

Big Muddy SOUNDINGS

Folk Festival

April 4- 5, 2008

Celebrating Our 17th Year at Thespian Hall

Sometimes life imitates art. Bob Dyer once wrote, "This time tomorrow, there might be snow. Here in Missouri you just never know. This time tomorrow don't be surprised if things change." Winter's grip seems to be more of a chance embrace this time around. We huddle close while the cold icy breath sweeps dry and southward up Main Street, but a few days give over to warming again and sometimes stretch to balmy. Now and then our favorite winter weather gumbo -- the "wintry mix" -- visits from the southwest and threatens to put us all in a human and automotive pinball game. Ice flows mottle the muddy Missouri; but the days when the river jammed with flowing ice and froze over, waiting for the thunderous ice break to boom up the river valley in the spring are mostly the stuff of history long past. The muddy water runs cold and brown these days; its valley remains the pathway through our memory and history. Over at Main and Vine, Thespian Hall safeguards her history and waits for more to come.

In this, our 17th year, the Big Muddy Folk Festival remembers Bob Dyer, as it will hereafter, and it proudly presents excellent performers of traditional and contemporary folk music marking the long cultural continuum. The artists range from young to senior, and repertoire from freshly composed to hundreds of years old, though the age of the artist doesn't necessarily correlate with the age of the music. We bring together friends old and new and invite all to take an active part in celebrating song, story, tune and dance.

Big Medicine: The Old Time Cure

The old-time string band is widely recognized as the progenitor of the bluegrass band; some groups like to keep the distinction well defined while other groups like to blur the lines. Hailing from Durham, N.C., **Big Medicine** features straight-ahead fiddle tunes, the mainstay of old-time string bands, but includes songs featuring duets and trios as well as the whole group -- something most groups forget they can do. They come closer to bluegrass with a careful approach to harmony. Members of the band—**Kenny Jackson, Jim Collier, Joe Newberry, and Bobb Head**—are highly-regarded performers on the traditional music scene today and veteran multi-instrumentalists and singers steeped in the music of the southern Appalachian and Ozark regions. Their expertise in the style affords them a creative interpretation that is both respectful and fun. Old-time songs from the Carter Family are there, as are some bluegrass standards, reminding us that bluegrass -- a style often described as "roots music" -- has its roots as well. Joe has reworked a Rudyard Kipling poem into what may yet become a bluegrass standard.

Master Players with Long Legacy

The legacy of **Alan Jabbour** has long exceeded his reach. A sizable number of tunes exist in the standard repertoire of fiddlers and other old-time musicians (whether or not they know it) simply because Alan learned them from Appalachian fiddlers and began teaching them to his friends 40 years ago. It might not be possible in a session anywhere in the U.S. not to hear tunes linked back to the recordings by the Hollow Rock String Band in the late 1960s. A classically trained violinist in his youth, Alan was attracted to traditional fiddle styles while in college. His field collecting evolved into a pre-eminent academic folklore career which included leading the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress, the folk arts program for the National Endowment of the Arts and 23 years as director of the American Folklife Center. An erudite student of the tradition, Alan is also a wonderfully nuanced player. While his occasional musical partner, **Ken Perlman**, undoubtedly was influenced by Alan's music, his own interest spread to the North American Celtic threads. Ken researched the fiddling traditions of Prince Edward Island for 10 years, while continuing his advancement of melodic clawhammer banjo style,

the most complex form of old-time banjo playing. Transposing jigs and strathspeys to the five-string is a feat in itself, and Ken plays them with great command. Also extending his influence on the acoustic music scene, Ken directs a number of banjo camps around the country, providing “48 hours of total banjo immersion” for anyone who dares.

Our Own Sister Act Returns

Well, we like to think of them as our own, because **Leela and Ellie Grace**, true to their last name, have gilded our shows many times over the years with their singing, playing and dance. They were officially on the bill in 2002, and for some reason we have waited until they moved away from their Columbia homes to bring them back: Leela from Portland, Ore., and Ellie from Asheville, N.C. The latter was captivated by a stint at beautiful Great Smokey Mountains National Park, enough to move to the Blue Ridge. She has been teaching a dance class at the University of North Carolina there and also joined up with the Dirk Powell band for a while to tour around the U.S. and across the pond. Leela had an active group of music students in Columbia before she left for the city of bridges last summer and is now adjusting to that community. The two manage to tour occasionally and last summer recorded their second album, “Where the Waters Run,” a project already praised by folks in the recording world who have heard it. They will return this February for an album release concert and tour more extensively in the area around the time of the Big Muddy.

A number of our audience members have asked after them during recent years, and we are glad to have them return.

Way Back in Time with the WIYOS

With their diverse instrumentation of washboard, kazoo, harmonica, banjo, bass and resonator guitar, the Brooklyn-based **WIYOS** seem to reenact the days before television, when live bands could be heard both on radio and at dances, juke joints and house parties. Drawing their repertoire largely from country blues and its commercial versions of the 1920s and 30s, they combine great musicianship and theatrical skill, bringing to mind vaudeville and folks like Fats Waller, the Hoosier Hot Shots and Uncle Dave Macon. Their

sense of physical comedy draws from the memories of silent movie masters such as Laurel and Hardy. Taking their name in 2002 from an 1890s street gang, the **WIYOS** took to the road in a big way, touring extensively in the U.S., Canada, France, the Netherlands and the UK, and included the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kan., last year where they were well received. Apparently, no theater, bar, art auction, street corner, nor pig roast is out of their bounds, and they’re ready to take on everyone from “hipsters to seasoned music connoisseurs, from children to bikers.” We’re glad they can make it our way.

