

Mad Folk News

That Burning, Sinking Feeling

By Emily Beebe

Everyone loves a disturbing tale of destruction and mayhem. Buttered popcorn is more delicious when dusty jeeps screech across the screen after a pod of cow-pocked Midwestern tornados. You can almost smell the sulfur as kayakers in scorched nylon vests race a belching pyroclastic flow across a steaming mountain lake. Who doesn't love reading about crazed grizzlies galloping through a Ponderosa forest ten pages before Seattle is hurtled like a shotput into the Pacific by the Big Cascadian Quake? Giant spider eruptions and blue-sky tsunamis have been responsible for the pulping of millions of poplars to fill magazines vamping in supermarket checkout lanes. Despite these roadside attractions, no media has the staying power for keeping a tragedy going across the generations better than the folk song.

A foot-tapping rhythm, a jaunty chorus, and a few wretched rhymes are all it takes to sear cautionary tales into the pliable psyches of children. After a school assembly about Appalachian coal mining history, third graders lie wide awake in their beds. They are not contemplating the social economics of labor unions, but thinking about what it is like to be buried alive.

In the days before society spun into the fractal wormhole of the metaverse, communities kept themselves in line with musical warnings about what could happen if you rip the tag off your mattress or discard the safety leaflet from your hot oil turkey fryer. A song was more lasting than a paper news bulletin, and entrepreneurs could even earn a quick buck. A catchy disaster ditty was also a great way to put your town on the map, at the expense of little weeping railroad orphans and grain elevator widows.

Every region has its own special brand of disaster song. Wisconsin is not known for mountain railroad derailments or mudslides, but does provide plenty of rich black loam to grow a bumper crop of great disaster tunes. For some reason, we are

particularly obsessed with burning and drowning.

The Peshtigo Fire of 1871 was certainly ballad-worthy, despite coinciding with the more famous Great Chicago fire. Ken Lonquist penned a vivid and powerful Northern Wisconsin tableau in his song Peshtigo, clearly demonstrating that the urban conflagration kicked off by Mrs. O'Leary's cow was overrated.

*They jumped in water wells to survive
But wound up being boiled alive
There wasn't any air to breathe
Where ever that devil fire seethed
Oh Peshtigo, Oh how it burned*

Nighty, night kids. Sweet dreams!

The more contemporary Great Madison Butter Fire of May 1993 was awful in a different way. That sautéed mushroom cloud bubbled over the far shore of Lake Monona for a week. Peter Berryman captured this disaster pretty accurately in the lyrics of the song Pflaum Road, co-written with Lou Berryman:

*When the building / started burning
How the sky glowed / Goin out to Pflaum Road*

*And the gutter / Ran with butter
And the cheese flowed / All the way to Pflaum Road*

Later than June, our stomachs, oh how they churned.

The other great way to die around here is to sink on a boat, preferably one just trying to get 'er done before the ice sets in on the lakes. Most folk music fans are familiar with Gordon Lightfoot's Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald. This is no ten-for-a-buck disaster song. The ballad rolls like steely waves on a churning Lake Superior, and Gordon's baritone and soaring guitar sounds the depths of the most unforgiving Great Lake. Despite weighing in at seven fat verses and six and a half minutes, this tragic folksong and the story of this shipwreck will be remembered for generations.

There are a more than a few well known Great Lakes disaster songs. Lee Murdock's The Christmas Ship describes the fate of the Rouse Simmons which sunk in Lake Michigan in November of 1912 carrying a payload of U.P. conifers to the children of Chicago. A fine song, but the aftertaste is a little like Santa getting escorted out of U.S. airspace by fighter jets on Christmas Eve. If you don't like this one, Lee has written and recorded many memorable songs about the Great Lakes, including Henry C Work's Lost on the Lady Elgin, describing the steamship's demise after a collision in Lake Michigan which took 300 lives in September 1860.

These songs have inspired me to imagine a new addition to the to the Great Lakes sinking boat song tradition, inspired by a recent promotional photo of the Lake Michigan Badger Car Ferry loaded up with vintage sports cars. The ballad is sung to the tune of The Wreck of the Old '97, a trollop of a folk song brazenly ripping off yet another shipwreck song, The Ship That Never Returned, also composed by Henry Clay Work. Luckily for you, there is not enough column space to print all the verses.

