

# MadFolk News

## Kaia Fowler:

## Music as Food and Medicine for the Human Spirit

"Once in a while, a musician comes along that just grabs your heart. Whether the words, voice, instrument or that rare special combination of all three, it's someone you just want to keep hearing. It's someone who's heart seems to reach out to yours. The emotions and message might vary from song to song but there is always something special. Listen to Kaia Fowler's, *Feelin' Alright* or *Where the Water Meets the Land* and I'm sure you'll agree."

- Ron Dennis, Sound Technician

Maya Angelou is credited with saying, "The idea is to write it so that people hear it and it slides right through the brain and straight to the heart." For Kaia, whose music has been described as speaking to the soul, the idea is to create and share songs that embrace the whole person—the brain, body, heart, and spirit. Her voice and guitar resonate truths of human existence with an energy that says, "I understand," and "We're all in this together," and "Joy exists even when we cannot feel it in our sorrow."

"From childhood, music has been food and medicine for me," said Kaia. "Food for my imagination, my inspiration, for when I hunger for wonder, mystery, laughter, and delight, and for thinking about the world and what it means to be alive. And medicine for the aches of living life with an open and empathetic heart, for the traumas and tragedies of

living, for all the suffering I witness and cannot bring to an end. Where would we be without this magic? What else permeates our being, submerges and lifts us like water or air? The power of words and the power of music intrigue me, and I take my responsibility as a creator of both seriously. I also enjoy the playfulness of it all."

Active as a performing singer-songwriter since 2007, Kaia Fowler writes and performs songs that blend the American singer-songwriter, contemporary folk, roots rock, and acoustic blues styles. A finalist in the Great River Songwriting Competition, she appeared as a featured guest on WORT's *Another Green World* program in 2019. Her performances with MadFolk include opening for Bill Staines at North Street Cabaret in 2019, and as part of the John Prine Tribute at the Willy Street Fair in 2019 and as a solo artist in 2017.

Other Madison venues where Kaia has performed include The Brink Lounge, The Wild Hog in the Woods, BOS Meadery, and Crescendo. Regionally, she performs at The Café Carpe in Fort Atkinson, the Burlington Coffee House, and the Rockford Listening Room, to name a few. She has shared the stage with Katie Dahl, Mark Dvorak, Joe Jencks, and Peter Mulvey. In addition to drawing from over 30 years of original songwriting material, Kaia cov-

ers songs by artists as diverse as John Prine, Patty Griffin, Stevie Nicks, Carole King, Dolly Parton, Bonnie Raitt, and Susan Tedeschi.

"Sharing songs helps me connect with others," said Kaia. "When I sing about my loves and losses, concerns and inspirations, fears and hopes, I know we all share these experiences, each in our own way. There, in that moment, because of the mysterious power of music and words, we understand one another better. I love that aspect of what I do most of all." In part because of the spirit of her musical work, Kaia has been invited to perform for non-profit events like the Veterans for Peace rally at the Capitol in Madison, Wis., cancer fundraising events, and hospice memorial gatherings.

In these days of needing to be separate for everyone's health and safety, Kaia has launched an online concert series: *Love Streams for Comfort, Courage, and Connection* on her YouTube channel ([youtube.com/kaiasong](https://youtube.com/kaiasong)). Kaia conceived of this live streaming concert series to bring the spirit of hope and love to these trying times. As with her in-person concerts, Kaia shares music that passionately and energetically offers transcendence of the day-to-day and supports wellness. Find details on her website ([kaiafowler.com](https://kaiafowler.com)). At the time Interview continued on next page

**During these times where we can't go out to listen to music, many musicians are putting concerts every week thru the web.**

**We at Madfolk are trying to post some of them on our Face Book page each week. So if you part of the Social Media world of Face Book, please "like" the page for Madison Folk Music Society and keep watch here for some great music. Looking forward to the future where we can all gather in public for music again.**

of this writing, Kaia was also looking forward to a November 6 live stream concert for Wild Hog in the Woods, which will be available live at 7:30 pm on Nov. 6 and later for playback on the Wild Hog in the Woods website.

