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# Mad Folk NEWS

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Newsletter of the Madison Folk Music Society

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## First up for 2005: Bryan Bowers on January 7

For nearly three decades, Bryan Bowers has been to the autoharp what Earl Scruggs was to the five-string banjo.

He presents instrumental virtuosity combined with warmth, eloquence, expression and professionalism. His creativity and talent have won him induction into *Frets Magazine's* First Gallery of the Greats after five years of winning the stringed-instrument open category of the magazine's readers' poll. This distinction put Bowers alongside other luminaries such as Chet Atkins, David Grisman, Stephan Grappelli, and Itzhak Perlman, recognized for their personal accomplishments. In 1993, Bryan was inducted into the Autoharp Hall of Fame to stand only with Maybelle Carter, Kilby Snow, and Sara Carter.

Born and raised in Virginia, his rural roots fostered an early appreciation for music as well as storytelling. Bryan would tag along with field workers and gandy dancers and learned to sing old call-and-answer songs.

"I thought that music was something that everyone did. It was years later that I realized what I'd been raised around," he recalls. His next pivotal musical experiences occurred upon listening to Ravi Shankar, Robert

Johnson, and Lord Buckley recordings in the '60s. It was then that Bryan took up the guitar, but it wasn't long before he encountered the autoharp. "I ran into a guy that played several instruments and could get the harp in good tune. It opened my eyes and my ears. I went out and got one the next day."

That chance beginning has resulted in a revolution in the use of the autoharp, as Bryan's innovations in tuning and technique have been passed to 'harp players across the country who credit him as their inspiration and guru. While traditionalists have used a simple strumming motion on the instrument, Bryan evolved a five-finger right-hand technique, whereby he keeps rhythm, melody, and harmony lines interplaying simultaneously.

Bryan says, "I developed my own style...I jerryrigged a knob on my steering wheel so that I could actually play the autoharp while getting paid for driving the mail around." Later, as a street musician and in bars, his style was further influenced as "a defense mechanism against going electric...I had three finger picks on that I'd seen Mike Seeger with, and thought, well, gee, if I could learn how to put picks on the other two fingers maybe I could get more sound and not have to get an amp."

And as if that all weren't enough, Bryan is also well known as a singer-songwriter whose powerful songs demand respect. And he has a dynamic outgoing personality and an uncanny ability to enchant a crowd in practically any situation. His tower-

ing six-foot-four-inch frame can be wild and zany on stage while playing a song like "Dixie," and five minutes later he can have the same audience singing "Will The Circle Be Unbroken" in quiet reverence and delight. He is a performer of such power that festival organizers don't hesitate to close a show by bringing Bryan up to



## Annual meeting highlights

October 30th marked the date of this year's annual meeting. All who attended were well-fed and well-entertained. After a wonderful meal provided by those who attended the potluck, we went on to a very brief annual meeting. One of the highlights of the meeting was an award given to Ramona Johannes (see photo inside) for all her years of volunteerism to the Madison Folk Music Society.

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follow a set of energetic folk rockers; in moments he will enchant the audience with an engaging and virtuoso performance.

It's been too long since Bryan Bowers played in Madison—come help us welcome him back!

This concert will be held at the Wil-Mar Center and will start at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$14 in advance and \$16 the day of show. Tickets are available in advance at Borders Bookstores East & West, Orange Tree Imports, Spruce Tree Music, B-Side Records and Steep-n-Brew on Odana Road.

# FOLK BALL set for January 14-16

Please mark your calendars for this year's unusually early dates for the FOLK BALL festival weekend—January 14-16!

All events are at the UW Memorial Union: the Friday contra with music by Duck for the Oyster, international

dance parties in Great Hall both Friday and Saturday nights, daytime folkdance workshops Saturday fea-

turing Lee Otterholt (Balkan), Steve Weintraub (Klezmer), and a variety of other guest teachers.

Look for full festival schedule and details in the January edition of *Mad Folk News!*

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<p><b>Membership Categories</b></p> <p>Student      \$10 _____</p> <p>Senior        \$8 _____</p> <p>Regular       \$12 _____</p> <p>Family        \$15 _____</p> <p>Friend         \$25 _____</p> <p>Contributing \$50 _____</p> <p>Life            \$500 _____</p> <p><b>Total        \$ _____</b></p>	<p><i>Check One</i></p> <p>I would like to help with:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Concerts</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Festival</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Housing performers</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Publicity</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Membership</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transportation</p>
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# 2004 Mad Folk Annual Meeting

(continued from front page)

The next order of business was to give a brief report to the members in attendance of what the different committees have been doing during the past year. Our final point of business was to elect the members to serve on this year's board of directors. Volunteering to return to the board were Bill Fiore, Darlene Buhler, Dede Goldberg, Norbert Wodke, and Tracy Comer. Three new members volunteered to join: Terry Corr, Meg Skinner, and Vicky Jones, who is returning to the board.

After the meeting, we were entertained with two sets of fantastic music by The Buzzards (Mike and Patty McDougal, Perry Baird). We welcomed back The Buzzards, as the trio last had played for a Mad Folk event back in October 1999 when they opened for Steve Gillette and Cindy Mangsen. The Buzzards only play a few dates each year, so it was a great opportunity for us to have them back for another Mad Folk-sponsored show.



The Buzzards play a post-annual meeting show while Ramona Johannes displays her Mad Folk recognition.



## Give the gift of local music this holiday

The ritual of holiday gift giving offers a wonderful opportunity to share the things we love with the people we love. But too often, this ritual is less one of joy than obligation, and more draining than fun.

This year, the Madison Songwriters Group (MSG) is offering the community an alternative to the holiday hub-bub. On Saturday, December 11, MSG is hosting a CD sale featuring the music of local artists and bands. The event will be similar to a craft fair, only the vendors are musicians and the crafts are CDs of their original music.

Intended to bring visibility and revenue to Madison's vibrant music scene by providing an opportunity for music fans and music seekers to connect with and support local artists, this event also promises to be a terrific community gathering. There will be free live music all day, ample listening stations to allow shoppers to sample the music of different artists, and a guaranteed flow of mutual apprecia-



tion between the artists who rely on local audiences to support their work and the fans who turn to the music for so many important reasons. The event is free, but MSG will be offering a "no-frills" gift wrapping service (using brown paper bags, twine and "I Support Local Music" buttons) to reflect the grass-roots nature of the local music scene and the intent to give local residents a non-commercial option for holiday gift giving.

A diverse and vibrant music scene is part of what makes Madison special. You need look no further than the street fairs, festivals, concerts, and other community events you've attended to recall the smiles and memories local musicians have helped bring into your life. This event is one discrete opportunity to thank these artists and to help spread the word about all they have to offer to this community. Please show your support by giving the gift of local music this holiday season.

*The Madison Songwriters Group's local music CD sale will be held on Saturday, December 11 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Madison Center for Creative and Cultural Arts (306 W. Dayton St.). This event was made possible by the generous support of WORT, Smart Studios, Rick's Café, Wardbrodt Music Mall, and CDRguy.com. For more information on this event or the Madison Songwriters Group please visit [www.madisonsongwriters.com](http://www.madisonsongwriters.com).*