

That's Entertainment at Fryeburg Fair!

Fryeburg Fair, established in 1851, has long mixed talent and entertainment of all kinds with their agricultural mission. Rudy Vallee, Tammy Wynette, Jeannie C. Riley, The Mamas & The Papas, Tiny Tim, Chubby Checker, Lady Antebellum and Jamey Johnson are just a few of the long list of performers that have headlined the Night Show at Fryeburg Fair.

Jon Bliss, of Lovell, ME, and Tony Martineau, of Fryeburg, have been the guys behind the Fair's music and entertainment scene for several years. Martineau started working at the Fair in 1999 joining entertainment directors Kevin Muse and David Hastings III, both of Fryeburg. Now is his 18th year; Martineau replaced Muse in 2004 when he tragically passed. Bliss joined the Fair in 2004 replacing Hastings when he moved to the Fair's Finance Committee. Martineau and Bliss have shared all talent responsibilities since. A.O. Pike, of Fryeburg, who began working with the fair in 1967, held the entertainment reins in the late 60s and 70s.

Pike says, "Back then our budget was \$500 and our most regular act was the Fryeburg Fair Boys, two talented blind men from northern Maine who were a big draw."

Much has evolved in country fair entertainment since then, leaving behind daredevil motorcycle acts, polesitters and "girly shows."

Today Bliss and Martineau work closely with talent agent Diana Ammon of Atlantic Music Productions from Newton, NH, to book night show entertainers. "Diana knows when a performer or group is just about to hit it big and often we can snag them for a show. She has the ability to identify up-and-coming stars. We've been very fortunate to contract with a few right before they hit the big-time like Lady Antebellum, Jamey Johnson and Phil Vassar.



Tony Martineau & Jon Bliss, the heads of entertainment at Fryeburg Fair



Fryeburg Fair History - Tammy Wynette (1942-1998) was the Night Show headliner in 1983. Wynette's photo, along with many others, hangs in the Fair's Entertainment Office.

We pretty much stick with country music but some diversity is good for the fairgoers as long as we don't stray too far," Bliss says. "We tried rap and that's not going to happen again."

"And we probably won't do comedy," Martineau adds, "comedians are best in a small setting and it doesn't translate as well in the great outdoors."

Fryeburg Fair built a much-needed new performance stage on wheels ten years ago. The Fair's year-round maintenance crew is charged with rolling it out as soon as the space becomes available. The stage sits on the Fair's 1/2-mile horse racing track. Set up begins right after the last horse crosses the finish line! A local group of seasonal hires makes up a strong and fast-moving stage crew. They populate the stage with music, sound and light equipment set up to the artist's specifications. New England Audio Tech's Rainbow Productions from Atkinson, NH, has been the Fair's sound company for over 20 years. It's high pressure and time-sensitive to seamlessly finalize the process by showtime - always 8 p.m.

Before most shows start, Martineau's wife, Gail, manages the "Meet & Greets." Lasting an hour or less, the "Meet & Greets" give a few lucky members of the public an opportunity for a brief visit and photos with their favorite entertainers. Unadvertised and by word-of-mouth, these informal gatherings are popular. It's up to each artist to determine if they want to do the Meet & Greet and decide how many people are allowed to attend.

Bliss and Martineau enjoy the excitement of each show. They alternate as emcees and introduce the performers to excited fairgoers. Martineau says, "We pride ourselves on being on time. We have lots of things that need to go right - especially the lights and sound."

Martineau adds, "It takes a bit for the performers to dial in on the soundboard. We can breathe a sigh of relief right around the second song. That's about enough time to feel confident that all is well!"

One challenge is the ever-changing weather of Maine's October nights. Martineau says, "The weather is huge for our night shows." Bliss adds, "But the show must go on as they say! It absolutely poured during Michael Delguidice's 2014 Saturday night show and it was windy too. He was fantastic just the same. A truly great performer. The weather didn't matter to him but the crowd was small." Shortly after his appearance, Delguidice hit the big-time becoming a permanent member of Billy Joel's band.

Martineau's favorite talent act was Lady Antebellum. Pike says, "Boxcar Willie was probably the best hit we ever made in the 80's. His show was great." Bliss adds, "Clint Black did a super job. It was one of the best shows we've ever had here. We figure we had 10-12,000 people in attendance." The Fair's grandstand holds approximately 3,200.

