

High Horse To Play

INTERVIEW BY DORI SMITH

High Horse, featuring fiddler Carson McHaney, cellist Karl Henry, guitarist G Rockwell, and bassist Noah Harrington, is a progressive-acoustic stringband breathing the energy of alternative rock into an indelible blend of Bluegrass, Old-time, and Folk magic with crisp vocals and virtuosic chops. See High Horse at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, November 15 (doors open at 1:30), at Natalie's Grandview, 945 King Ave, Columbus, OH 43212, as part of the Americana/Folk Concert Series. You can learn more about High Horse at their website, www.highhorseband.com or Instagram account @highhorse.band.

Dori Smith: On your web site it says that High Horse "collect[ed] the skills and artistry learned from their education at the Berklee College of Music and New England Conservatory." I also heard a story on a recent podcast where Carson talked about a recital piece that was sort of the gravitational event that brought the band together. Can you give us just a little bit on your backgrounds and how the band came together?

High Horse: Before we were High Horse, we were four curious

See High Horse, pg 2

"Most folks don't realize that your vote is about the best thing you got in the world because it is the best thing you can use to change the world and make it better."

Woody Guthrie, essay to Alan Lomax, 1940

A Different Strummer Newsletter Highlights

HIGH HORSE INTERVIEW PG 1

CFMS 2026 SURVEY RESULTS PG 4

THANKSGIVING SPIRIT WITH BILL COHEN'S "SONGS OF GRATITUDE" PG 6

SAVE THE DATE, WELCOME NEW MEMBERS PG 7





Photo Credit David Gray

musicians studying at Berklee College of Music and New England Conservatory in Boston. Carson McHaney, our fiddler, had a background in classical violin and some historical performance music (read: Baroque violin shredding) as well as electronic music, and attended Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio at the same time as Karl Henry, our cellist. Karl was pioneering a pizzicato sound expanding the textural palette of the cello into something supportive and percussive, drawing on Missouri River Fiddle Style, Jazz and indie rock as much as on classical repertoire. Carson and Karl matriculated to NEC for graduate studies in the Contemporary Musical Arts Program (CMA), where they met G Rockwell, pursuing his Bachelor's. G Rockwell is an incredibly driven guitarist, banjoist, and mandolinist who grew up at Bluegrass/Americana festivals, camps, and jam sessions around the northeast. At NEC, Carson, Karl, and G pushed themselves beyond the bounds of genre and reason to pursue more esoteric music. In 2023, Carson McHaney was slated to graduate from NEC, and wanted to put his interest in American and Irish Fiddling traditions into a “suite” of fiddle tunes for his Master’s recital. Putting together the band for this piece was a journey, but the short story is that Carson pulled in Karl Henry and G Rockwell because they were the baddest cats available. G Rockwell brought on Noah Harrington, a Berklee-trained bassist and Jazz composer with an extensive background in Bluegrass, Jazz, Rock, and multiple kinds of Latin American music, to anchor the quartet with a grooving foundation. With this notorious foursome assembled, "The Suite" (as it came to be known) went off very well at Carson's recital. You can watch it on YouTube - the moment we first performed together. A friend pitched us the name "High Horse", and the rest is High History.

Smith: When it came to writing and arranging your self-titled debut album, High Horse, how did the musical and lyrical collaboration play out between the four of you? Between the four of you, and your combined experience, you must have had so much raw material to work with.

High Horse: For our first album we already had The Suite from Carson's recital filling up 15-20 minutes of time and serving as an artistic anchor point. We added a balance of covers and originals for a total of ~60 minutes of music. G and Carson both had plenty of ideas for covers, including a 3 song set of Irish tunes; a song by indie band, Pinegrove, and finally; Groundhog, an American traditional song about rodenticide as homestyle cooking. We added original tunes to the mix too, by Carson, Karl, and G, and knew we almost had a complete album ready to track. Carson gave a melodic song seed (which

later became "Prelude," track 2) to Kat Wallace, legendary musician and friend of the band. Kat came back with the original song "Holy Water", a haunting murder ballad and perfect capstone for the record.

