

1. **Roll On Buddy**  
(Teddy Wilburn, Doyle Wilburn)
2. **Close By** (Bill Monroe, Robert H. Van Winkle – Universal Cedarwood Pub.)
3. **Montana Cowboy** (Jack Guthrie)
4. **I'm On My Way Back To The Old Home** (Bill Monroe)
5. **Happy I'll Be** (Vern Williams and Ray Park)
6. **Live And Let Live** (Wiley Walker, Gene Sullivan – APRS Sony/ATV Acuff Rose)
7. **Bald Knob, Arkansas**  
(Ira and Charlie Louvin)
8. **When The Golden Leaves Begin To Fall**  
(Albert Prince)
9. **I Hear A Choo Choo Coming**  
Keith – lead vocal (Ralph Stanley)
10. **Can't You Hear Me Calling**  
(Bill Monroe – Unichappel)
11. **Traveling The Highway Home** (Frankie Bailes, Walter Bailes – APRS Sony/ATV Acuff Rose)
12. **Love Me Darling Just Tonight**  
Del – lead vocal (M.H. Malone, Ruby Rakes)
13. **In Despair** (Jor Arh)
14. **I'm Going Back To Old Kentucky**  
(Bill Monroe – Unichappel)
15. **Darling Nellie Across The Sea**
16. **Pig In A Pen** (PD)

Tracks: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16  
**Vern Williams** – Mandolin, Vocal  
**Del Williams** – Guitar, Vocal  
**Keith Little** – Banjo, Vocal  
**Ed Neff** – Fiddle  
**Kevin Thompson** – Bass

Track 2 only, add Mike Eisler – fiddle.  
 Tracks 6, 7, 14, 15 omit Ed Neff - fiddle

**Tracks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 16:** Recorded 6-19-82 by KPFA-FM at the California Bluegrass Association's Father's Day Bluegrass Festival, at the Nevada County Fair Grounds, Grass Valley, California. Courtesy of KPFA-FM

**Tracks 6, 7, 14, 15:** Recorded 4-4-82 at the KPFA-FM studios, Berkeley, California, on Ray Edlund's "Pig in a Pen" show. Courtesy of Ray Edlund and KPFA-FM

**Track 11:** Recorded in June 1988 by KPFA-FM at the California Bluegrass Association's Father's Day Bluegrass Festival, at the Nevada County Fair Grounds, Grass Valley, California. Courtesy of KPFA-FM

**Tracks 8, 10, 13:** Recorded 11-12-84 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Courtesy of Peter Thompson

This CD comes from two-track tapes recorded live under various conditions. We did our best to overcome the sound and mix limitations of these tapes without intruding on the raw, live energy of these performances.

# The Vern Williams Band

## Traditional Bluegrass





**Vern:** I was born in Newton County [Arkansas], December 1930. Then I moved to Johnson County and down there's where, when I was a teenager, I started to play music. My mother played, she knew a few chords on the guitar and my dad played harmonica, and I had a whole bunch of uncles that played either the fiddle, the guitar or banjo. One of my very first memories was listening to them when I was, oh, I must have been five, six years old, or less. I just kind of got hold of an old guitar and learned a few chords and before you knew it, we was going to the old country dances when I was, oh, seventeen, eighteen years old, along there some place I suppose, I'm not sure. And they always had live music, just local people, you know, some guy get tired dancing, he sit down and play music for awhile, and somebody would be going to the local still to get a new

jug of moonshine whiskey or something. And everybody in the whole country would turn out, they'd come to that dance 'cause word of mouth, they just spread the word, "hey, we're going to have a dance Saturday night over at so and so's house." And we all go over to his place, they'd knock down the beds, carry all the furniture outside and spread a little sawdust or cornmeal on the floor and we'd have a dance, square dances and well, whatever you wanted to dance. They did a square dance, round dance that's what we use to do, sit on an old Army footlocker over in the corner, me and another guy [who was] playing the fiddle and we'd sit there all night, playing the fiddle and guitar, you know, while they danced.

We played Soldier's Joy, Down Yonder, Billie in the Low Ground, Old Joe Clark, you know, Rubber Dolly. I remember playing Rubber Dolly an awful lot. It was usually up to the fiddler, you know, he's the one that knew the tunes and then the

guitar player [and] whoever would just kind of follow along with him and play rhythm. We all knew the tunes but only the fiddler could play it. I never fooled with the fiddle any.

**You were playing the guitar?**

Yeah. [But] I had a cousin back in Arkansas, she had an old mandolin, it must have been made back in the 1920's. She use to play a couple tunes on it, Little Brown Jug and another one or two. I just thought I wanted to play the mandolin. Then I finally ordered me a mandolin from Sears Roebuck, boy was that a green one. But the guy didn't know how to tune it. Somebody told me that, this tunes like a fiddle, and I had a couple uncles that knew how to tune so we finally got the thing in tune. I just learned, which wasn't very much, just from doing it, you know. I never was around anybody until I come to California that knew how to play that I could actually see them play.

