

Big Muddy

Folk Festival **SOUNDINGS** April 3-4, 2020

Our 29th Festival Belongs to Cathy

Well, I guess they all belonged to her, even though we didn't expect to play every Big Muddy when we started it with Bob Dyer. Our faithful committee, however, prevailed on us that we must. This year isn't the exception we had in mind. Many fine things were sung and said to Cathy as we played last year's festival. Perhaps hope and optimism kept me from seeing what was more obvious to others. My feelings for Cathy are so deep that it's hard to separate my own from hers, as is separating our shared musical accomplishments, and that makes it difficult for me to raise tribute to Cathy Barton as others would. There were two artists known as CathyandDave; it's hard for the one left to take a step back. So, much like I have been sustained during the last 270 days or so, I will draw from our abundant circle of friends to help me. During the 12 days Cathy and I had after the festival we discussed this year's potential lineup without any doubt that the Big Muddy would continue. Bob Dyer died two days before our 2007 festival, and we found a way. Each evening will begin with a set in tribute to Cathy's music, and her many friends in the lineup will honor her as well. It was obvious to all how much Cathy loved playing and singing. The joy with which she played was as prominent as and integral to the power with which she played. A real tribute to her should be fun and echo not only her music and her love for it, but her joy and laughter that filled us all.

We chose the mighty Missouri River as a symbol of our festival not just because of geography or even history and cultural heritage. Bob's mentor, John Neihardt, saw the river as life, vitality and spirit spanning thousands of years of change, easily marked by the seasons which are depicted in our stunning quilted festival banner. So as the cold icy breath of early winter gave way to the warm southern breezes for the Christmas season, so shall the simple cold browns and grays of the river banks give way to emerging greens and pinks of spring. Thespian Hall quietly awaits the sounds, the song, the dance and story to resound again.

Bringing Their Charm Back to Our City

Just when someone in our 2018 audience turned to her husband and said, "These guys are sure having a good time," **Alex Lacquement** of **Charm City Junction** told the house, "If you ever wondered what a band looks like when they're having a good time, this is it." With a classic instrument package of fiddle, clawhammer banjo, button accordion and upright bass, this Baltimore-based quartet features great players unafraid to take roots music to new places and with the energy to take the audience with them. Those places are a captivating mix of Irish, bluegrass, and old-time music. **Patrick McAvinue** was the 2017 bluegrass fiddler of the year for the International Bluegrass Music Association. Button accordion player **Sean McComiskey** brings the tunes and spirit he learned from his legendary

father, Bill; and old-time banjo player **Brad Kolodner** grew up with tunes from his fiddling and hammered dulcimer playing father, Ken. Every band needs a pressure gauge and a fun gauge, and versatile bassist Lacquement fills that roll while tracking the different styles flying by. Their second album, "Duckpin," in 2018 charted high among Bluegrass albums. Their creative versatility enriches the tradition.

Three Voices Present A World of Music

I think the only way Chicago-based vocal trio **Artemisia** disappointed our audience in 2017 was by not having an album for them to take home. That situation has been rectified with the CD "Sounds Like Us," and the power of the unaccompanied voice is undeniable. With a trio praised for "sincerity, wit, and mind-blowing

technique” by *Vocal Arts Chicago* this pure-form music seems to bring the voices of the world closer together in one story. Appalachian folk, Tushetian highlander cries, and Cuban dance music are just some of the styles they have explored. **Diana Lawrence, Alexandra Olsavsky, and Kaitlin Foley** actively commission and perform newly composed works by living female composers, (They performed one of Leela Grace’s songs last fall) and all three members regularly compose for the group, frequently adding new arrangements and their own original compositions to their programs. In addition to performing *Artemisia* does educational outreach for community and youth ensembles on subjects such as cultural literacy through song, improvisational songwriting and female empowerment.