Also a Love Stream Sunday, November 15: Love Stream for Comfort, Courage, & Connection @ 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm. Kaia's next concert in the Love Stream series to bring the spirit of hope and love to these trying times. Kaia gives voice to grief, joy, and dealing with change. Join Kaia and kindred audience members on Kaia's YouTube Channel to experience this live concert event. Kaia will share music that passionately and energetically offers transcendence of the day-to-day and supports wellness

Kaia has two studio albums out—Seams of My Heart (2009) and All the Way (2015)—and one in final production now with Grammy award winning audio engineer Charlie Pilzer of Tonal Park. Kaia shaped her new album One Breath, anticipated in late 2020, with a holistic vision of her work as artist-healer. Songs on the album affirm family, friendship and our connection with nature. Awareness of the oneness of all shines through in songs like "Take Shelter in Love" and the

title track "One Breath." Featuring guest musicians Peter Phippen (bass, bamboo flute), Joe Jencks (vocals, bouzouki), Tricia Alexander (blues harmonica), and Caleb Wood (drums), One Breath reflects on the passage of time, how we change, and how we stay the same, all sung and played from the heart with a love for all. Learn more at Kaia's website [kaiafowler.com/onebreath](http://kaiafowler.com/onebreath).

The artist-healer identity came to Kaia gradually over the past several years. She first felt drawn to the healing arts by audience members who would come up to her after concerts to share their stories. "They would say my voice felt healing or that my songs gave them comfort or helped them make sense of their own life experience," said Kaia. "That inspired me to better understand what about the songs and my singing were supporting them in their own inner work."

In 2015, a friend invited Kaia to share songs and stories from her life for a group of parents dealing with difficult times. Through that workshop and retreats she has collaborated on since then, Kaia saw again and again how by sharing her personal—and universal—experiences in words and music, she

could support others on their healing journeys. "Over the past few years, really since my husband Scott died of cancer in 2013, I have leaned into music as a healing art," said Kaia. "I even decided to get a master's degree in counseling so I would be qualified to fully integrate therapeutic services into my work with music and words." Kaia will graduate from that program in May 2023.

Kaia sees herself as a "fellow traveler" with everyone she meets, valuing unity, community, and inclusiveness. Everyone is welcome. Vocally, Kaia is known for her rich vibrato, angelic tone, and wide mezzo-soprano range. Those who appreciate her music range from Baby Boomers, who miss when folk vocalists sounded like Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell, to college students who come up to her sometimes after shows and say things like, "I have never heard anyone sing that way before." Kaia's guitar playing—whether her unique fingerstyle or bluesy strumming—dances with the vocal lines, sometimes moving with them, sometimes offering counterpoint. So, whether you're looking for music that speaks to the brain, heart, or soul, I encourage you to look for ways to experience Kaia's music. Her website is a good place to start: [kaiafowler.com](http://kaiafowler.com).

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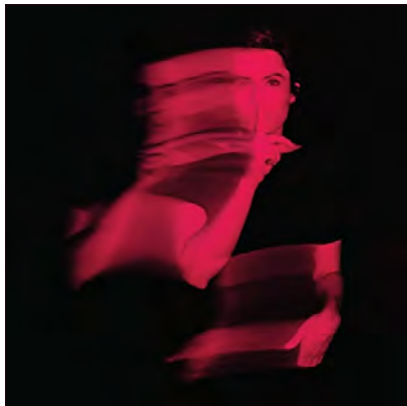
**Friends of Folklore Village** is sponsoring an On-line Auction November 13-22 to benefit Folklore Village, a unique folkarts center near Dodgeville, Wisconsin.

Shop in the safety of your own home. The auction features over 100 items of folk arts, musical instruments, jewelry, and traditional foods. Your bid on craft, dance, or musical lessons, get-away destinations and even a Green Bay Packers jersey will help this center pull through the pandemic. All instruction offers have on-line options, are good for one year, and most items will be shipped immediately to winning bidder. Auction updates and links to the auction site will be posted at [www.FolkloreVillage.org](http://www.FolkloreVillage.org).



