

# Furnace Mountain Band

Mary Winston Nicklin



Ms. Aimee Curl



PHOTO BY JAKE ELLIOT



PHOTO BY CHRIS CURL

Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands;  
And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done,  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

To listen to a recitation of the William Butler Yeats's poem, "The Song of Wandering Aengus," is to hear the cadences of music. The stanzas are sonorous, rhythmic, begging to be sung. This is just what the Loudoun-based Furnace Mountain Band did. "So many of Yeats's poems are titled "songs," as if the poet heard his words as songs. His poems are asking to be put to music," the band's Morgan Morrison tells us. Songwriter Nathan Moore and Aimee Curl wrote the music to the song that was such a sensation at the Watermelon Park Festival. (The 2006 performance in Berryville is now forever watchable on YouTube.) The song's harmonies— with Morgan and Aimee singing vocals— are as haunting as the poem itself.

But the Furnace Mountain Band is not limited to lilting Celtic ballads. Their repertoire is vast, spanning ancient folk songs to bluegrass to hip-shaking, heart-pounding, jump-to-your-feet, kick-up-your-heels Appalachian fiddle tunes (countless students seek to emulate the flying fingers of the band's Fiddlin' Dave). Pick up a copy of their joyful new CD, *Fields of Fescue*, and you'll see why author and folk musician Charles de Lint hailed it as one of the best Americana albums of the year.



### The Furnace Mountain Band draws the crowd to their feet at the Watermelon Fest

Steeped in the history and music of the northern Piedmont, the band is geographically inspired, taking its name from the mountain rising from the southern banks of the Potomac River near Taylorstown. In fact, all the band members are Virginia born and bred, though they have played with an impressive roster of musicians nationwide. Led by Dave Van Deventer on fiddle and Morgan Morrison on bouzouki with Danny Knicely on mandolin/guitar and Aimee Curl on bass, the band produces “Ethno-Appalachian Roots Music,” delving deep

into the region’s musical history. While the Piedmont’s music was dominated by horn bands at the turn of the last century, string band music was also prevalent. Morgan and Dave list fiddler John Ashby, who played in the 1960’s in Fauquier County, as an inspiring force (and John Morrison, Morgan’s Dad, of course, with whom she began playing guitar when she was 13).

“Today, the music scene is thriving in Loudoun and Clarke counties,” Dave tells us. “The Round Hill Arts Center and Franklin Park Performing Arts Center in Purcellville have concerts and jam sessions, and the Shepherds Ford House concert series features a different artist



They are the music, the soul, of this area—like the mountains and river,”

A local artist says of the Furnace Mountain Band

Order your own copy of the band’s new release on [furnacemountain.com](http://furnacemountain.com) or [CDbaby.com](http://CDbaby.com).



### Know Your Farmer/Musician, Know Your Food

A transient member of the Furnace Mountain Band, Zach Lester plays the bodhrán, and also happens to operate a pesticide-free farm in Waterford called Tree & Leaf. Washingtonians flock to the Dupont Circle and Mount Pleasant Farmers Markets to pick up the beautiful veggies grown in organic glory by Zach, his wife Georgia O’Neal, and their spirited team.

Their farm management — growing and harvesting in a sustainable way throughout the year — has caught the attention of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In fact, the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan kicked off the new initiative called “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” on-site at Tree & Leaf Farm. The campaign’s mission is to renew rural economies by supporting “small and local.”

Highlighted on Obama Foodarama (the official blog for White House food and garden initiatives), Tree & Leaf is exactly what the USDA has in mind: a small, five-acre farm that produces thousands of pounds of healthy food each year. Because of their success in Loudoun, Zach and Georgia were able to secure an infrastructure loan through the USDA for a new farm in Orange County. Read more about it at the USDA’s Know Your Farmer website or [treeandleaffarm.com](http://treeandleaffarm.com).

each month at our house.” And with only 50 seats, the acoustics are unbeatable. Perhaps biggest of all: the annual Watermelon Park Fest, co-hosted by the Furnace Mountain Band, which draws artists, music fans, and families to a wind-powered stage next to



PHOTO BY CHRIS CURL

the Shenandoah River near Berryville. First started in the 1960's, the Watermelon Park Fest has deep roots, having hosted a slew of big-name musicians: the Carter Family, Bill Monroe, Johnny Cash, Flat & Scruggs, Patsy Cline, The Stanley Brothers, and Dan Tyminski in 2008. (In the film “Oh, Brother Where Art Thou” Tyminski performed the song “Man of Constant Sorrow” which George Clooney lip-synched.) After the festival was shut down in the 1970's, local Bluegrass aficionados resurrected it in 2003.

Catch the Furnace Mountain Band at various venues across the Piedmont and beyond; some of the band members also perform gypsy swing and folk jazz with The Woodshedders. ■

**Book the Furnace Mountain Band for private events by contacting:**

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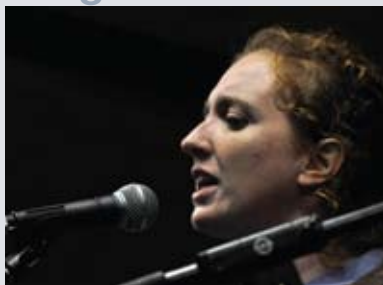
or  
**Dave and Morgan**  
 furnacemountain@yahoo.com  
 540-955-3946

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An international travel writer, **Mary Winston Nicklin** grew up in the Piedmont and is a regular contributor to the magazine.

Hailing from Taylorstown, Morgan Morrison began singing and playing guitar with her family at age 13. By 18, she had taken up the bouzouki and started delving into folk and Celtic music, creating her own compositions and arranging new versions of traditional songs.

### Morgan



Originally from Furnace Mountain, bassist Aimee Curl has toured with big name bands like Dave Matthews, Wide-spread Panic, and Blues Traveler as an original member of ThaMuseMeant. Back in Virginia, Aimee sings vocals with Morgan creating otherworldly harmonies for the Furnace Mountain Band. Dave, Morgan, and Aimee have played music together since high school.

### Aimee



### The Furnace Mountain Band



PHOTOS BY JAKE ELLIOT AND TARA WARD

### Danny

Danny Knicely knows a thing or two about mountain music. As a fourth generation Appalachian multi-instrumentalist, this Virginia native has won awards for his guitar and mandolin picking, including first place in the mandolin contest at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival—no small feat. He's toured nationally with such award-winning groups as Magraw Gap.



### Dave

Fiddle enthusiasts, take heed. Dave Van Deventer (aka Fiddlin' Dave) gives lessons. Music Director of the Watermelon Park Festival, he's been studying the folk origins of the fiddle for over 20 years. Dave grew up on a dairy farm in Purcellville and now resides with his wife Morgan in Berryville. Grab tickets to next summer's Watermelon Park Festival and you might be lucky enough to see Dave fiddlin' with other bluegrass musicians around a campfire.