Smith: On your album you have collaborations with Kat Wallace, Jacqui Armbruster, and Jacob Jolliff (who also helped produce the album) How do you end up pulling these artists in to add their unique sounds to your album? Do they get many chances to play live with you?

High Horse: Jacob Jolliff, a premiere mandolinist in new acoustic music, was our gracious producer. During marathon song-shaping sessions at his Brooklyn grass-dungeon in Prospect Lefferts Jacob helped us organize our ideas and time. Having him shred on tracks like Tombstone Territory, Groundhog, and The Suite was also a huge appeal of involving him. Kat Wallace and Jacqui Armbruster are both incredible singers, multi-instrumentalists, and composers/songwriters in their own right. Both also studied at NEC around the time that High Horse coalesced in Boston. Because Jacqui and Kat were our friends and some of our favorite musicians, it was obvious to include them. We can't omit sound engineer Dave Sinko, the most legendary audio capture auteur in progressive acoustic music. He was the Punch Brothers' live and studio engineer for years, and if you've liked a record in that zeitgeist in the past few decades you've heard his work. We've had Jolliff and Armbruster sit in with us for a handful of live shows since the album, but our artistic partnership with Kat Wallace has truly bloomed! We just released physical CDs of a live album titled "High Horse & Kat Wallace LIVE" where Kat backs us up on our High



Photo Credit Caleb Montague

Horse material, and High Horse backs Kat up on her original material from her record "Grand Design", as well as a few choice covers that we do together as a massive 5-piece band. This summer we toured with that Kat-Horse band across the country promoting that record, still digitally unreleased as of this interview.

Smith: You've obviously done a fair bit of touring since your album released. For the four of you what's been great and what's maybe been a struggle or a challenge with touring? Any favorite venues or performances? It has to be pretty cool to be connecting with fans and sharing your music across the country.

High Horse: We love connecting with new folks, but it's just one benefit of touring. Since Carson lives out in Colorado, touring is when we workshop new music together, a whetstone to refine our approach to material for future recording projects. Unpublished High Horse material can make up as much as 50% of a show, all the more reason to come and see us live. The challenges in touring are logistical and

financial. There's no playbook on organizing a tour, building relationships with fans and presenters, managing the schedules of 4+ in-demand musicians, and making it all work financially. We're figuring it all out as a team. As for favorite shows and venues, anywhere people are excited to hear us is our favorite place to play, and any show with High Horse is one of our favorite shows.

Smith: When putting your set lists together obviously you're going to do a lot from your album/singles, but you must have so much more you can perform. Do you sprinkle in unpublished High Horse songs? Covers with your unique sound/arrangement? Songs that some of you might have brought in from outside the band?

High Horse: We have a ton of material we can call upon, released and unreleased, covers and originals! At any given time we have ~4 hours of music we can reliably perform, and more music that we are polishing until it's ready. Typically a concert lasts for only ~75-90 minutes, so we are leaving roughly 2+ hours of music out anytime we play. The upshot is that if we play multiple sets in the same area on a given tour we can make the sets nearly completely distinct for audiences that tag along to multiple shows. This also keeps us musicians sharp and engaged in our performances - it's a lot of music to remember!

Smith: What can our readers expect next from High Horse? Another album on the horizon or other projects?

High Horse: We have an EP coming out in the next few months, and that aforementioned LIVE album with Kat Wallace & High Horse should soon have a digital release. We plan to track our next album in spring 2027. We're entering the apex of our creative lives, and this project is flourishing as a result. You can be part of the adventure on our instagram (@highhorse.band) or on our website (www.highhorseband.com).



Photo Credit Caleb Montague

CFMS 2026 Survey Results

BY JON LEVY, CFMS BOARD OF DIRECTORS VICE PRESIDENT

Thank you to those of you who took the time to respond to our CFMS 2026 Survey! This survey is important in helping our board shape the future direction of CFMS. We had 80 responses to the survey - If you didn't respond but would like your voice to be heard, it's not too late! You can take the survey here: https://tinyurl.com/CFMS-survey-2026

We thought you might appreciate a summary of our survey results. Of our 80

respondents, 71% attend our monthly concerts, 34% attend our weekly jams, and 91% attend the Central Ohio Folk Festival. Looking at our concert venues, 44 respondents listed the Mennonite Church as their top venue, and 21 listed Natalie's as their first choice.

