

Mad Folk News

Walking the Polka-Dotted Line

By Emily Beebe

(Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge a correction to the article from the May Newsletter about disaster songs of Wisconsin. Turns out there actually was a spectacular train derailment in Weyauwega in 1996 involving propane tank cars. Fortunately the town wasn't destroyed and the world is still graced with delicious Weyauwega cheese and two wonderful new ballads written and recorded by Peter and Lou Berryman, commissioned for a documentary about the incident. Naturally, this reminded me of Essen Haus during the UW-Madison football season, when students would chug lager out of glass boots, and then lurch around the dance floor to the tunes of the Mike Schneider band.)

On a frigid Friday evening in February, we walk gingerly across the icy sidewalk into the New Glarus Hotel. We hang up our scarves in the coat room, remove our winter boots and put on dance shoes, then get in line to be seated by the petite middle-aged woman wearing a dimd and a red flower in her curly black hair. After a light (colored) buffet consisting of fried white fish, mac'n'cheese, and iceberg lettuce with creamy dressing, the Roger Bright Trio walks onto the stage. The drummer takes a seat. Roger straps on a large piano accordion, and his son tunes up the electric bass. It is 7 pm and the tables around the dance floor are crowded with couples and old friends dressed for a night on the town: women wearing tiered knee-length skirts, low black heels, and white eyelet blouses. Some of the gents are wearing clean button down shirts and bolo ties. A few look like they just got off their shift at the bowling alley, with hair slicked back in the same style they were sporting 50 years ago when they married their best girls.

The music starts with a crash of cymbal and the driving on-beat of a Slovenian polka. The dance floor fills in seconds with couples hopping and spinning around the floor counter-clockwise, taking care not to slip in the small pile of sawdust near the stage which will quickly be distributed across the dance floor. The evening's music is interspersed with waltzes, foxtrots, schottisches, and an interlude of magnificent Swiss yodeling from the long table in the corner where the Jodlerklub New Glarus is out celebrating. The band follows up with their own yodeled

waltz.

Once a common pastime on Friday nights and Sunday afternoons across the upper Midwest, the community social dance has today taken a back seat to Netflix, concerts, and youth sporting events. Even in the 1990s when polka dancing was still fairly common, the median age of the dancers was 'post-retirement'. The youngest people in the room were frequently on stage as polka music is sophisticated and demanding, requiring stamina and a good back to play melody on a tuba or squeeze an accordion for hours in double-time rhythm.

The polka is a truly American dance form, drawing deeply from the cultures of the immigrants who established farms and the main street businesses of Wisconsin or worked in the meat packing plants and breweries of Chicago and Milwaukee. Each ethnic group brought their own traditions, and all shared an affinity for the lively gallops, polskas, or obereks of the Old Country and a desire to celebrate the things that really matter in life: eating, drinking, courting a sweetheart, getting married, music, and dancing. The verses to many polka songs are written in Czech, Polish, or German and are sung first in the original language, and then in English. In this way, these songs honor both where folks have been and also where they are going. One would be hard pressed to find a polka song written about prison, lonesome turtledoves, cheating spouses, or train derailments.

Walter "Li'l Wally" Jagiello may have written the most perfect polka lyrics in 'Chicago Is a Polka Town':

*The polka is the dance for me
My feet move automatically
My head swings side to side
My feet go left and right
Oh gee, I'm happy as can be*

An excellent version of this song was recorded by Stas Golonka and the Chicago Masters. This recording and many other examples of this rich and varied style of dance music can be found in Rick March's wonderful compilations, "Deep Polka: Dance Music from the Midwest" and the follow up CD, "Deeper Polka". These recordings include everything from Scandinavian waltzes, Serbo-Croatian tamburitza music, and

Finnish polkas accompanied by squeezebox and metal spoons.

Generations in, the polka-dotted quilt has faded in the late August sun, making it harder to discern the individual squares. Still, the polka tradition has seen some new growth through unlikely marriages with other genres. There was a brief resurgence of popularity in the early 1990s, when punk rock was dabbling with traditional music. Jim "Bruiser" Krueger, an Manitowoc native, founded a polka party band called the Happy Schnapps Combo. Jim and his band graced the world with some marvelous polkas such as "Fleet Farm (A Love Story)", "I Don't Wanna Do Dat", and "On Da Badger" (a tribute to the Badger Car Ferry). Here's the chorus from 'Com'ere Once', the Happy Schnapper's ode to the Two Rivers dialect:

*I says com'ere once
Come ere once
Why don't you come by here
We'll have a hot tamale and a couple two tree
beers
Or you can go dere by dat bubbler
But don't you budge in line
She's a nice day out, ain' so*

(They have also recorded polka versions of Steppenwolf's "Born To Be Wild" and the Beatles' "Number Nine".)

