

Big Muddy

SOUNDINGS

Folk Festival April 9- 10, 2010

Celebrating Our 19th Year at Thespian Hall

We saw a bald eagle fly over us on the Boonslick Bridge back in mid-December. Though not nearly as rare an event as it would have been 19 years ago, it is still infrequent enough to give a near-sighted townsman pause. More often in the sky birds that size are buzzards, but he wasn't soaring so there was no telltale V to his wingspan nor the fingered feathers on the tips. But then his tail flashed white in the lowering sun, and then his head, only 50 feet away. Our spirits rose with him as he winged his way down the Big Muddy scanning the brush at its brown banks now barren with the winter winds and frosts. Standing in quiet gratitude, we wished him well. In the deep midwinter even if you don't see a harbinger of spring it is at least comforting to see one of survival. About five blocks away, at Main and Vine, Thespian Hall had seen some life in the early holiday season, but she begins the New Year in waiting.

Our 19th Big Muddy Folk Festival has all the makings of being one of its very best as we welcome new players and some returning friends whose music soars to heights of its own. We look forward to classic performances of the syncopated kind, blues, ragtime and swing, as well as some old-time tunes from the Appalachians and some songwriters with an ear for the truth and the heart and little concern for pretense. Come and join us as we celebrate song, story, tune and dance in one of the best halls Central Missouri can offer. This could also be the year to bring an instrument to take home a song or a lick or two.

Rambling From the Red Clay To the Big Muddy

After playing and recording with other old-time string bands, **Bill Hicks** and **Jim Watson** (who currently plays with Robin and Linda Williams), along with Tommy Thompson founded the Red Clay Ramblers in 1972, and **Mike Craver** joined in 1973. For the next decade they toured the United States, Canada, Europe, Scandinavia and Africa. They appeared frequently on "A Prairie Home Companion," acted and played in two Off-Broadway shows ("Diamond Studs" and Sam Shepard's "A Lie of the Mind"), and released nine albums on the Flying Fish and Sugar Hill labels. Their repertoire stretched further than the traditional Appalachian fiddle tunes and songs they had congregated with to include more harmonically structured old-time novelty songs and some poignant arrangements of contemporary songs, some written by the band members themselves. All made for more dynamic stage performance and some landmark recordings.

Each member had left the band in the 1980s and Thompson passed away in 2003 after a long battle with Alzheimer's. Hicks, Watson, and Craver continued to play music together and these days are

joined by **Joe Newberry** (also of Big Medicine) on banjo and vocals. They feature selections from their many individual CDs, plus ensemble songs and fiddle tunes from the classic Ramblers repertoire that characterized their sound in their early days.

Iconic Blues, Phenomenal Player

Rory Block was 15 years old when she met Son House. Two improbable people, she recalls: a young teenaged Greenwich Village guitar prodigy and an older black man, 62, who had recorded nine of the most powerful blues pieces ever for Paramount in 1930. Watching him perform at the Village Gate, she “learned a deep lesson about the power of the music which became an inseparable part of me.”

Since those childhood encounters with blues legends, Rory has committed her life and career to preserving the Delta blues tradition and giving it new vitality and power to contemporary audiences around the world. With a singular mix of tradition and innovation, her guitar mastery and vocal style are both fiery and haunting and push the boundaries of acoustic blues and folk. The New York Times declared: “Her playing is perfect, her singing otherworldly as she wrestles with ghosts, shadows and legends.”

Rory scored numerous awards in the 1990s, W.C. Handy Awards four years in a row – two for Traditional Blues Female Artist of the Year, and two for Best Acoustic Blues Album of the Year. Her visibility overseas increased dramatically when her album “Best Blues and Originals,” fueled by the single “Lovin’ Whiskey,” went gold in parts of Europe.

If you could remove gratefully the phrase from its tired contemporary vernacular, “totally awesome” would be an accurate description of her show.

