

at Joshua Tree National Park

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History and Legends of the Joshua Tree Music Scene

Information

Date/ Time: Saturday, February 29, 2020 10 am – 5 pm

Meet at: [Black Rock Nature Center](#) (click on link for a map of the meeting site)
9800 Black Rock Canyon Road, Yucca Valley

Instructor: Bruce Fessier, 40-year Desert Sun music writer and UC Riverside, Palm Desert instructor

Overview

The Joshua Tree area has attracted spiritual-seeking musicians, singers and songwriters since the 1940s, or less than a decade after President Roosevelt established the Joshua Tree National Monument. Songwriters Hall of Famer Allie Wrubel wrote the Andrews Sisters hit, “The Lady From 29 Palms,” in his Twentynine Palms home near where Paramahansa Yogananda was writing his influential “Autobiography of a Yogi” in 1947. In the 1960s, a little-known singer-actor began bringing fellow actors and rock stars to Joshua Tree to share a recurring mystical experience. One companion was country rock progenitor Gram Parsons, who brought the Rolling Stones’ Keith Richards to the monument. After that, a cosmic American music scene literally began to mushroom in Joshua Tree. For Bruce Fessier, it culminated in seeing Paul McCartney at Pappy & Harriet’s Pioneertown saloon in 2016. Fessier first visited the Twentynine Palms Inn at one-month old in 1953 and his family has owned a house in Joshua Tree since 1958. He’s chronicled the Joshua Tree music scene since 1981, when he moved there in hopes of meeting the town’s most famous resident, the English troubadour, Donovan. In his class, Bruce will explore the music scene’s origins and share stories of how psychedelic experiences in the high desert not only shaped pop culture, but led to a vibrant scene including music festivals, famous recording sessions and a lounge named after Donovan’s 2004 LP, “Beat Café,” where an open mic night was heard internationally via Internet radio, inspiring a documentary of the influential but seemingly invisible Joshua Tree music scene titled “Nowhere Now.” In addition to the story-telling, Bruce will share a playlist of music recorded by integral participants in the Joshua Tree music scene and lead a caravan car tour of important sites, including the home of the Joshua Tree Music Festival, the hotel where Parsons died and Donovan stayed, and a studio where the high desert sound was recorded.

Itinerary

Saturday, February 29, 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Black Rock Nature Center

- **10-10:50 a.m.:** Introduction and history of the Joshua Tree music scene

- **11-11:45 a.m.:** Discussion and playing of 10 important early songs representing the high desert sound. A Spotify playlist of 25 Joshua Tree-related songs will be available to listen to on the car rides throughout the day and beyond for those who have Spotify.
- **12-12:30 p.m.:** Visit to the Joshua Tree Inn, site of where Gram Parsons died of a drug overdose
- **12:40-1:40 p.m.:** Bring your lunch or join Bruce at the Country Kitchen, 61768 Highway 62, Joshua Tree, where Josh Homme of Queens of the Stone Age brought Anthony Bourdain for breakfast. Reservations must be made weeks in advance, so please notify us if you want to eat at the Country Kitchen.
- **2-2:45 p.m.:** Visit to Joshua Tree Lake Campgrounds, where we'll discuss the burgeoning music festival scenes in the high desert.
- **3-3:45 p.m.:** Visit to a Joshua Tree recording studio to be announced, where we'll talk about famous recording sessions in the high desert.
- **4-4:50 p.m.:** Return to Black Rock Nature Center to discuss the current Joshua Tree music scene, with the playing of 10 more recent Joshua Tree-inspired songs

What to Bring to the Course

Optional Equipment

- Hiking Poles
- Camera

The 10 Essentials: Everyday in the Desert

- Day pack
- 4 quarts of water
- Hiking boots with traction soles
- Lunch and snacks for each day
- Clothing layers
- Hat
- Sun glasses
- Sunscreen
- Notebook and pencil/pen
- Whistle

Fitness Requirements

Participants must be in good physical condition for courses/activities in a desert that may be hot, dry, windy, and sometimes surprisingly cold.

Hike Level

Easy

Guidelines

- You are responsible for your safety.
- Park your car in designated areas only. Parking along the side of the road is dangerous to you and the environment.
- Rattlesnakes are present in the park. Avoid contact with wildlife. Put your hands and feet only where you can see.
- Stay with the group. If you get lost, stay put.
- Drink plenty of water. If you run out, notify the instructor or the Desert Institute Representative.
- Before leaving the class, check out with the Desert Institute Representative.

Instructor Biography

Bruce Fessier has been a journalist and desert community leader since 1979. His family has owned property in Joshua Tree since 1958 and his 40-year career with The Desert Sun in Palm Springs has yielded awards for stories on Sonny Bono (2018), the history of the Mafia in the desert (2015), the new federal uses of the Annenberg Sunnylands Estate (2012) and long-form stories on presidents Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford. He won a college award for a story on Richard Nixon's "Road to Watergate." Fessier co-founded the Desert Theatre League in 1987, the Jazz Celebrity Golf & Jam Session 1997, the Desert Rock at the IPAC concert series in 2010 and Tachevah: A Palm Springs Block Party in 2013. He served on Sonny Bono's founding Palm Springs International Film Festival committee in 1987-88. He received a Lifetime Achievement Award in Music Journalism at the CV Music Awards in June. He's now preparing to launch a website and write books related to his work in the desert.

* The Desert Institute staff/instructors will attempt to accommodate participant's needs; however we reserve the right to deny a student participation in the course due to concerns regarding health and safety issues.