There will always be some form of polka in the Midwest as long as we have new immigrants arriving and calling it home. The same themes of family, celebration after hard work, and love are at play here. Today you can hear this in the Wisconsin Latinx communities who still wear their traditional music proudly on their sleeves. Mexican polkas and traditional music can be heard wafting out the doors of small businesses, community centers, and picnic shelters. Other immigrant groups who continue to settle in the Midwest are also embroidering their squares. In a generation or two Midwestern dance music may no longer resemble an evening with Lawrence Welk, but it will remain a symbol of everything that really matters and is worth celebrating.

Check the fridge cover for information to further explore polka!

My Highway Home

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In My Father's Garage

A few years ago, I had a dream that stays with me. Especially as we head into the peak of summer, I recall so many fond childhood memories of my parent's house and yard. Some elements of this story seem unique to my experience. But in truth, this is a quintessentially mid-western experience. Many of you could tell similar tales. This may seem to some a departure from my usually music centered narratives. But in truth, as Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell would both agree in their analysis of both dreams and mythology, narrative is central to who we are as human beings. And I hold that narrative is fundamental to songwriting and to Folk Music. And I encourage you to troll through your unconscious mind and the dreamscape for stories that might need to become songs.

My dad died when I was 19. He was 62. He died on June 1st, 1991. And I think this story has been in my consciousness and in my heart as a result of recently crossing over that anniversary. This narrative centers around that dream and the archetypal themes within it. It was a dream about my dad and the garage at my parent's house.

I was blessed to have a genuinely good man for a father. I have come to realize as I get older that this is more rare than I imagined while growing up. I thought everyone had a great dad. I have come to understand that this was not true then, nor is it true now. I recall a particular M*A*S*H episode where Hawkeye's dad is in for surgery and he is impatiently waiting in the camp office for a telephone call from the States, with news of the outcome. While he is waiting, Winchester enters and sits quietly for a moment. And then he says, "You know Pierce, I envy you. Whereas I had a father, you had a dad."

A powerful line, delivered brilliantly by David Ogden Stiers. And something that has stayed with me since I first watched that episode. I had a dad.

It has probably been 20 or more years since I thought at length about my Father's garage. And more than 25 years since I stepped foot in it. But it was a magical place then. When I was younger we had a VW Bus. And my Dad usually kept a spare one for parts in the garage. That's right, a SPARE VW bus. Cheaper to buy a whole one at the junkyard I guess, and LEGO parts from one to the other. Faster too I suppose than always heading to the junkyard. But in my childhood mostly it was a spaceship in which my friend Douglas and I used to travel through

the cosmos. We spent countless hours hanging out and playing in those old VWs in the garage. We'd take turns driving of course! Ahem, I mean piloting.

So it was with shock and awe and delight and sadness all at once that I began to remember the dream. I was driving a car that was broken and I did not know how to fix it. But I just knew in the dream, if I could get to my folk's garage in Rockford, IL that my dad would know how to fix it. He knew how to fix almost anything.

I pulled up to a seemingly abandoned house, and there was some snow in the driveway. I drove gently down the hill, and parked next to the old white stucco building, nose just under the old basketball hoop. I looked under a rock for the key for the padlock. And then a string of festive white lights suddenly came on as I was fumbling for the key. And then the roller door opened magically, by itself.

It took me a moment to absorb what I was seeing. It was all in vivid color except for my dad. He was there in full dimensionality, but in black & white, and a bit translucent. I asked him for help. And he just looked at me. I asked again and he tried to pick up a tool from his workbench, but his hand passed through it, and he looked at me with wry amusement and just a little pain on his face. He began to tell me which wrenches to grab and what to do with them.

And he said, "You know what to do, you have the tools!"

I fixed the car with his counsel, and we didn't talk much. We rarely did. He always was a good listener. I asked for his advice a few more times and he just kept saying, with a gentle smile on his face, "You know what to do!"

The garage was cleaner than it had ever been in my lifetime. All the runner sleds for all seven kids were hung on the inside wall of the garage, on the opposite side as the workbench and tools. All of the bicycles were there, leaned up against the wall under the sleds. The basketballs and the little-needled air pump were there too. The trailer that was used to carry stuff to the dump and carry supplies on camping trips was also there, and the canoes as well. And his old 1952 burgundy and cream-colored Johnson Seahorse outboard motor was on a sawhorse in the corner alongside a few canoe paddles and some rope and bungee cords and garden implements.