We've noticed a drop in attendance at our monthly concerts, and the survey data supports that: 43% attended fewer concerts last season, with top reasons being not liking to go out in the evening (43%), not liking some of the venues (23%), and not being interested in some of the bands (20%).

The jamming opportunities we offer remains important to about 1/3 of the respondents. Of our jammers, 43% chose jamming with others as most important to them, while 31% chose playing music for others (senior living facilities, children's programs, etc) as most important.

Other folk arts of interest to the CFMS community include storytelling (59%), folk craft arts (43%), dance (38%), and poetry (29%) - all important areas for us to consider for future events.

With the triple-threat of a location change, a date change, and a funding change in 2026, we were very interested in feedback regarding the Central Ohio Folk Festival (COFF). Of the 91% of respondents who attend the COFF, 42% indicated that they attend every year, 35% attend most years, and just 7% were first timers; 15% attend rarely or have never attended. Of this population, 69% attended the 2026 COFF at Bank Run, with more than half attending both days. Their main reasons for attending the COFF included musical performances (80%), workshops (32%), jams (33%), volunteering (57%), family activities (11%), and food and culture (19%).

Of those who attended the 2026 COFF, 60% rated it excellent/loved it, 31% good/satisfied, 4% average/neutral, and 5% rated it below average. 87% indicated that they plan on attending next year, with 11% as maybe and 2% as no.

66% of the 2026 COFF attendee respondents did not attend the headliner concert, with top reasons being that it was too late in the evening (39%), inclement weather (31%), and not interested in the band (8%). In the comments, some people called out that having a long gap between the afternoon events and the evening headliner, combined with the more distant location, made attending the headliner difficult.

For those who did not attend the festival, the top reasons for not attending were location & logistics (48%), timing & scheduling (39%), health concerns (30%), financial factors (17%), and weather concerns (13%).

Finally, with regards to funding the Festival, 37% of the respondents prefer a ticketed event with a modest entry fee, 23% prefer a free event with at will donations, and 40% have no preference between a ticketed event and a free event with at will donations.

Again, thank you to those of you who responded to the survey, this data is very important to us! And to those who didn't respond, you still can at https://tinyurl.com/CFMS-survey-2026 if you'd like your voice to be heard.

Celebrate Thanksgiving Spirit with Bill Cohen's "Songs of Gratitude"



Friends. Family. Freedom. Food. Music. Pets. Laughter. Nature. And dozens of other things. Despite political turmoil and a divided nation, we have so much to be thankful for.

So join Bill Cohen from 4 pm to 5:30 pm on Friday November 27 as he sings a unique concert of folksongs and other tunes that express gratitude for all that we have. It's his 12th year for this Thanksgiving-themed concert, and once again, it takes place at Maple Grove Methodist Church, 7 W. Henderson.

Playing piano and guitar, Bill will sing songs linked to folk icons John Denver, Phil Ochs, Don McLean, the New Christy Minstrels, the Weavers, and Peter Paul and Mary. Plus, tunes linked to Bing Crosby, Louis Armstrong, Johnny Appleseed, Jiminy Cricket, and the TV show, "Golden Girls."

On several songs, Bill will be backed up by some wonderful veteran musicians. David Maywhoor will add percussion, and Joe Lambert and Joanne Blum will add soothing vocal harmonies.

Free parking is available in the parking lot just South of the church. It's accessible from Aldrich Road, one street south of Henderson, off of north High Street. Walk into the church from the parking lot through the back door.

$20 per person donations dare suggested at the door, but all contributions, large and small, will be welcomed. All proceeds will be sent to the International Medical Alliance of Tennessee. That's the group that Bill's wife Randi goes with to the Dominican Republic every February. The all-volunteer group of doctors, nurses, and medical students provides free medical care to impoverished, disenfranchised Haitian workers who live and work just inside the D.R. border.
Randi serves as the group's interpreter, bridging the language gap between the Spanish-speaking patients and the English-speaking medical workers.

