

# Big Muddy SOUNDINGS

Folk Festival

April 4-5, 2014

## ***A Festival for the Eyes, Ears, Feet, Heart and Mind***

The white, brown and gray have commandeered the landscape as the Missouri River valley shoulders its share of winter's real return. The snow, the rain and the in-between have made getting about a more thoughtful process and have muted the normal sounds of Main Street. No watercraft ply the river as the ice flows descend, collect at a wing dam and then move on, much like the brief respites of warmer weather.

With the exception of a few winter events Thespian Hall stands quietly but with the echoes of festivals, concerts and theater past. The **23<sup>rd</sup> Big Muddy Folk Festival** will donate additional vibrations from singers, players and dancers, most new to the festival and all inspired by the traditions of generations before to give their own soul and wit to the process. Old and fresh: These are exciting ingredients to a folk festival.

We also eagerly anticipate the installation of a new festival banner for the stage. We have prevailed on the generosity of festival friend Mona Stevenson and a small team of gifted quilters like herself to create a "slice quilt" with separate sections depicting different seasons on the Missouri River. One section can be seen at our festival website. We are in grateful awe.

This year makes our third effort to raise extra money for a kind of "rainy day" programming fund. Our state currently is making a budget, and sources don't anticipate any additional arts funding this year. Our mailing last year raised about \$5,400, a large percentage of our artistic budget. In addition to the shows, we do this balancing act to maintain quality programming that makes you want to come back and still keep ticket prices low enough to let you.

### **Friday Evening's Show**

#### **Songs of Blue Water Highways**

Heading south from the land of lake-effect snow, Lee Murdock is recognized as the premier interpreter of the music and stories of the Great Lakes. With research grounded in maritime work songs, Lee blends his own original works and those of other songsters of the region. He plays six and 12-string guitars and demonstrates his finger-style fluency in ragtime, blues and Irish tunes. Lee's studies led him to the University of Michigan archives of Great Lakes sailing songs collected in the early 20th century by Ivan Walton. When published recently as *Windjammers, Songs of the Great Lakes Sailors*, Lee contributed musical scores to the texts making it more useful to singer and folklorist. "The discovery of this vast collection of American maritime music was amazing to me," he says. "And to think that it exists a thousand miles from any salt water."

**Making folk music for the modern era, Lee's work is both documentary and anthem to the people of the freshwater highways of North America. While this might draw comparisons with some of those more famous folkies on the north side of the Great Lakes, we must invoke our own passed festival co-founder, Bob Dyer, and his songs and historical work of our Missouri River valley. Singing the songs of the people and place holds their history vibrant.**

#### **Got Banjo? Got Mustache? Yup**

**Mike Gentry** is a master of the plectrum banjo, one of the four-stringed banjos that characterized the rhythm sections of early jazz bands and also appeared in the early folk revival. Before Earl Scruggs spotlighted bluegrass banjo, it was the four-string in the hands of the likes of Ernie Peabody that comprised the American image of the banjo. Mike began his musical life playing the tuba throughout his school and college years and then graduated to the U.S. Navy, playing in its bands all over the world. He took up

the banjo after returning to his native Denver and working at Your Father's Mustache, an international nightclub chain that allowed him to continue his musical travels. He then moved to Orlando and worked for The Mouse, as they say in the biz, for 15 years. In 1988 he entered the cruise industry and resumed traveling by headlining shows with his banjo virtuosity and fine singing and showmanship. Our dear, late Bob Dyer worked with him on the *American Queen* steamboat in the late 1990s. At home currently in Arkansas, Mike was inducted last year in the National Four String Banjo Hall of Fame, and in 2011 was one of the selected soloists to perform at the 50<sup>th</sup> year reunion of Your Father's Mustache at Carnegie Hall.

## Footworks and Fluteworks

A leader in the emerging American vernacular dance movement, **Matthew Olwell** has been performing and teaching dance and percussion at festivals and theaters across North America and Europe since 1996. Traveling with his family's wooden-flute making business, he was immersed in a world of music, dance and theater from an early age and has studied with some of the finest teachers in percussive dance. He has timed his feet to the tunes of top traditional instrumentalists in both Irish and old-time music. He will be performing here with John Skelton, an accomplished and distinctive Irish flute player who is probably best known as a member of The House Band. John's grandfather and great-grandfather were flute and tin whistle players.