I was so amazed by being back in the old family garage and seeing all those things and having all the memories of playing for hours in

the garage as a child, that I almost forgot that my dad was there. Even in black & white, it really was him! And so I turned back to him. I had so many questions I wanted to ask. And he just said, "You have the tools you need to do the work that needs to be done!"

And then he smiled and turned and walked out of the garage, up toward the house, undoubtedly to grab a cup of coffee, and a handful of sunflower seeds. I looked as he faded into the twilight like an apparition. A monochrome man walking back into the past from which he had miraculously emerged.

Some dreams are just that. Dreams. And some are visions and visitations. I had a wonderful visit with my dad last night. It's been a long time. And I have missed him so much. But as I remembered the dream, I was filled with joy, not sadness. Because my Dad's garage WAS a magical place where mysterious things happened. It was a place where the rules of the everyday world evaporated and Technicolor fantasies took flight inside of old VWs.

Once more, I visited that mythical realm and witnessed astonishing events. And I came away fulfilled and reminded that my parents gave me all the tools I need to be a good person and to fix what can be fixed within or without. Anytime I get lost, all I have to do is go back and visit my Dad. He'll be hanging out in the garage pattering on something. Not because he needs to, but just because it gives him an excuse to hang out in the garage, which is after all, a magical place!

Go find the magic!

~ Joe Jencks

6-23-22

Joe Jencks is 22-year veteran of the international Folk scene, an award winning songwriter and vocalist, and a contributing writer to numerous publications. For more information please visit: www.joejencks.com.

*Joe Jencks also hosts a monthly radio show called **My Highway Home** on the new Folk Music network – **Folk Music Notebook**. MHH features interviews with people Joe meets in his travels and music by many artists from the big tent that is Folk Music. Tune in on the second Sunday of each month at 5:00 PM CT. Rebroadcast at 10:00 PM CT on the same night and again the following Wednesday at 11:00 AM CT.*

Listen in online via:

www.folkmusicnotebook.com



Review by Kiki Schueler

Most of the artists who were supposed to play at Kiki's House of Righteous Music in 2020 have finally made their way back to the basement. With Matt the Electrician returning after a six year absence, it was past time to catch up on his discography. But perhaps I should first catch you up on who Matt the Electrician is. Also known as MTE, Matt Sever really was an electrician back in the early days of his music career in Austin TX. He would often go straight from work to open mikes and gigs, introducing himself "My name is Matt and I'm an electrician." Eventually he was able to quit his day job, but he never stopped being known by his trade. Adjectives like whimsical and innocent are often attached to his music, which is unfailingly honest and personal. *We Imagined an Ending* is his thirteenth release, and it's another instantly likeable entry to his catalog. It was recorded pre-pandemic, but only just released at the end of last year.

Opening track "Night Owls" revisits those magical late-night hours of childhood, when it feels like you are the only person awake, sharing the night with crickets and the wind. Sever marvels at it all like Max on his way to the land of the Wild Things, "I remember waiting till the middle of the night to fall asleep, falling like, clutching to the sides of the boat that would carry me out into the middle of

the world, where there's so little left to cling to." The lightest of percussion and backing vocals complements his acoustic guitar. It's hard to imagine a more heartfelt song than the effusive "Dance," also the record's hummable highlight. "I told you that I didn't like to dance," he says before admitting, "but I do, I really love it, it's true." It's easy to imagine a Peanuts-style, head thrown back gambol during the chorus of "I'm not angry anymore" which features enthusiastic vocals from Danish "acid folkie" Ida Weno. Her voice works wonderfully with Sever's throughout *Ending*, notably on the lovely, lullaby-esque duet "Heartbeat," which gently flutters with the work of Bizarre Star Strings (Patty King on violin, Kyleen King, viola, and Anna Fritz, cello).

"*We Imagined an Ending*" was plucked from the graceful "When the Lights Went Out," an emotive tune that feels more than a little like successful group therapy. The title begins lines that end with sentiments like "we all gathered together, held each other hands," and "we forgot about the hours, remembering our friends." The empathetic "Switch Shadows" could comfort a child afraid of the dark or a friend who needs to know someone cares. The waltzing "Temporary" and the jazzy "Mindless" feature his soulful trumpet playing, and the latter also showcases his trademark whistling skill. It's easy to overlook Sever's multiple talents on a record that seems so effortless, but that would be a mistake.

Though it won't be immediately (or even eventually) obvious given his usual proclivity for positive tunes, Sever's inspiration for *Ending* was to find the opposite of the Seven Deadly Sins, virtue

always trumping vice. Sigh, just think if more folks were always looking for good. By the time you read this, Matt the Electrician will have already played at KHoRM, but hopefully you're intrigued enough to check out his catalog. Maybe I'll see you the next time he comes through.

