

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

> REED STURTEVANT '16, *Cofounder, College Folk Society*

"There's almost nothing you can't do with the banjo."



How did the College Folk Society get started?

I'd been poking around, trying to find people who wanted to start a bluegrass or old-time band. My friend Andrew Sun '18, who's a great musician on fiddle and mandolin, wanted to do informal jam sessions open to everybody. We started this term, when a few of us met up to spread awareness by playing a couple tunes in the library and around campus.

Did you grow up with folk music?

Everyone on my father's side of the family is a musician. My aunt was a fiddle champion of southeast Alaska. My grandfather collects string instruments. My father plays cello and Afro-Cuban hand drums. I was more of a classical musician growing up; I played violin and cello. I picked up the ukulele in high school. I didn't really break into the folk music thing until college. I started playing banjo about a year and a half ago. It was probably the most important decision of my life.

How so?

It has put me on a really fun path and opened up this whole section of heritage and culture of the United States and Irish music.

What's next for the College Folk Society?

We've been doing jam sessions every Monday evening. We were just recognized by the Council on Student Organizations, so we can apply for funding. There's this really cute little Dobro at Hanover Strings that we've got our eyes on.

How many students are jamming with you?

Usually we have five to seven people. It's a rotating group, so all in all we've had maybe 10 or 12.

What are the society's goals, beyond purchasing that Dobro?

What we see long-term is an expanded presence on campus. I hope we can ramp up until it's got a solid following and becomes a way for people to come make music. I think that's something that people would really like and should have access to here.

The banjo is the butt of most bluegrass humor. Do you have a favorite banjo joke?

Banjo players spend half their time tuning and the other half playing out-of-tune. My other favorite one: I asked my banjo teacher back in Oregon to recommend a good banjo mute so I could play indoors at night. He emailed me a link to an Amazon listing for a sledgehammer.

—James Napoli

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