



The Lowest Pair To Play

INTERVIEW BY JIM MCHIE

The Lowest Pair, featuring banjo-wielding songwriters Kendl Winter and Palmer T. Lee, weave intricate picking with poetic Americana roots. Their latest album, Always As Young As We'll Ever Be, expands their rich, collaborative catalog. See The Lowest Pair at 8 p.m. Friday, October 23rd at the Columbus Mennonite Church at 35 Oakland Park Avenue as part of the Americana/Folk Concert Series. You can learn more about The Lowest Pair at their website, <https://www.thelowestpair.com/>.

Jim McHie: You two first started playing with each other on the banks of the Mississippi River at the Boats and Bluegrass Festival in Winona back in 2013. I heard in an interview that you once joked that when you first floated the idea of starting a 'double banjo forward' songwriting duo, you thought, 'What the hell would that be like? Nobody's going to want that'. When you are performing with 2 banjos how do you navigate the sonic space of two banjos playing at once? How do your two styles intertwine rather than step on each other's toes?

Kendl: Ooh, I love this question. We take a lot of different approaches to our arrangements, though these days if we're going to do a double banjo song, we often will play in different

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'(They played the Mash) they played the Monster Mash (The Monster Mash) it was a graveyard smash'

Bobby 'Boris' Pickett - The Monster Mash, 1962

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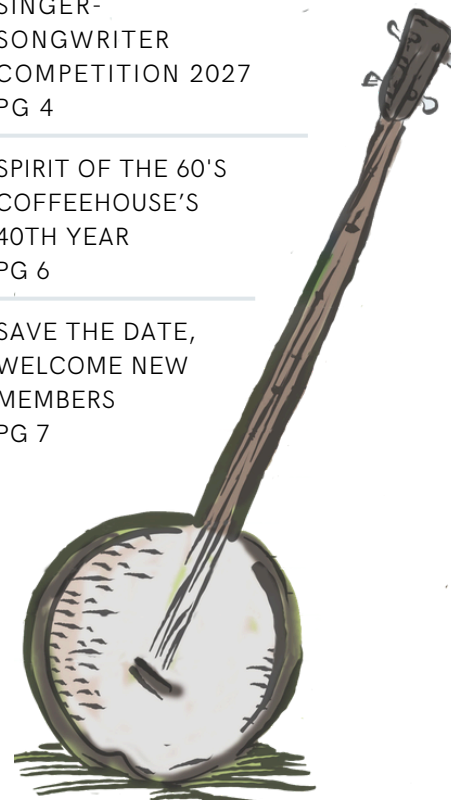




Photo Credit Sarah Cass

tunings and maybe one of us will play three-finger while the other plays clawhammer. For example, if we're going to play a song in the key of C, Palmer might play it out of standard position and I would probably drop my tuning to double C tuning. That's the easiest way to choose different sonic pathways. We also have become much more aware of the power of rests in our duo and try to weave our sounds in different octaves often rather than land in the same places. We've had a lot of fun hashing it out in practice, though between you and me, sometimes when no one's looking we'll really let loose, aggressively aiming at a ripping bluegrass tune with the same approach as fast as we can. But we're much pickier about what we decide to share on stage.

Palmer: The importance of learning to listen and respond, for any musician, can't be overstated. But yes, with banjos in the equation you need to make sure you don't accidentally conjure up a black hole. We try and make sure we're aware of leaving sonic space for the other player. If you're dominant in a tune or a moment be sure you're still leaving space.

Sometimes it's as simple as "you're going high so I'll go low," or "this is a busy moment in the melody or arrangement so I'll play less notes." Of course, tight harmonies or even unison is powerful but space is often the chefs kiss.

McHie: Both of you have deeply regular daily writing practices, and Palmer, you've even published a collection of poetry. You've both mentioned that songwriting essentially snuck in 'through the back door' of poetry as a way to share your words behind the protective 'force field' of an instrument. When you are co-writing, how do you negotiate the editing process? Kendl, you once noted that sometimes you can 'accidentally polish the raw material away from what was important'—how do you know when a song is truly finished and needs to be left in its raw, emotional state?

Kendl: I do tend to write most days whether it's jotting down morning pages, staring at a mountain, processing an interaction, or describing which fruit is on the trees this week and I try to notice when words or phrases or themes start to show up, often synchronistically in my musings. I used to really feel that a song had a finish point, but these days I do see them less as complete and more as a continuing little breathing entity. Sometimes my radar to know whether they are ready to emerge is playing it for a trusted friend and seeing how I feel in that process. Something about songs, I think, is that they reach a place where they really want to be uncovered, they're in there and asking for an excavation. I do tend to roll mine around rock tumbler like and see which parts really are essential, but I think the metaphor doesn't quite do

justice if you take it further. I'm hesitant to prefer "smooth" versus "edgie/raw" as most of my favorite songs these days have some grit, and more realness than slickness.

