

Big Muddy SOUNDINGS

Folk Festival

April 5- 6, 2013

Thespian Hall Awaits Your Presence

Autumn lingered well through its calendar span before bowing to some winter scenarios. A cold, cloudy and damp afternoon is kind of welcome amidst the memories of the fire-furnace summer gone before. The Missouri waters run lower than in memory, under three feet as of this writing. Wing dikes and jetties stand high and dry. An afternoon coal train from Wyoming rides high above her banks far from any water threat. Skeletons of old boat wrecks have emerged from the water lower in the valley recalling a distant past of the river's story. You could walk about half way across the Big Muddy and probably wade the rest. Her upstream reservoirs are lower than normal, too, so calls from the Father of Waters at St. Louis for an extra drink probably will go unheeded.

While her portico still shines golden in a far southwestern sunset, Thespian Hall has been at rest during the winter season awaiting the energy spring will bring. She sports a major improvement to her stage, a level orchestra pit cover which helps bring artists closer to the audience. It was one of those projects on the Friends of Historic Boonville backburners. It's hard to imagine you can improve the hall's intimacy and conduciveness for performance rapport, but we may very well have done it.

We have a truly exciting lineup for our 22nd festival; almost all of them are new to the festival. You will hear some great tunes played by folks that will make you drop your jaw as well as tap your toes. You will hear and share some great songs beautifully and generously sung. Some have inspired generations of singers since while other promise the same for the future. And there will be some stories and commentary with a wit that keeps us all from taking ourselves too seriously. It really should be fun.

Acquiring Some Notoriety

Contra-dancing began spreading across the U.S. from its New England home in the 1970s and has been part of the Big Muddy since Year 2. Playing for a dance is a great way to practice and learn new tunes from other players since steady time and endurance are all dancers require from the musicians. Among dance bands that offer dynamic and diverse music **Notorious** stands out. Guitarist **Larry Unger** has played with many top groups during his 30 years, and he has composed lovely tunes played by bands around the world. **Eden MacAdam-Somer** is at home with both classical and popular music and one of the most exciting young violinists and singers today. She has played major classical festivals in Aspen and Beijing, jazz festivals in Texas and at Wimberley and at Texas and St. Louis Renaissance fairs. In concert you could hear any fresh mix of traditional American, Celtic, and Eastern-European tunes and songs, swing, blues, classical and original pieces, all played superbly and sung with depth and passion.

Crazy for the Weavers

The Weavers – Pete Seeger, Fred Hellerman, Ronnie Gilbert and Lee Hays – were America's first commercially successful folk singing group, selling two million copies of "Irene Goodnight" in 1950. *Time* Magazine called them the most widely imitated group in the business. Their reunion concert at Carnegie Hall in 1955 precipitated the Great Folk Scare of the 1960s, because many famous folkies were in the audience then. In 1999, Chicago folksinger/songwriter **Michael Smith**, one of the group's many spiritual debtors, collaborated with his wife and singer **Barbara Barrow** to form the tribute band Weavermania!. Michael has been singing, writing and performing since the 1960s, and is one of the most exquisite songwriters in the genre in the U.S., and we are honored to have him and one of his many creative projects here. The band also includes **Mark Dvoark** and **Chris Walz** who played here two years ago in Mark's trio, as we closed the festival with "Irene." Something way in the back of my head was resounding, "This is the way a folk festival

should end.” In many real ways, most of us are a Weavers tribute band.

Yeah, the Alferd Packer Band Eat Your Heart Out

Ah, band names. So, 105 years after prospector/guide Alferd Packer became the only American convicted of cannibalism, Jim Brothers and a pack of crazy Kansas youth chose not to name their bluegrass/old-time/folk group something practical, like Free Beer, but after the 1870s cannibal. Good luck getting a straight answer as to why. **Lauralyn Bodle, Jim Brothers, Matt Kirby, Steve Mason, Mike Yoder, and Steve Goeke** dress like Packer’s bill of fare and pack fiddles, banjo, guitars, mandolin, hammered dulcimer, accordion, bass, shotgun and washboard. Their livelihoods are in art, sculpture, industrial education, instrument building and teaching Italian, so predicting the original music and humor borne from their convergence is best left to astrologers. Legend has it that their namesake’s judge exclaimed, "Alferd Packer, you voracious man-eater, there were only seven Democrats in Hinsdale County, and you done et five of 'em." Last year, at their 18th annual Tax Day Concert at the Lawrence post office, CBS “Sunday Morning” host Bill Geist remarked, “Dorothy could have stayed in Kansas. Oz was never as strange as this band.”

