# Takin' it to TEXA

Joseph musician sets his site on Austin's Ameripolitan scene

### **By Stephen Tool** Wallowa County Chieftain

Joseph resident Jimmy Bivens has been a lot of different things in his life: a ranch caretaker, golf course grounds keeper, handyman ... one thing he'll never stop doing is music.

Bivens has never let any of his jobs take his eyes off of music for long. The Wallowa County musician is a staple on the regional scene, including gigging in Idaho, Washington and Oregon, even Oregon's west-side.

Bivens comes by his passion for music honestly, but he didn't grow up with it, even though his father was future country swing music hallof-fame member Jimmy "Wayland" Bivens.

Born in Lewiston, Idaho, young Bivens didn't stay long. His father had three children with the singer's mother, but the elder Bivens couldn't knuckle under to his wife's request to step out of the music world. The father lasted about two weeks. The son thought the mother's request tragic.

"I don't agree with what she did," he said. "She knew who he was." Bivens' mother left the marriage.

Her son was three at the time. Years later he found a letter from his mother to his grandmother, telling the older woman how popular her husband Wayland was in Oregon, Idaho and Washington. She also mentioned a station called KWVR in a little Oregon town called Enterprise where her husband's records were spending a lot of time on the turntable.

In fourth grade, Bivens told his mother and stepfather that he wanted to become a musician. Not wanting him to follow in his father's footsteps,

his mother convinced the singer's two sisters to tell him he was tone deaf every time he started to sing. When he was 14, his mother shipped him to Long Beach, Calif., to his father in the middle of the night.

His multi-instrumentalist father gave him a guitar and taught him three chords. Bivens attended Long Beach Polytechnic High School where he played basketball for two years before following his father upstate to Sacramento. He played his first concert there with an audience of three: His father, the club owner and Tammy Wynette.

After nearly flunking out of high school, the singer had to put music down to concentrate on his studies. He didn't pick up the guitar for a decade. After graduation, he took a number of jobs and moved back to Idaho, where he managed ranches and trained horses. Then the music bug bit him again.

During the last part of his decadelong hiatus, he ran a camp in Idaho for children with cancer. When sscheduled entertainment fell through, Bivens contacted local musicians who performed.

"That's when I started playing music again," he said.

In the early 2000s, Bivens ran a prosperous resort ranch in the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho where he connected with country musicians. This led to playing in Las Vegas at a south-side casino called "The Boardwalk" during the 2002 National Finals Rodeo.

Bivens played six of nine nights and met a number of Nashville musicians and songwriters. An instrumentalist named Rex Weisman, who played for country star Clay Walker, encouraged him. Bivens gave Weisman a cassette tape of songs he'd written.

"There was a reggae song in there, a ballad, a rocker," Bivens said. "I write diverse - whatever hits me." At Weisman's urging, Bivens gathered \$7,000 of his own money to record an album in Nashville. He hired studio musicians, including Weisman.

Bivens took the album, "Tell the Story," to a Boise studio and laid down the master vocals and waited to see what would happen. The album received good reviews from critics, even though he intended it to showcase his songwriting talents so other performers would pick them up.

An overseas promoter offered the singer a chance to play England and France as a solo act. Bivens jumped on the possibility.

The tour was successful. When Bivens returned, Don Tunnell, who had done videos for a number of famous names and planned to put together an overseas blues revue, scrapped the tour for Bivens when he heard the album and took over as manager, a position he's held for a decade.

Tunnell invested the blues money into a tour called "Americana on Tour." Bivens worked on the tour for more than a year as the headliner.

"Don believed in me and still does," Bivens said.

The singer kept touring with Boise as his home base. While playing a solo act in Boise, he met Art Bell who convinced him to come over to Wallowa County. As Bivens and his wife, Michelle, came down Minam Canyon, they knew they'd found their home.

The couple moved to the county in 2008 and quickly learned the phrase, "If you're going to live here, you have to have three houses or three jobs." Bivens doesn't own three houses.

"It was part of the decision of being able to be here," he said. "The spice and variety for me is I don't mind doing it at all."

One of the many upsides of moving to the county was the change to Bivens' touring regimen.

"If I need to play somewhere, I call a couple a couple of buddies and we meet up and play the show," he said.



see you next time.' It keeps me from having to tour with people and babysitting.'

Bivens places a lot of emphasis on his shows, and he has a simple recipe for performing: The audience is number one. He said he gets paid to take people away from their woes, and he takes that seriously.

He works on establishing a connection with his audience, something he says a lot of performers neglect. To keep his show from getting stale, he doesn't use a set list.

"When the guitar player takes a lead, I look out in the crowd and gauge where I want to go next. If you're reading the crowd, they'll tell you."