I lived back down a place called Bullfrog Valley, Arkansas. It's a little community, there wasn't a town or nothing there, but it's on the map. It's marked on the map right on the Big Piney River that goes down through Oak County, Johnson County and down through there, and that's where I was raised up, upstream about ten, fifteen miles. Ray [Park] was born and raised on the same river. Fact, he recorded a fiddle tune that he wrote, he called it Big Piney River.

**Did you know each other back then?**

Well, no. I had heard of a Ray because he knew all the people that I use to know and run around with. But why we never did run onto each other back there, I don't know. I think he left and came to, California before we ever got around to meeting each other. But I do remember seeing Ray at one Pope County dance back there, one time up on Moccasin Creek. It was an old house over there, an old abandoned house, nobody living in. So we all got together and had a dance up

there and Ray was there. I never met him until I moved to California. And well, he lived in Stockton and so did I. I use to listen to Ray on, on the radio in the morning. He had a show he played with Logan Lamb and the Happy Hayseeds and they had a dance every Saturday night over here at Oak Grove. A dance put on over here on Highway 26. And, I use to go there, hear Ray play, see him there. I actually didn't meet him until about 1958 or '59, along there. And when we met, we just started playing a little music together. First at my house and then his house and before you know it, we were out playing. Back then there was just nothing going on [around here] in bluegrass. Ray, he grew up playing country and western, but he loved bluegrass, he just never had run into anybody who wanted to play it.

[My parents] had a little farm, a little forty acre farm. Everything we raised, we used ourselves. We didn't raise nothing for the market. You know, corn, potatoes, and my mother would can all kinds of

fruits and vegetables in the summertime. That's the way we lived, just on a little country farm. Had an old battery powered radio that the battery seems to always be dead on the damn thing.

**What did you listen to on the radio?**

Oh, we listened to the Grand Ole Opry, that was about it.

**Who was on the Opry then?**

Oh, I remember the Skillet Lickers, Fruit Jar Drinkers, Uncle Dave Macon, Bill Monroe, he was the only bluegrass that was in the world at that time. Roy Acuff and then later on, Hank Snow come in from Canada, Ernest Tubb, he come in, Peewee King and the Golden West Cowboys, Curly Fox and Texas Ruby, Duke of Paducca, Rod Brassfield, Minnie Pearl. Ah, it was really something to listen to back then. I remember they had one, one mandolin player, Mack McGarr, I think was his name. He played the mandolin, he was really good but he was just a single performer.

[Bluegrass] that was my favorite of all, used to stay up and listen to Grand Ole Opry, mainly to hear Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys. I liked a lot of them, but they was my favorites 'cause they were different. I used to listen to them sing and it was so different from all the other bands, you know. They were a lot more, I liked to say sophisticated, compared to the Fruit Jar Drinkers and all that, and I loved their music.

**Were there any local radio stations in Arkansas that were playing that kind of old time music?**

Ah, yeah, there was a few local stations that would have a real early morning country show, usually it only lasted fifteen or thirty minutes. Sunway Vitamins was the sponsor. It was Dick Hart, just him and his guitar. And he come out there and it was all live. He'd sell the vitamins and play us a couple songs. It only lasted fifteen minutes but we never missed him. It was good.



Dick Hart, the singing cowboy I think he called himself.

I remember listening to Knoxville, a radio station in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Eddie Hill, he was a DJ back there and he's the one that more or less discovered the Louvin Brothers. He had them on and they were doing bluegrass then. I mean, they started out doing real down-to-earth bluegrass. Ira and Charlie Louvin, and boy, were they good. And that's about the only two country radio stations that I can think of around that we, we would listen to.

**How did you start singing?**

I just listened to my mom and around the house, she was always singing. And at church, used to go to church all the time and everybody always sang. We went to a Pentecostal church, or Church of God, and they was real big on picking and singing. Gospel music, I mean, they'd bring their guitars,

mandolins and whatever they could play, and 'cause most of the churches was so poor, they didn't own a piano – and if they did, it was probably wore out and wasn't in tune and nobody knew how to play it. But someone would have guitars or mandolins, fiddles and whatever and they just all get together and boy, they'd have a gospel singing you wouldn't believe. I never did get up on stage and sing any, I'd sing like in the audience, oh, everybody's stand up and turn the page, I did, too, and sing whatever. I guess that's where I learned to sing, [and] you'd sing around home all the time.

In 1952, I got drafted into the Marine Corps. And they sent me to San Diego for basic training, then on up to Camp Pendleton at Oceanside, then eventually on up to Twenty Nine Palms and the desert there. And that's where my tour of duty ended. I got married and we moved to Stockton, me and Marjory. I started working at a packinghouse and a few years after I started, there's when I met

Ray. And from there, we just started playing music. We played music for about sixteen years, I guess, something like that.

Ray and I started playing together in Stockton in about '58, '59, along there. We started, together, for I guess a year, and Ray played the fiddle, the banjo, guitar, he played everything. But I remember one time we made up a demo tape, Ray and I did. Ray was playing the banjo, I had an old banjo and he learned to play it pretty good. One day after work, we got in his car and we drove over to Vallejo, I think. Blackjack Wayne had a live radio show over there and we went in with the tapes and everything. Introduced ourselves and told Blackjack, listen to this. And he liked it, he loved it. So, he played it on the radio right there while we was there and then he had us come back to his dance over at the Dream Bowl [Napa, Ca.].

