

Long Island Bluegrass Festival draws musicians, music lovers



Terri Hall, of [Bellport](#), sing and play along with John Chainey, mandolin player for Meadow Grass, during a jam session at the [Long Island](#) Bluegrass Festival on Saturday. (Aug. 18, 2012) Photo Credit: Kathleen Fordyce

By Kathleen Fordyce August 20, 2012 9:59 AM

A building maintenance worker by day, John Chainey comes alive at night and on weekends when he holds his small mandolin close to his chest, plucks and slides his fingers across its smooth strings, and sings bluegrass lyrics that have been calling to him for more than 22 years.

“When I’m playing, there is no Long Island Expressway. If I am under the weather with a cold and I am playing, I no longer have a cold,” said, Chainey, 62 of East Meadow. “The music is kin to meditation. It’s sound, expression and joy.”

On Saturday afternoon, after the rain had passed, Chainey, his fellow band members from Meadow Grass and other musicians gathered at the Long Island Bluegrass Festival and held an impromptu jam session.

In the spotty shade under a pergola at Tanner Park in Copiague, they circled around wooden benches, each playing an instrument of their choice – guitar, violin, fiddle, mandolin, base – and took turns singing, playing the lead and shouting out the names of songs they wanted to play next.

“This is my passion, second to my wife if she ever asked,” Chainey said.

Nearby, a crowd of more than 200 gathered on blankets and in lawn chairs on the lawn, listening to the bands performing on the main stage.

The festival, now in its 10th year and presented by the Town of Babylon and Babylon Citizens Council on the Arts, featured Grand Ole Opry Star and bluegrass legend Bobby Osborne and bands including Too Blue, Free Grass Union, Appalachian Diaries, Acoustic Electrix and The Mandolin Experience.

While many musicians came out for workshops given by the Long Island Traditional Music Association, or to just play together like Chainey and his friends, others like Katie Deoucia, 27 of Bay Shore, just came to enjoy the music.

“I came because I heard my two favorite local bands are playing: Free Grass Union and Electrix,” she said.

Lynne Dougherty and Ali Dernbach of Long Beach were enjoying the festival for the first time.

“There’s great music, it’s a beautiful day and a nice breeze,” Dernbach said from the shady spot under her umbrella. “It’s a lovely day.”

Others were die-hard bluegrass fans, like Terri Hall of Bellport. Originally from California, she said she was raised to the sound of bluegrass. Just four years ago, after living on Long Island for 18 years, she discovered the underground bluegrass scene.

Now, she often joins Chainey and a group of other local musicians for informal jam sessions they host around the Island.

“This is better than music lessons,” she said pointing to the group of musicians assembled.

As the day wore on under a beating sun, many of the musicians enjoyed breaks on the lawn, but they couldn’t keep their hands from their instruments for long.

“Listening is great,” Hall said, ”but nothing is better than being a part of a greater whole making the music together.”