Bivens' next career step is to travel to Austin, Texas, and explore Ameripolitan music

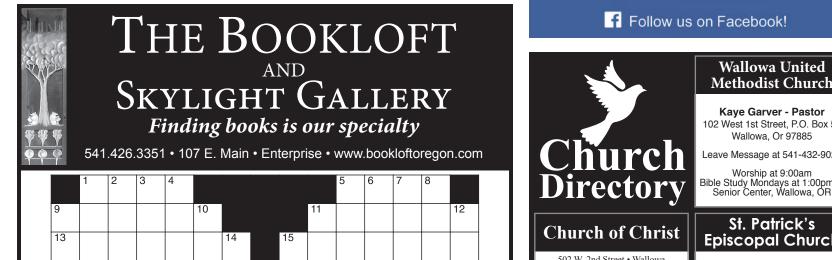
"There's a regeneration of what we call real country music," Bivens said. He noted performer Dale Watson started Ameripolitan, which is a combination of country music, western swing and rockabilly.

"Those are three things I'm really strong in writing and performing," he said.

The singer said the current plan is to record an Americana album and follow it with a tour while delving deeper into Ameripolitan.

"My job is to entertain people," he said. "I do this for the love of sharing what I do with people and put a smile on their face."

You can learn more about Bivens and his other recorded works at jimmybivens.com.



# IN BRIEF

## 'Stem Afternoon' planned Jan. 26

Family fun and science are on the agenda for a Stem Afternoon event Friday, Jan. 26, at Building Healthy Families, 207 NW Park St., Enterprise. The event includes prizes, a snack and variety of fun hands-on science stations exploring robotics, physics, biology and the Olympic sport of curling.

EOU Stem Hub and Wallowa Resources are co-sponsors.

### Parent Café opens for 2018

Networking and conversation about parents accompanied with a free lunch is offered through the Building Healthy Families Parent Café Wednesdays, beginning Jan. 18.

Building Healthy Families and community partners are on hand to host the discussions regarding child care and other topics that help parents connect.

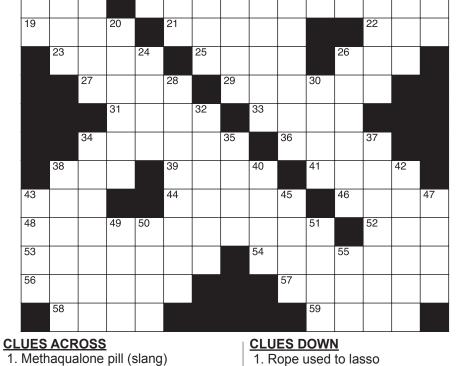
The sessions are at 207 NW Park St., Enterprise. Free.

### **Fishtrap lands** two grant awards

The Oregon Arts Commission has cut Fishtrap two checks recently. A general support grant from the Learning Grants division of \$11,306 will help expand youth labs that include K-8 Fishtrap Storylab; 2018 Summer Fishtrap, which will include a Youth Workshop led by educators Cameron Scott and Mosley Wotta; and youth participation in The Big Read.

"Our goal is to reach every kid in the county," said Shannon McNerney, executive director of Fishtrap.





- 5. Religious service
- 9. Woodland gods (Greek myth.)
- 11. "Where Is My Mind?" rockers
- 13. Deliberately contrary states of affairs
- 15. Inflection of the voice
- 16. "Great Expectations" character
- 17. Becomes a butterfly
- 19. Spoke
- 21. Tennis player Sharapova
- 22. Midway between northeast and east
- 23. Afrikaans
- 25. No instruction set computing
- 26. Pacific Standard Time
- 27. Relaxing places
- 29. Confiscates
- 31. Gladys Knight's fellow performers
- 33. Witnesses
- 34. Taking place in a series
- 36. Satisfy
- 38. Freshwater fish of N. America
- 39. Laments
- 41. "Girls" creator Dunham
- 43. Indian title of respect
- 44. Cocoa plum
- 46. Network of nerve cells
- 48. Link together in a chain
- 52. Cool 70s crew "The \_\_ Squad"
- 53. Persons engaging in energetic pursuits
- 54. Accumulation of glacial debris
- 56. Fastened
- 57. A cotton fabric with a satiny finish
- 58. Whiskey and bread are two
- 59. Scottish tax

- 1. Rope used to lasso
- 2. Idyllic places
- 3. Field force unit
- 4. Guitar great Clapton
- 5. Slang for type of skirt
- 6. Figure skating jump
- 7. Innocent
- 8. Mathematical ratio
- 9. Slowly drinks
- 10. Line where edges meet
- 11. Offices of the pope
- 12. Dry or withered
- 14. " the Man" Musical
- 15. Difficult situations
- 18 Greek goddess of discord
- 20. Marked by smartness in dress and manners
- 24. Habitat
- 26. Annoy constantly
- 28. Full of life
- 30. Great energy
- 32. BBQ and soy are two
- 34. Virtuous
- 35. Not fatty
- 37. Foes
- 38. Merchandiser
- 40. Dishonest scheme 42. Repents
- 43. Protective crust
- 45. Native American people
- 47. Any place of bliss or delight
- 49. Bring up
- 50. Birds
- 51. Geological times
- 55. Consumed