# IF YOU CAN'T SAY ANYTHING NICE... - LESLIE MENDELSON

ROYAL POTATO FAMILY - 2020



Review by Kiki Schueler

In the absence of live music, I've found out a lot about what exactly it is people like about it. Some people say it's the energy of the crowd, others say being able to feel the vibration of a rock show. I've even had people tell me they miss bumping into sweaty folks rocking out and spilling beer. These people tell me they can't get into livestreams because it's not the same. And they're right, it's not. It's better. Granted, you aren't going to see a full band rock show with arrhythmia-inducing bass online, but that's not my favorite kind of music anyway. At the beginning of the pandemic when musicians were scrambling to figure out a way to make up for lost gigs, livestreams didn't always sound great. But now that it has sunk in that we are in this for the long haul, most artists have invested in the equipment to make these shows sound good. Thanks to the magic of the internet, artists I used to see once a year (if I was lucky) I now see monthly, or even weekly. It is even possible to see more than one show a night without having to drive across town, fingers crossed you'll make it on time. Then there are the obvious benefits— cheap drinks and a comfortable seat.

My can't-miss favorites are two shows hosted on Zoom by Austin based musicians, each with weekly guests. Betty Soo presents Nobody's Happy Hour on Tuesdays at 6:30, and Bonnie

Whitmore has her Virtual Gallery on Thursdays at 8:30. A small donation gets you a meeting link and a chance to interact at the end of the show (comments during are restricted to the chat box). Over the last several months many of their guests have been House of Righteous Music veterans (as are they both), but they have also introduced me to new artists. Leslie Mendelson is one, a former bandmate of Whitmore and her sister Eleanor (of the Mastersons) in the retro 40's, NYC subway-busking trio Pretty Pennies. Aside from the motherly counsel of the title track, there isn't anything retro about *If You can't Say Anything Nice...*, her third full-length release. Clocking in at a bouncy two and a half minutes, that song is the record's lightest moment. The garage-y rocker expands the eternally good advice to include both thinking and doing nice. The piano-pounding opening track "Lay It All on Me" jumps out of the gate as if we walked into the middle of "Purple Rain." A strutting organ riff and "wooh ooh" backing vocals make "All Come Together" a slinky groover.

Mendelson freely admits that, despite some lighter moments, this is a record about depression and anxiety. Recording it was a way to exorcize some of those demons. Nowhere is that more obvious than on the lament "Medication." Recognizing it is both "the devil sitting on my shoulder" and "something I can't live without," accompanied only by a lonely keyboard, she debates the pros and cons of pharmaceuticals. (I wonder if she's heard Crazy Ex-Girlfriend's "Anti-depressants Are So Not a Big Deal," it might help.) She moves easily between guitar and piano, without typecasting either instrument. The buoyant strummer "Hardest Part" could be an Indigo Girls B-Side, while "Would You Give Up Your Gun?" finds the

dark side of the six strings. She frames the title question as a stark choice, completing it with "to save someone." If that doesn't convince you gun control is a good idea, maybe the logic that "the more things that can kill you, the greater chance you've got that you'll die," will. The ethereal "Flesh and Bone" espouses love as the cure for loneliness. Closing track "My Dark Peace" goes back to the keyboard for a sweet lullaby that suggests maybe her music therapy has worked, and she has found some peace.

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](mailto:madfolk@charter.net). Learn about concerts, membership, scholarships, and volunteer opportunities at [www.madfolk.org](http://www.madfolk.org).

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## My Highway Home

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# Cultural Diplomacy: Building Bridges Through Music

I'm on an hour-long national television broadcast in Grenada. On my right – is the Chargé d'Affaires for the US Embassy in Grenada, and to his right is the Minister of Culture for Grenada. In this small country, the Minister of Culture serves sort of like the head of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the head of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) all rolled up into one gig. And he also hosts a nationally broadcast TV show that focuses on the arts in many forms.