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. www.facebook.com/pages/Madison-Folk-Music-Society/34497984835

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Hello I Must Be Going. Again.

I used the Harry Ruby / Groucho Marx song title "Hello I Must Be Going" for my *last-last* Whither Zither, the **FIRST** time I decided that the answer to the question "Whither Zither?" was "Hither." So my **FIRST** last Whither Zither was the episode for September 2017. Then after a couple of years, because of the plague, live concerts disappeared. And of course, so did the necessity of concert reviews and concert promotional articles. The MadFolk newsletter needed some content, and Prez Darlene asked if I could fire up the ol' Mac Steamer for a few more spellbinding episodes. I started up again in May 2020 and since then have added a couple more years of WZ's.

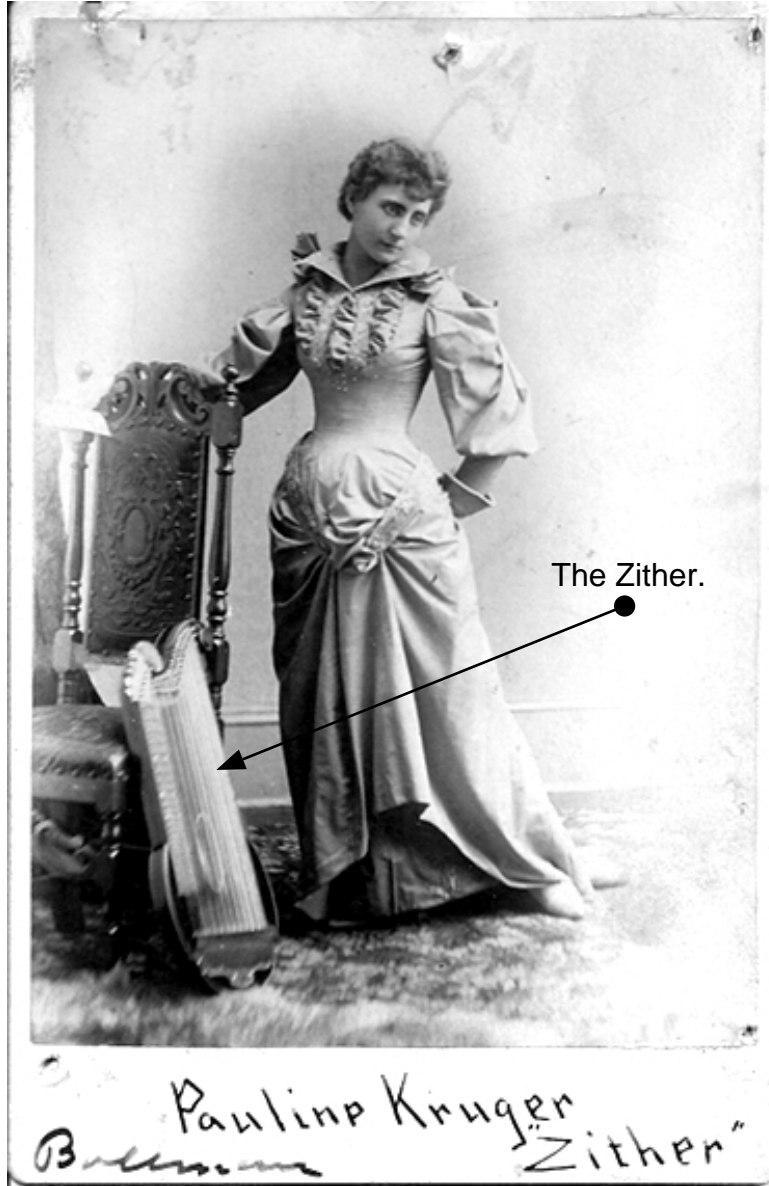
Well so now the stages are full once more, and not only that, the Newsletter is brimming with marvelous new writings so I feel comfortable about waving it goodbye. *Again*. Believe me, it's another deeply bittersweet farewell, as I have had as much of a blast shoveling these last two years of mudslides as I had with the previous twenty year avalanche (Though obviously my writing hasn't gotten any better).

So, Hello I Must Be Going, *Again*. The last-last WZ featured a neat old photograph of a woman with 'er zither. I'm doing the same this time, with what is apparently a selfie of a fascinating woman named Pauline Kruger Hamilton (1870 – July 8, 1918), standing by *her* zither.

Pauline Kruger was born in 1870 in Middleton, Wisconsin(!). She lived there until she

was 10, when her family moved to Minneapolis to help remove themselves from memories of the tragedy of her three youngest siblings dying suddenly from Diphtheria.