McHie: The name of your duo is taken directly from a John Hartford poem. What is it about John Hartford's legacy—his playfulness, his multi-instrumentalism, and his absolute authenticity—that guides your own philosophy of performance?

Kendl: You're spot on! The playfulness, his multi-instrumentalism, and his absolute authenticity is exactly the reason we're both drawn to him. His incredible proficiency at his instruments would be enough, but his many songs touch on so many feelings and energies while also he's dancing and enjoying the wordplay and the fun of the way words and sounds are musical. My favorite musical geniuses have a sense of humor and strike a beautiful balance of not taking themselves too seriously while clearly taking their passions quite seriously. The artists I'm most often inspired by are permission giving in that sense, and stay curious and explorative throughout their life. Hartford fully embodied that.

Palmer: I think you nailed the answer in your question! Ha. John always struck me a wholly liberated artist. Even beyond any sort of skills I admire in a songwriter or performer, witnessing someone who can express themselves genuinely and effortlessly is fascinating and beautiful. To feel inspired to seek out who I am so I can help coax it to the surface is something I've always felt grateful for in my admiration of John.

McHie: Kendl, I've read you were one of the original catalysts for the project, Banjo

Babes, wanting to create a community that brought female banjo players together in mutual support. Looking back on that experience, how have you seen the community and visibility of women in the bluegrass and old-time scenes shift since you first posed with your banjo?

Kendl: Oh yeah, banjo babes! I was inspired to create that after hosting a couple accordion babes at my house in Olympia for a concert and I personally was just looking to connect with other women playing banjo on the scene. I have seen the community and visibility of women in the bluegrass and old-time scene shifting in a positive direction and getting highlighted much more since my early twenties. So I'm grateful about the direction and look forward to it just being more of a regular day on stage for there to be an equal amount of women ripping string instruments or whatever they're inspired to get after musically. I still kinda count how many bands on the bill have women in them and I groan less I suppose, but I still often groan.

McHie: Palmer, you built your first banjo when you were 19 out of inherited parts, and you've spoken about the banjo as a modular, 'tinkerer's instrument'. Do you still play the banjo with the chunky 1970s Alvarez neck attached to a completely custom body you assembled yourself? How does having such a hands-on, mechanical relationship with your instrument shape the actual voice and tone of your music?

Palmer: I do still have that banjo! For the nerds- it's a Gibson pot from the 40's fitted to a modern Danick tone ring. I set it up for Hartford tuning (three half steps down

from standard G) for our Horse Camp recording session and it's been that way ever since. I'll take your second question literally. My primary instrument these days is a resonator banjo but with a more old-time set-up. Thicker head and short tail piece, for instance. I don't play bluegrass but very rarely these days so I was more than happy to lose some volume and punctuation in exchange for warmth and sustain. I want an instrument that can join me in being slow and quiet, moody and brooding. Ha

McHie: Your beautiful eighth album, 'Always As Young As We'll Ever Be,' was released earlier this year. It has been described as a record that doesn't chase tidy conclusions, but instead invites listeners to embrace the 'messiness of the human experience' and find warmth in its imperfections. How does performing these intimate songs live help you connect with audiences, and what can our Columbus community expect from your show?

Kendl: Aww thank you. We've been musical comrades for over a decade now and when we started we said that most important to us in the duo was to be in service of the song and to stay authentic to where our creative impulses were directing us. I love that the take away of this last album is to embrace the messiness of the human experience and to find warmth in its imperfections, because what more could we ask for? We try to give ourselves enough grace in our own creative endeavors to find the musical gems that we can share with each other and these songs come from those vulnerable places. It truly does bring us great joy to get to make music together and to get to perform and share it with others, and we can't wait to connect with

your lovely Columbus community for the evening.



Photo Credit Sarah Cass

COFF Returns Successful Singer- Songwriter Competition in 2027

BY BOB LIPETZ

After a highly successful first year, the Columbus Folk Music Society will offer a second Singer-Songwriter Competition, to be held at the Central Ohio Folk Festival in the Spring of 2027. Area singer-songwriters can compete for a \$300 cash prize, as well as a solo set at the festival. Details on how find out more about the competition and how to enter, are listed at the end of this article.

It was only through the alignment of fortuitous events, that the competition came to be. In the Spring of 2025, a CFMS board member invited me to put my name in nomination for a board position. I had recently retired from a career as Executive Director of national nonprofits. I recall thinking at the time, that I have sat in

enough board meetings, I'd like to do something more creative in retirement. I took a vacation trip to Tucson, Arizona that just happened to coincide with the Tucson Folk Festival. I was taken with the songwriter competition they held. The quality of the contestants was excellent. I believed that Central Ohio had every bit as much talent. If we had a songwriter competition at the Central Ohio Folk Festival, I knew it could be a classic win-win. Our area songwriters get a wonderful forum to share their music, and the festival would be enriched by the addition of talented songwriters.