Grace Sisters Are a Must

We’re grateful that **Leela and Ellie Grace** will be a part of this special festival; they just had to be. They grew up around Cathy and me, sharing the love and joy of music and community and a long friendship. Having played with their parents, Paul and Win, for years, they were already festival favorites for their first duo performance here in 2002. Many of us had watched as they played spoons and bones, sing harmonies with their parents, learned to clog and play banjo, mandolin, and guitar. All the while they were encouraged to find their own voices and emerged as fine and provocative song writers. This winter Ellie released her first solo CD of impressive original songs, much to the delight of her many friends.

With so much to offer a dynamic show on stage, Leela and Ellie have continued performing as much separately as together, considering the distance between their homes in Portland, Ore., and Kansas City. Both teach music and dance in their respective towns and keep the fires of inspiration and tradition well kindled.

The Coyote Bard

David Lynn Grimes sent me a photo of Yeats’ “The Fiddler of Dooney” that hangs in our hallway. “For the good are always the merry Save by an evil chance, And the merry love the fiddle, And the merry love to dance. And when the folk there spy me, They will all come up to me, With ‘Here is the fiddler of Dooney,’ And dance like a wave of the sea.”

Over the many years we encountered David, I don’t recall him playing the fiddle but his spirit and music dance like the ocean swell. An accidental shaman and bardic fool who has howled with wolves, run from bears, and cavorted with killer whales, David is an activist, poet and songwriter who grew up near the mighty Missouri River and sometimes quarters in the Alaskan fishing village of Cordova. Since drawn to the Copper River after the Exxon oil spill he has worked as a commercial fisherman, whale researcher, and environmental activist, but he has been a musician all his life. He produced three inventive acoustic albums along with published essays and poetry.

His adopted Eyak name is YaxadiliSayaxinh, “The Thinker” or more literally “He who causes his mind to involuntarily roam in an indeterminate direction.” Bob Dyer once told me if he tells you the story of how he got that name you will have forgotten what the point of the story was by the time he’s finished.

Four Brothers from Texas

The four **Vanderveer Brothers** hail from the Dallas area and are a growing string band assimilating instruments and musical styles as they go. Elder Christopher first brought music into the family with piano lessons, but four years later they were introduced to the hammered dulcimer at a Texas festival. Now, three of the brothers play the instrument, which is the Texas-sized one that Cathy played. Inspired by Cathy’s playing, Christopher also took up the banjo, and the band’s new CD included a dedication to her. All are multi-instrumentalists now and trade dulcimers, guitar, banjo, fiddle, piano/keyboard, mandolin, bones, pennywhistle, jaw harp, and harmonicas. Their excitement and joy of playing and discovering music manifests in a driving and energetic old-time string band performance.

Old Time Music that Rocks

Seattle songsters **Ben Hunter and Joe Seamons** make an extremely versatile duo that can make it happen. The expected fiddle and banjo breakdowns make room for a cappella field hollers, early jazz, and gospel songs which might feature Appalachian Piedmont guitar style and rattling bones. Traditional musicians often play a surprising variety of music that defies the commercial or academic tendency to divide them into categories. Ben and Joe have great knowledge

of and respect for the sources of their music. Their stories about them, rather than resurrect the past, show how these traditions are still alive in our present culture. Blues, prison ballads, like many folk songs and even dance music, speak of issues that remain current and common in the human experience. With the same versatility that won them the International Blues Challenge in 2016, the duo celebrates the ways Americans have triumphed over oppression through the vitality of their art. At the 2018 Albuquerque Folk Festival, Cathy and I saw them invite their audience to a more active role in their performance and push against the invisible barrier between performer and audience. Thespian Hall should provide an easier fence for them to scale.

