



2006 Induction Class



Sam Bush

Sam Bush extended the musical capabilities of the mandolin and the fiddle to incorporate a seamless blend of bluegrass, rock, jazz, and reggae. As the founder and leader of the New Grass Revival, Bush pioneered and guided the evolution of modern hill country music. Together with the bluegrass supergroup Strength in Numbers, he pushed the traditions even further. During a five-year stint with the Nash Ramblers, he provided a diverse range of textures for the songs of Emmylou Harris. On his own, Bush has continued to explore an eclectic musical spectrum.

Bush was exposed to country music and bluegrass at an early age through his father's record collection and, later, by Flatt & Scruggs' television show. Buying his first mandolin at the age of 11, his musical interest was further piqued when he attended the Roanoke Bluegrass Festival in 1965. A child prodigy on the fiddle, he placed first at the national fiddle contest in Weister, ID, three times in a row. Together with childhood friends Wayne Stewart and Alan Munde, later of Country Gazette, he formed a band and recorded his first album, Poor Richard's Almanac, in 1969. The same year, he made his debut appearance on the Grand Ole Opry.

Attending the Fiddlers Convention at Union Grove, NC, in 1970, Bush overheard the pioneering progressive bluegrass band the New Deal String Band. Inspired by their rock-flavored approach to bluegrass, he formed the New Grass Revival in 1972. Over the next 17 years, Bush and the New Grass Revival revolutionized the music of the hill country, incorporating everything from gospel and reggae to rock and modern jazz into their tradition-rooted sound.

The New Grass Revival went through numerous personnel changes, with Bush remaining as the sole original member. Bassist and vocalist John Cowan joined in 1973, with banjo ace Béla Fleck and acoustic guitarist Pat Flynn being enlisted in the early '80s. In 1980, the group toured with Leon Russell, opening the shows and backing Russell during his headlining set. A live performance at the Perkins Palace in Pasadena, CA, was released as *Leon Russell & the New Grass Revival: The Live Album* in 1981.

Beginning in 1980, Bush and Cowan periodically jammed with the Nashville-based Dockbusters Blues Band. Bush recorded his debut solo album, *Late as Usual*, four years later. In 1989, Bush and Fleck joined Mark O'Connor, Jerry Douglas, and Edgar Meyer in an all-star bluegrass band, *Strength in Numbers*, at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival in Colorado. When Fleck and Cowan elected to leave the New Grass Revival in 1989, Bush disbanded the group and joined Emmylou Harris' Nash Ramblers. He toured and recorded with Harris and the band for the next five years.

In 1995, Bush worked as a sideman with Lyle Lovett and Bela Fleck's Flecktones. He formed his own band, featuring Cowan and ex-Nash Ramblers Jon Randall and Larry Atamanuick, shortly before recording his second solo album, *Glamour & Grits*, in 1996. He released his next album, *Howlin' at the Moon*, in 1998, with many of the same players and special guests, including Harris, Fleck and J.D. Crowe.

In the winter of 1997, Bush and the New Grass Revival reunited for an appearance on *The Conan O'Brien Show* as the backup band for Garth Brooks. On March 28, 1998, Bush's hometown of Bowling Green, KY, honored him with a special "Sam Bush Day" celebration.