

Big Muddy

Folk Festival **SOUNDINGS** April 4-5, 2025

Sitting Out Winter, Thinking Spring

Winter is a time to hunker down. With daylight short and the cold winds blowing down the river valley life outside is less enticing. While there is always an occasional spate of time to squeeze some outdoor activity, even a little digging in the garden, times of real winter weather are another matter. A little ice layer with a blanket of snow keeps the landscape white and covered. It's a time to question going anywhere. Not much floating with the ice flows in the shallow river. It's a time to quiet down, slow down and let the sun and warmer air work outside. It's time to plan for warmer days and the energy they bring.

Up on Main Street with patches of snow trying to melt around its brick walkway, Boonville's iconic Thespian Hall had a few bad-weather no-shows this winter, but it will come alive for the 33rd Big Muddy Folk Festival. Our event presenting folk music in its broadest term, has a history of its own by now and contributes to the 168-year old hall's presence. Built to encourage and present the artistic talents of the Boonville community, it was the light of inspiration for the town in the mid-nineteenth century, a place for folks to come together and sing, dance and endure.

We look forward to presenting fine masters of their cultural traditions and folks ready to take their art to new places and new audiences. The hall so encourages a warm rapport between these artists and the audience; just add some barbecue, and the party is on.

The Badass Maestro And His Daughter

Dirk and Amelia Powell bring a legacy of traditional American music to our festival. Dirk grew up learning Appalachian fiddle and banjo largely from his grandfather in Kentucky. He toured with – or as - Joan Baez' band for 10 years, and currently with Rhiannan Giddens. You may have been lucky enough to see him on late night or morning TV. Steve Earle calls him badass to the bone, and he and Eric Clapton call him maestro. His deep knowledge and respect for American roots music is well articulated in his biographical essay at his website.

After moving to Louisiana Dirk toured extensively with Balfa Toujours and married Christine Balfa. His father-in law Dewey was a legendary ambassador of Cajun music, one of the celebrated Balfa Brothers. His daughter, Amelia, learned the driving guitar back-up so important to the traditional Cajun style from her mother as well as a strong,

soulful singing style, and she shares her father's passion for the tradition. Both father and daughter write songs, and their performance offers a dynamic variety of music.

Hey, Cowboys on a Trail

We were very fortunate to have **3 Trails West** with us in 2022 when one of our acts cancelled the Tuesday before the festival because of Covid. (That scenario remains one of my anxiety dreams, so I guess I was living the dream.) Their music was big and tight; they were well rehearsed for two other gigs that week, unlike some other groups whom the pandemic had quieted. Some of our longtime patrons recognized the Eilts Brothers and fiddler Marvin Gruenbaum from the group **Spontaneous Combustion** when they played in 2005 behind their fire-extinguisher mic stands. They brought the same excellent and expert musicianship they had 17 years before bringing it to bare on their Cowtown heritage.

This band is like a vocal group and an instrumental group, the kind you might hear in a cowboy movie of years past – truly Americana. Their precise, four-part harmonies have tracked every interval like a barbershop quartet overlay a swing style orchestra of accordion, fiddle and steel guitar to keep things lively. And lest you think they're not having a good time; their rapport includes enough jokes to do a set of their own.

Dulcimer Explorer

When he played for us in 2013 **Bing Futch** put out a lot of sound with his mountain dulcimer, and his energetic performance made for a memorable show. He still likes to begin a set with the Native American flute as a nod to his Seminole heritage and hopes for a happier world, and more recently his sonic palate includes the ukulele and a looper pedal for his dulcimer. A few years after playing here he won an international blues challenge and prompted critics' comparisons to Jimi Hendrix and Taj Mahal for using the blues as a musical foundation.

Bing first performed with the dulcimer at Knot's Berry Farm and then moved to central Florida to pursue production work. His music has been featured in numerous productions, and his theatrical work has included serving as the composer and musical director for *The Jungle Book: A Musical Adaptation* at Stage Left Theater in Orlando. He also contributed music to the soundtrack of The Castle of Miracles attraction at Give Kids the World Village in Kissimmee, Florida and his YouTube video series "Dulcimerica" has been viewed by millions of people worldwide and is currently in its 17th year.

Bluegrass Banjo Legend

Alan Munde returns to Thespian Hall where he played with the Country Gazette in the 1980s or 90s. I was struck then at how effortlessly Alan could play anything on the banjo. His bands are often called legends in bluegrass: Poor Richard's Almanac in the 60s, the Flying Burrito Brothers in the 70s, with

Jimmy Martin. In a career of almost 60 years, he is one of the most highly respected and best-loved banjo players in the world. Alan pioneered the melodic bluegrass banjo style, which enables playing more complete melodies than does the patterned rolls of the traditional Scruggs's style. Long admired for his creative mastery of adapting fiddle tunes to the banjo, Alan's lyrical playing reaches through a wide repertoire of standard bluegrass and Texas swing to gospel, jazz and original compositions.

He taught full-time in the bluegrass and country music program at South Plains College in Levelland, Texas, for 20 years. He is a member of the American Banjo Hall of Fame and a 2021 winner of the Steve Martin Banjo Prize.

Elliot and Janice Rogers, who sang and played so well here in 2023, often accompany Alan and will join him for a full and fun show.

