

# Big Muddy

# Folk Festival **SOUNDINGS** April 5-6 2024

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## ***A Promise of Celebration in the Spring***

Writing this newsletter sometime during the 12 days of Christmas (I'm a twelver) reminds me of the promise of winter. The naked trees and brush of the bleak landscape echo the cold in the icy winds; the river is low and uninviting; and all give way to the darkness of short days and long nights. The winter solstice, however, marks the rebirth of light as days start to regain length, a cause for communal celebration for 4,000 years. Together we laugh, sing, dance and endure to start the year over again. We can play in the snow.

High above the shallow, ice-bound river, Thespian Hall is also a symbol of promise. Built to encourage and present the artistic talents of members of the community, it was the light of entertainment for the town in the mid-nineteenth century, a place for folks to come together and sing, dance and endure.

The sun will not yet have set when folks come to our 32<sup>nd</sup> Big Muddy Folk Festival as it happens not too long after the vernal equinox and Spring sings her songs to the landscape. Patrons will enter the hall to a bright celebration of music and the cultural expressions associated with it. We look forward to a variety of musical styles played by artists new to the festival as well as some friends returning to fill the hall with sound.

### **Mariachi At Last**

We have been wanting to have a mariachi band at the Big Muddy for several years and have asked at restaurants, folk organizations, and contacts in our larger cities with Hispanic communities hoping for a possibility in the state. These bands typically play a regional Mexican music called ranchera, dating back at least to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has evolved greatly through migrations to Western Mexico. Back in the 1990s at a restaurant in Albuquerque we were treated to a full eight-piece band with violins, trumpet, guitarron, vihuela, and three-part harmonies. We were hooked on the full and rich sound from an ensemble of that size, the passion in the singing and harmonies from both instruments and voices. You go to hear Mariachi because you love it and you can love it instantly.

**Mariachi Flor de Missouri** is based in Springfield, but other members from elsewhere in the state can join depending on the size of the band you book. We ordered the plate special. The group also specializes in educating their audiences, so we are looking

forward to a workshop or two in song and dance in this vibrant musical and cultural tradition,

### **The Notoriety Returns**

It was in 2013 when **Notorious** played the Big Muddy and wowed an audience who thought they knew what to expect when a fiddler and guitar player walked on stage. What they got was an amazing show of technical genius, dynamic vocal and compositional music extending from American to world music with true passion for the cultural traditions presented.

Since then, **Eden MacAdam-Somer**, playing violin since she was four, has become renowned as a composer, performer, and improviser and a featured soloist. She plays with symphony and chamber orchestras, jazz and swing bands, and Romanian, Jewish, and American folk ensembles. She currently teaches full-time at New England Conservatory and serves as co-chair of its contemporary musical arts department.

Leading the list of the groups Eden plays with is the duet and sometimes larger band with **Larry Unger**, a top tier guitarist in the dance band world. Find him at contra dances, Scottish and English country dances, waltz events, dance weekends, dance and music camps and festivals. He has traveled the world playing guitar, banjo, and bass with many top bands for contra dances, and several of his more than 5,000 original tunes are favored by bands all over. Larry's pieces and recordings have been featured in Ken Burns' films. Mike Snider played his tune "Door County #2" on the "Grand Ole Opry," and "That Schoenberg Rag" was performed by the San Luis Obispo Symphony Orchestra. Like Eden, Larry has a broad understanding of traditional music, and he enjoys recounting the origins of his music and its sources. He spent many hours playing blues with Etta Baker, John Jackson, Turner Foddrell, Ted Bogan, and other masters of the style. He teaches guitar and old-time banjo at the Music Emporium in Lexington, Mass.

## Real Blues in Two

In Kansas City, the blues and barbecue have kept company forever, and a visit to BB's Lawnside Barbecue might get you a set from **Hudspeth and Taylor**, stalwarts of the Kansas City scene along with your ribs.

As a kid taking in children's educational television, **Brandon Hudspeth** saw Johnny Cash on "Sesame Street" and started taking guitar lessons in Muskogee, Okla. In high school he played the blues in clubs in the area -- Tulsa, Norman, Stillwater -- and then moved to Kansas City and soon met up with **Jaissón** (pronounced Hy-sōn) **Taylor**, a singer and percussionist who has traveled the world playing, producing, and managing tours. Jaissón worked for the Defense Department entertainment division, playing music to American troops and NATO allies throughout his career. Both have appeared with long lists of folks like Albert Lee, the Staple Singers, Al Green, Tina Turner, Leon Russell, Buddy Guy in locales far flung from Missouri, but they come back to Kansas City to hunker down and cook up some real blues

music. They like to record live in the studio to keep the musical conversation real.

## Musical Storm Front Blows in From Wales

**Gareth Pearson** is called "The Welsh Tornado" by guitar legend Tommy Emmanuel, appropriately since he quickly blew onto the guitar map. Inspired by classic country guitarists Chet Atkins, Merle Travis, Jerry Reed, and Tommy, he creates fingerstyle pyrotechnics and brilliant leads for his innovative arrangements to make an entertaining show.

Evidence of an innate talent, it was within a year of taking up the guitar that Gareth was opening for Tommy on his 2005 UK tour. In Cardiff, in Pearson's native Wales, Tommy invited Gareth to play at the Chet Atkins Appreciation Society convention in Nashville. He makes his home there now. Gareth's debut album "Urban Echoes Vol 1" was selected by Acoustic Guitar editors and frequent contributors as one of the "Essential Acoustic Albums of 2010".

