

Big Muddy

SOUNDINGS

Folk Festival April 2-3, 2004

The vines of the Vineclad City have long withered and browned. Winter has brought its bag of tricks, from warm western winds to the "wintry mix." The muddy Missouri runs mighty low, suffering from a five-year drought in parts of its valley.

Thespian Hall has been pretty quiet the past several weeks. The extensive restoration work of two years ago has earned the Friends of Historic Boonville a Preserve Missouri Award for 2004 from Missouri Preservation. The award presentation is scheduled for March.

We'll raise our voices in song for this, our 13th Big Muddy Folk Festival with singers from far and wide and a variety of traditions. A couple of long-time dreams have come true this year. Songwriter Bill Staines will be with us, as will our dear friends the Boyer family from St. Louis. Some local artists in the lineup will surprise you, and we should have a good mix of folks to make for some interesting workshop sessions.

A Loving Family Tradition

The **Boyer Family's** influence on the St. Louis folk community is long and deep. Janet Boyer and her brother, fiddler Bob Beers, grew up in the area with the traditional music of family gatherings. Bob moved eventually to New York and founded the Fox Hollow Folk Festival, a legend in the northeast. Meanwhile, Janet and her husband Bill Boyer opened a store, Music Folk, and started the coffeehouse Focal Point in 1975. (A few years later, Cathy Barton started performing there.) Both of those interests thrive today in other hands but remain at the heart of the St. Louis folk scene. Like her brother, Janet raised and nurtured musical children who joined in family sessions and later married musical spouses. A Biograph Lp recorded the extended family band in 1971. Daughter Susan, who continued a singing career of her own, will come up from Florida. Daughter Becky, who took fiddle lessons from her uncle as well as violin lessons, now plays second chair violin for the St. Louis Symphony and was featured with Mark O'Connor when he appeared there. Becky's husband, Jerome Hall, is a good flatpicker, too. This is music and love that has grown and intertwined like the fabled briar and rose.

Songs That Stay With You Long After He's Miles Away

This is the one of more than 30 years of criss-crossing North America that Bill Staines will take our I-70 exit. A New England native, Bill became involved with the Boston-Cambridge folk scene in the early 1960's, and in 1971 The Phoenix stated that Bill was "simply Boston's best performer." Now in his fourth decade with an international reputation, there is scarcely a folksinger in America whose repertoire doesn't include Bill's songs, folks like Peter, Paul, & Mary, Makem and Clancy, Nanci Griffith, Mason Williams, The Highwaymen, Glen Yarbrough and Jerry Jeff Walker.

When Bill opens his cookie jar of songs he resonates such ease and comfort that you would be satisfied if he sang the phone book. His wit and gentle humor draw his audiences right in. Traditional music and songs of his friends often inspire a prolific songwriter like Bill, so he can include them in a concert. Having won the National Yodeling Championship in 1975 at Kerrville, Texas, his performance can also surprise you.

British Roots, American Branches: A Well-Watered Tree

Phil Cooper and **Margaret Nelson** met more than 20 years ago at an open mike session and discovered a

shared fondness for strong stories set to beautiful tunes, especially the traditional English and Scottish ballads, the slow airs of Scotland and Ireland, and contemporary songs with the same feel. Margaret sings with a velvety alto voice rich enough to magnify the beauty of any song, and Phil's guitar style, reminiscent of Martin Carthy, shows subtly and power – "harp like at times--and a perfect match for Margaret's" singing. In 1995 they teamed up with friend and singer **Kate Early**, comprising a trio that features fine harmonies, guitar, cittern, bowed psaltery, whistle and a passel of rhythm instruments.

They have been called "stalwarts of the Anglo-Irish tradition," and ballads and traditional tunes are still the bedrock of their repertoire. It is a rare group that treats traditional music with deeper respect and integrity. Lest you think they take themselves too seriously, however, take note of their banter with an audience and introductions of their tunes. Their performance is dusted with puns nearly as cruel as the murder ballads they sing and a sense of humor that occasionally stretches to the absurd.

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Old-Time Music From the Eastern Border

From the St. Louis-, East St. Louis- or east of St. Louis area, come the Ill-Mo Boys, who have been playing together since the mid-1980s, specializing, as their name implies, in material reflecting their Midwest origins. Recently, a more refined musical focus has earned them a reputation as premier interpreters of Missouri fiddling and old-time country music. The four musicians have spent countless hours in the friendly confines of old-time master players like Tommy Jarrell, and Big Muddy veterans Bob Holt, Gene Goforth, and John Hartford.