Her Voice Will Catch You, The Songs Will Linger Long

We have wanted **Anne Hills** at the Big Muddy for many years and are glad it has worked out. We met her back in the 1970s at an open mic at Somebody Else’s Troubles in Chicago, where she co-founded the folk center Hogeys Music, and have always loved hearing her at shared venues since. Anne is a beautiful singer with a soprano voice that makes you sit up and listen and smile wide. She sings with a guitar, banjo, or a Tibetan bell and she performs with passion and such freshness that her concerts are one of a kind, every one. Her career has been productive and diverse, with 20 album projects, including collaborations with Tom Paxton and Bob Gibson, and Cindy Mangsen, Steve Gillette and the aforementioned Michael Smith. Her productions have included seasonal songs, children’s songs, the poetry of James Whitcomb Riley and Michael Smith’s songs. She has also taken time for some theater productions,

such as “Quilters” and “The Courtship of Carl Sandburg,” doing both performing and composing music. She has received Parents’ Choice, Kate Wolf Memorial and Kerrville Foundation awards, and she is a WAMMIE winner.

The Dulcimer and the Mouse

The mountain dulcimer’s journey from obscurity in Appalachia to national recognition started in the 1940s with Jean Ritchie, and Joni Mitchell and Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones played them in the 1960s. By the 1970s a West Coast dulcimer tradition had developed with many of the region’s musical trappings and sparked **Bing Futch’s** interest in the instrument. He started performing at Knott’s Berry Farm in 1986, and his African and Seminole roots helped assuage the dulcimer player stereotype. An additional interest in film and documentary production took him east to Orlando, much closer to the Seminole ancestral homeland, where he produced “Disneyland Overload” and was musical director for the reality series, “Toastin.” Bing takes an energetic approach to solo performances with an expectedly unique style of dulcimer playing while keeping pace with the technical developments brought to bear on the instrument. In his hands the dulcimer has been heard in unlikely places like The House Of Blues at Walt Disney World, Hard Rock Live Orlando, the Bamboo Room, Freebird Live and the Orlando Fringe Festival. He also plays Native American flute and ukulele, and his songwriting has been awarded by the Songwriters Showcases of America. He travels the U.S. concertizing and instructing and while at home his video pod cast of “Dulcimerica” has been seen by a million people. And he practically can see the fireworks from Walt Disney World from his house.

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The Missouri Arts Council,
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Irish Harp From the Tradition

Eileen Gannon is the youngest sibling in a family that has become synonymous with Irish music in St. Louis and Missouri. P.J. and Helen arrived there in 1967 and “had an accordion before we had a dining room table.” They founded St. Louis Irish Arts in 1972. Tutored by Irish harpist Tracey Fleming, Eileen

won several medals in international competitions, especially the All-Ireland senior harp championship in 2000, the first from the Midwest and only the third American to win it. With her parents and siblings, she has traveled regularly between the United States and Ireland to train, compete, teach, perform and spend time with extended family. Several of Eileen's students have also won honors in All-Ireland competitions.

In addition to teaching at Irish Arts, Eileen studied classical harp at St. Louis University. She was a member of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra and has performed with the Clayton and University City Symphony Orchestras. Eileen has also appeared with the Musical Diversions Society Orchestra and the St. Louis Women's Chorale.

