

Review of Concert by Special Consensus at the Lucy Opry on August 8, 2009

by Betty Westmoreland

The **Lucy Opry** in Bartlett, TN, is home of some of the very best bluegrass music performed by some of the very best performers that can be found anywhere. Located in the **Bartlett Performing Arts & Conference Center** (BPACC), at 3663 Appling Road, the Lucy Opry creates a down-home flavor on the nights when bluegrass rules the house! When Special Consensus hit the stage on August 8, 2009, fans were more than hungry to hear them. During their last trip to town, Special Consensus had to contend with a good-sized storm, complete with snow and ice. Band members recalled that they had fun slippin' and slidin' out in the parking lot at the BPACC.

Special Consensus is smooth and solid! The band has a strong traditional base, yet they mix newer and original work right into the show for a powerful impact. Instrument and vocal work are some of the finest that the listener will ever hear. The band has been in existence since the mid-'70s, before some of the current band members were even born. The strong, steady hand of banjo player and leader, **Greg Cahill**, has provided the direction for the band from its inception. The band has received wide recognition in *Bluegrass Unlimited* and with the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA). One particularly important element of their success is their development of the Traditional American Music (TAM) program in schools, on cable TV and on National Public Radio. Cahill and other band members saw the need to bring young people into bluegrass music, since it is the kids who will carry it forward.

Meet Special Consensus:

ASHBY FRANK (mandolin) sings lead, baritone, and tenor. He is from Winston-Salem, NC, and though he's young, his roots run deep. He began winning guitar and mandolin contests by the age of 12. Frank has performed with Ronnie Bowman, Jeanette Williams, Lou Reid and others. He joined Special Consensus in 2007.

DAVID THOMAS (upright bass) sings lead, baritone, high baritone, and tenor. He lives near Elkmont, AL, and he developed his interest in music from listening to the music of his uncles and great uncles. His grandfather took him to some bluegrass festivals, and Thomas picked up the bass at 19. A former member of the band Roanoke, Thomas joined Special Consensus in 2006.

GREG CAHILL (banjo) sings baritone and tenor. The Chicago native formed Special Consensus in 1975, and since then he has played countless festivals, recording sessions, radio and TV programs. Cahill also does jingles, participates in music camps, and records instructional videos and DVDs. He is a former chairperson of the IBMA's Bluegrass In The Schools Committee. Cahill currently serves as Chairman/President of the Nashville-based IBMA.

JUSTIN CARBONE (guitar) sings lead, baritone, bass, and tenor. As it is with many others, the New Jersey native attended a bluegrass festival when he was quite young, and he was hooked on the music. He formed a band called Kickin' Grass, which led to a name change (2nd Edition) and a first place win at the Society for the Preservation of Blue Grass Music of America (SPBGMA) in 2001. Carbone released a solo project, *Take Some Time*, in 2005, with several special guests: Greg Cahill, Ashby Frank, Jeremy Garrett, Randy Kohrs, and others. Carbone joined Special Consensus in 2004.

Set 1

1. Signs (written by Ashby Frank, title track of the band's most recent CD on Pinecastle Records), 2. Too Late Now, 3. Josie's Reel, 4. Mountain Girl, 5. Gone to Carolina (written by Carbone and Becky Buller), 6. Footprints, 7. Blue Skies, 8. Down the Trail of Aching Hearts, 9. I'll Go to My Grave Lovin' You (on latest CD, made popular by the Statler Brothers), 10. I Cried Again, 11. Branded Wherever I Go

Set 2

1. Rovin' Gambler, 2. Leavin' This Ol' Town (written by Carbone, Ryan Roberts, and Ron Spears), 3. Rose of Old Kentucky, 4. Simply Talkin' 'bout It Just Don't Get It Done, 5. Snowball Breakdown (written by Cahill, Frank, and Brent Truitt, named for the van in which the band travels), 6. Lord, Show Me the Righteous Pathway (written by former band member, Ron Spears), 7. Take This Hammer, 8. Justin Time, 9. Lonesome without You, 10. Everything's Alright, 11. Carolina in the Pines, and the spine-tingling encore: I'll Be No Stranger There (gospel quartet)

Special Consensus is an amazing, talented band with almost 35 years tucked away in their gig bags. Did we mention that they're funny, too? Their onstage banter was hilarious. Despite the disappointing turnout at the Lucy Opry, the band played as though they were giving a performance to several thousand fans. They often do play to thousands, and this writer would like to see a consistently larger crowd for all the bands who play the Lucy Opry. Special Consensus acknowledged the beautiful venue, the backstage food, and those who came out to hear them. Catch a Lucy Opry show soon—support bluegrass in Memphis and West Tennessee!

For more information:

Special Consensus www.specialc.com

The Lucy Opry www.lucyopry.com

BPACC www.bpacc.org