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The Missouri Arts Council,
A State Agency**

Many Facets Shine On Gem From Music City

The Cantrells have been playing folk, bluegrass and western swing music in concerts and festivals since 1985. Their present home base in Nashville makes it easy to work and record with some of the best, like Jerry Douglas, Bela Fleck, Ranger Doug and Too Slim of Riders in the Sky, Tim O'Brien and Mark Schatz. Their duet performances on stage, however, are equally compelling. When a hot player like **Al** on fiddle and mandolin can lean on **Emily's** strong and versatile rhythm guitar, the result is a duo that sounds like more than two people. Emily also sings beautifully, while Al can add fine harmony and adapt his playing sensitively with very tasteful leads and embellishments. Another highlight is Emily's songwriting, as her sense of poetry touches her own personal life or pays homage to musical influences. Her songs are very musical, using styles of cowboy swing, traditional country and contemporary folk. These two have been at it for some time, developing that give-and-take dance of the duet, and in an environment of excellent music.

Old-Time Music Master Perfect Pick for Big Muddy

We have known **Joel Mabus** for most of 30 years and thought about inviting him to the festival a number of times, and I can't say why it has taken this long. His

musical interests and perspectives parallel those of us who started this festival, and he's the kind of musician that could sit in with every other act this year and do a much more than credible job. He also writes songs relevant to his own life and community, but also those that catch the echoes of the music that inspires him. Perhaps it is the link to older traditional music that distinguishes the troubadour from the songwriter. As an acoustic guitarist he has mastered the old-time, country blues, bluegrass and swing styles that are so inter-related. Attendees of festivals, workshops and camps have known this for a long time. The banjo, fiddle and mandolin further extend his knowledge of the idioms and bring greater diversity to his performance. He shows as much wit in his writing as he does in his playing. As one Michigan reviewer says, "It's not just a wealth of musical styles or his smooth and expressive voice that have made Mabus such a fine artist. His songs, which range from thoughtful to silly to poetic, show that he knows his way around the English language and American culture just as well as he knows his way around a fret board."

From the Locals Down the Street

Cathy Barton and Dave Para, festival organizers, are always glad to be home for their favorite gig. Their travels this year fling them wide around the country, especially steamboating in what may be the Delta Queen's final year for overnight passage. They spent a fair amount of last year on the phone and hanging out in Pete Szkolka's studio in Columbia, organizing and producing a tribute album by the many friends of Bob Dyer, who passed away two days before last year's festival. It has been a most meaningful project for them, and at this writing they have every intention of having it finished by festival time. A tribute concert premier of this album is planned for Saturday, June 7, at Thespian Hall. From the stage, you are still likely to hear their vocal harmonies, a variety of stringed instruments and songs old and new mostly from Missouri and the surrounding region.

Missouri Folk Arts Program

Dedicated to identifying and preserving traditional music and folkways among distinct communities in the state, the Missouri Folk Arts Program marks its eleventh year with the Big Muddy Folk Festival. On

Saturday, at the First Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall, specialists Deborah Bailey and Lisa Higgins will present a two-hour program featuring performances and demonstrations by master musicians and craftspeople participating in the 2007-2008 Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program.

The Irish Singing Tradition

We are fortunate to invite traditional Irish singer **Len Graham** for a single performance on Friday evening. Born in County Antrim to a family steeped in traditional music, song and dance, he has been cultivating the song tradition of his native Ulster throughout his life and is a singer with great strength and depth in repertoire. He became a professional singer in 1982 and for ten years he was a member of the traditional group Skylark. In addition to his more than 12 albums he has recorded since 1971 (the year he won the All-Ireland singing competition), some of his large collection of field recordings have been published by the Northern Ireland arts council. He has been the recipient of numerous awards in Ireland and abroad including the 'Seán O'Boyle Cultural Traditions Award' in 1993 and recently the TG4 national music award for 'Traditional Singer of the Year' 2002. He has been the main source of songs for many of Ireland's leading traditional groups and singers including Altan, The Chieftains, De Danann, Dolores Keane, Karen Casey and many others. He lives in Mullaghbawn with traditional singer Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin and travels to the U.S. only infrequently. By luck and presenters elsewhere in the Midwest we have a chance to hear him in Boonville.

Barbecue: A Regional Folk Art

One of our favorite parts of the Big Muddy is the kind that comes attached to bone. Terry Smith has been cooking up barbecue with the Friends of Historic Boonville board of directors for years to the delight of BBQ enthusiasts and those looking for a well-cooked meal. Some of artistic director's favorite fieldwork is to "collect" samples of the results of the various dry rubs and sauces Terry likes to experiment with. We hope to have some of this fare available for the Friday evening dance as well as souvenir slabs of ribs to go.

Festival Wristbands

Festival wristbands are required for admission to all workshop sessions Saturday morning and afternoon and will be available at the Thespian Hall ticket office for a \$5 charge. Wristbands are free to all festival goers attending both evening concerts who will get a wristband with their tickets. (Festival goers attending both evening concerts will receive wristbands with their tickets.)

Editor's Note

This festival newsletter since its beginning has been written and edited by Dave Para, artistic director. For this issue he thanks Cathy Barton and Meredith Ludwig for their contributions

Tentative Festival Schedule

Our **Friday evening concert** will include Len Graham, the Grace Sisters, Barton and Para and Big Medicine, with an old-time dance following at Turner Hall.

Workshop topics for Saturday will highlight our instrumental talent and include a veritable banjo congress, and sessions on guitar, blues harmonica, fiddle, clogging, an old-time jam and a songwriter's circle, as well as a close-up concert or two. An occasional check at bigmuddy.org will keep you as up to date as we are.

Saturday evening will feature Joel Mabus, the Cantrells, Alan Jabbour and Ken Perlman and the WIYOS.

Friends of Historic Boonville

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