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## Hot Rize Raises Spirits and Raises Dough with 'Pickin' Up the Pieces' Flood Benefit

BY MARQUEE MAGAZINE ON NOVEMBER 1, 2013

BRIAN F. JOHNSON, COVER STORY, FEATURES, INTERVIEWS



By **Brian F. Johnson**

Just west of Niwot, Colo., across Highway 119, on a dirt, tree-lined road in Boulder County, the home and small practice cabin of Pete "Dr. Banjo" Wernick sits nestled on the bank of Left Hand Creek. For 37 years Wernick and his wife Joan have lived there, and over the decades they've seen their share of flooding. But on September 11, 2013, after returning home from an out-of-state gig, the Wernicks saw something they'd never seen before — the creek, which had never swelled more than 80 feet wide during their time there, was about 500 feet wide, and the water was up passed the windows of that cabin, the very place where Wernick wrote the vast majority of his catalog.

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When the flood waters receded, the Wernicks counted themselves among the very lucky. While the cabin was filled with over two tons of mud, its windows smashed out, it was still standing and only some minor electrical equipment was lost. "We had a draw bridge over the creek that my son designed and built as a teenager and we were very proud of him for that. It had lived through many, many storms, and the cable held for a day after the flood this time and then it all went. That was the worst loss for us, and it was so minor compared to everybody else," Wernick said in a recent interview with *The Marquee*.

While Wernick was also lucky enough to have his banjos safe, one of his travel cases had disappeared in the flood, the very same case that he had with him when, along with his wife and son, he survived the 1989 crash of United Airlines 232, that claimed 111 lives. "I knew that it must have been gone and sure enough, when I got into the cabin, it was. But a few days later, a neighbor from downstream brought it back and now that case has even more stories to tell," he said.

As the community continues to dig out and inch closer to a return to normal, Wernick and his Hot Rize bandmates (Tim O'Brien, Nick Forster and Bryan Sutton) began organizing an event to help "raise spirits and raise dough," Wernick said, a nod to the band's namesake Martha's White's self-rising flour.

Wernick said that he is personally more concerned about mental health issues than property loss for the residents of Boulder County, and the Doctor of Sociology said that it saddens him that the community won't know the full effects of the flood for a long time to come. "We won't know for a very long time about people who feel that their insurance company or FEMA didn't do their job, in the meantime there are folks with immediate needs. With mental health issues especially, it's like, 'Take a ticket and wait.' There's only one person in the navigator role for the whole county. The whole thing is bigger than we understand and it will take a while to fathom it all," he said.

The benefit show that they have prepared, which is being offered to those affected by the flood in the form of an "Uplift" ticket for only \$5, will not only help "raise spirits and raise dough" but will also give the legendary bluegrass band the chance to spend some time together in Boulder to complete more work on their forthcoming album. "We spent six days in the studio in June. That's a fact. Everything else is speculation," Wernick said.

He did offer, however, that he's very proud that he and his bandmates recorded the album without headphones, in a room, playing in a circle. "Well, you can't call it a circle because there's only four of us, but we sat in a square — or a diamond — within earshot of each other, the way people have always played music. Bluegrass music and every kind of music, except classical, is made in a circle, most of the time, and therefore, getting up on stage and facing forward, that's artificial, and making a record where everyone sits around with headphones in their own room is *really* artificial."

The band cut 14 tracks over the six-day session and every band member contributed a song to the album full of new, original material. The album, which they hope will be released "around this time next year," will be Hot Rize's first release in over 10 years and their first studio release in over 20 years, and Wernick and the rest of the band couldn't be more happy to have new songs to play. "Everybody knows that the four of us are real, breathing musicians — Tim (O'Brien) proves that more than anyone — but when we get together as Hot Rize we

play "Radio Boogie" from 1980 and "Nellie Kane" from 1978. This is going to show that we're not stuck in the 20th century," Wernick said.

### Hot Rize - Nellie Kane



:: Pickin' Up The Pieces – A Flood Benefit for Boulder County Flood Relief ::

featuring

:: Hot Rize ::

:: Red Knuckles and The Trailblazers, Bill Nershi, Jeff Austin, Andy Hall, Chris Pandolfi, Sally Van Meter, Mollie O'Brien and Rich Moore, Eric Thorin ::

:: Macky Auditorium

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