

# Big Muddy SOUNDINGS

## *Folk Festival April 1-2, 2005*

Thespians Hall has been quiet since the year began and winter settled in. We're excited about our 14th Big Muddy Folk Festival with one of our most dynamic lineups ever with several excellent groups – some returning favorites, some new to the festival and some we have been trying to get for years. With four indoor venues we are trying to expand the festival programming as much as is feasible.

Most of you readers of this mailing recently received a letter from the Friends of Historic Boonville describing a less than confident financial situation. Missouri Arts Council funding for this year's festival is still in place, and we welcome additional sponsors this year. Our sold-out crowds the past number of years keep the festival in the black and contribute to the Friends' limited budget. The Friends' unique situation among arts councils in general is our ownership and maintenance of three historical properties, all of which were saved from certain demolition. Last year's Big Muddy surveys indicated our ticket prices, even with a slight increase, are better than reasonable. Let me take this time to urge your consideration of a membership to the Friends. Either way, we look forward to your visit with us this year as we celebrate the wide diversity that folk music affords, instrumental excellence, songs with stories and deep impact, pieces centuries old and brand-spanking new, and dance to help you feel the music from your toes on up.

### **The World According to Bluegrass**

When **Spontaneous Combustion** formed in 1986, they looked like they do now: a regular bluegrass band, with **Marvin Gruenbaum** on fiddle, **Leo Eilts** on upright bass, brother **Roger Eilts** on guitar, and **Scott Prowell** doubling on mandolin and banjo. And when they play, the arrangements are 100-percent bluegrass, but songs like "California Dreamin,'" "Secret-Agent Man," and "Great Balls of Fire" are not the typical of the style. While commercial music often seems preoccupied with defining its own boundaries, Spontaneous Combustion has simply taken the approach that all songs are potential bluegrass songs, and all stages, like the downtown Kansas City jazz and the blues club Tuba, Guitars and Cadillacs, the Plaza's Penguin Court and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, are potential bluegrass stages.

Bluegrass Unlimited Magazine said the "blend of contemporary popular material and bluegrass instrumentation . . . has an undeniable appeal," one that comes partly from the band's irreverent notion that even classical music has a place on a bluegrass stage. One might speculate that if Mr. W.A. (Bubba) Mozart were alive today, he may well be composing

for high-energy bands like Kansas City's own Spontaneous Combustion.

Their stage show is a sparkling mixture of interactive fun and tight, high-spirited music. Their stage dynamics are arresting and designed for a "focusing" effect, making the band as much fun to watch as they are to listen to.

### **The Breadth and Depth Of Old-Time Traditional Music**

**Ginny Hawker and Tracy Schwarz** teamed up 15 years ago and combined a wealth of the understanding and performance of old-time and traditional music. Ginny grew up in southern Virginia singing with her father in the Primitive Baptist Church. Transferring that powerful, stirring unaccompanied vocal style to bluegrass harmonies has produced an impressive list of concerts and recordings.

There was a time in the '60s and '70s when anyone wanting to learn rural southern music relied on the recordings of the New Lost City Ramblers. Tracy's masterful fiddling, soulful singing and his interest in Cajun music have earned him three Grammy

nominations. The Washington Post said you could “smell the wood smoke” in Tracy's music. Ginny and Tracy have appeared in concerts and festivals throughout the United States, Canada and England, and they teach southern traditional singing in several camps. Their music is both authentic to their culture and straight from the heart. This time they are joined by guitarist Debra Clifford, whose fine backup playing lets Tracy feature his fiddling more.

## **One Fine Ozark Singer, One Great Festival Friend**

We asked **Judy Domeny** to our first Big Muddy, and she has remained a good friend to the festival ever since. The fourth of five children growing up on a farm outside of Springfield, Mo., Judy sang folk songs in a very natural and traditional place. Her clear, sweet voice and engaging sense of humor make her singing very much at home on stage as well. Poring through the Max Hunter Folk Song Collection in the public library, Judy developed a broad and deep command of traditional Ozark song. She also developed a reputation for hitting a stage with a wholesome presence (while every mother in the audience asked herself, “Why didn’t my son marry that woman?”) and then proceeding to sing some of the goriest songs in the traditional repertoire – sometimes keeping a running body count. More recently, Judy has turned to writing her own songs about her own life, primarily that as an elementary school art teacher. Her humorous “Teacher Therapy” album has touched the pulse of teachers all across the country.

## **Rhythm Bubbles Up From Down Below, Infuses All**

Don’t let the name **One Drum** confuse you. This group has more drums per square inch than any band you have seen. The ubiquity of the drum worldwide, however, is the conduit for this powerful Milwaukee-based band to explore and celebrate music from the many continents. With six to eight members in the band all singing and playing, their effort is a constantly expanding musical quilt woven from multilingual three and four-part vocal harmonies, African, Latin and Brazilian dance forms and instruments like charango, dijeridoo, oud, berimbau and kalimba. Drums have their own languages, and virtually every One Drum song is built upon the wooden, ceramic and metallic foundation of drum

talk. Their musical performance is like a conversation – deeply interactive with an uncertain outcome that transforms the performers. The conversation touches the audience as well.