The Wreck of the Old 9115

*Well they pulled into Man'woc at half
past seven
On a hot, humid day in June
Lined up at the dock of the Badger Car
Ferry
For their voyage that afternoon*

*The car club owners so loved their
Porsches
They will drive whenever they can
So across Lake Michigan to Luddington
harbor
They were bound for Gingerman*

*The greedy promoter booked way more
Boxters
Then that ferry could safely hold
He did not know that his actions would
pay off
With prison instead of gold...*



Review by Kiki Schueler

It is difficult to believe Molly Tuttle is only twenty-nine and even more improbable that Crooked Tree is only her third album. Her songwriting speaks to a long life of experience, and her guitar playing is the stuff of legends. The California-raised Nashville resident has packed a lot of life into her first three decades, and made a lot of friends along the way. The most fortuitous, and productive, of these is Old Crow Medicine Show's Ketch Secor, who co-wrote eight of the record's thirteen tracks. Secor and the rest of OCMS are featured musicians on Tree, along with an intriguing list of guests. Add in producer/legend Jerry Douglas, who also played dobro, and there is no doubt that Tree is a straight-up, no modifier, bluegrass album. Dobro, fiddles, mandolin, banjo, guitar and upright bass all get a chance to step up on a record that sounds like the future of the genre without forgetting the past.

According to the final track, the credit goes to her father who took her to bluegrass festivals as a child. "I was ten years old and happy, out of school a week early," she sings on "Grass Valley," confessing, "My heart opened to the sound, I didn't know it then but my life turned a page." Bringing her father in to sing on the tune cemented it as the record's anchor. Dan Tyminski of Alison Krause & Union Station duets with Tuttle on another autobiographical turn. "San Francisco Blues"

bemoans the cost of living that keeps her from returning to the city of her childhood, "A tidal wave just hit the shore and folks like me, we can't afford to stick around here in this town we love so well." A mournful fiddle pours real ache into the palpable homesickness. Perhaps an even more personal glimpse comes with "Side Saddle," which dares you to qualify any of her accomplishments with "for a girl." It's a traditional sounding folk song with a "My Bucket's Got a Hole in It" melody, but it's smarter than that. Appropriately, fellow non-conformist Gillian Welch joins her at the anything you can do, I can do better rodeo. It is impossible not to smile as they sing, "I said I don't wanna ride side-saddle, sidesaddle, sidesaddle. I just wanna ride bow-legged, bow-legged like the boys."

The past inspiring the future provides the theme of "Dooley's Farm." Have you been wondering what ever happened to the moonshiner Dooley, star of the Dillards song of the same name? Times changed, and so did his cash crop, "they used to grow tobacco, then they made moonshine, but there's something better in the back of the barn, down on Dooley's farm." After Dooley gets busted, one of those daughter's daughter takes over the family business, "growing green must've ran in the family, 'cause old Dooley is my grandpa." Tuttle's contemporary and bluegrass poster boy Billy Strings gets the vocal assist. "Big Backyard" may lean a little too hard on "This Land Is Your Land" mentality with its "come on out to the big backyard, it ain't mine, it ain't yours, it's all of ours" chorus, but it's also an equally irresistible singalong. Meanwhile, the title track is an eloquently infectious ode to the benefits of being different.

Looking for a murder ballad? I

refer you to the darkly bewitching "The River Knows." (Which reminds me of a bumper sticker I saw once, "If you're in a folk song, don't go to the river.") Hoping for a Wisconsin shout-out? Check out "Nashville Mess Around." (Way to go Fond du Lac!) Wishing she would cover "We Don't Talk About Bruno"? Sorry, no, but "Castilleja" has a dark Tejano vibe, wicked picking, and layered mysteries. Crooked Tree is an immensely satisfying listen, and Molly Tuttle is an artist to watch.