Born in London, he spent his formative years during a golden period for Irish music there in the 1970s, playing with musicians who formed some of the best Irish bands of the day. John's repertoire includes the haunting music of Brittany, those Celtic provinces of France, and he plays the region's traditional oboe-like instrument called the bombarde. He also has a reputation as a raconteur and has been called "England's Garrison Keillor." We're fortunate to have this high level of dance and music at Thespian Hall.

## The Folkies Down the Street

The devil has no workshop over on Sixth Street as festival organizers **Cathy Barton** and **Dave Para** have begun the New Year busily with concurrent projects. The Big Muddy Musical "Gumbo Bottoms," which Cathy co-wrote with

emcee **Meredith Ludwig** will take the stage this summer both at Turner Hall and on the *Queen of the Mississippi* river boat. A recording of the songs of that show is currently in the works with current and past cast members. Dave, Cathy and Meredith are also directing the annual "Love Notes" show that the Turner Hall River Rats do every Valentine's Day weekend.

As the weather improves Cathy and Dave look forward to returning for appearances on a number of riverboats plying the Mississippi, Ohio and Columbia rivers and spend some more time taking life at 10 mph.

## Saturday Evening's Show

### A Reason to Congregate

Hailing from one of America's great river towns, Louisville, in the Bluegrass State, **Storefront Congregation** has the joy and musical depth that comes when longtime musical friends reunite. Dreaming of their musical heroes, both **Kent Houchin** and **Murrell Thixton** started playing at 12 and teamed up for a local talent show aspiring to be the next Buck Owens and Roy Clark. While childhood stardom eluded them they both kept at it and separately played and started a number of local and regional bands. Together in the 1980s they founded the locally reputed bluegrass band New Horizon, incorporating the country and rock sounds of the day and included many different musicians during its run. Both have earned reputations as excellent players and are on the A lists to call when someone needs a sub. In 2002 Kent and Murrell started talking about putting together a band for the sheer joy of playing music, and their conversation included mandolinist **Nathan Livers** and bassist **Lauren White**, both of whom were brought up with the Kentucky acoustic sounds and pursued them from early age. Ready to stand up to the tight, fast, smooth and gritty rigors of the bluegrass band sound, the Congregation brings them to bear on their inspiration from different types of music and both standards and original material for a uniquely blended sound.

### STEAM! Is Hot

Dancing to a **STEAM!**-driven tune is fun, but if you are a player you could get distracted in mid-turn by the music: some unexpected medley of Irish and old-time tunes with a key-change that

wires you up. So it's a good thing we'll see them on stage, too. In 2010, four long-time friends happily jamming with each other while playing in other bands took a leap into a cross-continental venture from homes in Arizona, Colorado and Denver to contra dances across the U.S. **Dave Firestine, Alice Boyle, Robert Rosenberg, and Claire Zucker** rely on potent fiddle and mandolin leads and a drive from guitar, banjo and drum rhythms in a repertoire wider than the day is long. In concert Claire is a fine singer and step-dancer and has been known to squeeze a concertina.

Festival directors Cathy Barton and Dave Para have in the past few years found a musical home at the annual Carp Camp at the festival in Winfield, Kan., and these four band members are at the heart of this camp, playing great tunes long into the night for the sheer joy music brings to a group of often more than 50 people. Veteran performers, STEAM! members have produced 10 CDs with various bands -- the Privy Tippers comes to mind -- and happily they can take their jam session juices on the road. We will look forward to listening and seeing them, and dancing and playing with them, too.