## Bluegrass Distilled

Their band name refers to having gotten their start with a weekly gig in a distillery in Durango, Colo., but music by the **Stillhouse Junkies** isn't some ordinary swill. The trio formed in 2017 after **Fred Kosak** moved from Boston to some place where there were mountains and a friend in Durango who thought he should check it out. He brought his guitar, mandolin, and an ear for writing and found two others who also were looking for the right musical path. Bassist **Cody Tinnin**, who comes from a musical family and played trombone for his high school jazz band, had travelled back and forth between Arizona and southwest Colorado, between the musical world and the real world and landed in the scenic tourist town. Fiddler **Alissa Wolf** is a Durango native but she has journeyed long from classical training in her youth, to Celtic music and the ear training it requires, to improvising in a progressive string band.

Bluegrass music in the American West tends to feature the vocal and instrumental styles you would expect, but the inspiration can come from swing, rock, jazz and old-time, as well as classic standards. Original music figures more prominently, too, and that drives this trio. A newcomer to the mountains, Kosak draws inspiration from the landscape and its history for some of his songs.

The group's creative chemistry results in very tight and musical arrangements with the space to play off of each other in a jam. The band received the Momentum Award in 2021 from the International Bluegrass Music Association, and we are happy to have them roll our way.

## ***Cookies or Firecrackers, They Can Have Some Fun***

Listening to the "Crazy for Christmas" album by Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks is appropriate background for writing about the **Ladyfingers and a Thing'r, Too** band from Albuquerque. They are good friends and having a good time. You wouldn't think that a band that sounds this good doesn't take themselves too seriously but try asking them a serious question and you have set yourself up for some laughs. They inhabit a community where potluck-and-jam is the go-to gathering – food, fun, friends, and music. What more could you want?

The band's repertoire has evolved over the years with changing band members and included Celtic songs and bluegrass. They have a penchant now for the swingy side of things with inventive renditions of American Songbook standards, old-time songs, the Beatles. Three of the original band members are **Gretchen Newman** plays guitar with **Pat Aruffo** on fiddle and **Erika Gerety** playing bass. Gretchen's husband, **Steve Yessner** has joined this most recent rendition of the band as their opposable thumb playing harmonica and flute. He is also a dedicated ukulele player. We were treated back in 2019 to an iteration of the band, the Hot Pink Ladies, when Erika and Pat pulled a group together at

the last minute to fill in for Phyllis Dale. They were a hoot.

## **Ellie Grace Home Again**

It was very special to have **Ellie Grace** with us last year as co-emcee and performer, and we are happy for her return this year. She sort of grew up around this festival and having her with us is like a family celebration.

Ellie has been directing a community chorus in her hometown of Kansas City and continues to teach music and dance. And raising a two-year old can fill out the rest of any day. Ellie got to know and work with Eden Macadam-Somer while she studied for her Master of Fine Arts in dance and choreography at Smith College. I think the two are scheming to collaborate this year.

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

## **Thanks to the Friendly Rats**

The Turner Hall River Rats for the Arts started years ago to promote and present arts in the general Boonville community, including plays, art shows, music and the annual favorite "Love Notes" show. Last year the group reached out to sponsor visits to Boonville school music classes by Big Muddy artists Artemisia and Cedric Watson. Teachers and students alike appreciated the chance for a closer encounter with professional musicians. We plan on repeating that this year, thanks to festival committee member **Lesley Oswald** for making it happen.

## **Welcome Rayce Kendrick**

We're happy to be able to work with **Rayce Kendrick**, the new executive director at the Friends of Historic Boonville. He started work early in December just in time for a festival committee meeting. I believe he is the first musician to serve as Friends director, in an organization that has always been about both historic preservation and

community arts. Also encouraging is Rayce's experience in marketing, and more importantly, his real desire to see historic Thespian Hall in greater use. That's one reason we started the Big Muddy Folk Festival 33 years ago.

### **Skeletal Festival Schedule**

**Friday evening's concert** will feature Notorious, Hudspeth and Taylor, Ladyfingers and a Thing 'r Too, and Ellie Grace.

**Saturday sessions** at Presbyterian and Christ Episcopal churches and Thespian Hall in the morning and afternoon in song writing, a dance, group singing and a variety of instruments from great players. **The evening concert** will feature the Stillhouse Junkies, Gareth Pearson, Mariachi Flor de Missouri, and Dave Para.

### **Barbecue, Of Course**

Always a favorite at the festival, **Terry Smith** again will grace us and tempt us with smoky and tangy pleasures from his great smokers. The Big Muddy Barbecue is sponsored and operated by the Friends of Historic Boonville board of directors and is the organization's major fund raiser. Plates, sandwiches, and take-home packs will be available.

### *Friends of Historic Boonville*

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**Festival Tickets** go on sale Jan. 30, 2024. and are **\$35** per night or **\$60** for both nights. Children under 18 free accompanied by an adult, Students 18-22 \$25  
To purchase online, visit [www.friendsofhistoricboonvillemo.org](http://www.friendsofhistoricboonvillemo.org)  
Or call our friendly office at 888-588-1477 or 660-882-7977

### *In Memoriam*

**Paul Fotsch** died in his sleep last July at the age of 74 to the shock of us all since he was the image of good health and had played for the farmers' market the previous day like always. Paul had graced the festival over the years with his Grace family band, the Discovery String Band and as a solo. Whether or not performing on stage he was a friendly fixture and festival stalwart. It will be hard not to see and hear him with us. And we're going to have to tell all those corny jokes ourselves.

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