

EXCLUSIVE

KENTUCKY

Fishing with a Musician: A Kentucky music experience that funds school programs



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Key Points

- Americana singer-songwriters SG Goodman and Kelsey Waldon are both from the river counties of Western Kentucky. Goodman is from Fulton County. Waldon is from Ballard County.
- Can't aid, a Colorado-based nonprofit that, in part, raises funds to put more instruments and music in schools, holds a charity auction called 'Fishing with a Musician.'
- 'Fishing with a Musician,' the brainchild of Kentucky artist and horsemen Arthur Hancock IV holds 30 opportunities each year from Bozeman, Montana to Paris, Kentucky.

PARIS, Ky. — The wood dock creaked slightly as S.G. Goodman shifted her weight before letting the line on her spincasting rod fly across the pristine pond at [Stone Farm](#), the storied home of thoroughbred racing fixture [Arthur Hancock III](#).

In 24 hours, Goodman would warm up her voice for a sold-out show at The Burl, a music venue in Lexington's Distillery District.

But for now, the Fulton County native felt a tug on her line.

Luna, a Golden Pyrenees, sensed the movement beneath the surface too as she eagerly peered at the water. If her dad (and Hancock's son), Arthur Hancock IV, gave her the sign, Luna would jump right in and pull the fish out herself. Instead, she waited as Goodman turned the reel until the fish was right below the dock.

"He ate it on the drop," Hancock IV said, reaching into the water and extracting the fighting fish.

Goodman began to repeat Hancock's words like she was refining a lyric for her next song. *He ate it on the drop*. She stuck her thumb into the mouth of the bass and held it high for a photo. *He ate it on the drop*. She had just caught her first fish during Fishin' with a Musician, [an annual charity auction](#) that gives a musical intimacy unlike any other.

In an age of oversized music festivals — where posters nearly require a magnifying glass to read the lineup and event hosts try to make a shared space of 50,000 feel intimate — Fishin' with a Musician offers the ultimate ticket for philanthropic-minded fans. It goes beyond VIP and feels more private than any listening room. It's just an artist, a rod and reel, and the kind of unhurried conversations where connections are made and everything is stripped to the core of what makes a good song: a good story.

What Goodman and fellow western Kentucky native Kelsey Waldon gave two music fans that afternoon in May was an exclusive experience. Similar trips happen a handful of times a year in remote fishing locations across the country with other artists.

This year's Fishin' with a Musician auction includes more than 20 country artists in places like Tennessee, North Carolina and, of course, the honey holes of Stone Farm. Bidding begins Oct. 15. This year includes opportunities with a lot of

Kentucky artists, from Nicholas Jamerson and The Creekers, to Logan Halsted and Arthur Hancock IV, himself. Plus Goodman and Waldon will return.

The offerings at the Bourbon County horse farm stretch furlongs beyond fishing. Fishin' with a Musician is a quintessential music experience, finely tuned in three chords, a reel and the truth.

But for now, one of the auction winners just baited a bluegill.

Supporting music education

Chris Graig and Gabe Douglas flew in from Seattle, the two friends who won Kentucky's Fishin' With a Musician experience through Can'dAid's Instrument for Change online auction. The experience raises funds to place music education and instruments into under-resourced schools. To date, professional musicians have raised more than \$162,000.

Graig and Douglas love hearing music and watching artists perform at intimate venues. When Waldon, an Americana singer from Ballard County, posted the opportunity to her Instagram just days after the two men saw her show in Seattle, they bid on it.

"Neither of us had even been to Kentucky so we thought, 'Why not take a trip together?'" Graig said.

Just days after the Kentucky Derby ran, the Seattleites found themselves closer to thoroughbred racing history than any race-day goer.

'I'm going to remember this one'

Before you can go fishing on a horse farm, you have to visit horses. But before you can see the horses, you have to learn about the history of such a storied farm — from Gato del Sol, who won the farm's first Kentucky Derby in 1982, to Sunday Silence, the one who saved the farm from bankruptcy. Stone Farm has bred eight championship horses, including three Derby winners, two runner-ups and recent Eclipse winner She Feels Pretty.

After a quick tour of the awards, accolades, photos and newspaper clippings in the farm's main office, the artists and fans loaded into Waldon's white tour van. It dipped and curved as it drove down the one-lane farm road through fence-lined pastures to the foaling barn, a converted ol' tobacco barn.

"We built stalls and put wood up, but when I was a kid we'd have horses in the front of them and tobacco in the back," Hancock said. "I'll never forget it."

"Yeah, they built them up this tall because they hang (the tobacco stalks) from the different rafters," Goodman said.

They stopped at the first stall on the left where the 2000 Kentucky Derby winner was born, Fusaichi Pegasus.

"When he was born, he came to and started looking at everybody," Hancock said. "My dad named him Superman. He was the nicest baby horse and yearling he ever had. He sold for \$4 million —"

A whistle of surprise filled the barn.

"Yeah, which is nuts, as an 18 month old," Hancock said.

In another stall on the left, a three-day-old foal walked toward his mom as the strangers approached. Across the barn, another foal stood hiding behind his mama, his long legs and knocked knees the only thing indicating his presence. They watched the new babies in awe.