Mad Folk News is published monthly by the Madison Folk Music Society, a non-profit, volunteer-led society dedicated to fostering folk music in the Madison area.

Contact us at madfolk@charter.net. Learn about concerts, membership, scholarships, and volunteer opportunities at www.madfolk.org.

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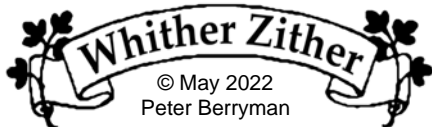
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MUSICIAN DAUGHTERS

Amazing the way all the modern technologies have made the past so much more available than it used to be. Still can't see the future, but I spend hours in the online archives of old newspapers, magazines, vaudeville playbills, and so forth.

This month I happened upon the archives of Cosmopolitan Magazine, which started out in 1886 as a "family magazine." In the magazine's first issue appeared this overview: "There will be a department devoted exclusively to the concerns of women, with articles on fashions, on household decoration, on cooking, and the care and management of children, etc." The "concerns of women" have expanded considerably since those days, obviously.

I was drawn to a title in the very first issue: "**SHALL ALL OUR DAUGHTERS BE MUSICIANS?**," by Emma W. Babcock (1849-1926). *Wikipedia* describes Babcock as an author and "litterateur." A litterateur is usually taken to mean one who writes about writing; Babcock was a prolific book reviewer. But she also authored a few books of a "domestic" nature, such as *Household Hints* ("a domestic management guide"), and *A Mother's Note Book*.

Her article appears in a section of the magazine called "*The Household*". Her point in this article is not particularly new, but the writing is quaint, and revealing of the thinking of the time. Written in the third person, the piece is about a woman on a visit who picks up a book to pass the time while waiting in a parlor for "the mistress of the house" to appear. She happens upon a passage which gives her the beginnings of a sort of epiphany about a subject currently under discussion at her house, namely, "...how much time and money should be expended on the musical culture of her daughter."

"After three years of competent instruction and somewhat faithful practice, it was still a difficult matter for her to sing with even ordinary correctness of tone."

The "discussion at her house" is with the

girl's father who feels the girl is not "called" to music, and would be better off spending her time doing something she enjoys and is good at by nature. The mother, meanwhile, feels it her duty to push the child in the direction of excellence in music.

The passage that the mother happens upon is in a book called "Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*," which, I have to admit, I have not read. But then I don't think Plutarch has listened to my songs, either. Here's the quote:

"it was not said amiss by Antisthenes, when people told him that one Ismenias was an excellent piper. 'It may be so,' he said; 'but he is but a wretched human being; otherwise, he would not have been an excellent piper.'"

And that is followed by King Philip, who tells his son who just played a piece of music with skill, "Are you not ashamed, son, to play so well?" Arguing that to be so skillful, "...other more important things must have been neglected."

These wacky but thought-provoking opinions encourage the mother to do some soul searching. It turns out she had had dreams of being a great musician when SHE was a kid, and is plunking her own bucket list onto her daughter's head. She finally realizes "It is useless to try to live our lives over again in our children."

She also admits to herself that she "...felt a certain humiliation in confessing that what was possible and even delightfully easy for her neighbor's daughter, was impossible for her own." Not thinking that her neighbor's virtuoso daughter might be a serial killer and bad at parchisi.

She continues to wrestle with these observations, talks more with her husband, and eventually is able to say this:

"Our Elizabeth, from a very little girl, has had the careful hand and the quick eye of an experienced housewife. She has domestic instincts and has often begged of me to allow her to relieve me of special household cares, and I have always answered, 'But your music, Elizabeth!'"

The final sentence of the article: "*I am not at all sure but it is much more rare to have a daughter with her taste than to have a musical prodigy.*"

Cool glimpse into parenting in the 1880s. I like the way the article covered the mother's shift from one opinion to its opposite.

Actually, a lot of the issues the mother is wrestling with in 1886 are the same sorts of things I'm sure parents wrestle with today, though not being a parent I wouldn't know first hand: Embarrassment about their being influenced by what the neighbor's kid is accomplishing; wondering if they are loading their OWN dreams onto the agenda of the kid; and how much "time and money" should be used up pushing the kid to do something they don't want to do and are not good at.

