

Wednesday, April 27, 2005

Last modified Thursday, April 21, 2005 3:09 PM MDT

Barnes rejects banjo's hillbilly reputation

## MONITOR STAFF REPORT

Intellectual, literature-loving banjo player Danny Barnes will be playing selections from his newest album, "Dirt on the Angel" in a free show at 7:30 p.m. Friday at the Community Building.

Barnes has collaborated with a very large array of acclaimed musicians, including jazz-folk guitarist Bill Frisell, keyboardist Chuck Leavell (Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, Allman Brothers), violinist Darol Anger (David Grisman, Turtle Island String Quartet, Psychograss), multi-instrumentalist Dirk Powell (Balfa Toujours), drummer Carlton Jackson, vocalist Amy Denio and bass player Garey Shelton (Bo Diddley, Randy Meisner).

Through it all, his medium of choice has been the banjo.

"As a composer, the banjo is the 'canvas' upon which I work, Barnes said on his website, [bannybarnes.com](http://bannybarnes.com). "However, I'm not an anachronistic musician. I'm not dressed up like it's 1945, or something. My work is contemporary. My writing and presentation, are of this time period. I'm trying to develop a modern lexicon for the banjo."

Barnes said he tries to stay up-to-date on current banjo trends by reading what his contemporaries are working on. But he finds that putting too much stock in what the magazines are toasting at any given moment creates "a ghetto-izing type mentality."

"They seem to want to have the banjo off on its own asteroid, boxed in by its limitation," he said. "I too, followed along with this reasoning for decades, believing certain truisms."

These truisms, Barnes continued, include the belief that the key-centered instrument is too difficult to learn how to read, the open-tuned intervals are too close together, tablature is the only proper visual musical representative for banjo, banjo music is hillbilly or bluegrass, and the banjo is limited in what roles it can function in.

"As I studied composition books," Barnes said, "it became clear to me that the banjo was an instrument like any other. With each instrument, there are things we must work around. Notes on certain instruments are always out of tune, no matter what we do. Some instruments read in keys that have to be transposed into - i.e. they don't read in the same key they play in. Having a vast range on an instrument is a feature of that instrument to be taken into account, but it doesn't make said instrument superior in every case."

Barnes said while he thinks genre is meaningless, he has little in common with most bluegrass players and doesn't consider himself one of them. He seems to believe in music for music's sake: "It's great because of its own merits. Music itself is a higher function than marketing," he said.

Friday night's concert is presented by Los Alamos County.

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