

Steam Machine EPK
updated February 2024

BIO:

“Was great to see this ubertalented old time stringband tear up the stage and wow the crowd. The Midwest has such impressive old time/bluegrass talent and Steam Machine is exhibit A!”

- *Adventures in Americana, show review, January 2024*

Steam Machine is an award winning Minneapolis project formed to explore fiddle/string band traditions from the midwest and beyond that straddle the line between bluegrass and old-time music. Fronted by 2023 Clifftop Old Time Fiddle contest winner AJ Srubas and old time music and dance instigator Rina Rossi on guitar, their sound has been described as both ‘bright and fresh’ and ‘suspiciously entertaining.’ Centering on the combination of (primarily though not exclusively) midwest & Missouri style melody-strong, long bow old time breakdown fiddling with three finger banjo and bluegrass influenced rhythm back-up, interspersed with songs from old time, bluegrass, and early country traditions, Paul Brown described the project as a band that “seriously honors the old traditions without smothering them.”

In-demand Minneapolis multi-instrumentalist David Robinson (*High 48s*, formerly of *Monroe Crossing*) fills the banjo seat as often as possible, and a short list of talented bass players round out the band. While not purists, Steam Machine does listen closely to the old stuff and strives to capture the essence of what makes these tunes and songs special as they hear them, inspired by the legacy of musicians like Lyman Enloe, Garry Harrison, Cyril Stinnett, Arthur Smith, Kenny Baker, Kyle Creed & the Camp Creek Boys, and others whose styles blended old time and bluegrass elements.

Two time Clifftop traditional band contest finalists and Folk Alliance Midwest Official Showcase Artists, since 2018 Steam Machine has performed at diverse venues across the midwest and country from concert halls to bluegrass and Americana festivals to listening rooms. When home in Minneapolis, they are heavily involved as organizers in many of the local community old time and bluegrass institutions. Their first album, released in 2018, was described by the *Old Time Herald* as “a stout example of the vitality of fiddle music up north these days.” As things opened up in 2022 and 2023 they began touring again, in the midwest and beyond.

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Web and Social media:

www.steammachinemusic.com

steammachinebooking@gmail.com

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[YouTube](#)

Current Album:

<https://steammachinemusic.bandcamp.com/album/steam-machine>

Video:

[That Girl I Love Don't Pay Me No Mind](#)

preview of unreleased new video (2024)

[Paddy On The Turnpike](#)

Filmed at the Old-Time Tiki Parlor (2018)

[Countryman's Reel](#)

Bb fiddle tune from Cyril Stinnett filmed outdoors on a Nagra (2018)

[Full Concert at Deep End Sessions](#)

Full live concert set filmed at Deep End Sessions (2018)

[Hard to Love](#)

Catchy little song filmed outdoors on a Nagra (2018)

Accolades and past appearances:

Appalachian String Band Festival (Clifftop) Fiddle contest (AJ -1st place) - 2023

Mt. Airy Fiddlers Convention Bluegrass Fiddle Contest (AJ - 2nd place) - 2023

Folk Alliance Midwest Official Showcase Artists - 2022

Appalachian String Band Festival (Clifftop) Fiddle contest finalists (AJ - 3rd place) - 2019

Appalachian String Band Festival (Clifftop) Traditional Band Contest finalist - 2018, 2017 (2nd place)

Examples of past appearances:

Lotus World Music Festival, IN | Boats and Bluegrass, MN | Durango Bluegrass Meltdown, CO | Indiana Fiddlers Gathering, IN | Wheatland TAW - MI | University of Chicago Folk Festival, IL | Portland Old Time Gathering, OR | Sugar Maple Festival, WI | Austin String Band Festival, TX | Larryfest, WI | Ozark Folk Center, AR

Camps and Workshop Instruction:

Augusta Heritage Center, WV | Festival of American Fiddle Tunes, WA | Minnesota Bluegrass and Old-Time Music Festival, MN | Berkeley Old Time Music Convention, CA | Minnesota State Fiddlers Association | John C Campbell Folk School, NC

Press:

“Simply put, Steam Machine is a supergroup, one with intertwined musical relationships that create a chemistry so much more profound than four disparate musicians coming together. Seeing Srubas at the helm is exciting, not only because I’ve seen him play a supporting role at so many shows and love hearing his voice take lead vocals, but because the group’s sound is subtly more fiddle-forward than a lot of other local old-time acts.

