

2018 North Carolina Heritage Award recipient Tony Williamson is a visionary musician, composer, musical instrument expert, teacher and mentor. He has played stringed instruments, most famously mandolin, for six decades and has been receiving awards and honors for his music for nearly 50 of those years. Never content to rest on his laurels, today Tony continues to perform live and travel internationally and continues to compose and record music. His latest release, "Heritage" shows him at the top of his game, while also showcasing an illustrious career.

Tony was born and raised in rural Piedmont North Carolina to a family of wood-workers and musicians. His grandfather, Alfred, made his own musical instruments (at one time his banjo was on display the N.C. Museum of History) and inspired his grandchildren, who began playing music around 1957. With Tony on mandolin and his brother Gary on banjo, they became child sensations and by 1969 had won first places in the coveted "World Championship" in Union Grove, North Carolina. In 1968 the Williamson Brothers recorded "John Henry" for Follett Publishing Co. for an anthology called "Discovering Music Together". Also included in this book and LP record album collection were contributions from "Blood Sweat & Tears" and the Boston Symphony.

After taking a degree with highest honors at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill in 1975, Tony answered the call to go on the road with a touring band, the Bluegrass Alliance, whose alumni include Vince Gill, Sam Bush and Tony Rice. Afterwards, working in a succession of bands led him to the top of his field playing classical, jazz and folk music as well as bluegrass. His credits include performances on stage and/or in the recording studio with Alison Krauss, Chris Thile, Earl Scruggs, Bill Monroe, Bobby Hicks, Tony Rice, Vassar Clements, David Grisman, Sam Bush, Mike Marshall, Ricky Skaggs, Jerry Douglas, Don Stiernberg, and Robin and Linda Williams of Prairie Home

Companion fame. In addition to the prestigious NC Heritage Award, his list of honors includes the IBMA recorded event of the year in 1994, many on-stage highlights such Mando-Mania at Merlefest and an unforgettable performance for Luciano Pavarotti!

David Ryoko of the Chicago Tribune summed it up back in 2001: "Tony Williamson is among the finest mandolinists alive, and (his) instrumental passages...dazzle without ever lapsing into flashiness. This is great music!" The latest recordings by Tony include his solo "Lloyd Loar Mandolins" and with his brother, Gary and an all star band, the Williamson Brother's "Bluegrass!" His tours have included performances in almost every state in the US, as well as appearances in France, Ireland, Japan, Taiwan, Brazil, Peru, Canada and Italy. He brings to the concert stage a love of music, a deep connection to his Carolina roots, an enthusiasm to take those roots to creative new realms and a wonderful knowledge of musical instruments and their history.

"Quite simply, what Tony Williamson doesn't know about mandolin is probably not worth knowing. As a player, collector, dealer, historian and mandolin community activist, Williamson has helped keep the mandolin's great American legacy alive while uplifting and encouraging generations of modern players. From bluegrass, to classical, pop and other forms, Tony Williamson is a national treasure."

- David McCarty, staff writer for Fretboard Journal, Bluegrass Unlimited, Mandolin Magazine and others.