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## **Blue Ridge Music Trails Research Signals Growth in Traditional Music Audiences Western North Carolina Music Venues Report Increased Attendance Before COVID-19**

Enthusiasm for Western North Carolina's traditional music and dance is alive and well. That's according to a recent survey by the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA). Leaders at the organization believe that excitement will be the key to a successful reopening for nearly 150 sites along the Blue Ridge Music Trails (BRMT).

"Although it is a difficult time right now, we expect traditional and bluegrass music will come back even stronger" said Executive Director Angie Chandler. "Together with our Blue Ridge Music Trails partners, we have developed community pride in the musical traditions that are authentically ours to share. Plus, we are engaging with new fans and educating younger generations."

Traditional music in Western North Carolina through the Blue Ridge Music Trails effort includes old-time, bluegrass, gospel, blues, ballad singing and traditional dance.

In February 2020, prior to disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the nonprofit organization conducted research among its partners associated with the Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina (BRMT), an initiative launched by BRNHA and the North Carolina Arts Council in 2013 to promote the preservation and awareness of traditional music and dance in Western North Carolina. These partners include music and dance venues and events of all sizes, regular concert series, local arts organizations, and others within the 29-county BRMT geographic footprint.

A majority of partners (69%) reported increased attendance in 2019 compared to 2018; a similar majority (68%) reported increased attendance overall since the launch of the initiative in 2013.

Highlights of the survey results include:

- 81% of respondents believe that the BRMT has helped their community. Increases in awareness, visitation, attendance, and the overall preservation of traditional music were most often cited as community benefits.
- When asked about the impact of the BRMT upon their own organizations, 71% said they believe it has helped them, and 29% said the initiative had aided them significantly. Many cited the benefits provided to traditional music in general and a boost in reputation of their event or venue.
- 65% of events and venues that track revenue reported increases for 2019, and only 5% of respondents generating revenue reported any decline. (About four in five respondents said they generate at least some revenue annually).

Music venues and artists receive support from the BRMT initiative through a website ([BlueRidgeMusicNC.com](http://BlueRidgeMusicNC.com)), social media channels and a visitor map brochure. A dedicated BRNHA team oversees ongoing promotional and partnership opportunities for the Western North Carolina traditional music community.

One venue boosted by BRMT's efforts is the Surry Arts Council. "The Blue Ridge Music Trails partnership has provided economic benefits to the Surry Arts Council and our community ranging from increased traffic in the Old-Time Music Heritage Hall to increased awareness of the Blue Ridge and Beyond Series at the Historic Earle Theatre," said Executive Director Tanya Jones. "BRNHA has marketed and supported the Surry Arts Council's old-time music retreats,

performances, festivals, weekly jam sessions, and concerts. Protection, preservation, promotion – and playing old-time music has never been more important as we celebrate increased awareness and interest in our music traditions.”

BRNHA is committed to continuing to strengthen traditional music venues and events through the Blue Ridge Music Trails program. Currently, the non-profit organization is creating virtual training programs on how to develop and promote livestreaming events, social media and other resources. The instructional webinars will roll out this summer.

For more information about the Blue Ridge Music Trails, visit [BlueRidgeMusicNC.com](http://BlueRidgeMusicNC.com).

*The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, designated by Congress in November 2003, works to protect, preserve, interpret, and develop the unique natural, historical, and cultural resources of Western North Carolina for the benefit of present and future generations, and in so doing to stimulate improved economic opportunity in the region. National Heritage Areas are locally-governed institutions that encourage residents, non-profit groups, government agencies, and private partners to work together in planning and implementing programs that preserve and celebrate America’s defining landscapes.*

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