Swing Into Spring

While purists declare that the traditional Missouri fiddling style is wedded to square dancing, nearly all of the old-time players we knew had some kind of swing tune in their repertoire, be it even the simplest of rags. The rise of the Swing Era, for which Kansas City claims much credit, was more typically an orchestra sound, but the syncopated songs found their way to the fingers of string bands in Texas, and to some specially gifted players far away in Paris. Swing DeVille combines the sounds of Bob Wills and Django Reinhardt, and this band from St. Louis and Independence can really pull it off. They draw their musical influences not only from the early western swing and gypsy jazz, but also from old-time and bluegrass fiddle, and popular music of the 20's through the 40's. In addition, the band continues to add original compositions to its repertoire. Swing

De Ville delights concert audiences and dancers alike with distinctive musical energy played acoustically on quality vintage instruments.

Songs Touching the Heart

From Portland come **Kate Power** and **Steve Einhorn** who bring a carefully crafted duet sound and songs reaching to the heart of matters. Singer Tracy Grammer says, “Their music embodies reverence -- for the craft of songwriting, for the folk tradition, for the audiences they sing to and for this complicated, terrible, beautiful world that we live in. Kate's earthy banjo and her emotive voice ring with compassion and hope; Steve's spot-on guitar leads and wry sense of humor are grounding, organic, the perfect complement. But all time stops when they sing together. Close your eyes and listen to that blend, friends -- that's where the love really shines through.”

As part of their music on the road, Kate and Steve endeavor to turn people on to playing music themselves through their newly published "Ukualiens Songbook", CD and workshops. Ukulele makers Petaluma have helped the effort by supplying two dozen ukes to lend to anybody wanting to learn. This partnership is breaking new ground in converting non-musicians into new uke players, singing and playing with a fever.

Employing a soundscape that is both subtle and complex, Kate and Steve strive for music that inspires feelings of beautiful possibilities, helps us to examine and mend where we are broken, or simply provides an absorbing distraction from daily life. They bring to the task their intelligence, wit, and extraordinary skill to poetry to bring songs to life with elegant voices and masterful musicianship.

The Little Rev with the Big Sound

Lil’ Rev showed up at our festival from Milwaukee in 2007 and surprised everyone with his super harmonica and ukulele playing and a show that revived the fun of old-time music from two generations ago. While hopelessly Midwestern, he teaches and tours all over the continental United States. He has developed distinctive one-man shows of Jewish heritage of Tin Pan Alley and the blues, quilting lore and history in America, as well teaching harmonica and uke workshops for all ages. His sessions here enticed quite a few folks to start playing those two instruments.

Rev grew up in a musical family with a mom who loved to sing Broadway and grandparents who sang

and played piano and harmonica. He purchased his first guitar at the age of 12 with his paper route money and set about learning chords and songs off of his favorite records. Guitar was followed by harmonica, mandolin banjo. He took up the ukulele 25 years ago, excited by the humble instrument so imbued with tradition and style.

He is excited to announce his latest CD, "Drop Baby Drop"

**Funding Assistance From
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Northern Trickster Wanders In

I first encountered **David Lynn Grimes** one afternoon in the mid-1970s in the Chez Coffeehouse in Columbia when I heard someone playing my favorite John McLaughlin song, "Follow Your Heart," right outside my room. My encounters with him since have been infrequent and mercurial, but always just as fascinating.

Originally from Columbia, David followed a call to artist/activists after the 1989 Good Friday Exxon Valdez oil spill epicentered in his home waters of Prince William Sound, and he has been working and playing to help protect and restore wild ecosystems such as the Sound and the Copper River and delta. He has spent a lot of time living on rivers, and on boats in the ocean, and a lot of time around rain.

Musically, he walks an axis between Ireland and Brazil, with influences from American folk, jazz, hillbilly and blues. His original songs often touch themes of sacrifice and resurrection, and the pervading presence of the Trickster Fool, which endeared him to our late festival co-founder, Bob Dyer. He did the bassa nova arrangement of Bob's "Wandering Fool" for the title cut of the tribute album. Some might remember a guest spot David did a few festivals ago with a tale about an encounter with a family of grisliest. An adopted member of the Eyak Indian tribe, he was given by the late Chief Marie Smith Jones the name, YaxadiliSayaxinh—which translates as "The Thinker", or more literally, "He who causes his mind to involuntarily roam in an indeterminate direction." I am told if you should inquire how he got that name it can take quite a bit of time.

