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Life & Arts

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He is a man
of constant
fixation on
music icon



So To Speak Joe Blundo



Gary Reid picked the right word, I think, to describe his devotion to bluegrass musician Carter Stanley.

"I guess you could call it an obsession," he said.

Reid, of Roanoke, Va., has spent 40 years researching Stanley and his brother, Ralph. He has written *The Music of the Stanley Brothers*, released this year.

And now he portrays Carter Stanley in a one-act play, *A Life of Sorrow: The Life and Times of Carter Stanley*, to visit

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Columbus on Saturday.

Reid was neither an actor nor a musician when he resolved a few years ago to channel Carter Stanley onstage. He took four or five years' worth of music and acting lessons to make it happen.

"Nobody told me I couldn't do it," the 58-year-old said, "so I kind of charged ahead."

The play uses no Stanley Brothers recordings. It's all Reid, talking and occasionally singing portions of their songs.

His fixation began in high school — after a teacher gave him some records, including one by the Stanley Brothers.

"When the needle hit the grooves, the sound emanating from the speakers just jumped out and captivated me."

Carter Stanley, a Virginia native, was a sweet-singing, hard-drinking guitar player whose vocals were complemented by the high tenor of his banjo-picking brother. Among their best-known recordings is *I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow*.

The Stanleys are considered part of the founding trinity of bluegrass, along with Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs, Reid said.

Carter Stanley was



COURTESY OF GARY REID

Gary Reid, channeling Carter Stanley, in a one-act play to be presented this weekend in Columbus

► *A Life of Sorrow: The Life and Times of Carter Stanley* will be presented at 7 p.m. Saturday at Wild Goose Creative, 2491 Summit St. Tickets cost \$10 at the door. Visit www.wildgoosecreative.org.

only 41 when he died in 1966. But he left a big impression.

"He had a very emotional way of putting a song across," Reid said.

Among the musicians who performed with the Stanleys in their early years was Darrell "Pee Wee" Lambert, a mandolin player who lived in Columbus during the 1950s and '60s.

He, too, died young, and the play treats his passing in 1965 at age 40 as a foreshadowing of Carter Stanley's fate a year later.

Reid's love of Stanley's music changed his life.

After working in banking in Maryland early in his career, he moved to Roanoke about 32 years ago to join a company that produced bluegrass music. He eventually launched Copper Creek, a bluegrass record label.

He has had a long association with Ralph, the surviving Stanley brother — who continues to perform.

Ralph hasn't seen the play, Reid said, but he is aware of Reid's encyclopedic knowledge of the Stanleys' lives.

"He tells me that I know more about him than he does."

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