"So, who's ready to go fishing?" Hancock said as the group exited the barn.

The group turned to walk back to the van when a five-day-old colt and his mom approached the fence line. When the brown baby saw he had an audience, the colt began to buck. As his mom grazed, the colt whipped his tiny tail, showing off. Then, like he burst from a starting gate, he took off running around his bluegrass-covered pen.

Fishing could wait.

The colt showed off around the pen until his curiosity got the best of him and he walked to the fence line again for pets from strangers. Goodman cautiously raised her left hand toward the colt, Beignet 26, named after his mare and the year he was born, until he is officially named.

Baby Beignet nuzzled her hand. Then, as if to celebrate the new bond with Goodman, he began bucking around sporadically in joy.

"I'm going to remember this one," Hancock said of the friendly colt's confidence.

In just a few Mays, the group could be cheering for Baby Beignet to race in the Kentucky Derby.

Making memories

The first pond sat in the middle of the farm.

Waldon stood right on the pond's edge, her dark olive rubber boots disappearing beneath the tall grass. Goodman, in her black Carhartt bib overalls, stood far up the bank, away from lurking ticks.

Nearby, Graig and Douglas hid beneath the shade of a white Sycamore tree, reeling in bass and bluegill. Waldon sighed. She picked up her pole again and walked far away from the cordial chatter. She was focused on baiting a fish.

Cast. Reel. Cast. Reel.

Waldon hid behind high cattails and tall weeds. A queen of bass, it was one of four of her own poles she brought that day.

"Alright, let's load up!" Hancock yelled from across the pond after a while.

"Just let me try one more spot," Waldon said, disappearing once again.

She was looking for her honey hole, which Douglas seemed to have already found. He was reeling in one catch after the other.

But Hancock thought they'd all have more luck at a second, even larger, pond tucked next to the house where Arthur Hancock III and his wife, Staci, still live. The Mercedes he drove to the 1989 Kentucky Derby still sat parked next to the house.

This pond allowed all four fisherman to spread even farther apart as they hoped for a bite.

In 2011, country music star Trace Adkins released a song called "Just Fishin'" about a dad and daughter fishing. The song is really about the memories made while spending time together.

Graig grew up on the Stones and the Beatles. Bluegrass country didn't find him until later in life. Now, he loves finding rising musicians at small-venue shows and following their careers. That's what he and Douglas have done with Waldon and Goodman.

Today is about memory making.

'A pal of mine'

As the sun began to drop, Hancock loaded the group into the bed of his farm truck, driving to a portion of the farm only passable if the creek is down. On a road that doesn't exist, the truck rattled and bumped across Kentucky's bluegrass, Luna running beside until the truck parked along a random tree line.

Through an unmarked trail across vines, Waldon carried her teal guitar case and Douglas carried a wicker basket, while Hancock hauled a cooler full of the night's dinner. The group trekked up a hill to a hidden cabin on a ridge, overlooking the creek below.

"Wow," someone said as they bit into Kentucky's famous dinner, fried chicken. Not from Colonel Sanders, but from Trackside in downtown Paris. There were warm biscuits and cornbread, all of the fixings. The musicians and the music lovers laughed and chatted as old friends around a wood table, wiping their hands on blue gingham napkins in between bites.

They didn't talk about the fish caught, the miles traveled or the music lyrics, but about the state of Kentucky. As they often do in their lyrics, Goodman and Waldon represented the best of the state to their listeners: speaking of the Red River Gorge and Mammoth Cave, thoroughbred racing and bourbon distilling, Corvettes, Ale 8s and a rising Appalachian clothing brand they were both wearing, New Frontier.

As the sun began to set and the crickets chirped, Waldon took a seat on large slat of stone, placed her guitar in her lap and took a deep breath.

At a music festival, fans get an artist warmed up, tuned up and glammed up. In the backwoods of a charity event, Waldon plucked her strings as she tuned, hummed a bit and never found the pick she thought she desperately needed to play.

The opening chords of "Kentucky, 1988," a song about her roots in the state, echoed as she serenaded an acoustic set. It was raw and honest and as clear as the water running through the limestone below.

Goodman joined her, harmonizing The Carter Family's "Hello Stranger." As their country croons filled the night air, Luna laid in the grass, the front row to this acoustic concert not listed on any schedule, with no commemorative ticket.

*Now hello stranger put your loving hand in mine
Hello stranger put your loving hand in mine
You are a stranger
But you're a pal of mine*

Turns out spending a day fishing with a musician is about a whole lot more than wetting a line.

Correction: This story has been updated to include the correct name for a barn in which pregnant female horses deliver foals; it is called a foaling barn.

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From left, Chris Graig, Kelsey Waldon, Gabe Douglas, Arthur Hancock IV and S.G. Goodman stand on a dock at a pond during the Fishing with a Musician charity event at Stone Farm in Paris, Ky., on May 14, 2026.

Jeff Faughender/Courier Journal



Musicians Kelsey Waldon and S.G. Goodman perform during the Fishing with a Musician charity event at Stone Farm in Paris, Ky., on May 14, 2026.

Jeff Faughender/Courier Journal