

2018 Blue Blaze Award Winner

Michael Cleveland

Award-winning fiddle player Michael Cleveland has been named the 2018 Blue Blaze Award Winner for the Smithville Fiddlers' Jamboree & Crafts Festival. This most recent honor will be added to a rather impressive collection of accolades among his musical peers. Cleveland has won more IBMA awards than any other fiddle player including 10 wins for **Fiddle Player of the Year**, six wins for **Instrumental Recorded Performance of the Year**, and fronts their 5-time **Instrumental Group of the Year**. On March 30th, Michael will be inducted into the National Fiddler Hall of Fame in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Together with Flamekeeper members Josh Richards (guitar), Nathan Livers (mandolin), Jasiah Shrode (banjo) and Tyler Griffith (bass), Cleveland makes his way around the country performing and delighting audiences, while leaving them with jaws dropped in complete amazement. Cleveland will be accepting the Blue Blaze Award on Saturday, July 7th, 2018 during the Smithville Fiddlers' Jamboree & Crafts Festival at 5pm followed by a mini-concert by **Michael Cleveland & Flamekeeper**.

"Michael Cleveland embodies what we look for in a musician when choosing a recipient for the Blue Blaze Award," said Sam Stout, President and Coordinator of the Smithville Fiddlers' Jamboree & Crafts Festival, "He started performing at the Jamboree as a young boy, and grew his talent to an impressive career in bluegrass music. The purpose of the Blue Blaze Award is to recognize a group or individual who keeps the embers of bluegrass music glowing for future generations. Michael Cleveland certainly does that, and more. He is an inspiration to all of us. We invite the public to come out and support Michael, while enjoying the best that bluegrass has to offer."

Cleveland has a very loyal fan base, along with an amazing story. Michael was born blind, along with many additional health complications. He has endured over 20 reconstructive surgeries including brain surgery. In addition to these challenges, he lost 80% of his hearing in his left ear. But Michael Cleveland is not a 'glass half empty' kind of guy. He prefers to focus on his goals, his love of music, and being the best in his field. Although only in his mid-



30's, Michael Cleveland, a 2018 Grammy Nominee, has reached plenty of those goals.

Cleveland began his love affair with music by taking violin lessons at only four years old. This passion for the stringed instrument led him to bluegrass music. His teachers quickly labeled him a musical prodigy. "When

I started taking lessons at age four," he remembers, "I told the teacher right up front that I wanted to learn how to play bluegrass and I wanted to play 'Orange Blossom Special.'" Reluctant as they were, his teachers quickly found reason to his rhyme, helping him progress to the point when, at age 9, Michael was invit-

ed to sit in with the legendary Bill Monroe at the Bean Blossom Bluegrass Festival. During this time, he visited the Smithville Fiddlers' Jamboree and competed alongside fiddle players of all ages and skill levels. Soon after, he brought his virtuosic style to the Grand Ole Opry as a guest of Alison

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