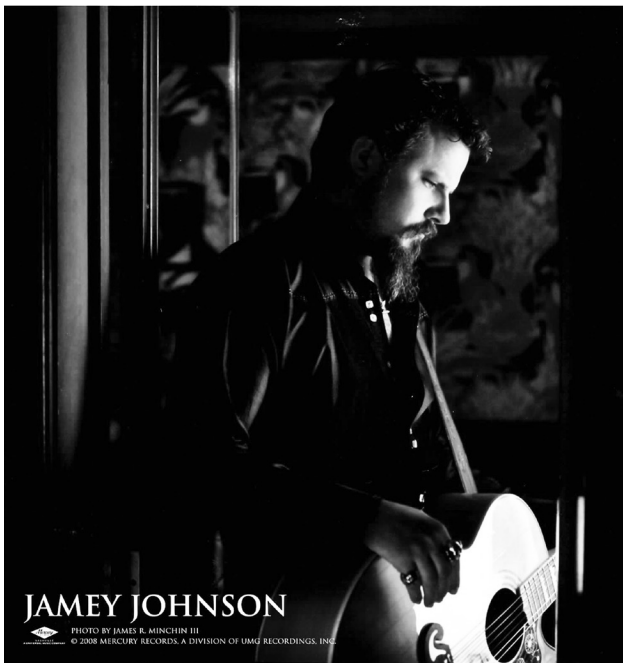
The team of Bliss and Martineau are constantly asked why they don't book huge country music legends...George Strait, Garth Brooks, Willie Nelson. "Our roads could not accommodate the traffic," says Bliss. "We don't have enough restrooms, seating or parking. We don't want to do more harm than good and have people get stuck everywhere. Lots of our current acts max out our grandstand. There are times when we have to have security open up paths through the crowds. If someone needed medical attention, we have to be able to get to them."

Pike notes that Martineau and Bliss have made the Fair's entertainment offerings much more professional and the shows just keep getting better.

"We want entertainment to be part of the Fryeburg Fair experience," Bliss says, "but we don't want to overwhelm our agricultural mission. We also take pride in the fact that the night shows come with the price of admission at Fryeburg and it's affordable. Lots of fairs charge separately for big name entertainment."

Besides the Night Shows, booking approximately 132 daily entertainment gigs is a huge aspect of Martineau and Bliss's work. They spend most of May, June and July booking and confirming entertainers. Shows in five parks run from 9-5 each day.

What do Bliss and Martineau look for in an act? "We look for genuine talent and performers that enjoy being on stage with each other because that translates to our fairgoers," says Martineau. Bliss adds, "Denny Breaux is a great example of an entertainer who loves performing. You can't help but have a good time with him. He's smiling and happy, he's incredibly talented and he connects with the audience. Everyone has a great time."



Thanks Tony & Son
[Signature] 2009

Jamey Johnson performed Fryeburg Fair's Night Show in 2009. He has received nine Grammy nominations and has won multiple country music awards.



Jeannie C. Riley made famous by the song "Harper Valley PTA" performed on October 4, 1973 at Fryeburg Fair. Riley is now 71 years old and lives in Tennessee.

Bliss says, "We have hundreds of inquiries about performing at the Fair. Our entertainers want to be here. They love the Fair as much as we do. For every stage we have filled, we have ten other acts that would love to get that spot. We have some incredible talent in Maine and many of them are at the Fair every year. Kismet Strolling Quartet, Jon Sarty, Linwood Cash, Heather Pierson, Nancy & Jeff Ray, Junco and so many more. All excellent. We make an effort to bring in new entertainment each year. But we have many regulars who are incredibly popular. Jose Duddy is 'the man!' He draws the largest crowd for sure."

Martineau notes, "He's got silver hair, a cowboy hat, tight pants and a great voice. It's a sea of women in his audience!"

Post-Fryeburg Fair, Martineau's year-round job is in sales at Fryeburg's Green Thumb Farms. He works promoting and selling the company's many varieties of local potatoes and dried heirloom beans. Jon owns Bliss & Associates in Lovell, a land surveying company and is also a talented drummer. The Martineaus have two children, daughter, Erica Martineau Maguire and wife, Dr. Chris Maquire, grandson, Ryan, and son, Tim Martineau. Bliss and wife, Pam, have one son, Django, and wife, Cherie. Pam Bliss is in charge of all the information booths at Fryeburg Fair.

When asked about retiring (Martineau is 63 and Bliss is 64), both men agree, "We love our jobs at the Fair. We're going to do it for as long as we're able. It's very entertaining!"

"Wicked!" says Martineau.

For more information on Fryeburg Fair entertainment, visit www.fryeburgfair.org

Written by Rachel Andrews Damon