

Weathers Brothers Music Pickin' and Pastimes



Photo Anthony Scarlati

Bill Phillips of Weathers Brothers Music Shop in Lawrenceburg

It's 9:30 am on a Saturday, and temperatures are on the rise for what will be another hot and hazy summer day in Tennessee. People are already flowing into Weathers Brothers Music Shop. A few go searching for vinyl or CDs



By Rebecca Bauer

If we're lucky, the guys may pull out their strings for a little pickin' - a tradition that has been going on for the past 26 years at this small relic of a music store. Owner, Bill Phillips, says "Pickers will show up and sit over there in the corner all the time. But, I haven't picked in two years." Well, that's about to change.

Phillips, 70, is a humble man with thick-rimmed glasses and Santa Claus beard. He was a traveling bluegrass player for the band Shades of Bluegrass that toured the country for twenty years, stacking up awards from state and national champi-

onships. "I played bass violin and bass fiddle," he says. I ask him how he interprets the difference, and he says simply, "A violin carries strings; a fiddle carries strangs."

Bill, along with original partners Jackie and Ricky Weathers, opened Weathers Brothers Music in June of '86 after "having their day in the sun" playing bluegrass. They filled the rectangular space tight with used LPs, cassettes and 45s; CDs would fill in as time went on. They added music lessons upstairs (with Andy Spearman, a very committed teacher who has been there for 23 years) and merchandise like amps and Martin guitars. It's anyone's guess what recordings can be found here. Flipping through, I catch the vaguely familiar artwork of Vern Gosdin, the Osmonds, Linda Ronstadt. There's everything from George Jones to Nat King Cole to Leroy Troy. "I try to carry stuff you can't find at other shops - Bluegrass, old Southern Gospel, Southern Rock, the classics. I probably have a stock of 10,000 CDs," says Phillips. But, it's vinyl that has been leaving the store in droves. "People will come in and buy 100 or so, I'm not always sure what's even in there."

The walls really speak volumes. Vintage guitars hang high on display, faded and worn with fingerprints etched in their necks. They vary in sizes and brands, some painted and one-of-a-kind. They were all given to Phillips over the years, like one owned by Gene Autry or the 1900s guitar from Portugal. Surrounding them are old black and white photos of bluegrass bands and signed glossies of popular artists from past decades.

The shop sits in a corner storefront on the historical square of Lawrenceburg - the birthplace of Southern Gospel music. A radio

station broadcasts music out of the center pavilion that can be heard by anyone within earshot of the square; a charming encounter you don't find everyday. The original station was WOAN, which was the first licensed radio station in Tennessee in 1922 and owned by James D. Vaughan, a visionary who created the first Southern Gospel quartet among other successful ventures.

Phillips knows his story well: "Old man Vaughn owned a publishing company selling songbooks back in the early 1900s. They'd go to the conventions selling their songbooks for 25-30 cents a piece; but eventually the conventions slowed and sales dropped off." The history of this consequential American art form is chronicled in the local museum and celebrated as the James D. Vaughan Quartet Festival each year.

Phillips lives for his time spent talking music and filling requests. "If I don't have it in stock, I'll trace it down. May have to go to the artist directly." He has shipped all over the world from China to the Netherlands. "I got a call one time, I thought it was a sales call. They asked if Bill was in, I said No. They asked when he would be back so I told them around 2:00. Sure enough, at 2:00, a lady calls from Ireland looking for a Joan Baez CD; she wanted to order it over the phone, didn't trust putting her credit card on the Internet."

The shop owner reveals that among his large stacks of music, the cream of the crop is stored in the back and out of sight. "I don't bring those out, just can't part with them," he says, referring to first pressings of icons like Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash. He slips one out for a little show and tell - handling it like it's the good china coming out of the antique cabinet - Now Here's Johnny Cash from Sun Records, 1961. I don't blame him one bit.

Finally, the guys so complacent in their chairs pull out their instruments and start tuning their strings. Bill drags over an upright bass while eyeing his buddies on fiddle and guitar. They move into a song that rolls off their fingers in pure bluegrass style. I think Bill has found himself back in the pickin' game - a true musician can never stay away.

