

## Cody Jordan – Apprentice Biographical Information

Date and Place of Birth: 02/23/1989- Gallipolis, Ohio

Place of Residence: Charleston, WV

### Apprentice Bio:

I was raised in Point Pleasant, WV and lived and attended school there until I graduated high school in 2007. My parents were not musicians but were fans of music and I grew up listening to various genres. My dad worked with a guy who was a well-respected bluegrass banjo player in the area and we would frequently attend local shows where he and other people he was associated with were playing. I played music in the marching band during school and also learned to play guitar while growing up but did not play any traditional music until later on. After graduating I moved to Huntington to attend Marshall University. I was living with friends of mine from high school and we played a lot of music then. We were gradually being exposed to more traditional forms of music by attending the Vandalia Gathering and Appalachian String Band Festival in WV. My friends Jesse Pearson, TJ Riffle and I had played music together all through high school and we began learning to play fiddle and banjo by listening to various recordings. We met Kim Johnson at an Appalachian Studies Conference in Huntington and really began diving deeper into WV traditional music at that time. Kim introduced us to various mainstays of the traditional music scene in WV and we have been playing and learning as much as we could ever since. We formed a group playing mostly music learned from WV traditional musicians and have traveled around the state and country playing for square dances, concerts and various other community functions.

### Art Form/Tradition:

The type of music that we play is primarily a social music played for community enjoyment and participation in the form of dances, worship, and the general appreciation of friends and family. It is typically passed down through oral/aural traditions from older practitioners to younger people. I am no expert on the origins of the banjo or banjo styles present in the region though some research has been conducted. It is my basic understanding that the banjo has African origins and that playing styles and even some repertoire is related to traditional styles played by enslaved people which were brought with them to America. In West Virginia these styles and repertoire were brought by enslaved people and later on African-American workers who came to work in various industries here. White people who were living and working in proximity to these African-Americans learned their playing style and repertoire which continued to adapt and change, picking up influences from other traditions including Scots Irish, German, Italian and other immigrant communities found in West Virginia and across the Appalachians. While there are many different traditional banjo styles one of the most common is an overhand down picking style which is often called Clawhammer. It is commonly played either solo or as accompaniment to the fiddle or singing. This style was and is common in West Virginia. It is distinctive from more modern styles of bluegrass picking. The focus of this style is often rhythmic over melodic and provides a good base for fiddle tunes or accompaniment for singing and dancing. Additionally it is more widely varied than modern styles. Older generations of musicians who were not exposed to commercial

recordings and homogenized styles often had personal styles that were unique to themselves. By learning primarily through imitation and aural transmission each player could develop an idiosyncratic style which was rooted in traditional forms yet unique to the player's tastes and abilities, creating music that allows great personal expression but remaining in a recognizable and familiar tradition. This way of learning continues in West Virginia's traditional music community.

Artist Statement:

I came to play traditional music from WV at first by exposure from festivals in the state which promote this type of music including the Vandalia Gathering, Appalachian Stringband Festival and the West Virginia State Folk Festival. Kim Johnson who is my mentor in this project has been a huge influence on both my playing and my approach to this music. Through her I have met many other extremely gifted and passionate musicians from whom I have learned a great deal. I aim to carry on the tradition of making music for the enjoyment of myself and my community and to teach others about this particular style and repertoire. I find value in having a form of art that has been developed and practiced by the people of this place and which carries so much history, contains so much wisdom and provides so much entertainment.