Geoff Seitz is well known coast-to-coast for his hot square dance fiddling. A frequent finalist at fiddle contests he has won at both the Galax Fiddlers Convention and the Appalachian String Band Festival. Around home he is also well known as a drummer and an expert in fiddle repair. **Curtis Buckhannon** has developed his old-time mandolin style that is dynamic and rich in complexion. He was a founding member of Cousin Curtis and the Cash Rebates, a St. Louis string band formed back when the federal government used to give away such things. **Jim Nelson's** 25 years in

the old-time music and dance scenes has helped him raise the art of "second guitar" to new levels. He is an avid collector of 78-rpm records of old-time country music. **Marc Rennard** lately has joined the band with his driving fiddle style and sense of invention. Marc was a member of the Mid-Missouri Hell-Band with Forrest Rose back in the 1970s, and has spent years traveling and playing with bands around the country.

Country Blues You Can Taste

Mississippi blues artist **Steve Cheseborough** (pronounced CHEZZ-bro) brings to life the acoustic country blues of the 1920s and '30s, live and wailing in the 21st century. He might have traded with Jim Nelson for some of his old 78s of Blind Boy Fuller, Memphis Minnie, Charley Patton, Robert Johnson and Bo Carter. Listening through the scratches and surface noise unknown to today's CD owners, Steve can re-create the music loud, clear, here and now, preserving the spirit and intricacies of the original while making it his own. Singing from the heart, he accompanies himself on a shiny steel resonator guitar. He also adds a bit of harmonica and percussion to his one-man act.

"Steve did such a good job capturing the emotions associated with southern blues, I was tempted to ask him if the CD came with collar and greens," one of his concert reviewers said.

An authority and "gazetteer of the blues," Steve writes for *Living Blues*, *Blues Access*, *Oxford Town* and *Mississippi* magazines. He also wrote and photographed the guidebook *Blues Traveling*, published by University Press of Mississippi. He holds a master's in Southern Studies from the University of Mississippi, and has lectured on blues topics at academic conferences.

Can You Imagine What I'm Telling You?

A longtime friend of the Big Muddy Folk Festival, **Beth Horner's** goal as a storyteller is to entertain and engage her listeners' imaginations. "When you watch a story on television or in a movie theater, you see one person's (the film maker's) depiction of an image," she says. "When I'm telling stories to 50 different people, there are 50 different movies going on in the minds of listeners. Nothing is as powerful or vivid as your own imagination."

Although she has partially migrated to Chicago, Beth's roots on a Boone County farm informs her 18 years telling a wide variety of folk, literary, traditional, contemporary and original tales from around the world. Beth's repertoire includes folktales,

literary tales, myths, ghost stories, adventure tales, humorous tales, songs and participation stories from different regions of the United States as well as from China, Japan, England, Indonesia, Haiti, Ireland, Austria, Scotland and other countries around the world.

As a result of spending her childhood summers in the Missouri Ozarks, she has developed an interest in traditional stories from that region. Horner's lively, traditional style often incorporates music to create a dynamic performance.

Bluegrass That Ranks Right Up 'Ere

Old-time hillbilly bands were notorious for wacky monikers, a standard born by rock bands as well. So, what about central Missouri's own Rank Sinatras? If you can hear old Blue Eyes singing, "My kind of town... Hazard is..." then you have an idea where these four alpha-pickers from Boone County, Mo., are coming from. **Mike Dulak** on guitar and fiddle, guitarist **Claud Crum**, mandolinist **Joe Hinkebein** and **Forrest Rose** on the doghouse bass are "esoteric crazy, from hillbilly to swing." Bluegrass is such a well-defined style that it can embrace songs from disparate styles. Two of its cousins growing up in the 20th Century were jazz and swing. The "World's Oldest Boy Band" mines deep and varied musical lodes from Blind Blake and Bill Monroe to Bob Wills and Guy Lombardo. But don't let the band's motto -- "If it ain't rank, it ain't right"—fool you. Pulling these things off takes astute playing and arranging. Their high-gear bluegrass picking and harmony vocals make clever, entertaining music.