**Funding Assistance From  
The Missouri Arts Council,  
A State Agency**

## **Inter-Tribal Fancy Dancing**

Native American dance styles have evolved considerable owing to the growing popularity of the inter-tribal pow wow movement in North America. “Inter-tribal” is pretty much a way of life in neighboring Oklahoma, since so many tribes were relocated to that territory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Oklahoma Fancy Dancers is a group that specializes in this special style of native dance with full regalia. Troupe leader **Steve Littleman**, a former schoolteacher and administrator and member of the Kiowa and Cheyenne tribes, has worked hard to generate interest in American Indian culture for most of his life. The troupe appeared for last year’s opening of the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. His son, **Kevin Connywerdy**, is one of the finest fancy dancers in the U.S., and his performance of the hoop dance here in 2001 garnered a spontaneous standing ovation. **Leslie Deer** will also return to demonstrate female dances such as the jingle dress and fancy shawl dances.

**Additional Sponsorship  
Appreciated From  
The Isle of Capri Casino**

## **Words and Wit Mark Repertoire Of Model Modern Folk Singer**

In the Central Missouri folk scene, a tall, thin guy with a red beard is easily identified as Lee Ruth. In the Northeast, it’s **Mike Agranoff**. Calling himself the epitome of the modern balladeer, Mike is an engineer by trade (not the long-steel-rail type); by nights he produces concerts for the Folk Project at the Minstrel Show Coffeehouse, a venerable New Jersey folk venue.

As a performer he is equally at home in the contemporary and traditional camps and a fine

fingerstyle guitarist with a tune list that runs from Tin Pan Alley to fiddle tunes. He also plays concertina, piano and banjo. Mike chooses carefully from his wide exposure to the traditional repertoire, and his keen ear informs his own song writing and recitations. His words can leave you in contemplation or in laughter deep down.

## **Yiddish Hillbillies, Movies Return to the Lyric Theater**

**The People's Republic of Klezmerica** have a growing following in Central Missouri and made quite an impression at our 2003 festival. **Jordan Wax**, bandleader of the energetic Klezmer group, is studying traditional music of various kinds, and has made fascinating parallels with hillbilly music both in Eastern Europe and the Ozarks. Recent projects include writing musical accompaniments to old silent movies, and last year they premiered their take on an old silent Jewish comedy, "Pass the Gravy." Columbia named it one of its best musical events of the year.

Thespian Hall's last use before the Friends of Historic Boonville saved it from the wrecking ball was as a movie theater, and it was known as the Lyric. We think returning an afternoon matinee to the hall would be great. The band, which includes **Dean Anderson** on violin, **Laura Bettebhausen** on clarinet, **Charlotte Overby** on bass, **Josh Parshall** on trumpet and percussionist **Amy Salveter**, will also open the Saturday evening show.

## **Missouri Folk Arts Program**

The Missouri Folk Arts Program celebrates its 20th anniversary of the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program and its ninth annual participation in the Big Muddy. The program is dedicated to identifying and preserving traditional music and folkways in among distinct communities in the state, and we're happy to visit with the various masters and apprentices they engage. Specialists Deborah Bailey and Lisa Higgins are planning something more expanded in music, dance and craft demonstrations to celebrate the anniversary.

## **A Family Fiddling Tradition**

Bobby Forrester and his uncle Joe get together in and around their Nashville homes and play tunes with years of tradition in their family. Bob's father, and Joe's brother, the late Howdy Forrester, played with Roy Acuff for more than 40 years, and his tone and mastery made a true giant among fiddlers in the U.S. and the world. The ancestral family home is about an hour or so east of Music City, in Hickman County, where the traditional arts of fiddling and moonshining were often tested at community fish fries. Howdy bore the tunes from his immediate ancestors, but also played with the legendary early country fiddler Georgia Slim. Whether the music is traced to the backwoods or to the Grand Ol' Opry, they're all part of the family repertoire.

## **Locals on the Loose**

**Cathy Barton, Dave Para, and Bob Dyer**, festival organizers and popular Missouri minstrels, are glad to have a gig they can walk to. They spent a busy part of last year in the Discovery String Band with Paul & Win Grace celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and they're still tracking the Corps of Discovery reenactors on their trip to the Pacific and back.

## **Heartfelt Welcome, Thanks To Louisburg Cider Mill**

Tom and Shelly Schierman have been more than regular patrons of the festival for many years. Back 30 years ago, Tom's hosting of the "Cedar Creek Pickaway" on KOPN kept folks in the whole area listening to bluegrass and old-time music, introducing many new listeners to the music and encouraging the direction of local future players. They moved out to Louisburg, Kan., in 1977 to renovate an old barn and turn it into an apple cider mill and now distribute the lovely nectar in many states. Tom and Shelly have kept up with good friends in Central Missouri and have made the Big Muddy an annual trip. This year, in addition to a sponsorship of the festival, they will bring their specialty soda drinks to enjoy at Turner Hall along with Terry Smith's special Big Muddy BBQ.

## Other Special Events

Homer McCollum, of Paris, Mo., returns to Turner Hall this year with his fine collection of homemade traditional toys. Also, with the use of Christ Episcopal Church for a venue, we will feature a series of close-up concert sets Saturday afternoon featuring various members of the artistic roster as well as a spot by Sam Stone, a frequent friend to the festival hailing from Henryville, Ind., and whose songs have been featured in guest spots and workshops over the years.

### Tentative Festival Schedule

Our **Friday evening concert** will include Cathy Barton, Dave Para and Bob Dyer; the Forresters; Ginny & Tracy &; the Kiowa Dancers and Judy Domeny, with the dance following at Turner Hall.

**Workshop topics for Saturday** will include traditional dance music and native and world dances, ballads, gospel and humorous songs and a series of close-up concerts.

**Saturday evening** will feature Peoples' Republic of Klezmerica; Mike Agranoff; One Drum; Spontaneous Combustion and Barton, Para and Dyer.

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