The band largely plays classic and traditional old-time songs...which were first recorded in the 1930s. They offer small bits of background on the songs, or insights on what they’re doing in them (such as calling out a song that’s particularly exhausting to play on fiddle—after Srubas completely nails it and makes it look easy), but for the most part they let their playing speak for itself.

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Steam Machine's renditions seem faithful and classic, so it's hard to explain how their playing feels bright and fresh. Whereas sometimes the music of artists steeped in tradition can feel static or even ponderous, Steam Machine brings a levity and energy to their performances. You can step back and be impressed by their artistry, but you might instead wind up just swept away in enjoyment because they make it seem effortless and look like they're having so much fun." - Adventures in Americana

A (new) band "that seriously honors the old traditions without smothering them...Steam Machine brings a broad repertoire of old-time and bluegrass songs and tunes to its new album – with a distinct Midwest accent including melody-strong, long bow fiddling from AJ Srubas and three-finger banjo picking...that straddles the line between bluegrass and down-home old-time square dance music." - Paul Brown, NPR/Across the Blue Ridge

*"Every once in a while a new band emerges that catches my attention. Not only their great name, Steam Machine, likely taken to honor the memory of my dear friend the late Garry Harrison, but most of all their music which has the power and the glory of the old stuff, the stuff I love to listen to, the stuff that makes me wanna play more, learn new tunes and play the old ones every single day. Steam Machine plays with respect to the sources, accuracy and drive that seems to be often missing nowadays. They roll on like a steam machine indeed!"
-Rafe Stefanini*

"Great music and great musicianship. Agile fiddling, hard-driving three finger banjo, a rock-solid rhythm section..." -Minnesota Bluegrass Magazine

"Steam Machine represents the exciting frontier where old-time string band meets bluegrass. The tunes come from the fiddlers most influencing the current generation of players, and fiddler AJ Srubas gets his elbow into every note. Banjo, bass and guitar follow AJ through every crooked tune, and the group dusts off old songs and plays individualistic versions that will serve as reference points for bands to follow. The outcome of Steam Machine's relentless attention to detail is a highly polished performance style that is simultaneously rustic and sophisticated."

-- Phil Nusbaum, Bluegrass Saturday Morning, KBEM-FM

"Minneapolis continues to be a hothouse for established and up-and-coming bluegrass, Cajun, and old-time musicians. The new self-titled CD by (mostly) Minneapolis-based Steam Machine is a stout example of the vitality of fiddle music Up North these days."

- Old-Time Herald

"Steam Machine is a band that bridges the old-time/bluegrass divide. Their consecutive second-place finishes at the clifftop trad band contest lets you know they are serious about old fiddle tunes, but they are also suspiciously good entertainers..." - Homestead Pickin' Parlor

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“Steam Machine comprises four very talented musicians, all with impressive musical backgrounds, abilities, and influences...I think the style of music here could be described as a bridge joining original old time to the awakenings of bluegrass.”

- Old-Time News (UK)

“First rate string band tunes and songs.” - Old Time Herald

“Sometimes it seems that there is a schism or divide between bluegrass and old-time string band music, and that most folks tend to play one style without giving any regard to the other. It wasn’t always like this, however; many a good fiddler back in the day just played whatever they considered to be a good tune and didn’t bother classifying it as old-time or bluegrass. They just played it. Steam Machine is hoping to blur those divisions a bit.” - Adam Kiesling