
Mad Folk NEWS

Newsletter of the Madison Folk Music Society

Volume 33, No. 1 / January 2007

Autoharp innovator Bryan Bowers in Jan. 20 show

Mad Folk is proud to kick off our new year of concerts with the artistry of Bryan Bowers. A veteran of nearly 40 years as a touring musician, Bryan is an award-winning instrumentalist, riveting storyteller, acclaimed singer and songwriter, and an irrepressible ham.

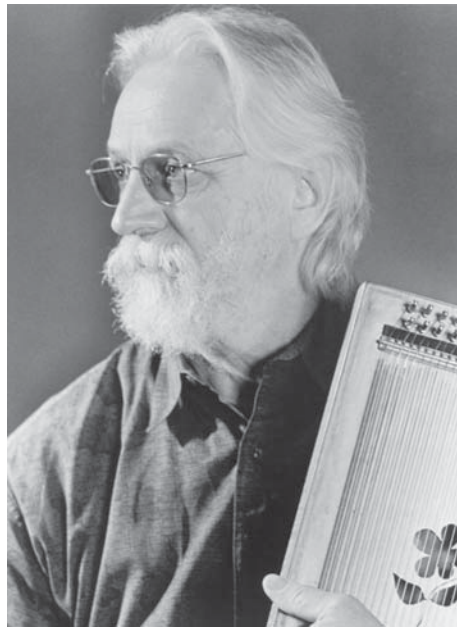
A creative and energetic performer, Bowers' towering six-foot four-inch frame can be wild and zany on stage while playing a song like "Dixie" and five minutes later he can have the same audience singing, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" in quiet reverence and delight. He is an acknowledged master of the autoharp—a multi-stringed folk instrument that was usually strummed, until Bryan invented his intricate, five-finger picking style, which allows him to simultaneously play a melody while strumming chords. He's adapted many fiddle songs and traditional folk songs to the instrument.

Additionally, Bryan's inventions of fine tuning mechanisms have become standard on many instruments being built today.

Based in the Seattle area, Bowers grew up in New Bohemia, Virginia, where he tagged along with the field workers and gandy dancers and learned to sing old call-and-answer songs. After his beginning playing for coins in the street and passing the hat in bars, Bryan took to the road where his music was introduced by the Dillards, Sam Bush, Curtis Burch, and Courtney Johnson of the New Grass Revival to bluegrass musicians whose support helped to launch his career.

Bowers' 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. In 1993, Bryan was inducted into the Autoharp Hall of Fame to stand only with Maybelle Carter, Kilby Snow, and Sara Carter.

One achievement he is particu-



Bryan Bowers

larly proud of is his hand in a 3-CD recording of autoharp music released in 2003. Co-produced by Bryan and fellow autoharp player Ron Wall,

Autoharp Legacy features 55 of the best-known performers of the autoharp from around the world. It documents the diversity of styles currently being performed today. Bryan says of it, "I would trade all [my] honors and recognitions for the pride and joy I've had in being associated with the recording, *Autoharp Legacy*." Bryan also brings with him a brand-new album, *Bristlecone Pine*, released in 2006.

But his joy is bringing fine acoustic music to diverse audiences. "I want to have a good time and I want people to have a good time, no 'woe is me' trip. I want the joy of bringing people together and communicating. If I can say it like I see it, I can bring happiness." Please join us in welcoming this fantastic performer, on January 20, 2007, at 8 p.m. at the Wil-Mar Center. Tickets are \$14 in advance and \$16 day of show and are available at Borders Bookstores East & West, Orange Tree Imports, Spruce Tree Music, B-side Records, and Steep-n-Brew on Odana Road.

For the record...

Last month, we ran a story showing a photo of a "Mad Folk 30th Birthday" cake prepared for the recent Mad Folk annual meeting. I knew at the time that something was amiss, as I had to look no further than the newsletter masthead to see that we were poised to enter Volume 33 of the publication.

I went to my newsletter archive and affirmed that the numbering was not in error. The oldest newsletter I have, from Oct. 1975, is "Vol. 2, No. 1." (The first newsletters were numbered from October of each year—a scheme that changed in late 1979 when the newsletter went to calendar-year sequence.)

A Mad Folk stalwart whose name appears in many of those early newsletters is Jeff Scott Olson, and I called him to see what he could tell me about this organization's startup.

Jeff said that he and two others—Mac Robertson, and Erica Gruen—were the organizers. He couldn't recall the year activities began, but he provided me with some early posters, including one announcing the "Madison Folk Music Society First Get-Together" on Wednesday, September 4. It was for a song-sharing session to be held at the Chrysanthemum Coffeehouse, 101 E. Mifflin St. (basement of the YWCA building). The year was not indicated, but a scan of calendars shows the only year between 1968 and 1985 with September 4 falling on a Wednesday was 1974. That tracks with the newsletter numbering.

So, tack another two years onto Mad Folk's three decades.—Perry Baird

Joe Jencks at Wil-Mar on Feb. 17

Joe Jencks, first introduced to Madison audiences through Folk on State, will give a concert for Mad Folk on Friday, February 17 at the Wil-Mar

Center at 8 p.m. He will be accompanied by guest Elisa Korenne.



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On the jacket of his latest CD, *Rise As One*, Holly Near is quoted saying, "In these times we need the singers who will do the homework and tell the story! Joe Jencks is among the fine next-generation artists who are ready to carry on the tradition as well as look into the future."

When Joe provided the music for services at the First Unitarian Society one Sunday last July, he was called back for an **en c o r e !**



His songs have the ability to move people, often celebrating the unsung heroes of our world.

