



Pat Ahrens

1. Ahrens discusses her roots...(03:31)

Interviewed by Allan Hinnant

P. Ahrens: *<Audio cuts in>* ...How I got interested. That's a long story.

A. Hinnant: Once-upon upon a time. Where were you born?

P. Ahrens: Once upon a-where was I born? Aiken, South Carolina.

A. Hinnant: Aiken, South Carolina.

P. Ahrens: I'm originally from Aiken.

A. Hinnant: Ok

P. Ahrens: *<A. Hinnant adds a number of "um hums" throughout the dialogue>* But, I've lived-I've lived in Athens, Georgia for close to five years and then moved here and I've been in Columbia ever since, since 1964. So I guess I could claim Columbia. I was born in Aiken, but I claim Columbia-

A. Hinnant: -I understand-

P. Ahrens: -as home. Yeah.

A. Hinnant: And, you just-how-how did-how did you fall into A) liking this music, and B) then hooking up with all these people.

P. Ahrens: Alright, uh, let me see how briefly I can make this-

A. Hinnant: -Don't worry about brevity-

P. Ahrens: -When um, when I was growing up I always sang. I did-my whole life I-I've sung and, um, my mom actually had a little tiny picture of me-she said I was five years old, first time I ever sang on a stage and a picture does exist of me, *<she laughs>* you know, *<he laughs>* real little, with all my curls, you know, standin' on a stage somewhere that nobody has any idear. And I always sang in church. I sang in high school, sang in the, uh, chorus. And, uh, I sang in a band. We had a high school band, but I was doing 'pop' stuff.

A. Hinnant: Right.

P. Ahrens: And that was all I ever knew, you know, at that point in time and, you know, the few pieces that the chorus would do. It was a little bit towards Classical, not-not really. And um, I moved to Athens, Georgia in 1960. My ex-husband was a veterinarian and went to the University of Georgia Veterinarian School. So-

A. Hinnant: Right.

P. Ahrens: -I lived there, and we lived in a public housing project and these people that lived next door to me were from Washington, D.C. And the guy's name was Henry [Ighler]. Well Washington, D.C. was like the seed of, you know, where bluegrass got started. Because many of the people that founded so many things were from the D.C. area.

A. Hinnant: Right.

P. Ahrens: Well, uh, Henry [Ighler] is this man's name and, um, he was married to Miriam [Ighler] at that time, whose brother was, uh, Donny, um, who was really a-a-a famous banjo picker at that point in time. I got right the second-I can't even remember Donny's last name <*she laughs*>-

A. Hinnant: Well, it-it's not a test, I promise.

P. Ahrens: Cause, uh, yeah I know, but I-I'll have to look it up, I'll think of it in a second. Bryant. B-R-Y-A-N-T.

A. Hinnant: Oh, ok. Donny Bryant.

P. Ahrens: Donny Bryant, who, uh, is a banjo player. And he was good enough, that, like, when Earl Scruggs was in a wreck, Donny took Earl's place. I mean, he was a very well known banjo player, you know, from that area. Well, uh, they also knew, Bill Emerson had gone to high school with him.

A. Hinnant: Right.

P. Ahrens: You know, and um, at the University of Georgia there was a guy called Walter Forbes, who was a banjo player, long time ago. And he had a deal with RCA. He was on RCA. He was like B.M.O.C., I mean, you know, the University of Georgia, this guy has a recording contract. You know, well he was the first live person I ever heard play a banjo. And he came over to visit Henry. Henry played guitar and sang and I thought that was wonderful, you know. And then, um, Walter came over there and played one day and that was the first time I'd ever heard anybody, in person, play a

banjo. I'd like seen it on television, but I didn't, you know, it just never happened to me before...<Audio ends>

2. Her first concert (02:21)

P. Ahrens: We used to have parties. We used to have what we called 'pickin' parties'. And, uh, well Henry did, uh, traditional stuff and bluegrass, but I'd never heard a bluegrass band at that point in time. And so we had this party one night and this guy walked in, his name was Kent Taylor and he had this big Martin guitar, you know, and he could flat-pick and God could he sing <they laugh>. Oh could he sing. And there were like four of 'em and they played and sang. And they said it was real strange 'cause I talk a lot and they said I went over in the corner and I sat down. Said I didn't get up all night long and they played and sang, about half the night, you know. And when they finished, I got up and I went over and I asked him, "What do you call that kind of music?" And he said to me, "Bluegrass." And that was the first time I'd ever heard the word and that was in 1960. And then very shortly after that was when, you know, all the folk [boom] stuff started and, uh, Flatt and Scruggs played at the University of Georgia and I went with Kent. There was a gang of us that hung out; there'd always be seven or eight of us that, you know, were goin' different places. And reason I could do this, was my ex-husband was always studying. He was down at the Vet. School, <they laugh> I never saw him so I was pretty free to do whatever I wanted to do, you know. And, went to that Flatt and Scruggs, um, concert and he actually sh-that was the first Dobro I ever saw, in person, you know-

R. Alston: -[????]-

P. Ahrens: -When he explained-right-I'd never seen one and he explained to me what the instrument was, you know. And then I, um...after we left the University of Georgia, because I'd hung out with all the people down there that were musicians and, you know, it broke my heart when I came here and I couldn't find that many people that played <she laughs>. I mean, I thought that was supposed to be the way it was. And it wasn't the way it was. So it took me a while after I moved here to find other people that played. But I eventually did, you know. <Audio ends>