

Big Muddy

Folk Festival **SOUNDINGS** April 1-2, 2016

25 Years of Water Under Our Bridges

In 1992 we didn't think much about looking back on it in 2016; we were just trying to put a show together. I haven't spent much time on it in the years in between, but looking through the concert lineups and these *Soundings* newsletters since 1994 gives pause to take a longer view of the life of a two-day event. We have been hugely fortunate to have had the long list of talented and some legendary artists to play here. So many we would love to have back – or every year – but cannot. There has been plenty of time for bands to change or break up, and too many musicians have passed. I quoted Bob Dyer in 2008, the year after he passed, “This time tomorrow, there might be snow. Here in Missouri you just never know. This time tomorrow don't be surprised if things change.” Freud once wrote that life's transience shouldn't be depressing, rather it is what makes us appreciate beauty. It's a lesson taught by our beautiful quilted festival banner of the changing seasons on the Missouri River.

In 1994, our third festival, and the first time we used Turner Hall, the first *Soundings* appeared. In it I said, “folk music events are best when they bring together the purveyors of traditional song, tune, story and dance and those who, inspired by these traditions, compose their own material. Tradition is the link between the historical and the contemporary, and the Big Muddy celebrates this link.” I also said, “every good musician should play in Thespian Hall at least once.” These statements and our efforts on their behalf still stand. The echoes of the fine players of past years vibrate somewhere in the rafters and walls of Thespian Hall. Those vibrations, I believe, make richer those that come after them, and that's how you can be spiritually connected to a 159-year old building. In bringing wonderful artists together with wonderful audiences our festival tries to honor its elegant venue, “a monument to the liberality and good taste of our citizens,” as members of the Boonville Thespian Society envisioned in the 1850s.

To remember many good times, we are bringing back some of our special performers, but like the river, I guess you can't step in the same Big Muddy Folk Festival twice, even after 25 years.

Rhythm Bubbles Up From Down Below, Infuses All

An eclectic world music ensemble, **One Drum** rocked the house in 2005 with music and dance rooted in Africa, the Caribbean, Australia, the Middle East and the Americas. Their cargo is an extensive collection of aboriginal, ancient, modern and one-of-a-kind percussive, string and wind instruments like charango, didgeridoo, oud, berimbau and kalimba, but the ubiquity of the drum worldwide is the conduit for this powerful Milwaukee-based six to eight member band. (Ten years ago they also wheeled in an electric guitar and the only Big Muddy appearance of a Hammond B-3.) Drum talk, in wood, ceramic or metal, weaves a tapestry to illustrate the common cultural origins of music. Making use of oral

traditions of call-and-response, sing-along, creative movement and dance, **One Drum** expresses a universal spirit that knows no boundaries.

Chuckwagon Singers Riding Down the Santa Fe Trail

From the Bar D Chuckwagon Suppers in Durango, Colo., come the **Bar D Wranglers**, the evening show. Between their summer venue and their touring, the group has performed for more than 2.5 million people since 1969. On the road, they perform the classic cowboy western music: harmony singing, instrumentals, comedy and stories. Although they are new to the Big Muddy this year, they are old friends of Ron and Alisa Jones Wall. It was their show that inspired Roman

Jones to open her dinner theater in Mountain View, Ark., in the 1980s, where the musicians served you your food. The Wranglers include Gary Cook, a twice national flat pick guitar champion at Winfield, Kan., and whose "Colorado Waltz" is played by many; fiddler Matt Palmer, who toured with his musical family before joining the band in 2000; Joel Racheff, the bass player and raconteur, longtime Durango citizen and who named one of his sons Ringo; and Richard Espinoza, playing rhythm guitar, the newest member and best known for his award-winning western singing voice.

Our Friendly Riverboat Neighbors Return

As one dedicated festival patron observed in 2010, from the moment **Bob Schad** and **Jazzuo Jones** walked out on stage it was obvious their intent was to entertain everyone in the house. The two first teamed up as a banjo-ragtime piano act for the Great Steamboat Race between the *Delta Queen* and *Mississippi Queen* in 1981. Working as cruise directors as well as entertainers they found a variety of outlets for their talents and as many ways to make as many friends. Missouri's ragtime heritage is internationally renowned, and riverboats historically were homes for the development and spreading of early jazz. Like Thespian Hall, the *Delta Queen* is held dear in the hearts of many. Thanks to our mutual friend, Phyllis Dale, for helping to bring them here.

Her Voice Will Catch You, The Songs Will Linger Long

We had long wanted **Anne Hills** at the Big Muddy, and in 2013 it worked out to everyone's benefit. A beautiful singer with a soprano voice that makes you sit right up and listen, Anne is a talented and studied songwriter and also a keen song finder. A affection for traditional songs is evident in her writing and repertoire. Her guitar and banjo playing are lovely additions to her voice, and three years ago she began her set singing with a school teacher's bell. That helped us sit up straight, too.

Anne has collaborated with many fine musicians and writers she met in the Chicago scene, like Tom Paxton, Bob Gibson, Cindy Mangsen, Steve Gillette and Michael Smith, with whom she did a great workshop here.

Her 20 album projects have included seasonal songs, children's songs, the poetry of James Whitcomb Riley; she performed and composed music for theater productions, such as "Quilters" and "The Courtship of Carl Sandburg."