Not Solo in the Big Canoe

Somewhere in the April fog between the festival and Cathy's memorial service, my sister and brother in law urged me to consider continuing working in music knowing that Cathy fully expected me to keep playing somehow. Thanks to the generosity of the *American Queen* Steamboat and American Cruise Lines, and the patience of some good friends, I was able to keep the dates on the river I had initially cancelled. Using the close-to-the-heart-and-home name of Big Canoe, I worked in three different duos with Big Muddy friends Paul Fotsch, Lauralyn Bodle and Dana Hamilton, keeping in contact with the river community and sharing the gigs Cathy and I most favored. A Big Canoe sextet even played a Kansas City barn dance. I am preparing for a new role on the river this year: river-orian on the new *American Countess*. The late Bob Dyer held that position on the *American Queen* in the late 1990s.

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

Festival Workshops

The line-up this year features great players, dancers and singers, so the Saturday workshops will offer a variety of expertise and entertainment. We're working on the schedule now. Morning and afternoon sessions will be at Turner and Thespian halls and First Presbyterian and Christ Episcopal churches. Please check the website,

<https://bigmuddy.org> as we get closer to festival time and the schedule is finalized.

Emcee With More Than Words

Tilly Tyrell will return to assist Dave Para with the emcee duties and hopes everyone is still "thumping their thymus". With the cost of healthcare skyrocketing she says, "You just can't afford not to!" Luckily many of you were healthy enough to make a donation to The River of the Big Canoe performers fund again this year. Your generosity continues to support our efforts to maintain ticket prices while raising the amount we have for performers and we deeply appreciate it. If you would like to be a part of this fund, please let us know at the Friends' office.

Smoky Goodness to Feed Us

We happily welcome back Terry Smith to the BBQ pit, something he started in 1994 as the sole fund raiser for Friends of Historic Boonville. It still is the only food service the festival provides. Members of the board of directors will be happy to serve you up the smoky goodness. Like any good hobby, Terry's has grown in planning and equipment and, much like music, it's one that is best enjoyed by a bunch of people. It makes for a great welcome table over at Turner Hall.

Welcome to Laura Wax For Her First Big Muddy

Well, it's not really her first. Laura has grown up around the Friends of Historic Boonville. Last summer she took the Friends director job her mother, Maryellen McVicker, had earlier this century. She went to the office in July in time to prepare for the 44th Missouri River Festival of the Arts. Previously, Laura was director of Boonville Chamber of Commerce and also worked for her alma mater, the University of Missouri. As a fourth grader, like her immediate predecessor, Kelly Smith, she made a mouthbow with Cathy and me during one of our residencies at David Barton School. We've been happy to work with someone as familiar with and affectionate for our community.

The Cathy Barton Collection

Cathy was a collector of many things and she enjoyed her various collections. She also liked to dress well for performances and holidays. While much of her regular clothing can be taken to resale stores, I felt her fancier skirts and tops could be better distributed, such as in a silent auction and donation to the festival and the Friends. We will have them on display at Turner Hall. Then there are all those peacock ornaments...

Welcome KOPN As a Sponsor

Cathy first heard the hammered dulcimer during the "Cedar Creek Pickaway" on Saturday morning on KOPN radio. I hosted a radio show myself there on Sunday afternoons, "Across the Wide Missouri." This community station has always been an important part of our musical lives. Steve Donofrio, one of our faithful sound crew, has hosted one of my favorite shows, in that Sunday slot, as the Radio Ranger. We're pleased to have them sponsor our festival.

Friends of Historic Boonville

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Festival Tickets go on sale Jan. 21, 2020,
And are \$25 per night or \$45 for both nights
To purchase online, visit
www.friendsofhistoricboonvillemo.org
Or call our friendly office at 888-588-1477 or
660-882-7977

First Look Festival Schedule

Friday evening's concert will feature a special tribute to Cathy Barton, David Lynne Grimes, Artemisia and the Vanderveer Brothers String Band. We will have a dance at Turner Hall following the evening show.

Saturday sessions in songs, instruments and dance will be in the morning and afternoon. The evening concert will feature a tribute to Cathy Barton, Leela and Ellie Grace, Ben and Joe and Charm City Junction.

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