Tickets for the show will be \$12 in advance, \$14 at the door. Advance tickets may be purchased at the usual outlets (see Bowers story for list).

Madison Folk Music Society

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Membership Form: **Madison Folk Music Society**
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Time to renew? Don't want to cut up your newsletter? Just be sure your name is on your check and mail it to the address shown. Enclose a note if there are changes needed to your information. Or, you can print a form from the Mad Folk web site: www.madfolk.org.

19th Annual Folk Ball Festival on January 26–28

Come, join hundreds of folk dancers, musicians, and singers at the Midwest's great gathering of the tribes, the 19th annual Folk Ball Festival weekend, January 26–28 at the Memorial Union! Renew connections with old friends and familiar dances, make new acquaintances and sample something novel, or just enjoy the outstanding music and ambiance. There's plenty for everyone: workshops, performances, and monster dance parties powered by rhapsodic musicians & inspired dancers. This unique celebration is 90-percent supported by your voluntary donations at the various events.

Centerpieces of the weekend are the legendary live music dance parties Friday (7:30–midnight) and Saturday

(7 p.m.–1 a.m.) nights in Great Hall, featuring varied dance bands each evening, plus the kickoff contra with Duck for the Oyster and caller Karen Kaufman in Tripp Commons 7:30 Friday. Bands for the Great Hall dances include Yid Vicious (klezmer), Reptile Palace Orchestra (eclectic), Izvor (ethnic), Cajun Strangers (Cajun), Orkestar Bez Ime (Int'l), Maritza (Int'l), Dave & Yuli (Balkan), and Sloboda (Int'l). Brief dance performances early Saturday evening by Yonim (Israeli), Ensemble Narodno, and others.

Saturday workshop highlights include featured dance teachers Iliana Bozhanova (Bulgarian) and Sani Rifati (Balkan Romani) as well as sessions on Transylvanian csardas, Argentine

tango, Israeli dance, and perhaps East Indian folkdance. Sani Rifati discusses the current situation of his own Romani people at a brown-bag lunch session. Iliana will join Tri Bratovchedki for a Balkan singing workshop.

Additional workshop and review sessions with Iliana and Sani are in Great Hall on Sunday afternoon. Finally, a Survivors Party (request dancing) Sunday 7:30–11 p.m. at The Crossing, 1127 University Avenue.

For more info: Michael 608-241-3655 / mk@mailbag.com . Website: <http://plantpath.wisc.edu/~tdd/folkball.html>.

Nova Scotia traditions concert and workshops scheduled

Explore the musical heritage of Nova Scotia! On February 9, guest artists Andrea Beaton, Kimberley Fraser, and Troy Mac-Gillivray will present an evening of Nova Scotia traditional music and dancing. The following day, the artists will present three workshops: Cape Breton Fiddle Techniques, Cape Breton Step Dancing, and Nova Scotia Accompanying Techniques.

The concert will be Friday, February 9 at 8 p.m. in Music Hall on the UW campus. Tickets are available at the door only—\$12/\$10 students. The

workshops will take place on Saturday, February 10 in the School of Music, 455 N. Park Street, starting at 1:30 p.m. Call Andrea Bontrager Yoder at 608/263-6670 or e-mail music@dcs.wisc.edu to register for the workshops.

In the **Cape Breton Fiddle Techniques Workshop** with Andrea Beaton (1:30–3:30 p.m.), you will learn to play some Cape Breton tunes and explore the embellishments and ornamentation that give the tunes their distinct Cape Breton sound. Enrollment fee is \$55.

Master teacher Kimberley Fraser will lead you through the energetic, percussive dances of Cape Breton in this 90-minute **Cape Breton Step Dancing Workshop**. You will learn the traditional strathspey, the reel step, and a figure to a Cape Breton square set, and to then combine these figures into a routine danced to lively Cape Breton fiddle music. Enrollment fee is \$36.

In the two-hour **Accompanying Workshop** with guest artist Troy MacGillivray (1:30–3:30 p.m.), experience the unique rhythms and patterns for accompanying fiddle tunes common to Antigonish County and to Cape Breton. We will study the work of pianists from these areas who were pioneers in this style of fiddle accompaniment. *Demonstrations are on piano, but guitarists are also welcome.* Enrollment fee is \$55.

For additional spring Celtic music classes see uwmusicclasses.org.



FOCUS ON FOLK

A Look at songwriting
with Erin O'Brien

How did you get started writing?

I decided to become a songwriter long before I even knew how to play an instrument. Shortly after college I discovered the singer-songwriter genre of music and was just blown away. I'd leave shows soothed by the music, inspired by the stories, and completely cracked open from the chance to stare at the world through someone else's honest lens. I was too young to know anything about anything, really, but I'd leave these shows with this really insistent voice in my head saying, "You could do that too, you know." So I started taking guitar lessons with the single-minded goal of someday learning to write songs too.

What's your writing process?

Like most songwriters, my process is to welcome whatever's working that day. The most important thing is carving out time and getting clear on what I'm trying to convey. Intention usually comes before words or music. I tend to write stories, so I spend a lot of time working out the characters and plot in the writing and crafting a mood through the melody. I have a few tried-and-true tools too. I keep a notebook with me all the time, I'm really picky about what kind of pen I use, and I co-write most songs with a rhyming dictionary.

'Tis the season to **RENEW**

If the mailing label on this newsletter ends with Exp. DEC 06, you need to renew your membership in Mad Folk!

As a reminder, your membership benefits include receiving this newsletter every month, a \$1 discount off the DOOR price (not advance price) of any Mad Folk event, and a coupon good for a 10% discount (up to \$15) on accessories, strings, books, and music at Spruce Tree Music. Use the form on this newsletter and take some time to renew now!