

Sebastian Library celebrates bluegrass with free play about Carter Stanley

By Mike Winikoff

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SEBASTIAN — It's hard to become famous as the second person to do something, which is one lesson of the life of Carter Stanley.

Along with his brother Ralph, Carter Stanley formed the Stanley Brothers, generally considered to be the second band to play the style of music that became known as bluegrass. The first was Bill Monroe.

Actor, author, and bluegrass enthusiast Gary Reid, considered one of the leading authorities on the Stanley Brothers and the bluegrass genre, has created a one-man play called *A Life of Sorrow* — the Life and Times of Carter Stanley. He brings that production to the North Indian River County Library in Sebastian for a free performance on March 22 at 3 p.m.

Carter and Ralph Stanley performed what was then a brand new style of music from 1946 until Carter's death in 1966, at the young age of 41. Actor Reid says Carter Stanley "played the music, wrote the songs, and... he self-destructed."



Gary B. Reid portraying Carter Stanley

Alcohol was a big part of Mr. Stanley's downfall, which was also driven at least in part by his jealousy concerning the success and acclaim being bestowed upon "competitors" Flatt & Scruggs, who seemed to get all the big breaks while the Stanley Brothers struggled.

Then there was their dispute with Bill Monroe when the Stanley Brothers released a record of the song *Molly and Tenbrooks*, also known as *The Racehorse Song*, which Mr. Monroe had actually debuted on the radio weeks earlier.

In other words, The Stanley Brothers had issues, and Mr. Reid explores them with great humor in his play. On top of the humor is the sense of authority — when listening to Gary Reid, it is quickly apparent that he knows more about bluegrass than most people know about any one topic.

When the play premiered in 2014, *Bluegrass Today* wrote in its review: "both the play and Gary's depiction of Carter conveyed the sense of a passionate artist possessed of a rare gift,

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but perhaps without the savvy or street smarts to navigate the complicated world of a performing artist. No Stanley Brothers fan, precious few bluegrass lovers, and not many in the general public could fail to appreciate the drama and pathos of this story."

Mr. Reid laments that Carter Stanley's musical legacy is largely forgotten.

"*A Life of Sorrow* affords today's audiences a chance to connect with this bluegrass legend as he recounts highlights from his life and career, including childhood days on the family farm, old-time musicians who influenced him, his songwriting, struggles with alcohol, stories from life on the road, and his admiration for Bill Monroe."

The North Indian River County Library is located at 1001 Sebastian Blvd., Sebastian. For directions, call the library at (772) 589-1355.

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