I am wearing a nice pinstriped suit, and that is nearly intolerable in the heat and humidity of the Caribbean in July, to say nothing of the television studio lights. Old school. No LEDs here. These things are kicking out some serious Lumens and enough BTUs to cook lunch. I have just finished singing a few American Folk songs from our rich cannon of Civil Rights and Labor music. And I sang one of my own songs about workers. Then it happens. My biggest fear comes true. The Minister of Culture asks a question that I have no idea how to answer without offending someone, somewhere.

He turns to the Chargé d'Affaires, and says, "Mr. Link, Mr. Jencks sings songs that to us sound very patriotic. He sings songs that celebrate the workers, civil rights, and the common people of the United States. But his views are clearly at odds and at times critical of the government of the United States and of your economic disparity. Why would the US bring an artist like Mr. Jencks on a diplomatic tour, as a representative of your nation?"

Mr. Link replies, "That's an excellent question Minister. I'd like to let Mr. Jencks answer that."

Now time slows down as my adrenalin spikes. I was not expecting this. I think to myself, as I try not to look like a deer in the headlights, "Thanks amigo. Remind me to kick you in the shins later for dropping that pineapple in my lap." I thought my job was to sing and "The Chargé" as they call him, would answer all the political questions. Now I am on a national television in a foreign nation, being asked to either answer a question honestly and risk offending my own county, or to varnish the truth, and risk offending the island nation hosting me. Awesome.

I say a prayer. The Shepard's Prayer. Alan

Shepard's Prayer. What he said while sitting atop a rocket about to go into space. A rocket with over a million individual parts and components, each built by the lowest bidder on a government contract. Alan Shephard said, "Dear Lord, don't let me \*\*\*k up!"

I said that prayer. And I wondered how I arrived at this point in my journey? What decision did I make for right or wrong that put me in this particular hot-seat? And how do I answer a question like that, and say what needs to be said? Do I even know what needs to be said?

The silence felt conspicuously long. But that is how adrenalin works. It messes with our sense of time. I take one deep breath and release, and I begin.

"First Minister, let me say again what an honor it is for me to be here today with you and with the people of Grenada. You live in a beautiful country, and I have been deeply touched by the graciousness of the people I have met and the natural splendor I have witnessed. It really is a joy to be here. And thank you for making room in your schedule for me to come and sing some songs for you today." OK. I bought myself time for another deep breath.

"And to answer your question, yes! I do feel like I am a patriot. I love my country, I love my people, and I deeply respect our current president, President Obama. I sing songs that reflect the lives of the people I meet in my travels while on concert tours. Songs of workers and farmers, songs of celebration and of protest. Songs that honor the idea that Civil Rights and Labor Rights were hard won in the United States. I sing songs that celebrate my people. It is the very heart of the Folk music tradition in my country. And while some people would not call me a patriot, they would have other names for me, I am a patriot. As are the people I sing about."

"As to your question Minister, about why the US Government would choose someone like me to be a representative of our nation, I would say this: A democracy can only ever be as strong as the rights of her people. Sometimes my opinions and songs are critical of my government or society. Sometimes my ideas are not popular with everyone. But I believe the message that my government is trying offer a young

democracy like Grenada by sending a musician like me on a multi-nation diplomatic tour, is that the voice of dissent, the minority opinion must be heard, and not suppressed. A democracy is made stronger by this Civil discourse. And while it is not easy to accomplish, a thriving democracy requires that the rights of all of her people are respected and honored. That all of the voices are heard. Not just the voices that speak a popular opinion, but also the unpopular opinion. When everyone has a right to be heard, a democracy can flourish. I think that is why my government would invite a protest singer to be a Cultural Ambassador, to demonstrate part of what makes a Democracy possible."

I looked at the Grenadian Minister of Culture, who smiled and thanked me for my words, affirming the value of my ideas. And then he invited me to sing another song. I looked at the US Chargé d'Affaires, who gave me a subtle and kind smile while sticking his thumb up ever so slightly towards the sky. And I went on to sing a few more songs. I had just passed with flying colors, the granddaddy of all Pop-Quizzes in a real-life Civics class, broadcast on national television on foreign soil. I was authentically myself, and authentically American all at once. And for the first time in my life I truly felt like I could honestly claim the identity of patriot.

