

“The heart of old time Mountain Music beats in Bryson City NC”

By Rob Ashford

On most mornings around 10, the worn musty boards in the old Bryson City train depot begin to vibrate and hum from rhythmic tapping of footwear.

The whole building seems to grind to life as a banjo floods the depot with a spicy twang, accompanied by the harmony of a resonating six-string guitar, and the thick smooth chocolate tones of the upright bass. This is the old time mountain music of The Freight Hoppers. The harmonic vocals of the group shine forth, welcoming the appearance of tourists and railroad workers, helping to shake off just a little of the morning chill.

Across from where the band plays, the massive GSMR No. 711 locomotive, waits patiently still on the rail tracks, a constant growling from its core accompanying the music perfectly. The occasional blast from the train whistle hovers seductively on the wind, and spreads through the smoky vapors from that old iron horse. The whistles echo highlights the fresh cold air somehow. It almost causes the few remaining orange red leaves still clinging to the trees to shiver. As the sun crawls out from behind a cloud, it pierces the thin color and illuminates them.

If you close your eyes and listen to the music, with the sun's warmth on your face and the warmth of your surroundings, you will feel like you've been transported directly into the heart of the mountains.

This music of the Freight Hoppers is as raw and old as the painted wooden station floor it's played on, and effortlessly captivates the imagination. Timeless tunes such as '*The train that carried my girl from town,*' '*Scandalous and a shame*' and '*Down on me,*' carry away the many tourists who happen to pass through the station, getting ready to board the train.

Five shrill blasts from the 11am Great Smoky Mountains Railroad engine, signals the end of the Bryson City train depot music festival for another day, plunging the old place into a temporary silence. The music of the Freight Hoppers is infectious. After happening upon the band at the depot one cold November morning, I have returned for more ever since. I dare anyone to listen to the live raw old time mountain music of the Freight Hoppers, without tapping their feet on that old wooden floor.

The Freight Hoppers are Frank Lee, Barry Benjamin, Mclean Bissell and Bradley Adams.

www.thefreighthoppers.com