What a throwback to good times. Bill's eyes sparkle when I reminisce about days working in

record stores in the late '80s and '90s (remindful of the movie Empire Records). Take today's camaraderie of meeting the locals as we swap first-concert stories, being serenaded by a crafty songwriter or visiting with the young man who was on his way to Memphis to audition for the reality-show The Voice. This is what makes the independent record store.

Vintage product, music lessons, merchandise and a little savvy knowledge of the Internet has Bill Phillips and Weathers Brothers Music thriving despite the demise of retail. They're a perfect example of the common thread that runs among people in a community: the love and preservation of music. And, maybe it's a little bit about reclaiming our own histories. I, too, went searching for a lost record from my youth (though, I won't admit what that was). I know I can order it on Amazon, but it just wouldn't be the same.

I ask Bill what's the secret to staying in business, and he proclaims, "Some try to fly too high, stay down to earth and people will keep coming back to see you."

Weathers Brothers Music is located at 13 Public Square in Lawrenceburg and can be reached at 931-762-6055 or visit BillsBlue-



Bill Phillips on bass, Terry Pierce on fiddle, Jeff Bosheers on guitar. Photo Anthony Scarlati

grass.com.

REBECCA BAUER IS A COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSIONAL, FREELANCE

WRITER AND EQUESTRIAN. THE MARYLAND NATIVE HAS A MASTER'S DEGREE FROM JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY AND HAS MADE FRANKLIN HOME SINCE

2000. SHE HAS WRITTEN ON ART, MUSIC, BUSINESS, GREEN LIVING AND LOVES TO TRAVEL AND DISCOVER THE PEOPLE AND PLACES OF THE SOUTH.

Visit Historic Centerville

This Month for Treats, Great Eats, Shopping & Fun!



Home of Minnie Pearl



ANTIQUES & More 3 Stories High on the Square!

Centerville Marketplace 100 Church Street
931-729-4800

Open Tue. - Fri. 9:30 - 4:30, Sat. 10:30 - 2:30,
or later by appt.



April's Attic

If I'm Not Open - I'm SHOPPING!

Open only five days each month, my unique shop features an ever-changing assortment of unusual vintage and collectible treasures.

This 1,600 square foot converted barn also includes a furniture showroom featuring vintage and handcrafted barnwood furniture & signs made by Tom the Furniture Guy

Open this month:

August 15-19 from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Bring this Ad and Get 20% Off

One Item in August!

In Centerville, take Highway 50 West & look for our signs! We're by the Winery!

www.aprils-attic.com or call (931) 729-3388.

HARPER'S

custom clothing

400 WEST PUBLIC SQUARE
CENTERVILLE

Tuesday - 10:30 - 7:30

& Friday

Thursday - 9:30 - 1:00

or by appointment

931-994-2825

SEWING FOR EVERY NEED

LADIES tailoring

menswear *Children*

accessories

alterations

costuming BRIDAL

HOME FURNISHINGS

monogramming

contact@harperscustom.com

WILD DUCK SOUP EMPORIUM

105 S. PUBLIC SQUARE

931-729-0690



Whole Foods, Local artists,
Hand-made gifts & Wearable Art!

www.WildDuckSoupEmporium.com

Open Tues-Fri 9:30-5:30,

Sat 10am-3pm, Closed Sun-Mon

Come & speak with our Pharmacists --
They are here to help you with all your pharmacy needs.

Liberty Pharmacy, Inc.

at 401 W. Public Square • Centerville, Tennessee

931-729-3541 • Fax -931-729-4874



Liberty Clinic Pharmacy

at 146 E. Swan Street • Centerville, Tennessee

931-729-2999 • Fax -931-729-3393

Pharmacy, Medical Needs,

Diabetic Shoes, Gifts, Jewelry, Purses

Ask About Our \$5 Prescriptions

Pharmacists: T. Melvin Mays, DPh., Linda H. Mays, DPh.,
Christy Mays, Pharm. D., Emily S. Cook, Pharm. D., Jason Lindsey, Pharm. D.