Then people heard us on the radio and

then, they started trying to get in touch with us, some pickers in Sacramento, Luther Reily, and Clyde Williamson, the guy who wrote Cabin on the Mountain, and two or three others. We agreed to go over to the Dream Bowl and play a few songs. So we got over there, that's when we met all these other pickers we didn't even know existed. We just figured we was the only two in California because we never heard of another one. And from there on, well, we started meeting more and more people who played and was interested in it.

One of the first people I ever met was Scott Hambly. Well he was one of the first and Pete Berg, he was another banjo player from Berkeley [Ca]. And then we started meeting a lot of people, and a lot of pickers around Berkeley that was real interested [in us]. Sandy Rothman, Herb Pedersen, Rick Shubb. We played one show, I wish somebody had it on tape, at San Francisco State where Jerry Garcia was playing the banjo with us. He played

the banjo with us two or three times, different shows. He had, his finger was cut off I believe. But he still was a hell of a good five-string banjo player. And a nice guy, too, that's way before he ever got famous.

I'd like to think Ray and I are the ones who got him started... I'm kidding of course!

I guess about 1974, when Ray and I quit playing together and he got together his little group, I got together with this band, Delbert and Keith and we just started playing around the house here. In fact, right here in the kitchen. We drank a lot of whisky and played a lot of music. I wish we had that on tape. Some of the best music was ever played, sitting in the kitchen here. Delbert and Keith when first started, they both played good but they wouldn't sing. They said, "naw, you do the singing, we'll help you pick." And one day I told them, now if you guys want to sing, you can sing. All you got to

do is just sing. I said don't worry about how it sounds. That will get better, but if you want to sing, you can sing. Well, they took me at my word, and before you know it, you couldn't shut them up. And they were good, too, damn good.

Yeah, we started in I guess about '74. And I don't know, we went up to I guess '88 or '89 along there somewhere. We played quite a few years together.

### **Why do you play bluegrass music?**

Well, I don't know how you describe it except to say, I just love it. I just love that type of music. And, the very first music I ever heard was acoustic music, you know, played by my uncles and when I was a little tiny, little bitty kid growing up and I never got away from that. I just love acoustic music. I just love the sound of the instruments. I love the songs they sang, especially loved the songs, they always had a little story to tell or whatever. Lot of times they was real sad but nevertheless, it was a story, to me, it had a

lot of meaning. Some of the songs nowadays, I don't know where the hell they come from, I don't know where they're going. They don't tell me nothing. Most the times, the words don't even rhyme in some of them, you know. I remember Ray told me one time if you want to remember a song, the words to a song, just remember they're telling a story. He said, then the words, if you can get the start of the story, you can more or less figure out the rest of it. And, and he was right. Just about any of the old bluegrass songs that you can think of, especially the older ones, told a little story, usually in three verses or less.

Produced and edited by Tom Diamant  
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### **Thanks to:**

**Ray Edlund** who is on KPFA-FM Berkeley, CA, on alternating Sunday afternoons 3-5 PM hosting his bluegrass and old time music show "Pig In A Pen" which can be heard live on the web at [www.kpfa.org](http://www.kpfa.org).

**Peter Thompson** who is on KALW-FM, San Francisco, Ca. Saturdays 6:30 – 8:00 PM hosting his show "Bluegrass Signal" which can be heard live on the web at [www.kalw.org](http://www.kalw.org). He can also be heard on [www.bluegrasscountry.org](http://www.bluegrasscountry.org).

**The California Bluegrass Association** which has been supporting bluegrass and old time music in California since 1975. They produce a variety of events, including their annual Father's Day Bluegrass Festival held every year on Father's Day weekend at the Nevada County Fairgrounds in Grass Valley, California. They also publish the monthly newsletter "Bluegrass Breakdown." For

more information visit their web site:  
[www.cbaontheweb.org](http://www.cbaontheweb.org).

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### **Also available on Arhoolie Records:**

Rose Maddox with the Vern Williams Band "Rose of the West Coast Country" (CD 314)

The Vern Williams Band also has a CD out on Rounder Records "Bluegrass From The Gold Country" Rounder CD 131

**Del Williams** and **Ed Neff** are currently in the band True Blue. Information about the band and their CD "Years Gone By" can be found at: [www.truebluegrass.com](http://www.truebluegrass.com).

**Keith Little** currently has a CD out "Distant Land To Roam" on Copper Creek Records: [www.coppercreekrec.com](http://www.coppercreekrec.com)

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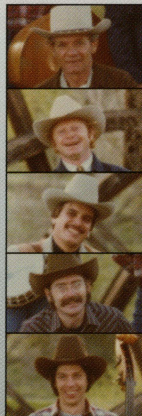
**Vern Williams** –  
Mandolin, Vocal

**Del Williams** –  
Guitar, Vocal

**Keith Little** –  
Banjo, Vocal

**Ed Neff** -  
Fiddle

**Kevin Thompson** -  
Bass



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