The band's approach has been more trying on Claud, one of Missouri's best flattop players. A young Claud disdained his family's hillbilly music, preferring rock n' roll and later jazz. Bluegrass bit him the last decade. He joins up with some of the best pickers in the neighborhood, and they're the Rank Sinatras.

"I was totally ate up with bluegrass music and never wanted to play anything else again," he says. "This band is not a bluegrass band at all. They took me into this kicking and screaming, but I have to admit, it works. This is one of the better bands I've played in, and I'm enjoying it - well, most of it."

German Male Chorus Returns

Folks in the town of Cole Camp, southwest of us, have kept alive a Low German dialect spoken there since the town began. In 1989, a German club was formed, and a group of men got together to sing German Christmas carols for the holidays. The fun

they had prompted Neil Heimsoth to organize the **Maennerchor** the following year, and they sang for us in 1998, performing German folk, religious and classical songs in both four-part and two-part harmonies. A favorite piece is the "Hunters Chorus" from Weber's opera "Der Freischuetz." The group, usually 15 to 18 men, has since become regulars at the Kansas City Oktoberfest and last December gave a German Christmas program at Precious Moments Chapel in Carthage.

The group belongs to the *Nord-Amerikanischer Saengerbund*, a national organization of 2,500 members formed in 1848. The Maennerchor has a sister group, the Damenchor, and they recruit young singers from local high school choirs and sponsor a college scholarship.

Missouri Folk Arts Program

The Missouri Folk Arts Program will feature two styles of music with deep historical roots in Missouri and the South. Van Colbert is an Ozarks claw hammer style banjo player from Willow Springs who will perform with members of his family and his apprentice. Stephen Miller, from Paris, Mo., will bring the sounds of the Southern Gospel quartet with his group Praises to Him. His apprentice will join the group for this performance.

Missouri traditional crafters will include Alan McMichael who makes northern plains tribal breastplates and has two apprentices; and Mexican-American airbrush and tattoo artist David Morales, from the barrios of Laredo, Texas, who also paints murals and low rider cars.

Locals on the Loose

Cathy Barton, Dave Para, and Bob Dyer, festival organizers and popular Missouri minstrels, are glad to have a gig they can walk to. They spent a good part of last year working with **Paul & Win Grace** to form the Discovery String Band and produce an album and show of music relating to the Lewis and Clark expedition. They introduced some of that music at last year's festival, but their premiere concert in Columbia last November was quite a success. The American Library Association has named their album, "Most Perfect Harmony" a Notable recording for children for 2004. These "Meriwether pranksters" will make a festival appearance in some form or fashion and hope to perform at a number of events along the river during the bicentennial celebration.

**"Lewis & Clark's Missouri"
Traveling Exhibit at Hain House**

Missouri had its own unknowns when Meriwether Lewis and William Clark traveled through it 200 years ago. Abundant in flora and fauna, it also contained a complex and diverse gallery of people. The explorers' observations during their journey and the choices they made afterward had sweeping consequences for the future of our state and nation. The human geography through which the Corps of Discovery passed, as well as the post-expedition impact of Lewis and Clark on the state's development, is the subject of this exhibition by the State Museum on display at the historic Hain House throughout the month of April. The 500-square foot exhibit, developed by the Missouri Historical Society, will feature high-quality color photographs of artifacts, documents, artwork and interpretive text.

Tentative Festival Schedule

Our **Friday evening concert** will include Cathy Barton, Dave Para and Bob Dyer; the Ill-Mo Boys;

the Rank Sinatras; the Boyers and Beth Horner. Lisa Harris will call the dance at Turner Hall.

Workshop topics for Saturday include guitar; fiddle; swing; kids' stories; family traditions; band arranging; and songs of place, food, drink, love and lust.

Saturday evening will feature Bill Staines; Steve Cheseborough; the Maennerchor; Cooper, Nelson and Early; and Barton, Para and Dyer.

NEWS FLASH!

Berrymans Concert at Turner Hall March 7

Peter and Lou Berryman, Big Muddy veterans and writers of some of the funniest songs ever heard, are traveling through the area soon and will perform at Turner Hall for a Sunday concert at 7 p.m., March 7. Tickets are \$10. Call the hall, 660-882-3300 for info.

Friends of Historic Boonville

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