



## Song Review:

### “Big Bluestem, King of the Prairie”

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Finally, a song that extols the virtues of a prairie grass! Annie Wilson, singer and songwriter with the Tallgrass Express String Band, describes big bluestem’s significance and character in “Big Bluestem, King of the Prairie.”

There are many books defining Kansas plants...now there is music! The ultimate teacher (she teaches writing and literature to high school juniors and seniors), Annie stuck to her “ligules” and “rhizomes” against advice of friends who said that was too much information for the general public. The song’s title “King of the Prairie” came from a County Conservation District contest to find the tallest big bluestem with winners nearly ten feet tall.

“Big Bluestem” is one of 16 songs that celebrate the culture and the flora and fauna of the Kansas Flint Hills on a new CD titled Clean curve of Hill Against Sky. The Tallgrass Express String Band includes three other talented musicians: Charlie Laughridge on fiddle, mandolin, harmonica, and concertina; Loren Ratzloff on banjo, mandolin, and dobro; and Carl Reed on bass and guitar.

Lyrics, on this the third CD by the Tallgrass Express, depict the beauty of the prairie landscape and Annie’s affection for it. Each song tells a story. There are cowboys, Kaw Indians, cottonwoods, horses, coyotes, evening crickets and starry nights. The diversity of the prairie ecosystem and why prairie grasses and wildflowers have survived in Kansas is explained in “Last Stand of the Tallgrass Prairie.” “Sail the Summer Sky” is about six characteristic prairie birds. “Hot Summer Day” is a tribute to photosynthesis (yes, photosynthesis!).

My favorites are waltzes: “The Moon Can Take Me Home” and title song “Clean Curve of

Hill Against Sky.” A beautiful instrumental, and the only music on the CD not written by Annie, is “Home from the Z Bar” by Charlie Laughridge.

You will find details at [www.tallgrassexpress.com](http://www.tallgrassexpress.com). Beginning January 2011 the band has a monthly concert series on the third Saturday of each month at the Emma Chase Café in Cottonwood Falls. If you get a chance to see this group perform in person, don't miss it!