



SOUNDINGS

34th Festival Will Ring in the Spring

Winter seems to wait until after December to start. The holiday energies of November and December hurl us to year's end before we get the time to hunker down. The weather, too, these days has a way of jerking temperatures up and down offering an unexpected chance to catch up outdoors rather than sit by the fireplace and write a newsletter.

Standing proud and pretty with new paint on Main Street, Thespian Hall speaks to the fine year the Friends of Historic Boonville had in 2025, with a spectacular 50th anniversary celebration of the Missouri River Festival of the Arts standing out. The Friends endeavor to make the 169-year-old hall a living part of the fabric of the Boonville community, and this in face of the vagaries of public funding. We started the Big Muddy Folk Festival with this mission in mind and to bring folks together to hear masterful players of a wide variety of folk cultures and traditions, to come together to sing, dance and play. We're excited to bring back some old friends and new faces, great players all.

Who Is Playing

Watson and Hinkebein

The Creek Rocks

Catfish Keith

Rachel Sumner & Traveling Light

Ellie Grace and Dave Para

Tim May and Steve Smith

Timothy Hill

Hot Club of Cowtown

Bringing in the Swing

Congratulations to the **Hot Club of Cowtown** for its induction in the International Western Music Association Hall of Fame in November in recognition for their musical contribution and influence on Americana culture. It's amazing what can happen with a phone call, which is how singer and guitarist Whit



Smith answered an ad that fiddler Elana James placed in the classified music section of *The Village Voice* in 1994 wanting to join a band. Their chosen band name invokes the legendary Django Reinhardt, Stephane Grappelli, Bob Wills and Leon McAuliffe – all worldwide musical heroes – and is quite an aspiration, but these folks have the technical skills and the imagination to bring these two regional idioms together. They really are the best at it and play with the joy needed to bring it home to audiences worldwide. Elana and White expanded the band for a while early on but prefer the intimate conversations a trio induces in this jazz form. Beau Sample plays

upright bass for the low end.

Last summer they released a collection of eclectic standards, cowboy tunes, hot jazz, a Roma folk song and a waltz for Lupa! "Limelight" highlights the band's inspirations from both sides of the Atlantic, including songs by Jimmie Rodgers, Marty Robbins, Joe Venuti, Bob Wills, Django Reinhardt and points in between.

Catfish Is On the Line

We hosted **Catfish Keith** at our festival in 2001, and he stood out as a solo in an already impressive lineup, if I do say so myself. Keith plays country blues with acoustic guitar and resophonic – you know, the cool metal guitars with the things that look like hubcaps in the body. At the time, he was already a 20-year veteran in the style, and his singing and ever-present foot stomp cut a groove for him that took us all in. He is one of the most engaging guitarists to play for us.

He still travels the U.S. and the world and dives deep into the lives and music of the players of the style, both famous and obscure. He also reaches deep into his own heart and soul to create an exciting dialogue of voice and guitar. His slide work is a joy to hear. The tension of the strings with the pleading wail is both touching and eerie. The result is a singularly expressive performance that seems to hold him and us in a trance.



Serious Songwriting in Bluegrass Clothing



Rachel Sumner and her trio, **Traveling Light** use the musical canvas of the bluegrass style to find their own voice and expression. Other bands have done this to produce high quality acoustic backdrops to their songs. At the center is Sumner's songwriting rooted in history, myth, and personal reckoning and carried by close harmonies, upright bass, acoustic guitar, and fiddle. Unlike the roar of a full-blown five-piece band, their sound is spare and intimate, sometimes eerie, sometimes sweet. Rachel writes about saints, scientists, and stubborn women.

The Boston-based band is on the move touring coast to coast. We are fortunate to accommodate them on their trip to Missouri, Kansas and beyond. They performed at the Library of Congress, and Rachel won a New Folk competition at Kerrville in 2024 as well as the band competition at Telluride last year. Her song "Radium Girls (Curie Eleison)" struck a nerve recently and was streamed more than 300,000 times. They recorded their newest album, "Heartless Things," live around one microphone with no overdubs. Just the way they play it.

Two Terrific Pickers Update Classic Style

The mandolin and guitar found their way into American homes through early 20th century catalogue sales and then helped shape the emerging sound of bluegrass and early country music. The Monroe Brothers, the Blue Sky Boys and the Louvin Brothers are classic examples. More recently, David Grisman celebrated this wonderful sound in albums with Tony Rice, Martin Taylor, and others. **Tim May** and **Steve Smith** honor and advance this tradition.

The duo brings their listeners original and traditional tunes that draw from the expected American old time and bluegrass, but the two instruments have repertoires in Latin, swing, jazz, and classical genres. Don't forget Jethro Burns here. May (guitar/mandolin) and Smith (mandolin/octave mandolin) get along well together and

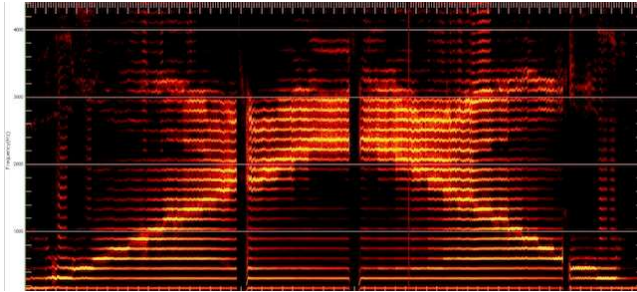


keep each other entertained as well as the rest of us with pretty dazzling technique, nuanced improvisation and the fun of singing together.

