

BÉLA FLECK & ABIGAIL WASHBURN

TD Arena at College of Charleston

June 1 at 7:30pm

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ARTISTS



ABIGAIL WASHBURN: If American old-time music is about taking earlier, simpler ways of life and music-making as one's model, Abigail Washburn has proven herself to be a bracing revelation to that tradition. She—a singing, songwriting,

Illinois-born, Nashville-based clawhammer banjo player—is every bit as interested in the present and the future as she is in the past, and every bit as attuned to the global as she is to the local. She pairs venerable folk elements with far-flung sounds, and the results feel both strangely familiar and unlike anything anybody's ever heard before. To put it another way, she changes what seems possible.

It seemed just as certain that Washburn would study law in Beijing—she even had the plane ticket—as it seemed far-fetched that she would be offered a record deal when she was not looking for one. And yet, half a decade back she emerged without a law degree, but with a debut album, that album being *Song of the Traveling Daughter*. Alongside old-timey originals that felt impossibly lush and light on their feet were songs she wrote in Chinese—she's fluent—and even an instrumental that wove together an old-time banjo tune and with a traditional Chinese folk song: “Backstep Cindy/Purple Bamboo.” It was a new way of hearing both.

In 2008, Washburn and three virtuosic comrades—cellist Ben Sollee, fiddler Casey Driessen and three-finger-style banjo player Béla Fleck—presented Abigail Washburn and the Sparrow Quartet, a set of seemingly boundless compositions sprouted from seeds of American and Chinese folk. The album extended an imaginative musical bridge between East and West. The world had never seen a chamber ensemble, stringband or bluegrass group quite like the Sparrows.

Recently, she played the prominent USA pavilion at the World Expo in Shanghai. Washburn has regular collaborators in China: a group of women musicians from the China Conservatory and Haggai. She has been popular in Britain as well, singing with the likes of Robyn Hitchcock, Richard Thompson and Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones. She's no less sought out stateside; she played the Clearwater Concert—a multi-generational folk extravaganza celebrating Pete Seeger's 90th birthday—sang Stephen Foster songs backed by the Nashville Symphony during the 2009 Americana Music Festival and has become a favorite opening act for Steve Martin and the Steep Canyon Rangers. She and Fleck still do shows as a duo—a meeting of the minds and banjos.

BÉLA FLECK: Premier banjo player Béla Fleck is considered one of the most innovative pickers in the world and has done much to demonstrate the versatility of his instrument, which he uses to play everything from traditional bluegrass to progressive jazz. He was named after composer Béla Bartok and was born in New York City. Around age 15, Fleck became fascinated with the banjo after hearing Flatt & Scruggs' “Ballad of Jed Clampett” and Eric Weissberg and Steve Mandell's “Dueling Banjos,” and his grandfather soon gave him one. While attending the High School of Music and Art in New York, Fleck worked on adapting bebop music for the banjo.

Fleck always had diverse musical interests, and his own style was influenced by Tony Trischka, Earl Scruggs, Chick Corea, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, the Allman Brothers, Aretha Franklin, the Byrds, and Little Feat.

In 1979—only five years after he took up the instrument—he made his solo recording debut with *Crossing the Tracks*, which the Readers' Poll in Frets magazine named Best Overall Album.

Fleck, mandolin player Sam Bush, fiddler Mark O'Connor, bassist Edgar Meyer, and Dobro player Jerry Douglas teamed up in 1989 to form Strength in Numbers and record *The Telluride Sessions*. Late that year, Fleck was asked by PBS television to play on the upcoming *Lonesome Pine Special*; in response, he gathered together a veritable “dream team” of musicians to form the Flecktones.

Busy and prolific, Fleck released an album of classical pieces, *Perpetual Motion*, in late 2001, followed by *Live at the Quick* in 2002, the ambitious double-disc *Little Worlds* (and its truncated single-disc version, *Ten from Little Worlds*) in 2003, and *Music for Two* (with bassist Edgar Meyer) in 2004. Fleck appeared on Abigail Washburn's first album, *Song of the Traveling Daughter*, in 2005.

In 2012, Fleck collaborated with the Marcus Roberts Trio, recording the co-billed *Across the Imaginary Divide*. Ever ambitious, he composed both an orchestral concerto and a chamber work around his banjo playing, and performed and recorded with the Nashville Symphony Orchestra and the string quartet Brooklyn Rider, respectively. The recording appeared as *The Imposter* in August of 2013.

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