This particular chapter of my life began with Column continued on next page

*Joe Jencks is 20-year veteran of the international Folk scene, an award winning songwriter and vocalist, and a contributing writer to numerous publications. His column **My Highway Home** is a recent addition to the Mad-Folk newsletter. For more information please visit: [www.joejencks.com](http://www.joejencks.com).*

*Joe Jencks continues to host a monthly radio show called **My Highway Home** on the new Folk Music network – **Folk Music Notebook**. This show features interviews with people Joe meets in his extensive travels along with music by many artists from the big tent that is Folk Music. Tune in on the first Monday of the month at 9:00 PM ET / 6:00 PM PT. And rebroadcast on the following Sundays at 1:00 PM ET / 10:00 AM PT. Several past episodes are archived through **Folk Music Notebook** including shows about the Kerrville Folk Festival, Old Songs Festival, The Great Labor Arts Exchange, Ireland, and an interview with Sonny Ochs.*

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a Folk concert I gave at an outdoor concert series, at mall in Florida in 2006. Not unlike the Folk-on-State series that used to run in Madison. I met a woman there who was a volunteer with the US Diplomatic Corps, and worked with our mission to Albania. She asked me if I might like to travel with the US State Department, and offer concerts in other countries. It sounded like fun to me. I said yes. We traded information and kept in touch. It took a few years and the conversation went cold for a while. Presidential elections, recessions, etc. all had an impact. But then in the fall of 2009, I received a call from a fellow in Texas. He was about to retire from the diplomatic corps, and was tying up loose threads. Apparently, my file had been "on his desk" for a few years, and he liked my music. So he wanted to see if he could set the wheels in motion before he retired, for me to be formally invited to be a Cultural Ambassador for the US State Department.

Then I was called by a man from the US Embassy in Barbados. And after several conversations with people from the embassy and about nine months of planning, I was on my way from Seattle to Miami, and on to Antigua & Barbuda. The first of five island nations in the Caribbean where I would give concerts, offer workshops for school children and presentations in libraries, along with appearances on radio and television. All the while, wearing a suit and tie in the Caribbean, in July. I lost like 10 pounds in 2 weeks, and did a lot of laundry in hotel sinks. I rarely had 2 nights in the same hotel, and I got up as early as 4:30 AM daily. We usually had a 6:00 AM call-time in a hotel lobby. And I usually did not get to sleep before midnight. I was astonishingly sleep deprived by the end of those two weeks. And the frogs... these tiny little things called Coqui are so unimaginably loud as they sing and vocalize all night long. But they also groove, with an undulating rhythm that feels like the very underpinning of Caribbean music. Even sleep deprived, my heart was full.

In Antigua and Barbuda, I offered a command performance for the Queen's Regent. She was a woman of profound character and poise. A septuagenarian who was herself quite Regal in demeanor. I was schooled on protocol, not to approach unless invited, not to turn my back on her within a certain distance, to speak only when spoken to, etc. The sound tech at the theater in which I was performing, was not very well versed in the equipment. But he was someone's son, or nephew, or cousin. My cab driver on the other hand had a degree in Audio Engineering from Columbia

in NYC. As he was driving me back to my hotel in between sound check and the concert, I said, "Who you know here in Antigua and Barbuda is more important than what you know, eh?" He smiled uncomfortably and nodded his head.

I ended up using a single microphone, plugged into one bass amp. They never got the theater sound online. But it was an amazing performance anyway. I was swinging for the fences, and it turned out to be a marvelous show. When I got to songs like Wade In The Water, We Shall Overcome, and Eyes on The Prize, the Queen's Regent started clapping her hands and singing along. And smiling in a way that was somehow brighter than the stage lights. Her honor guard looked at her and looked at me and looked back at her. He had likely NEVER seen her let loose in public like that. After the performance, I was beckoned to approach. She shook my hand and thanked me. She was positively effusive. Her parents had been connected to the Harlem Renaissance, and she herself had been sent to NYC if memory serves, for university during the '60s. She had marched and protested in the US during the Civil Rights movement. I had the extraordinary privilege of singing these songs for someone who had "been there." Dropping all usual protocol when we parted, she embraced me gently, and kissed my cheek. I thought her honor guard was going to faint.

