



BIOGRAPHY

Kendra Ward & Bob Bence

Every Saturday night, music could be heard coming from a little log cabin deep in the hills of Appalachia. Every Saturday night, Kendra Ward then just a child, could be found there, along with a host of relatives, friends, and neighbors, all making music with banjos, fiddles, guitars and dulcimers.

From beginnings such as these, it is no surprise that Kendra has emerged as one of our most respected Appalachian musicians. She is recognized as a true master of the hammered dulcimer, and has been likened to the legendary guitarist Chet Atkins. Kendra's eight recordings have been hailed by fans and critics alike, while her instruction books and videos have introduced a new generation of dulcimer players to the joys of making their own music. Kendra's potent commitment to sharing her Appalachian culture has helped to keep a vital part of America's traditional heritage alive and vigorous.

Kendra's unique upbringing has left her with a powerful link to her Appalachian roots. Derrick Bell, of the Grammy award-winning Chieftains, recognized this when he wrote from his home in Ireland to tell Kendra that he loved her *Way Down Yonder* CD. He commented that the original tunes sounded so authentic that he had thought they were traditional!

Kendra's music may be rooted in the traditions of the past, but she strives to carry it into the future. She is committed to sharing her cultural inheritance with others – whether it is a 4th grader who wants to know, “how do you play that thing?” or an 85-year old, with a tear in her eye, who says, “I haven't heard that since dad played it on his fiddle 70 years ago!”

When Bob Bence met Kendra back in 1983, he had no idea that his life was about to make a hard left turn. In those days, Bob was entertaining audiences as a member of an improvisational comedy group and performing stand-up on the side. Guitar playing was “just for fun.” However, after hearing Kendra play, Bob was completely captivated, both

by Kendra, and her amazing hammered dulcimer! Before he knew it, Bob had put his comedy career on the shelf, and made making music his new full time gig. Nowadays, Bob's offbeat sense of humor is on display at the many “Emcee-ing” jobs he gets, and during his concert appearances with Kendra.

While live performances are certainly the best way to experience the magic of Kendra Ward and Bob Bence, their music has been captured on numerous recordings. They have released four albums of traditional and original tunes, along with a recording of old-time gospel favorites and one of Christmas classics. These recordings have sold tens of thousands of copies, bringing Appalachian music into homes around the world.

Additionally, Kendra is the author of several best-selling hammered dulcimer instructional books and two dulcimer songbooks. She has also produced three award-winning instructional videos. Her degree in education and love of teaching combine to make her instructional materials truly effective. Her hammered dulcimer method book “sets the standard,” and her videos have garnered international acclaim.

Between touring, recording, and publishing, Kendra and Bob also find time to carry on another Ward family tradition – building mountain dulcimers. They learned this art from Kendra's father, who began building dulcimers in 1925. Their hectic schedule prevents them from making as many instruments as they would like, but they do manage to build 12 to 15 a year.

Together, Kendra and Bob have earned a reputation as one of the most entertaining and accomplished traditional music duos in the nation. They have appeared on stage with The Statler Brothers, Debbie Reynolds, Bill Monroe, Allison Kraus, John Hartford, David Holt, and a host of other top performers. They have toured the United States from coast to coast, and are international favorites throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Whether on stage, on record, or in print, few artists communicate with the honesty, wit, charm and talent of Kendra Ward and Bob Bence.