

## The Ozark Mountain Daredevils Are Still Shining

by [Dean Nelson](#) | February 8, 2017



Courtesy Ozark Mountain Daredevils

Walking down the steps from my room at Wildwood Springs Lodge in Steelville last November, I catch the tail end of a discussion between two patrons about the weekend that had just ended.

“We don’t go to Florida in the winter, and we don’t take Caribbean cruises,” one of the gentlemen proclaims. “We come here.”

The “here” he’s referring to isn’t just the lodge, although that’s part of it. The 1920s-era building is set back in the woods above the Meramec River, the food is homemade and amazing, and the employees act as if they’ve known you for years and were counting the days until you came back.

The “here” is also the experience of hearing the Ozark Mountain Daredevils perform in a setting that feels at times like a living room and at other times like a church.

“It’s the coolest gig we do,” says Mike “Supe” Granda, bassist and writer for the band that is entering its forty-sixth year. “Everyone in the crowd is so close that there’s no division between the musicians and the audience.”

The Daredevils have been performing sold-out shows at Wildwood every November for the last ten years as part of the lodge’s fall music series. Some fans are under the impression that the band gets back together just for these shows.

“The truth is, we have never stopped touring,” says Steve Cash, another Daredevil mainstay who plays harmonica and writes a lot of the band’s songs. “There were some rough years, but we’re still playing.”

Influenced by their Springfield roots, the Kansas City jazz and blues traditions, and St. Louis-area musicians such as Chuck Berry and Miles Davis, the Daredevils’ music is a mix of folk, rock, country, blues, bluegrass, and gospel, with an occasional harp, oboe, and cello thrown in the mix.

“Our music is like the topography of Missouri itself,” Granda says. “One part has rivers, another has mountains, another is as level as Iowa. In many ways, our music is just about a bunch of hippies going for walks in the woods.”

Of the six original Daredevils who played in the early days, three remain: Granda, Cash, and John Dillon. Granda spends most of his time in Nashville, where he writes music. His 2008 book, *It Shined: The Saga of The Ozark Mountain Daredevils*, traces the band’s beginning, successes, and setbacks throughout its four-plus decades of making music.

Cash lives in Springfield and still writes music. He also has written a historical fantasy trilogy called *The MEQ*. It’s a series about a rare breed of people who may be hundreds of years old but still look and act like adolescents. Draw your own conclusions as to where he might have done his research.

Dillon, who plays guitar, fiddle, and mouth bow, also writes a lot of the band’s songs and lives in Springfield. He spends some of his time with an advertising agency and some of it with Artist Signal, an Internet start-up that provides a platform for emerging artists. Other more recent members of the band include Nick Sibley, Ruell Chappell, Ron Grempe, Dave Painter, Bill Jones, Kelly Brown, and occasionally, Molly Healy.

Dillon and Cash collaborated on one of their most famous songs, *It’ll Shine When It Shines*, a song that took the duo less than twenty minutes to write. To the devoted congregation singing along at Wildwood, it’s the equivalent of the hymn *Amazing Grace*.

The good news for Daredevil fans is, in addition to an upcoming February show, that the band is back in the studio, recording what will probably be a double album of new songs.

Reflecting on the band’s journey since he and his cohorts began playing together in the 1970s, Granda says one thing has not changed since those early days: the pure joy of playing.

“Every time I put on my guitar I turn into a giant eighth-grader who is trying to play the crap out of *Louie Louie*,” Granda says. “I’m grateful to be on this side of it. We are a group of fortunate men.”

*Ozark Mountain Daredevils will appear with the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band on February 17 at the Uptown Theater in Kansas City. For more information or to buy tickets, go to [UptownTheater.com/home](http://UptownTheater.com/home).*

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