Next, we flew to the island of Dominica, after a brief stop in St. Kitts & Nevis. Dominica remains the most natural and perhaps the least "settled" of the Caribbean Island nations. And it is the last refuge of the Carib people, the indigenous people who thrived in the islands before Columbus. And I must say, it is truly one of the most beautiful places I have ever been in my life. The whole island is connected to Eco-Tourism now, and they work hard to preserve their natural splendor. If I ever wanted to take a trip back to the Caribbean, I would go there. Mountains that rise out of the ocean, jungles and flowers and birds, waterfalls everywhere, and amazing food. And as gracious a reception as I have received anywhere. People rightfully proud of their country, and eager to share its wonders with visitors.

Then we were off to Barbados, where I sang for many children and offered several community concerts, and had my one scheduled night off. I wanted to wander all over the island. But I stayed in the small resort I was hosted in, went for a walk on the beach, went for a swim in the pool, had dinner, and was asleep by 8:30 PM. Those

of you who know me will understand the level of exhaustion that this represents. I don't usually see a pillow before 2:00 AM. 8:30 PM bedtime is a sign of pure, flat-out, steam-rolled exhaustion. Anyone who says that employees of the US State Department don't earn their salary, has no idea how hard these people work. I have never felt more pride as a citizen of the United States, than when I was working with so many good people in the Caribbean, each taking their efforts so seriously, and with such gentle, diligent, and profound care.

The next day there were a couple of short concerts and interviews, and then an evening flight to Grenada. I was dropped off by the Embassy staff, and waited for my flight. It never came. I was alone, in a tiny inter-island airport, not the bigger national airport in Barbados. I had no cell phone. I called my contact at the embassy from the desk in the airport, and he was not home. He and his staff were already onto other places, other duties. The airport said my flight would not arrive until the morning. They re-scheduled me on the new flight, after some serious negotiating, and then told me I had to leave the airport. I had no phone, no wheels, and a fair amount of stuff to carry. More haggling, and they called a cab for me.

FYI - It's not easy to get a cab in rural Barbados, after dark. I explained my situation to the cabbie. And this guy spoke a creole tongue that was only part English. But he got me to a tiny hotel, and between the owners – a lovely Barbadian couple in their late sixties, and myself – the cabbie came to understand that I needed to be picked up again at 6:15 AM. I asked the couple if there were any restaurants nearby where I could get some dinner. They laughed charitably and said, "No." The woman looked at me for a moment, then looked at my bright red, battered and stickered Calton guitar case, and then looked back at me and said, "I will feed you." I asked if I could pay her for the meal. She said, "No. But you can sing for me while I cook!"

I sat on the back stoop outside of her small kitchen as she prepared chicken, rice, black-eyed peas, and some vegetables. I sang and we talked about life in Barbados, life in the US, history, culture, music, family, etc. They don't get a lot of international visitors in the area, unless they are Barbadians who are coming back home for a visit. The motel was of cinder-block construction, and had only six small rooms – all in a row. One elongated rectangle. The proprietors had a small house next to the motel. They don't

Column continued on next page

normally serve food to guests. I knew this was a once in a lifetime moment. I was in a different country, with no chaperone, seeing the real Barbados. Not the tourist locations and the places of government and international commerce. I was sitting on the stoop of an older couple who had spent most of their lives on this island, and they were delighted for music and stories from somewhere else.

The meal was outrageously good. The hospitality and kindness, welcome beyond measure. And the connection sans external examination, was real and human and profound. I was on a concert tour representing my nation. On guard always, careful to say the right thing or to avoid saying the wrong thing. And finally, I just had a night with normal people living normal lives. All by accident of fate, and all miraculously beautiful and serendipitous. It's why I tour. It is those moments that redeem the travel, a life spent in motion as a peripatetic bard. It is those moments that I live for, cherish, and adore. When my father questioned if being a musician was a wise calling to pursue, my mother always said "A good musician will never go hungry. They can always sing for their supper." And here I was, stranded in Barbados for a night, singing for my supper, literally.