## **Clever and Powerful Songs Bring Your Listening Hat**

A singer and songwriter of great wit and storytelling, **Andrew Calhoun** stands as a leader of songwriters rooted in tradition. In 40 years of performing, he has evolved an increasingly varied song repertoire from Celtic, American and African American traditions and original songs drawing on the strength of that music. Literary early in life, he earned a nickel at age seven from his mother by memorizing W. B. Yeats' "Song of Wandering Aengus." A few years later some hippies came to live with his family, and he got his first guitar and soon began writing his own songs. Chicago in the early 1970s retained its hootenanny ways and enabled lots of players to hear and learn from a variety of traditional musicians and songwriters, from Blind Jim Brewer to John Prine. A trip to Europe in 1977 lead him to the Cambridge Folk Festival where he heard Martin Carthy who had remained a guiding musical inspiration. In 1992, Calhoun founded Waterbug Records, an artists' cooperative folk label which has grown to 115 titles, bringing some of the brightest singer-songwriters and folk musicians to an international audience. In 2012,

he was given the Lantern Bearer Award for 25 years of service to the folk arts by the Folk Alliance Regional Midwest. Andrew is a powerful songwriter and a convincing singer of traditional song while his performance tends to the sly quiet side. He is not easily predictable, so listen up.

## **Kate and Kat**

It is pleasantly no surprise that **Kate MacLeod** and **Kat Eggleston** got together as a duet. While every good fiddler needs a good guitar player, these two draw from common wells of both instrumental and vocal music, song-writing and strong backgrounds in American and Celtic traditions. Also no surprise is that Andrew Calhoun's Waterbug Records (feeding the same wells) brought them together and double-billed them for concert tour in Europe in 1999. Both work separately as solos and in groups, but as a duo their charm and musicality make a sum greater than its parts. They have published two full-length recordings, "Drawn from the Well," and "Lost and Found." Kate is best known for her original songs and her unique fiddling style that demonstrate a strong link between traditional music and contemporary composing. Her songs have found new life in jam sessions and performances by traditional singers, bluegrass and Celtic musicians, and songwriters of many styles. As a fine guitarist and hammered dulcimer player, Kat has played with past Big Muddy performers Michael Smith and the Irish band Bohola, but most often lets her musical versatility carry her in solo performances. You would go to see either Kat or Kate to hear clever and observant songwriting mindful of the tradition and beautifully sung and enhanced with very adept playing; to see them in collaboration is a real musical treat.

## **Not Just Whistling Little Dixie**

**Howard Marshall** and **John Williams** represent two generations of the Central Missouri fiddling style, having learned from the local masters when they had the chance. Howard seems to have extended the "publish or perish" tradition from his academic career into his retirement. In addition to playing and judging fiddle contests, he often is at work writing articles and tracking historical details. Last year, he "wrote the book" on Missouri fiddling, *Play Me Something Quick and Devilish*, published by the University of Missouri Press.

As a boy John wanted to emulate his grandmother's fiddling. He was lucky to start young enough to learn from many of the same local masters that inspired Howard, and benefited from the efforts to preserve local fiddling traditions like camps and apprenticeships as well as the many contests held in the state. He says what really inspired him was "these older gentlemen who could play for three or four hours and never play the same tune twice."

Together, the two don't play what is called "twin fiddling," a pretty precise harmonic style. Rather, they tend to play their own versions of the same tune concurrently, which imitates an older style you might hear in somebody's kitchen. Howard has enjoyed exploring the "second fiddle" back-up style and employs other kinds of accompaniment more popular in the past.

## Festival Workshops

At this writing we are getting workshop ideas together. There are a lot of tune-mongers this year representing old-time and Irish music with some fine fiddlers. Jam sessions and a fiddle workshop would be expected along with some song sessions and dance workshops. The Friday evening dance should rock, too. Turner Hall, First Presbyterian and Grace Episcopal churches will be ready.

### *Friends of Historic Boonville*

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Check our <http://bigmuddy.org> website as we get closer to April.

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### When the Trailer's Smokin'

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 and which hopefully raises funds to support the Friends general operation.

**Big Muddy Tickets** go on sale Jan. 27,  
2014

**\$25** per night or **\$45** for both nights

Visit [www.friendsofhistoricboonville.org](http://www.friendsofhistoricboonville.org)

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