Grace Sisters are Family to Us

When Leela and Ellie Grace appeared at our fourth festival with their parents in 1995, central Missouri had been watching them grow up in a musical family, gradually taking part in the show and discovering their diverse talents. Their clog dancing first caught everyone's attention, and many a festival finale included them dancing to a fiddle tune played by the festival lineup. Dance has remained a major focus for them; Ellie last year got her masters in fine arts in dance and choreography in Massachusetts. Fine players of the banjo, guitar, fiddle and mandolin and well versed in old time music, they also found their own voices in composing their own songs, so their shows have a lot of powerful variety. With Ellie studying and teaching and Leela moving from Portland, Ore., to Vermont with a baby, Arizona, 2015 brought a hiatus to their touring together. But they are happy to return to Missouri this year. As for all kids who have grown up and moved away and come back, we have photos and memories which we could use to embarrass them, but we promise not to.

Duo From the Far Side

It was our fourth festival, in 1995, when **Lou** and **Peter Berryman** came out on stage and started singing their double yodel song and folks realized something very unexpected was afoot. Everyone laughed with their eyes wide. And when they sang the song about the foreign language ventriloquist puppet (a foreign language they made up, of course availing themselves of the opportunity to leave out the difficult consonants) someone looked at me sideways and asked, "Who would think that up?" Well, had they been aliens or time travelers from another dimension we would have found out by now. Lou and Peter were art students together at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and if you have ever looked in the backyard of an art school you would see a number of things that would make you ask the same question. It's not that their songs are so far out there; they wouldn't be so funny, and they wouldn't be

sung by other singers around the world if they were. It's that they have a special lens and timer for looking at the real world which the regular person doesn't carry in their camera bag.

When the Zither Met America

The Shwartzner family in Washington, Mo., won world prizes making zithers, but during the Depression years, a variety of hybrids came out. Ukelins, pianolins, marxaphones, the dulceola, perhaps all were inspired by the survival of the oldest one, the autoharp, the one with chord bars invented in the 1880s.

A Columbia native, **Ron Wall** remembers Cathy Barton getting him started on the autoharp, though she says she really didn't show him very much. He soon began experimenting with instrument design and new ways of playing it while developing a powerful performance style. He spends much of his remarkable creativity in manufacturing gift products, but music has always been a source of joy, family and community for him. He combined the two in 1988 when he and his wife, Alisa Jones, and friend Mark Howard formed Cumberland Records to make albums for the gift market. He has played here as a solo and as part of his late mother-in-law, Ramona Jones', band at our second festival in 1993, featuring both his dazzling instrumental pieces and well-crafted original songs.

The Only Festival That We Can Walk To

Festival organizers **Cathy Barton** and **Dave Para** had a full year of America's roads and rivers, playing festivals in Albuquerque and Mystic, Conn., on subsequent weekends, and plying the waters of the Upper Mississippi in the fall. Energized by annual doses of new tunes, they have enjoyed playing dances with **Mike Fraser** and **Tenley Hansen**, and go by the band Snorty Horse, a name they got from a bar closed down east of Columbia. As the duo Shortleaf, Mike and Tenley specialize in old time songs and tunes from the Ozarks, and we have much in common.

A folk festival at Thespian Hall became a reality when Dave and Cathy pitched the idea to **Judy Shields**, director of the Friends of Historic Boonville, and she immediately called **Bob Dyer** and **Ken** and **Linda Askren** to form a committee to make it happen. Judy, Ken and Linda have been

with us ever since, as has sound engineer **Sam Griffin**. Friends **Steve Donofrio**, **Bill Lacy** and **M. Boden Lyon** have worked with Sam for most of these years. **Christopher Bolin** has created some of our best festival designs, and many events at Thespian Hall have depended on his technical stage skills and creativity. Bill, like **David Oswald**, and emcee **Meredith Ludwig**, joined the committee years ago. Dave and Cathy are always grateful to return to the Thespian Hall stage and appreciate the continued support and contributions of good friends.

**The Friends of Historic
Boonville receive funding
from the Missouri Arts
Council, a state agency**

Festival Workshops

At this writing we are getting workshop ideas together. From African drumming to Western swing, there should be a wide variety. One Drum will again do a session on both rhythm and dance, and the Graces could have dance sessions as well. The song writers in the line up are mostly longtime friends so we should get them together. Cathy looks forward to having her banjo student Leela back for some old-time music.

The Missouri Master Apprenticeship Program will return with Missouri master fiddler Vesta Johnson from Kirkwood and her grandson Steve Hall who has a guitar apprentice, Ellen Gomez. These events will be held again at Thespian and Turner halls, First Presbyterian and Grace Episcopal churches. Check <http://bigmuddy.org> website as we get closer to April.

Smoke Signals From the Lot

Terry Smith went public with his hobby and started the Big Muddy BBQ in 1994, which remains the only fund-raiser for the Friends of Historic Boonville. The musicians don't serve you, but the board of directors do. We hope the Wranglers approve. Barbecue is a classic regional food and, as far as my taste buds are concerned, a traditional art. Two years ago, they got adventurous and started serving the local Friday lunch crowd and ran themselves silly. We're grateful they help feed our performers and make for a congenial venue at Turner Hall.

Current Festival Schedule

Friday evening's concert will feature the Ron Wall, Bob Shad and Jazzou Jones, Leela and Ellie Grace and One Drum. Longtime central Missouri caller Jim Thaxter will call the following dance at Turner Hall.

Saturday sessions in songs, instruments and dance will be in the morning and afternoon. The evening concert will feature Cathy and Dave with Snorty Horse, Lou and Peter Berryman, Anne Hills and the Bar D Wranglers.

Festival Tickets go on sale Jan. 25, 2015, and are **\$25** per night or **\$45** for both nights

To purchase online, visit
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