

Big Muddy

Folk Festival **SOUNDINGS** April 6-7, 2018

Navigating Snags from One Year to Next

In a British Christmas play from 100 years ago there is a song to bid the old year goodbye: “Oh you've eaten all my hay and you spoiled all my straw; You're neither fit to ride upon nor neither fit to draw; You are old, you are cold, you are lazy, dull and slow; So he'll hang him, whip him, stick him, to the hounds will let him go; Poor old horse.” Yes, 2017 was that kind of year. Health problems kept both our barbecue chef and our sound engineer – and their equipment -- at home at relatively last minute, but we had a terrific festival of music last year despite the challenges. Melissa Strawhun at the Friends of Historic Boonville kept her wits to help to make it happen, and folks in the community stepped in to help us out. The summer dealt serious health issues for Cathy and kept her at home for a month. The support and love we received this year outshone the difficulties we faced. We draw strength from the old horse to carry us through the New Year, and we can sing “Auld Lang Syne” with full heart.

The river, though, just keeps rolling on with little care of what the folks are doing up on the bluffs above, whether looking forward or back as the year turns. With the subfreezing temperatures through the holidays the river partied up with a nice wheat-tea cocktail with ice floes jamming the river for a time like in the old days. It's a lovely kaleidoscope moving in browns, grays and whites now as the cold abates a bit. The river doesn't belong to us; we belong to it, as Bob Dyer once wrote, so we will reconvene to sing, play and dance our time in sight and celebration of the force of life flowing by us. We have inspired and creative artists to lead us all together this year; folks who can tell our stories or make their instruments talk, or pull our voices into a harmonious current of its own, up here on the bluffs.

Not Exactly Their Fathers' Old Time Band

They may seem a bit young to be a super group, but **Charm City Junction** comes from Baltimore packed with an inordinate amount of power for an old-time string band. This quartet isn't afraid to take roots music to new places while still keeping an eye on tradition. Fiddler **Patrick McAvinue** is highly respected in the country and has played with some legendary bluegrass players. **Brad Kolodner** on clawhammer banjo and **Sean McComiskey**, on Irish button accordion player are both sons of well-known players and have grown up in earshot of high levels of music. **Alex Lacquement** studied jazz and bass at Eastman and plays confidently with various bands along the Atlantic. Bluegrass fiddling and Celtic tunes with button accordion and clawhammer banjo are not the typical elements of an old-time band, but even

bands in the old times weren't all alike, and that's always been part of the fun of listening to them.

St. Louis Jazz Traditions

The Gaslight Squares are a band dedicated to playing and preserving the history of 1920s jazz and take their name from the St. Louis riverfront area where the music first started to jump. Like a classic early jazz band, the number of personnel can vary from two to seven as they play weekly in various city venues, and several of the musicians may show up in other bands in the area. We're expecting five players to show with piano, accordion, guitar, banjo, cornet, trombone, clarinet, saxophone, tuba, percussion and someone with wind enough left in him to sing. Band leader, trumpet player and vocalist **T.J Müller** started with the idiom at an early age in his native England. He spent three years playing trumpet and plectrum banjo with Pokey Lefarge which brought him to Boonville for the Pedalers'

Jamboree, as well other venues like the David Letterman show, "A Prairie Home Companion" and "The Grand Ole Opry." Tenor banjo player and vocalist **Jacob Alspach** is a performing member of the St. Louis Banjo Club and plays trombone for the Sidney Street Shakers. Pianist **Matt Sellars** has worked with the swing group Miss Jubilee, and Jon Weiss plays tuba regularly for the Shriners. These are energetic, well-versed and versatile players who serve up some hot solos and great old tunes.

Tales from the Ozarks Hills

Marideth Sisco has stories to tell, whether at a KSMU radio microphone or on stage with her musical group of geriatric hillbillies, **Blackberry Winter**. If her life was a garden, and much of it is, stories would be her most abundant crop. A retired journalist, author, singer and folklorist, she has been singing, writing and telling stories about her part of the world for a very long time. She has gathered and gleaned pieces of the culture and music and relates stories that are always poignant, sometimes hilarious, and often inexplicable. And unlike those on reality TV, this stuff **is** real.

Her own songs speak from simpler times, like her familiar and inviting rendition of our state song that opens the film, "Winter's Bone." This winter she released a new album of songs in collaboration with songwriter Robin Frederick whom Marideth says could do melodic and musical wonders with her notes and scraps of lyric. The project also features the sensitive accompaniment by band members Bo Brown, Linda Stoffel and Tedi May.

Singing for the Community

We're glad to welcome back **Matt Watroba** with his well-chosen and welcomingly sung repertoire that he last brought in 2006. Many know him as the voice of folk music in Michigan as producer and host of the "Folks Like Us," "Sing Out Radio Magazine" and "Folk Alley," and with Detroit Public Radio. For a while, his show on WDET was in the same studio which originally broadcast "The Lone Ranger." He has recently returned to the airwaves Sunday evenings in "Folk with Matt Watroba" on Michigan State Public Media, WKAR. His radio work has helped him absorb many aspects of folk music and culture and shaped a unique repertoire and

presentation. Matt has been called a singer whom songwriters live for. Christine Lavin cites his terrific taste (He does enjoy her songs.), outstanding voice and the ability to not only perform beautifully, but to teach audiences the songs as he sings them." He prefers to call himself a community singer and is committed to inspiring the world to sing-- one town at a time.

