



THE BOB WILLS FIDDLE FESTIVAL & CONTEST

By Jill McGuckin



Ballroom at Landon Winery, 2508 Lee St., with Carolyn Wills and Brett Bingham of the Bob Wills Heritage Foundation. Grammy-winning former Asleep at the Wheel fiddler Jason Roberts and his band will perform. The Greenville Chamber of Commerce and Greenville Board of Development are co-sponsoring the event; tickets are available at bobwillsfiddlefest.com.

Friday's concert opens with the Jason Roberts Band and Rausch, who sang with the Texas Playboys from 1958 to the early '60s, then returned in 1973 for Wills' final album, *For the Last Time*.

"Ameripolitan" honky-tonker Watson, the 2007 Texas State Musician, even named his band, the Lonestars, after his favorite state. And his new album, *Live At The Big T Roadhouse, Chicken S#!+ Bingo Sunday*, reflects another quintessentially Texas aspect of his career: spending Sunday afternoons slingin' songs while fans wager on where the fowl in question will deliver its ... deposit. Austinite Watson owns the Big T, located in St. Hedwig, east of San Antonio. When he's not presiding over bingo there or at Austin's C-Boy's, he's on the road.

Perhaps no one has done more to keep the memory of Bob Wills alive than Asleep at the Wheel's Ray Benson. In addition to recording three tribute albums — including 2015's *Still the King: Celebrating the Music of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys*, which reached No. 11 on Billboard's Top Country Albums chart — the 2004 Texas State Musician and nine-time Grammy winner developed the stage show *A Ride with Bob*. Like Roberts, many Wheel alums have gone on to form western swing bands, further spreading love of the genre Wills created.

Saturday events get underway at 10 a.m. with Bob Wills Fiddle Contest preliminaries at the Texan Theater, 2712 Lee

St. Play continues until 5 p.m. Admission is free. At 11:30 a.m., live music commences on Lee Street's outdoor stage. Roberts' band, the Cherokee Maidens (featuring original Dixie Chick Robin Macy) and the Tulsa Playboys will perform. The Playboys also will play a free dance starting at 9:30 p.m. at the Landmark on Lee Street, the former post office building at 2929 Lee St., where World War II legend and movie star Audie Murphy enlisted in the Army.

Of course, Saturday night's main event is the return of The Time Jumpers, who performed at the inaugural Bob Wills Fest in 2014. They will, no doubt, play tracks from the Gill-produced album they're releasing on Sept. 9 in tribute to fallen singer Dawn Sears, wife of bandleader Kenny Sears.

Though Oklahoma native Gill is one of the most respected artists in country music, the Pure Prairie League alum and onetime Rodney Crowell sideman told *Rolling Stone* magazine that when he's with the Time Jumpers, "I'm just one of the guitar players." (And vocalists.) But no one in the Time Jumpers is a background player. They're some of Nashville's finest, who started getting together to jam nearly 18 years ago. Playing Monday nights at Nashville's Station Inn, they quickly began filling the tiny bluegrass haunt, where they convened for 10 years before moving to the larger 3rd & Lindsley. With Franklin on steel guitar, Sears on vocals and fiddle and Green on vocals and acoustic rhythm guitar, they'll likely jump through a menu of country, swing, jazz and pop standards — and any other offerings they might feel like cooking up.

Sunday, the festival wraps up with the fiddle contest finals at Greenville Municipal auditorium, starting at 11 a.m. and ending with some big "a-ha" moments, as Wills might have said, for the lucky winners.

For more Bob Wills Fiddle Festival & Contest info, including lodging, visit bobwillsfiddlefest.com. Find festival news at: facebook.com/bobwillsfiddlefest twitter.com/DTGreenvilleTX

Jill McGuckin

Jill McGuckin is a publicist and media consultant for a number of national and regional entertainers. You can reach Jill at: 512.217.9404 | jill@mcguckinpr.com

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