

# Oklahoma Gazette

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## Two High String Band

"Hillbilly Jazz," "Hick Music"...Billy Bright has made his peace with the labels that have accompanied blue grass music for decades. His band, Two High String Band, performed a blistering set on Thursday night at the Blue Door, as he played his mandolin with a ridiculous amount of control and speed. The show was to promote their second album, "Moonshine Boogie."

Blue grass, like most genres that focus on stellar musicianship, is more impressive when seen live, and the Blue Door (known for its earthy and warm acoustics) was a perfect venue for their high-energy sound. The crowd was a good mix of young and old, showing how relevant blue grass has become.

"There is more acceptance for this music than ever before, as far as going into a neighborhood bar and not getting chased out," Bright said in an interview prior to the show.

He even thinks "Hillbilly Jazz" might be an apt label.

"It is very complex and hard to play, much like jazz," Bright said. "The level of technical ability from some of the people who play blue grass is unbelievable."

That complexity is evident in the swift flourishes in Two High String Band's instrumentals and their precise and furious finger picking. For such a small instrument, the mandolin can produce an amazing amount of sound, which came across in the album, but was breathtaking live.

The trio is three years removed from their debut, which featured mostly covers. The new album focuses on originals, brings in some guest musicians and even adds three part harmonies.

"It just worked out in the last few years, we were on the road and writing,"

Bright said. "Our first choices for the new record were going to be the originals, because no one has heard them before and they are a part of you, it's your music."

The audience and the style shifted for modern blue grass, away from the more traditional music.

"Our version is less rural," Bright said. "I do live in the sticks, but I didn't grow up in the sticks. I grew up with all the modern influences around now, and the world is different now than when Bill Monroe created his music."

The burden to maintain their audience remains on the musicians, Bright said.

Blue grass must continue to innovate to remain relevant.

"It's always a challenge for blue grass players to make blue grass a little different, to get it to more listeners," Bright said. "Blue grass is the kind of music that someone may hear once, and go along time without hearing it again, but when they do, they will like it...or not."

- Charles Martin