Banjo for the World

Where in the world did **Michael Miles** learn to play the banjo, and where in the world does he take it? A photo of a guy with a banjo could tell you different things; you need to see who he is standing with. Michael could be standing with an orchestra, a choir, string quartet or a jazz band, or flute soloist **Lloyd Brodnax King**. His playing won't clue you in much, either, as he came to the instrument on his own path. In Chicago he learned some from Fleming Brown at the Old Town School, who also had his unique approach, far from the hollers of the Southern Highlands. Where he goes with it could be from Senegal to Seeger, as one of his productions is titled, or transcribing Bach cello suites for banjo and bass. This extension of his own innovative style has earned him accolades from banjo legends, both traditional and progressive. Pete Seeger said he made him "want to learn banjo all over again." Michael worked with Pete while he directed the Old Town School, where his creative sense in community arts precipitated a six-fold increase in enrollment. He has also played in Morocco, Lebanon and Turkey for the State Department.

Crossing the Country with Songs Traversing History

Intrepid road warriors **Sparky and Rhonda Rucker** were here in 2011. Their talent for weaving their music into stories that history books don't always tell put them close to the heart of this festival. Forty years ago Sparky was playing bottleneck guitar, singing gospel songs and telling the news and blues. He had spent valuable time at Appalshop, Kentucky's mountain cultural heritage haven, and recognized folk traditions as effective social linkage. Since teaming up with Rhonda the music keeps getting richer as adding combinations of guitar, piano, harmonica and banjo broadens their sound palate. Their

repertoire continues to expand as well as they present educational programs spanning centuries of African-American history, including slavery, the Underground Railroad, the Civil War, the birth of blues music, and the civil rights movement. Sparky's family-born tradition of telling stories has brought the duo to the International Storytelling Center and Festival as featured tellers, and they have performed at the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival as well as your favorite shows on NPR.

Where Is Our Red Hot Mama?

Well, at current writing Phyllis Dale is changing residences down in sunny Florida, but she expects to make the drive back to Missouri, up the lazy river and to the festival she has so lovingly adopted. We are sure to enjoy her "15 minutes" in the lineup.

Irish Tunes Different Voices

Na Skylark is a Kentucky-based trio playing Irish music with striking arrangements of harp, flute, tin whistle, Uilleann pipes and fiddle.

Lorinda Jones keeps the mountain dulcimer a mainstay in their sound as well. Irish tunes have been a part of modern dulcimer repertoire and helped entice her to play harp. She incorporated both in her studies of music education and music therapy. Her knowledge of the Irish idiom greatly expanded when she teamed with flute player **Cathy Wilde** who took up the whistle and wooden flute after her first trip to Ireland. She later found her passion in the pipes. In addition to the care it takes to combine these often subtle instruments, these two women like to change instruments in mid-set for dynamic impact. Fiddler **Jannell Canerday** is adept at both Irish and old-time tunes and brings that melodic anchor to the open sounds and drones her band mates send swirling about her.

At Home with Our Festival

Festival organizers **Cathy Barton** and **Dave Para** are especially grateful to embark on our 27th Big Muddy. They spent the first part of last year finishing their 16th album project, "Carp Fishing in Missouri," managing to have delivery to their front porch two days before the festival. During the year they were able to share concerts with most of their Carp Camp friends who helped them

in the studio. The two were able to do concerts until right before Cathy's surgery in the summer. Through the wonders of robotic surgery and Cathy's own determination, they were able to make a show on the *American Queen* after only four weeks of recuperation. The fall was particularly busy, but the two were supported by musical friends everywhere they went. The tunes keep on coming faster than they can learn them. They look forward to events both in the northeast and southwest as well as back on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers.

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

River of the Big Canoes Fund

One great spiritual lift for us has been the generous response to the letters from festival emcee **Meredith Ludwig**, aka Tilly Tyrell, soliciting donations to bolster our artistic budget. Squeezing eight or so acts into two evenings in a hall that accommodates 600 is a happy little puzzle. The fund continues to grow, and we have more in the fund than we did a year ago. This is partly due to the full house we had both nights last year as well as the gracious donations of our festival friends. This enables us to bring together artists of high level, including both the familiar and unfamiliar, and make our cultural celebration adventurous. Thank you all.

Festival Workshops

We are currently communicating with our artists and exchanging ideas to get workshops together for daytime sessions on Saturday. The festival is particularly banjo-friendly this year, but there is also a consortium of fine fiddlers, storytellers, and broadcasters. Expertise in Irish and old-time music, jazz and song topics is dispersed through the roster. Check the festival website or call the office as we update schedules.

In Memoriam

Volunteers **Angie Chipley-Smith**, 45, and **Donna Myers**, 80, both passed away recently. Angie devotedly helped her husband, Terry, with the barbecue, and it was her sauce that flavored the afternoon. Donna was a longtime and

committed volunteer at the Friends office and was our festival liaison at First Presbyterian Church greeting participants as they found their way to workshops there. It is volunteers like them who make a festival and a community go and make living here a joy.

Tickets for the festival go on sale January 23 and are **\$25** per night or **\$45** for both nights.

To purchase online, visit
www.friendsofhistoricboonville.org
Or call our friendly office at 888-588-1477 or 660-882-7977

Current Festival Schedule

Friday evening's concert Sparky and Rhonda Rucker, Marideth Sisco and Blackberry Winter, Cathy Barton and Dave Para with Lauralyn Bodle, and the Gaslight Squares. An old-time dance will follow the evening concert at Turner Hall.

Saturday sessions in songs, instruments and dance will be in the morning and afternoon. The evening concert will feature Charm City Junction, Matt Watroba, Michael Miles and Lloyd Brodnax King and na Skylark.

Friends of Historic Boonville

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