I came back to Columbus and pitched the idea of the competition to the CFMS Board. I offered to organize the competition, managing all aspects, from marketing to acting as emcee. The board approved.

I began by recruiting four highly experienced Central Ohio singer-songwriters to act as judges. The judges had experience professionally selling songs, performing, as well as with song contests. Together, we defined the critical processes of selecting finalists from all the entries, choosing winners from the finalists, the rules of the competition, as well as the dates for the opening and closing of entries.

The judges felt that performance was an equally important quality to be considered along with song composition. So, we changed the name from a songwriting competition to a singer-songwriter competition. A website was built, posters were printed, and the competition was announced on September 1, 2025. Entries opened October 1st and closed October 31st in 2025. Being the first year, we had no idea what kind of response to expect. We were delighted when we received 87 entries!

The judges listened to the songs and ranked their top choices. By mutual consent, the judges chose six finalists, as well as two alternates.

The 6 finalists were given a morning program at the festival, where each sang their submitted song and one other original. On the day of the competition, a large crowd attended. The performances by the finalists were wonderful and the audience loved it. Following the performances, the judges met to choose the winner. However, the four judges were evenly split between two of the finalists, Jesse Powers and Sophie Lockhart. It was decided to award both of them. The judges generously provided an additional \$300, so that both winners would receive a cash prize.

The solo performance was scheduled to be the last performance of the day. I got permission from the stage manager to extend the time, so that both winners could perform a solo set. The crowd loved it. Everyone considered the competition a huge success. This had proven to be not only a boon to the singer-songwriter community, but it also boosted the mission of the Society and the festival. The board felt this could be something to be offered every year going forward.

Like last year, the 2027 Singer-Songwriter Competition offers a \$300 cash prize, as well as a solo set at the Central Ohio Folk Festival. Competitors can enter through the website by filling out an entry form and attaching a recording of an original song and a lyric sheet. The entry form will be available on the website starting November 2nd and entries close November 30th. Entries will be cut off after

100 entries have been received. Six finalists will be chosen to compete at the Central Ohio Folk Festival.

Full information on the rules and application process can be found at the competition website, when the website goes public on October 1.

<https://www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/songwritercontest>

Folk Music Tells Story of 1960's as Bill Cohen Show Celebrates Its 40th Year

Civil rights sit-ins. Bell-bottoms. Anti-war marches. Student Power. Afros. Mini-skirts. Hippies. Riots. Space flights. Political assassinations. The generation gap.

Those hallmarks of the turbulent 1960's will be rekindled Friday October 16 at this year's annual "Spirit of the '60's Coffeehouse" at the King Avenue Methodist Church, 299 W. King at Neil.

Singing songs made famous by iconic folkies like Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan, Tom Paxton, Buffy St. Marie, and Pete Seeger, Bill Cohen and friends

will lead the candlelit, year-by-year journey through the era. It will also include "news reports" of sixties happenings, displays of anti-war buttons and posters, and far-out sixties fashions. Plus, Bill will also challenge the audience with fun sixties trivia questions. Far-out !!!!

Proceeds from the suggested \$20 donations (at the door) will go to the Mid-Ohio Food Collective. Free parking is also available in the lots just South and West of the church.

The show begins at 7:30 p.m. in the church basement, but get there early for a good seat.

Bill began doing this 1960's show around 1986, so this year, he's celebrating its 40th anniversary.

For more information, call Bill at (614) 263-3851 or e-mail BillCohen@columbus.rr.com



Circa 1967



Welcome NEW Members

Sherry Hubbard

Cynthia Addis

Scott Solsman

...and Welcome Back RENEWING Members!



Save the Date!

Americana/Folk Concert Series

Friday, Oct 23rd - The Lowest Pair

8 pm 6pm open jam / 7pm Open Mic (presign-up) / 8pm

Refreshments available. \$15 door donation / \$10 CFMS members

Venue: Columbus Mennonite Church, 35 Oakland Park Ave, Columbus

In-Person Jams

Mondays, 6 - 8pm - various

locations during summer - contact

Cbusjammers@gmail.com for

location

Fridays, 2:30 - 4:30pm - Gillie

Senior Center, 2100 Morse Rd. Meet

in auditorium. Register at desk for

Gillie Jammers (free)

Saturdays:

9:00am - noon - Worthington Village

Green southeast side. Jam happens

during the Farmers Market. Bring a

chair (last market jam for season is

Oct. 31)

9:30 am - 11:30am - Whetstone

Community Center, 3923 N. High St.

- first class is on Sat. September 26.

Register at front desk for Music

Jamming With Others (free).

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In-Person Jams, Continued

NOON - 2:00pm - Carriage Place Community

Center, 4900 Sawmill Road - Music Jamming Class

begins Saturday, September 19 (free) - Register at desk.

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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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.

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