

Salard, Herbert Pierre "Buzz"



Fiddler (1937-2019)

Master fiddler plays with many titles

By: Steven Niette

Navy veteran. Former State Trooper. Civil War researcher. H.P. “Buzz” Salard fills many roles, but people around here recognize him most for something you can’t really put a name to: his *fiddling*. Not that people haven’t tried. In 2007, H.P. “Buzz” Salard, 75 at the time of this interview in 2013, was inducted into the Louisiana Folklife Center’s Hall of Master Folk Artists for his “contributions to the preservation of Louisiana’s cultural traditions.”

When he was a boy, Salard’s family bought a fiddle for him and his older brother, Winston. When his brother “confiscated” it, little Buzz didn’t give up without a fight. He snuck the fiddle out when Winston was gone and worked at teaching himself to play.

“You have to just do it,” Salard said. “You have to get with people and play and be willing to make mistakes. Otherwise you won’t learn anything.”

As he grew older, Salard learned several more instruments (though to this day he can’t read a “lick” of music), including guitar, mandolin, banjo, viola and double bass. Basically, he picked up anything with a string he could find.

Over his life, Salard’s musical talent provided him with opportunities to meet people from all walks of life.

“In 1954, I went into the Navy, and my brother and I played in a band on a destroyer,” he said. “I played the fiddle, my brother played the banjo and we had a guitar player. We even had a

mascot, a Californian who claimed to be an honorary Confederate. When we'd play, he'd wave a Confederate flag tied to mop handle. We were just clowning around.”

Salard and the band played for other ships when they'd meet in the ocean, but—while those other ships had more traditional orchestras—he and his friends stuck to their roots. Once word got out about the unconventional bluegrass band, people began handing in requests. While in the Navy, Salard performed in England, Spain and across the Middle East. He also played in Massachusetts, where he serenaded a young nurse named Janet Darche, now his wife of almost 57 years.

After completing his tour of duty, Salard played music sporadically, usually at house dances and school functions. Eventually, he joined the State Police, started a family and dropped back on music. But he couldn't stay away for long.

He recalled one story in particular: “I was working late at night, around one or two a.m., when someone ran a red light. They had a full-sized bass fiddle on top of their station wagon. They were Southland Bluegrass, a band from Deville that'd been playing in Texas. I went down for a practice session and was hired immediately, and we played for several years in states across the South. Needless to say, I didn't give them a ticket for running the red light. I figured that, as musicians, they didn't have any money anyway.”

After leaving Southland Bluegrass, Salard continued to “jam” across the state and attend bluegrass festivals. He played with many people—including a group from the Air Force—and even recorded twice in Tennessee. Eventually, he helped form All Points South.

Over the course of Salard's life, *fiddlin'* has given him the opportunity to meet legends such as Bill Monroe (the “Father of Bluegrass”) and many other past guests of the Grand Ole' Opry. He played with The Cox Family, who performed on the soundtrack of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* He's also jammed with less-famous people—woodsmen, bus drivers, white collar workers, district judges—people such as himself who play music simply for the love of it.

“I've met all kinds of people through playing music,” he said. “I even played with Dwayne Murphy at Blanchard Funeral Home a few times...when no bodies were out, of course.”

When he's not entertaining his grandkids with cannon-fire, Salard is probably around the area playing with Reasonable Facsimile Band. Grateful for the relationships that have developed around music, he continues to involve himself in the community through that art.

“I'm better now than when I was younger,” he says, “and, though turnout ebbs and flows and there are a lot of young people playing progressively, I'm still playing...and I still like it.”

So, from a past that has earned him many names—veteran, State Trooper, even “Master Folk Artist”—Buzz Salard has chosen for himself the one least assuming: *Fiddler*.

Article written and submitted by Steven Niette

Photo provided by Doris Salard Whatley and submitted by Steven Niette

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