May and Smith met in 2012 while on staff at Camp Bluegrass in Levelland, Texas and have since continued an enduring partnership with five albums and performances across the country. Their latest instrumental album, *The Hillsboro Hay Incident*, uniquely captures their dynamic musical force.

The two are based in the Nashville area, where they work hard. Both are also sought-after instructors for music camps, workshops, and private lessons.

Transcending Genres on a Musical Journey



Sonogram of first 16 harmonics sung by Timothy Hill

records Paddy had given his parents. An earliest of memories is singing the “Rambler Gambler” from Lomax's “Texas Folk Songs.”

As a teenager in Oregon, he fronted a rock band emulating musicians like Captain Beafheart. He started learning piano and jazz and studied classical music and was introduced to Tibetan chant. He formed the Glass Orchestra which performed original music on instruments made entirely of glass (inspired by the Javanese gamelan and the first recordings of humpback whales) and played with avant-guard composer John Cage. He mastered and performed the art of harmonic singing with David Hykes and the Harmonic Choir around the world.

This is but a partial list of the paths in a broad and dedicated journey, which you might not discern from the thoughtful and musical songs that Tim writes. Sometimes there's a lot more behind a guy with a guitar – and a piano --than you would expect.

Singer/composer **Timothy Hill** brings a lifetime's musical journey to his show. He reaches out to his audience with a clear and warm voice as he unfolds the myriad of the influences his music has taken him to folk, jazz, world music, contemporary classical and improvisation.

Timothy was raised by actor parents who were friends with Paddy Clancy of the Clancy Brothers when he was acting in New York. Clancy had started the Tradition record label, which introduced Odetta and Alan Lomax, as well as his brothers, and Timothy grew up listening to the stack of



Resonating in the Ozarks

Cindy Woolf and **Mark Bilyeu** return with their banjo and guitar as the **Creek Rocks**. The duo from Springfield appeared at our festival in 2017 and rendered some fine Ozark traditional and original songs. Mark, who started and played with the vibrant family band Big Smith for 16 years, first collaborated with Cindy on projects of her original songs.

They caught up with us just after their debut album together, “Wolf Hunter,” which mined the field work of two important collectors in the region: Max Hunter, who emceed the first Big Muddy, and John Quincy Wolf of Batesville, Ark., Cindy's hometown. To songs hundreds of years old they bring the sounds of their musical generation.

It is fitting that the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress awarded them as the first recipients of its Artist in Resonance Fellowship in 2024, which is a program that supports artists creating new musical works inspired by and sourced from collection material in the Center's archives. Their new research studies the earliest songs collected by Sidney Robertson Cowell in 1936 and 1937 in the Ozarks for the New Deal's Resettlement Administration. Cowell is a relatively unsung hero in social efforts that helped shape the American folk revival.



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

Ellie Grace and her Fellow Emcee

Her new daughter, Juniper, smiled for the first time in December, so you can tell where **Ellie Grace's** head has been for a while. She still happily directs the Fountain City Folk Chorus in Kansas City, and you can come sing with her on Sunday afternoons this winter.

Ellie has co-emceed the festival with **Dave Para** the past few years and appeared with her sister, Leela, and the Grace family many times. Each time she has favored us with spirited dancing, playing and singing from the heart both her own finely written songs and old songs that still speak to her and to us. She has offered workshops to get people to sing and dance together. Like Pete Seeger used to say about his Carnegie Hall concerts: He didn't come all that way to hear *himself* sing. This year, at the request of the Big Muddy committee, Ellie and Dave will share an opening set. Dave – that would be me --looks forward to collaborating with a dear friend he has known all her life. They have plenty of music Ellie has heard over the years in the Mid-Missouri folk community.



Local Duo Gets It Together



Two veterans of the Columbia roots scene, **Joe Hinkebein** and **Robert Watson** recently have teamed up to sing and play unique instrumental arrangements of bluegrass, old-time and folk songs on fiddle, mandolin, guitar, and clawhammer banjo.

Joe is a multi-instrumentalist fixture of the midwestern music scene playing with some of the area's best acoustic musicians since the 1980s. Joe appeared at the Big Muddy in 2004 with the iconic Rank Sinatras band who featured a distinctive take on the high and lonesome sound and an affection for country duet singing.

Robert fronts the River Ghost Revue whose performances have featured tributes and occasional covers

of entire albums of classic bands. He put together a "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" show back in 2024, and Joe was one of local musicians participating. Most recently they celebrated the 25th anniversary of "O Brother, Where Art Thou."

The two had some mutual musician friends and had played a few sporadic shows together over the years. A couple of summers ago, Joe caught one of Robert's solo shows at Cooper's Landing including a song he favored but didn't expect to hear and suggested that they get together and play some tunes. You know how that goes.

Joe and Robert have been doing some heavy listening of the songs of artists like Norman Blake, the Louvin Brothers, Tommy Jarrell, the Carter Family, and contemporary players like Bruce Molsky and Robbie Fulks to inform their repertoire.

No Ticket Price Increase This Year

Festival Tickets go on sale Feb.9, 2026. 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 or 660-882-7977