A New Family Tradition

Hailing from East Texas, the **Wright Family** doesn't play a music passed down through several generations of their family. On a vacation in 1994 they happened to visit Mountain View, Ark., mostly to see Blanchard Springs Caverns, and Margaret left town with a mountain dulcimer. The interest in music spread through the family and intensified. They traveled to many festivals, especially in the Appalachians, to learn and collect old-time tunes before starting their own festival in Palestine, Texas, which is held a week or two before the Big Muddy. Son Lloyd has proven a quick study, winning the national dulcimer contest in Winfield, Kan., in 2000, and he has since taken up guitar, mandolin, banjo and bass. His wife, April, is a lovely singer from a musical family herself. Brother Hollis plays mandolin and Jerry, the *pater familias*, can play the lesser-known pickin' stick and regale an audience with his narrative style.

The pleasure and enthusiasm this family has for old time music is both apparent and infectious. They have put their hearts into performing, learning and teaching as much of the music in as many ways as possible. Guess it's in their blood now.

The Folkies Down the Street

Festival organizers **Cathy Barton** and **Dave Para** were surprised and honored last year with three awards. The Missouri Committee for the Humanities gave them the Governor's Award for exemplary community achievement, one which festival co-founder, the late Bob Dyer, received 11 years ago.

Young Audiences of Kansas City, for whom the duo and with Bob have performed school assemblies since the 1980s, awarded Cathy and Dave the Lighton Prize for Teaching Artist Excellence. In addition, Folk Alliance Region Midwest (FARM) granted them the Folk Tradition in the Midwest Lifetime Award at their annual gathering in St. Louis in October. Achievements in folk music are by definition not solo efforts, but rather work shared with the many people who bear the tradition as well.

Cathy and Dave were pleased to return to the river last year on both the *American Queen* and the new *Queen of the Mississippi* and hope river levels will permit their return this year.

They are still fired up over new tunes learned at Carp Camp at Winfield and hope to play some with some fellow campers at the Big Muddy this year. "Raiwlin Reel" rules.

Festival Workshops

At this writing we are soliciting our artists for ideas, but for Saturday activities reasonably expect sessions in mountain dulcimer, at least one old-time jam, fiddling, shape-note singing, a duo session with Anne and Michael as well as song-writing. Check our <http://bigmuddy.org> website as we get closer to April. We should also have a mighty good pick-up band for the Friday dance in Turner Hall after the evening concert.

Where There's Smoke There's BBQ

Chef Terry Smith represents well the art of barbecue and keeps the grounds around the festival fragrant and inviting. It's a substantial plate for the price with a wide selection of smoky goodness, and the cooks are a clever bunch. You might even take home a slab of ribs after the show to remember us by. We're grateful the Friends board of directors sponsors our prime food event.

Keeping the Festival Afloat

Many of you received our fund-raising brochure last month as we endeavor to keep the Big Muddy Folk Festival going and maintain the accessibility inherent in the concept of a folk festival. Public funding for the arts has dried up like the bottomlands in 2012, and we will keep looking for ways to replace it so we can keep a good quality artist roster. To date we have received \$3,400 in generous donations, a

significant amount for a festival of our size and breadth. You can still make donation if you wish to help.

Phyllis Dale will be here for a guest spot. She made it possible for us to raffle a cruise for two last year on the new *Queen of the Mississippi*, a boat she herself christened in August. When you see her, please thank her for being our friend.

Tentative Festival Schedule

Our **Friday evening** concert will include Eileen Gannon, Barton & Para, the Wright Family, Notorious and special guests. An old-time dance follows 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 Bing Futch, Alferd Packer Memorial String Band, Anne Hills and Weavermania! Watch for our own Red Hot Mama, Phyllis Dale.

In Memoriam

Claude Barton, 96, passed away in December and will miss the Big Muddy for the first time. He was a dedicated career Army man who served heroically in the Pacific in World War II and dutifully served wherever the military sent him in the world far from his Mississippi home. Thankfully he chose his last assignment to teach ROTC at the University of Missouri at Columbia, where Dave was able to meet and marry his youngest daughter. Claude built Cathy's first hammered dulcimers.

Big Muddy Tickets go on sale Jan. 21, 2013

\$22 per night or **\$40** for both nights

Visit www.friendsofhistoricboonville.org

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Friends of Historic Boonville

P.O. Box 1776
614 E. Morgan
Boonville MO 65233

fohb@sbcglobal.net
<http://bigmuddy.org>
<http://www.friendsofhistoricboonville.org>

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