The one aspect that seems to have changed since those days has a lot to do with gender equality, hence the title using "Daughters" instead of "Children." The implication is that the girl has two options: One, keep forging ahead sadly with intense music training, or two, work on homemaking skills. I don't think that's the case today, and I have a hunch the options available to little boys were more plentiful even in 1886. As a matter of fact, I don't know if most boys were ever forced to take music or, for that matter, to hone homemaking skills. Just a guess.

On a personal note, it's funny. This 136 year old article dredged up a 60 year old memory for me of a trick my own mother pulled that was pretty neat, and in some form might have helped the 1886 mother arrive at a compromise plan:

After I took piano lessons from two different teachers, and -- being lazy and rebellious -- did not practice and so failed miserably, Mom searched for and found a book on how to play songs using three simple chords. Instead of grueling finger exercises and tedious sight-readings, this little book taught me the fingering for three chords: C, G, and F, and taught using these chords to play simple songs by ear. To this day I only play these three chords. Well, maybe a few more. But I guess what I'm saying is, one option for that mother and little girl might have been to have the girl continue to make music, but casually, without the word "prodigy" coming into the conversation. The girl might have ended up actually enjoying it now and then, between sessions of studying to be a nuclear physicist. And on the side, with C, G, and F, she could have been a folk musician.

The Mad Folk Refrigerator Cover

May 2022

Gigs

Kiki's Righteous House of Music

Invitation & Advance RSVP required.

For full details or to request an invitation, contact Kiki at righteousmusicmgmt@gmail.com

- Friday, May 6th @ 8pm (doors at 7) Walter Salas Humara - \$15
- Saturday, May 28th @ 8pm (doors at 7) Ben de la Cour - \$10 - Waitlist

Our House

Invitation & Advance RSVP required.

For full details or to request an invitation, contact Dave & Anne at annedave@chorus.net - 608-256-2958 or 335-7909

- Saturday, May 14th @ 6:30 pm - Natalia Zukerman - \$20
- Saturday, June 4th @ 6:30 pm - Josh Harty - \$20
- Friday, June, 17th @ 6:30 pm - Patchouli - \$20
- Friday, July 8th @ 6:30 pm - Ellis Paul - \$20
- Saturday, August 13th @ 6:30 pm - Danni Nicholls - \$20

Venues

FOLKLORE VILLAGE

Folklore Village

3210 Cty Hwy BB
Dodgeville, WI
folklorevillage.org
608-924-4000

- Tue, May 3rd Virtual Open Mic - @7pm
- May 13th-15th, English Country Dance & Music Weekend
- May 21st - Aslak Lie Barn Raising - 5:30 picnic / 7pm dance - Preregistration required!
- May 30th - Gladdening the Garden Workbee
- Tue, June 7rd Virtual Open Mic - @7pm



18 S. Water St.
Ft. Atkinson, WI
cafecarpe.com
920-563-9391

Cafe Carpe

All shows at 8:30pm unless indicated otherwise.
Please call 920-563-9391 to reserve.

- Thu, May 12th, Katie Scullin / Corey Hart - \$15
- Fri, May 13th, Luke Callen + Long Mama - \$15
- Sat, May 14th, Dulcimer Fest - \$15
- Th, May 19th, Dance Around Molly - \$12
- Sat, May 21st, My Politic - \$12

NORTH STREET CABARET

610 North St
Madison, WI
northstreetcabaret.com

- Sat, May 7th, WORT Benefit - Combo Noir, Gaines & Wagoner, Elm Duo - @7pm - \$12
- Fri, May 13th, Josh Harty & Side Pony - @8pm - \$15
- Sat, May 21st, Ritt & Wilder Deitz & Special Guests TBA - CD Release Show - @8pm - \$15

CARGO COFFEE

750 E Washington Ave
Madison, WI
cargocoffeemadison.com

- Fri, May 6, JF Zastro, Nate Meng
- Sat, May 7, Crusin Round, Shelby Floyd
- Fri, May 13, Uncle Jim, Van Dwellers
- Sat, May 14, Lucky Vita Album Release
- Fri, May 20, Angela Puerta, TBA
- Sat, May 21, Sira Sangare, TBA
- Fri, May 27, Meggie Shays
- Sat, May 28, Mackenzie Moore, Karen Wheelock