A Bit of the *Delta Queen* Comes to Thespian Hall

From the stage of the legendary steamboat *Delta Queen* (well, the bandstand, really, the stage is what most non-river people would call the gangplank) come former cruise directors and extraordinary entertainers **Bob Schad** and **Jazzou Jones**. They have performed as a duo since 1981, when they were paired as a banjo-ragtime piano act for the Great Steamboat Race between the *Delta Queen* and *Mississippi Queen*. Both these talented and engaging entertainers had worked previously as solo performers for the Delta Queen Steamboat Company, and from the moment they appeared together in the Paddlewheel Lounge, they were a hit. In the years since, they have directed entertainment and performed their own solo shows aboard these magnificent paddlewheelers.

Bob Schad has entertained on USO tours to Asia and Europe, and has worked frequently for The Mouse in Florida at Walt Disney World, Cypress Gardens, and Rosie O'Grady's. He is also a veteran cruise director and entertainer on deep-sea vessels. Jazzou Jones has tickled the ivories from a young age, entertaining regularly in concert at clubs and festivals from coast to coast, as well as playing locally in Cincinnati for ten years on day excursions with BB Riverboats.

Local Hijinks and Mainstays

Festival organizers and local troubadours **Cathy Barton** and **Dave Para** always enjoy the chance to play two blocks from home. Following the premier a year ago of the musical "Gumbo Bottoms," which Cathy co-wrote with Meredith Ludwig, they helped the Turner Hall River Rats take the show to Hermann, Jefferson City and Washington. Also on the Thespian Hall stage, they joined the MoHiP Theater Co. and the State Historical Society of Missouri for a reading of a historic play for the national Santa Fe Trail Association. This writing finds them busy in the studio trying to finish their 14th or 15th album depending on how you count. They also look forward this year to banjo camps in Florida and Michigan and a tour and cruise along the East Coast.

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

The Missouri Folk Arts Program is dedicated to identifying and preserving traditional music and folkways among distinct communities in the state. This year, master weaver Irene Livingston will set up a booth in Turner Hall and do a workshop on making rag rugs. She is best known for her "twined rag rugs" done on a frame loom which differ in appearance from floor loom produced rugs and involve particular hands-on techniques. Irene is of German-American heritage and learned 45 years ago from an elderly aunt while growing up in rural Missouri. Her apprentice, Diana Lehman learned to crochet rag rugs 15 years ago (with a very large hand carved wooden crochet hook) and is also a weaver.

Festival Workshops

With all of the great players on the bill we can expect a variety of instrumental workshops on Saturday. Fiddle, guitar, banjo and ukulele can be covered. Some of these could be pretty hands-on, such as rhythm guitar in some different styles, an improvisation for a variety of instruments. Songwriters will also want to talk about their musical interpretations of the world.

Those attending the festival for both evenings also can attend all workshop sessions Saturday and will get a wristband with their tickets. Other folks can get a wristband at the Thespian Hall ticket office for \$5.

Taste the Smokey Goodness

I am sure that the Mound Builders were barbecuing in this area a thousand years ago. No danger of that tradition dying here. Terry Smith has been cooking up 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. The smoker has been upgraded considerably over the years, but the tent remains a good place to hang out as barbecue becomes art. We hope to have some of this fare available for the Friday evening dance as well as souvenir slabs of ribs to go.

Tentative Festival Schedule

Our **Friday evening concert** will include Rory Block, Lil' Rev, Barton and Para and Kate Power and Steve Einhorn, with an old-time dance following at Turner Hall.

Workshops on Saturday again will be held in nearby Turner Hall, First Presbyterian Church and Christ Church Episcopal, for instrumental and song sessions and some close-up concerts. An occasional check at bigmuddy.org will keep you as up to date as we are.

Saturday evening will feature Swing DeVille, David Grimes, Jazzou Jones and Bob Schad and Hicks, Watson, Craver and Newberry.

Friends of Historic Boonville

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