Columbus Folk Music Society thanks the following grant providers:

GREATER COLUMBUS ARTS COUNCIL
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Welcome NEW Members

Rick McCracken-Bennett
Patrick Madden
Mickey Maguire

...and Welcome Back RENEWING Members!

Save the Date!

Americana/Folk Concert Series

High Horse - Sunday, Nov 15th 2:30pm
1:30 pm doors open; Refreshments available.
$15 admission + $3.75 processing fee
Venue: Natalie's Grandview, 945 King Ave, Columbus

In-Person Jams

Mondays, 6 - 8pm - 4th Ave. Christian Church, 296 W. 4th Avenue. Pizza!
Fridays, 2:30 - 4:30pm - Gillie Senior Center, 2100 Morse Rd. Meet in auditorium. Register at desk for Gillie Jammers (free)
Saturdays:
NOTE: Community Center classes (both free) require a Leisure Card, available for no charge at any Columbus Recreation center
9:30am - 11:30am - Whetstone Community Center, 3923 N. High St. Register at front desk for Music Jamming With Others.
NOON - 2:00pm - Carriage Place Community Center, 4900 Sawmill Road. Register at front desk for Music Jamming Class.

NEWSLETTER TEAM

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In-Person Jams, Continued

9:00am - Noon - South East Worthington Village Green. Jam happens during the Farmers Market. Bring a chair. Last Market Jam of season is Sat, October 31.

Donation Matching is Back!

For the past ten years, we've had an anonymous donor come forward towards the end of the year with an offer to match all donations to our organization beyond those of regular membership dues, received before December 31, up to a total of $1,000. That means if we are able to raise $1,000, it will be matched by our generous donor to a grand total of $2,000!

Whether a CFMS member or not, a monthly concert goer, or one of the thousands attending our COFF festival, your donation to the Columbus Folk Music Society yet this year may be doubled!

Donations may be made via the website:
https://www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/contact-donate.html
via the Columbus Foundation's Giving Store:
https://columbusfoundation.org/the-giving-store/nonprofit-directory-listing/ColumbusFolkMusicSocietyInc/6505
or by check payable to Columbus Folk Music Society and mailed to: CFMS, PO Box 20735, Columbus, OH 43220. Please write "matching challenge" on your check or online donation note.

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BECOME A MEMBER OF THE COLUMBUS FOLK MUSIC SOCIETY

Date _____ ☐ New ☐ Renew Preferred Newsletter Format: ☐ Digital ☐ Hard Copy **[NOTE: *if you choose hard copy, we request an additional $15 contribution over & above dues to cover postage & handling]***

Name(s) / Band Name (if applic) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

General Age Range – Born: ☐ 1930s-40s ☐ 1950s-60s ☐ 1970s-80s ☐ 1990s-2010s

Phone _____ (Cell) _____ If Band, website _____

E-mail Address _____ Additional e-mail (if a household or band) _____

We are also a growing, vibrant community of volunteers; the awesome force behind our work! Please ✔ at least 1 box.

☐ May folk festival	☐ Fundraising	☐ Musician	☐ Social Media
☐ CFMS concert events	☐ General Help	☐ Organizational Skills	☐ Web Design
☐ Cooking / Baking	☐ Graphic Design	☐ Professional Musician	☐ Writing / Newsletter
☐ Cbus Jammer Musician	☐ Leadership Skills	☐ Professional Instructor	☐ Other _____
☐ Data Management	☐ Legal	☐ Publicity	☐ None

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE ANNUALLY ON DECEMBER 31. ✔ one of the membership levels listed below.

☐ Individual $20	☐ Band $25	☐ Sponsor $100	☐ Silver $250
☐ Household $25	☐ Good Friend $50	☐ Patron $200	☐ Life Member $500

☐ *I have included an additional $15 (postage & handling) to have a printed version of newsletter mailed to me.*

To join/renew by credit card, visit CFMS' website: columbusfolkmusicsociety.org (About Us/Join)
OR click here: https://tinyurl.com/CFMS-Join

To join/renew by cash or check, please mail completed membership form with payment to: *Columbus Folk Music Society, PO Box 20735, Columbus, OH 43220.* Membership amounts may be tax-deductible.

My place of work matches donations: ☐