I think that evening of being so unguarded with the lovely couple in Barbados, primed the pump for what happened two days later on the national broadcast, with the Minister

of Culture in Grenada. I realized that I could be a conscientious representative of my nation and be a patriot, and be myself all at once. That awareness had been rising in me for days. But on a back stoop in rural Barbados, it coalesced into tangible form. And two days later it emerged on a television broadcast as a personal doctrine. For all of our faults, for all of our struggles as a nation, we are still one of the great nations that have existed in human history. And we are great not because of our government, or our military, or Wall Street. We are not great because we have Hollywood and the Empire State Building. We are not great because of the Grand Canyon or the Rocky Mountains, or the Grand Old Opry. We are great because we have the capacity to be generous, and because we continue to pursue the experiment of Democracy with due diligence and purpose. And we can be greater still when we do so with graciousness.

It has not been easy for me to claim being a patriot. But when we can separate patriotism from nationalism, when we can be brilliant without diminishing the light of another nation, when we can elevate others with dignity and camaraderie amongst nations, we demonstrate what Democracy can look like. And music has the power to be a passport to a place of understanding and respect. As we use music to humanize abstractions, we also build bridges. We help heal wounds when we celebrate individual acts of bravery, kindness, service, and soli-

arity. We lend dimension to what divisive purpose tries to tear asunder. Music heals. My beloved and late friend James Durst said that all the time. He put it on a tee-shirt. Music heals.

There is much healing needed, in many places right now. There is much work to do, and many injustices to address. But once one leaves the US, we are no longer Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Greens, or any other party members. WE are "Americans." And the world judges us and hold us accountable as Americans. Whether we acquiesce or not, we become representatives of an entire nation once we leave home soil. And so we should be patriots, on our own terms. No one here has a right to define a singular form of patriotism. But we should still claim being patriots, especially as we sing about the workers and wanderers, the Civil Rights movements, and the beauty of this land and her people; people who now need to be reminded of their commonality, more than any time in my life. Patriotism is not inconsistent with a spirit of protest or with dissenting opinions. Patriotism in fact requires the voice of dissent, the minority opinion. I learned that in a new way while singing about the beauty and resiliency of my country and her people, while on tour in the Caribbean. I was to my great honor to be called a Cultural Ambassador for two weeks. But I will carry that identity and purpose with me as long as I live.

~ Joe Jencks, 10-20-20

*On the Air*

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



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## IEVAN POLKKA

I'm an absolute YouTube nut. Partly, I guess, because I used to be an experimental film nut, back in the days of 8mm and Super-8 filmmaking. Partly, I guess, because I'm a lover of input variety and how it tickles your brain to watch how they made hedgerows in England in 1940 then watch a vintage Mighty Mouse cartoon about the Krakatoa volcano then an industrial film on how they make jellybeans.

But a large part of my YouTube hours are taken up by exploring the crazy worlds of music. Sometimes I'm tempted to judge my own current emotional frame of mind by thinking about my day's choices in music viewing.

Recently I've found myself watching hours of music from other lands in general, and music in foreign languages that I don't speak in particular. I haven't figured out what this says about my emotions yet, but who cares. I have always found the sound of words fascinating, which, I guess, is why I became something of a lyricist. And it is such a treat to listen to the sound of words and how they work with melody and harmony, without having to worry about understanding what they mean. Funny thing for a songwriter to admit, I suppose. But anyway, when you don't speak the language, it's all nonsense verse, which I've also always loved.

When I was a kid, in fact, I invented a nonsense language called "Bint de Morlo." Just out of curiosity, yesterday I started to plug "bint de morlo" into Google Translate, and got as far as "bint de morl..." and it detected the Catalan language and came up with the definition "daughter of morals." So maybe I was onto something.