Wild Hog in the Woods
953 Jenifer St.
wildhoginthewoods.org

- Fri, May 13th, The Rose and Dragon - Virtual Concert @7:30pm

Misc

Gay Mills Folk Festival of Music and Dance

May 6th - 8th - Gay Mills, WI
www.gaymillsfolkfest.org

Old Time Jam

Monthly - 3rd Sunday of every month, 4 to 6pm
EVP West 3809 Mineral Point Road
Coordinator: Al Wilson
cell: 608-572-0634
adwilson@pediatrics.wisc.edu

Madison Area Ukulele Initiative -- Singalongs 3rd Sunday 11am - 1:30pm
- for location visit www.MAUImadison.com

On the Air



Simply Folk on Wisconsin Public Radio w/ Dan Robinson, Host

Sun 5:00-8:00pm

Concerts recorded in Wisconsin, music and dance of people the world over. For playlists, calendars, station listings, and more, visit www.wpr.org/simplyfolk.



WORT 89.9 FM community radio

- Weekdays 9:00am - noon - "On the Horizon" w/ Ford Blackwell, Paul Novak, Gloria Hays & Helena White
- Mon - Global Revolutions (folk from the world over) w/ Dan Talmo & Martin Alvarado
- Tue - Green Morning Radio w/ Brian Hirsh
- Wed - Back to the Country (country music on a theme) w/ Bill Malone
- Thur - Hejira (folk and international) w/ Gloria Hays, George Dreckmann, Jeff Spitzer-Resnick & Paul Novak
- Fri - Mud Acres (bluegrass and acoustic) w/ Chris Powers



WVMO The Voice of Monona - Promoting the best in Good Music - Roots Music - Americana Music
Plus Community Members Hosted Shows
Streaming Live and on your mobile device through tunein radio

Stuart Stotts

Weekly new song Facebook Live event. Song Premiere on Tuesday (SPOT) at 11AM - facebook.com/stuart.stotts



Ritt Deitz with Wilder Deitz - HINGE release show

Following a weeklong tour across the south (shows in Louisville, Cincinnati, Vienna VA and Wilmington NC), Ritt and Wilder Deitz will play a CD release show at the North Street Cabaret. The concert celebrates release of Hinge, Ritt's tenth album and the first fully father-son effort.

A regular performer in listening rooms and house concerts from Wisconsin to his native Kentucky, Ritt Deitz has been writing and recording since the age of eleven. The Onion's AV Club called his songs "concurrently earthy, ethereal and intelligent" and compared him to songwriters Greg Brown and Bruce Cockburn. Madison, Wisconsin's Isthmus says, "Deitz combines rugged mountain sonics with an aesthetic that's closer to ragtime than anything else." Cincinnati's City Beat said Ritt's "smart, perceptive and poetic songwriting [...] glows with an aura similar to Springsteen at his most organic."

Ritt is joined in this set by his son Wilder Deitz, (piano, mandolin), neo-soul and traditional player and founder of the Wilder Deitz School for Creative Music. Wilder has played with his dad since Ritt's After the Mountains tour in 2006.

HINGE will be released on May 12.
Opening act TBA.

"WHEN IS MY RENEWAL DUE?"

(Hint: It is NOT the date on the mailing label!)

The date shown on the mailing label is NOT your membership expiration date! There has been some confusion lately, and we apologize for that. The date is just the date the labels were printed, as new cost-saving postal procedures do not allow us to include expiration dates there anymore. When it is time to renew, we will send you a personal notice by mail or email. At that point you will be able to either mail a check or renew online at www.madfolk.org. If you have questions about your membership in the meantime, send email to info@madfolk.org. Thanks for your membership and support of Mad Folk!

Way #1 – online

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Way #2 – unplugged

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Scholarship fund donation (optional) \$ _____

Total \$ _____

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