason says when he was checking the song catalogue one day, "There were 80-something songs on there. I was surprised to find that many."

Thomason attributes his song-writing process, in part, to manual labor.

"I used to farm," he says, "and spent a lot

of hours on the tractor. That's a lot of time to think."

Thomason also has a genuine passion for bluegrass, and pours it into the songs he writes, whether funny or serious.

"I've written a lot that can't get through," he says, "cause they're too emotionally affecting. I know it's a good song, but it's no use if you can't sing it."

Fortunately, there's an endless well of songs that Thomason does perform, and a repertoire of stories to tell in between.

Thomason, with his ability to see things like they really are, ignores all those clichéd adjectives when describing Dry Branch Fire Squad.

"Our music's pretty groovy," he says. "It's got guts."

Dry Branch Fire Squad will perform Saturday and Sunday at the Buisson Music Hall, beginning at 3 p.m. Call 706-867-0050 for ticket information.



'Goldilocks and the Three Bears on the Square' returns for festival

Bring the kids out for the annual favorite performance of Goldilocks and the Three Bears on the Square. This fun and comedic play was written by Tim Guigley and is based upon the actual occurrence of the bear wandering on the Dahlonega town square over 10 years ago — but with the Goldilocks story intertwined.

This year's play offers a fun new twist: Young audience members become actors. The adult cast of this year's production will be interacting with the audience, and young patrons can become trees in the bears' forest and more.

"Goldilocks and the Three Bears on the Square will be shown onstage at the Holly Theatre Saturday, April 22 at 11 a.m. and Sunday, April 23 at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$2 at the door. For more information on this performance or any other programming at The Historic Holly Theatre, please visit www.hollytheater.com or call 706-864-3759.

Bear on the Square returns for 10th year of Mountain arts

"Bear on the Square" is an authentic Mountain Festival featuring bluegrass and old-time music, traditional art and craft, folk art, dance, and storytelling. The festival is held on the Historic Public Square of Dahlonega, Georgia. The festival website is: [HYPERLINK "http://www.bearonthesquare.org" www.bearonthesquare.org](http://www.bearonthesquare.org)

The festival is produced by The Bear on the Square Mountain Festival Committee, Inc. — a group of dedicated Dahlonega community cultural volunteers. Founding Sponsor is The Nick Pender Family. Festival Corporate Partners are "Banjo.com" and the Appalachian Studies Center at North Georgia College & State University. Heritage Sponsor is folk artist Billy Roper.

Calling all Gardeners! Appalachian Studies Center seeks 'Heirloom seeds'

The Appalachian Studies Center North Georgia College & State University asks community members to bring their heirloom seeds to its booth at the Bear on the Square Festival. "Save Appalachian Gardens and Seeds" (SAGA) is a center project seeking to collect area heirloom seeds to bank for protecting biodiversity and the stories about the seeds to preserve as oral histories.

An heirloom seed is one that has been passed down through the family for at least 50 years and not sold commercially. For more information, please call the center, 706.864.1540 or email, asc@ngcsu.edu.

Find beauty, value, fun at Georgia Mountain Marketplace

Bountiful bargains of beauty and fun can be found at Bear on the Square Mountain Festival's "Georgia Mountain Marketplace" April 21-23 on the Public Square in Dahlonega. Smart shoppers will find North Georgia's finest market of traditional crafts, a remarkable collection featuring one-of-a-kind, hand-made items available for purchase directly from some of the mountain region's best artists.

Browse and buy affordable items for the body, the home, and the estate including items by renowned potters, weavers, spinners, soap makers, herbalists, quilters, blacksmiths, broom makers, basket makers, musical instrument builders, bee keepers, candle makers, furniture makers, and jewelers. Shoppers will also find imaginative birdhouses, turned wooden bowls, jams and jellies, fabric and needle-craft, and folk art paintings by outsider artists and memory painters. Many of these artists will be demonstrating the making of their art. Shoppers will also enjoy educational history displays including gold panning, moonshine craft and folklore, and an heirloom garden seed swap.

"The Georgia Mountain Marketplace" has chosen the best quality practitioners of mountain craft. The event is a celebration of the beauty, value, function, and fun of these fine artists' products. The mountain market atmosphere offers shoppers the chance to select perfect items directly from the artist, to see and learn about mountain crafts, and to appreciate the value, quality, and living traditions of the treasures found in the Marketplace.

"The Georgia Mountain Marketplace" is presented in partnership with the Appalachian Studies Center at North Georgia College & State University and is a special feature of the Bear on the Square Mountain Festival. The Marketplace will be presented Friday, April 21 from 11 a.m. until 6 p.m.; Saturday, April 22 from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m.; and Sunday, April 23 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Facejugs by Mark Williams (Submitted Photo)



Log Birdhouse by Jo Kilmer (Submitted Photo)