So I've been watching a lot of Russian folk music videos. Just put "Russian folk music" in the YouTube search field and *dasvidaniya!* Russian melodies are largely in a minor key, which adds another layer of delightful unfamiliarity to Western ears. Another wonderful aspect of these videos is that often (certainly not always) they are recordings of friends and family sitting

around a table with what's left of a meal in front of them, which makes it all so very homey. And the music is gorgeous, often with marvelous harmonies. And accor-dions.

Pretty soon, due to who knows what Google algorithms, I was steered to a video of a group called **LOITUMA** singing a song called the **IEVAN POLKKA** in Finnish. Their version is the one that gave the song its first surge of popularity around the world about 25 years ago. That's **IEVAN**, not "**LEVAN**" as I first read it, and note the two "K's" in Polkka. Apparently the title means "**Eva's Polka**," and according to Wikipedia it was written in the 1930s to a Russian folk melody from the 1700s by someone named Eino Kettunen. You can find Loituma's video by searching YouTube for **LOITUMA IEVAN POLKKA**. As with all things YouTube, you'll get a number of hits. Look for the one that says, in the comments, that it was recorded in 1996. or go directly to:

<https://youtu.be/7yh9i0PAjck>

I am completely transfixed by this group singing this song; I think it's marvelous.

The song had been recorded a few times previously, but apparently this Finnish group's recording of the song on their 1995 debut album "Things of Beauty," for which they added some improvised nonsense "scat" lyrics, gained a second popularity in 2006. That year, just the scat part of the song was incorporated as the soundtrack for a Japanese looped animation of a girl from a manga series called "Bleach," twirling a leek. A leek! The vegetable! Don't ask me why!

The animated girl was dubbed the **Loituma Girl** (or "**Leekspin**") and the animation was uploaded to a Russian social networking site. And it took off. (Search YouTube for "**LEEKSPIN**" or "**LEEK SPIN.**") Uploaded 14 years ago now, the little song loop shows 14 million hits on YouTube, and that's just for this first two-minute version. All sorts of people from countries around the world have recorded zillions more versions of the whole polka or just this sweet gibberish part of it.

The lyrics of the more complete polka translate in various ways, and new lyrics have been written all over the place. Copyright lawyers are jumping off buildings, though by now the original copyright may

have lapsed.

Here are a few wild translations and rewritings of the song that Wikipedia tosses off as "*It takes the point of view of a young man and leva/Eva/Eeva in Finnish, who sneaks away to where everyone is dancing to a polka, and dances all night.*"

Partial translation of the Finnish by Google Translate:

*From Nuapuri covered it to the pace of the poloka my feet were teasing. leva's mother watched over her girlfriend, but leva talked about it, because we are not bothered by the prohibitions when we also dance on the wide side. Salivili hips tufts dots dots drops quietly. Eve's mouth was on wheat. The head was wet on everyone and the violin was whining and moaning. This is not the case with the fact that the wetness is detrimental to the bride.*

Part of a Russian version:

*Oxygen drops quiet! Eva danced a polka, People gathered in a Circle. All sweaty and tired, But we have no time to rest. Because the sweat does not bother us, When the feet themselves break into a dance! Salivili hoppers tassels paws Oxygen drops quiet! The grandmother locked herself in the closet To offer prayers to the Gods. Well, I did something in the hayloft with Eve! Because there is no time for morality, When the girls themselves are torn ... Salivili hips tufts taps Oxygen ticks hilliale!*

Part of a Japanese version:

*A girl with a green onion sang At the bus stop at the hour of dawn. She spun a green onion, She could not sing in Japanese. But for us, Finnish is not a problem when we dance Eva's polka! Salivili hippu tupput-tappu Happit tippu hiljale! The girl's head was torn off, The bag was taken away and the bow was taken away The hand was cut off, the dress was taken off...*

And on we go. A 17th century Russian melody updated and with Finnish lyrics in the 1930s, popularized first by a Finnish a cappella group in 1995 and made a worldwide viral meme by a leek-twirling Japanese animated girl named after the Finnish quartet. Apparently everyone in the world knew about all this but me. But thanks to YouTube, I'm being educated.

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