Rare Old-Time Fiddle Music

Old-time fiddle musicians are always on the lookout for unusual old tunes or versions of them, and **Tricia Spencer** and **Howard Rains** have supplied a plethora of "new" old tunes. The couple are both fiddlers, guitar players and singers who preserve and build upon the traditions of their home states of Texas and Kansas. Their playing is marked by close and resonant harmony in both their twin fiddling and singing and the connection to their family traditions that they are dedicated to preserving. Tricia was raised in a family of farmers and old-time musicians in Big Springs, Kan., where her grandfather Vernon Spencer first taught her to fiddle. She is well known for her teaching workshops. Howard is recognized as an authority on an old, seldom-heard Texas fiddling style. He grew up in Sherman, Texas, in a family who valued singing songs and playing instruments as an important part of everyday life. The couple has also started playing with their children Orion, Isaiah, and Ru as the band The Lost Keys. Howard says they are honored greatly that their kids want to play music with them.

The couple also are both interesting visual artists, Howard in watercolor and Tricia in pen and ink, and music inspires their artwork. Their six album covers feature it; “The Skeleton Keys” CD included a 40-page book of notes and color illustrations for each of the 17 tracks. Tricia recently launched a website celebrating the beauty of the fiddle and the art of fiddling and has published a book, *The Fiddle Garden*.

Hitting the Country Road

The root sounds and themes of country music still echo their traditional origins, and with some of the more astute performers the differences are well blurred. **Todd Day Wait** is a Missouri native with an easy-going, good, humored nature that pervades his own style of timeless country music in which you can hear strains of the seminal Jimmie Rodgers, Willie Nelson, Wynn Stewart and Kris Kristofferson, the country sounds echoing a closer-to-folk tradition.

In 2009, he put all his earthly belongings on the curb and hit the road in his diesel shuttle bus fueled by vegetable oil for an open-ended tour. He busked on the streets of New Orleans for almost a decade and headed to Nashville in 2019. Other travels had him playing in the shadow of European castles with his band and keeping the late-night honkytonk dance floors filled with two-stepping.

Never Pass Them Up

When the New England style of square-dancing spread eastward in the U.S., hitting Missouri in the mid-1970s, it gave fiddle and old-time string band players new and regular ways to play publicly, and the music grew and developed. **Cheap Shots** has been together since 2004 playing mostly for contra dances in New Mexico. The band enjoys playing New England and Southern style tunes drawing from and contributing to the open and eclectic range of expressions that contra dance music has become. This energetic six-member acoustic band plays tunes from

several folk styles. Currently the band consists of **Pat Aruffo**, fiddle **John Brinduse**, keyboard, guitar and percussion; **Bill Balassi**, guitar and mandolin; **Peter Esherick**, hammered dulcimer and mandolin; **Erika Gerety**, bass, mandolin, and vocals and **Dave Para**, guitar, banjo, gourd banjo, vocals, leaf, artificial teeth and anything else he finds at the flea market.

The band has been together for longer than any of them can remember. Many of them are also contra dancers, so they incorporate the cheap tricks that make dancing look and feel especially enjoyable. Their latest cheap trick was to add Dave Para to the mix and get him to marry the bass player.

Ellie Grace Family Time

We’re happy to have **Ellie Grace** with us again this year to help Dave Para as co-emcee and to do an engaging and heartfelt mix of original songs, dance and tunes. She can get a lot done all by herself on stage, but she enjoys collaborating with other players, too. She and her family are part of the festival’s heritage

Ellie directs the Fountain City Folk Chorus in her Kansas City hometown and also teaches music and dance. Music has been part of her everyday life since she was in vitro, and her performance is real and true.

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

Barbecue, Of Course

Always a favorite at the festival, **Terry Smith** and the Big Muddy Barbecue will be serving at Turner Hall with smokers drawing folks from blocks away. The 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.

Dance Saturday Afternoon

We have long included a contra dance as our activities, but found over the years that starting it Friday evening after the concert ended was too late. The past few years it has successfully moved to Saturday afternoon at Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall. Music is done by open band for other performers and participants, and this year Kaw Creek – Alice Boyle and Robert Rosenberg – will lead the band.

Festival Tickets go on sale Feb.3, 2025. and are **\$35** per night or **\$60** for both nights. Youth price is **\$10**, available by calling the office.

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

Tentative Festival Schedule

Friday evening's concert will feature Ellie Grace, Spencer and Rains and the Lost Keys, Todd Day Wait, and Alan Munde Trio.

Saturday sessions will be held at Presbyterian and Christ Episcopal churches and Thespian Hall in the morning and afternoon, and will feature workshops in banjo, fiddle, dulcimer, ukulele, songs and other topics still to be determined, including a dance. Passes for the workshop sessions are free to festival series ticket holders but can also be purchased for \$10. **The evening concert** will feature Dirk and Amelia Powell, 3 Trails West, Bing Futch and Cheap Shots.

In Memoriam

Linda Askren's name has been on every Big Muddy program as a member of our committee since the festival began. She and her husband, Ken, have been a great part of our festival's success. It's impossible to say how such dedicated and consistent volunteer help is, and there are plenty of other organizations in our community that know the same about her. Linda passed away in October, and our hearts are with Ken and their daughters, Jennie and Elizabeth.

Friends of Historic Boonville

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