She always wanted to be an artist and after studying art somewhere (?), as a young woman opened an art studio on Nicollet Ave in Minneapolis, where she had shows of her work and hosted an arty social circle.



The Zither.

As well as being an artist, **she was an accomplished zither player and performed solo concerts at various venues around the city.**

The photograph, taken about 1893, shows her standing by an Arion Harp zither by Franz Schwarzer of Washington, MO. The story of Mr. Schwarzer and his zither factory is a whole 'nother potential Whither Zither article that I guess will have to wait until the next plague.

Eventually she fell in love with and married a newspaper writer named Frank Hamilton, shortly before he got into a fight with someone and killed him. Hamilton was convicted of murder and sent to prison. She lived near the prison and stayed faithful until his release. Sadly, shortly after he was freed, he died of tuberculosis.

After a time of grieving, she moved to Vienna Austria to further her art career, and became interested in photography, becoming court photographer for Archduke Ferdinand and his family. She returned to the U.S. in 1915 and worked for a charity to save starving Austrian war orphans.

Suspected of being a spy, one entry in her file reads:

"May 18, 1918 ...they received information that a Mrs. Pauline Krueger [SIC] of 12 W. 47th Street, N. Y. formerly photographer to the Kaiser, was signalling[SIC] from her apartment overlooking the river to ships in the river. Was associating with questionable characters; was an expert at wigwagging."

That's a new word for me. Merriam-Webster says:

Wigwag: to send a signal by or as if by a flag or light waved according to a code.

Among so many other things, Pauline was a feminist and friend of feminist activist May Wright Sewall, also Wisconsin born. With such intriguing glimpses of a rich 48 year life, it seemed odd that it was so difficult to find out more about her. Oh, those inscrutable wigwag-

ging zitherists!

 So that's that for Whither Zither. Again, huge thanks to the late Mike Tuten, former prez of MadFolk, and Darlene Buhler, current prez (she prefers "Queen"), and to all you loyal readers of this odd stuff. Love to all, and see you in the folding chairs.

- MAIN SOURCES:
 ---The Evening World; Fri., July 12, 1918
 ---Zither US (www.zither.us)
 ---Wikipedia
 ---Wikimedia Commons

The Mad Folk Refrigerator Cover

July 2022

Gigs

Kiki's Righteous House of Music

Invitation & Advance RSVP required.

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

- Saturday, July 2nd @ 8pm (doors at 7) Jon Dee Graham & William Harries Graham - \$20
- Sunday, July 3rd @ 6pm (doors at 5) The Waco Brothers - \$20
- Thursday, July 7th @ 8pm (doors at 7) Sarah Borges - \$15

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

- Friday, July 8th @ 6:30 pm - Ellis Paul - \$20
- Saturday, August 13th @ 6:30 pm - Danni Nicholls - \$20
- Friday, September 9th @ 6:30 pm - Willy Porter - \$20
- Thursday, October 13th @ 7 pm - Martyn Joseph - \$20

Common Chord

- Monday, July 27th, @7:30pm - Rural Musicians Forum, Spring Green
<http://ruralmusiciansforum.org/>
- Saturday, July 16th, @5pm - Farley Center - 2299 Spring Rose Rd, Verona
<http://farleycenter.org/>
- Sunday, July 17th, @10am - Paoli Mill Park- 6890 Paoli Road, Paoli
<http://thehopgarden.net/> and <http://paolimillpark.com/>
- Sunday, August 21st - Paoli Mill Park - 6890 Paoli Road, Paoli
<http://thehopgarden.net/> and <http://paolimillpark.com/>

Venues

FOLKLORE VILLAGE

Folklore Village

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

- Tue, July 5th Virtual Open Mic - @7pm
- Sat, July 9th Healthy Hoedown - The Sugar River Strutters with caller Catherine Baer - @6pm Potluck - Dancing @7:15pm - \$8 adults, \$6 seniors & teens, \$4 kids (under 5 admitted free)
- Tue, August 2nd Virtual Open Mic - @7pm

Cafe Carpe

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

- Thu, July 7th, Spook Handy - \$15 - @7:30pm
- Fri, July 8th, Piper Road - \$20
- Sat, July 9th, Marianne Flemming / Cris Plata / Bill Camplin
- Thu, July 14th, Jackson Grimm - \$10 - @8pm
- Thu, July 21st, Daniel Champagne - \$20 - @7:30pm
- Fri, July 22nd, Mother Banjo + Folios - \$12
- Sat, July 23rd, Mark Dvorak / Chris Thieme / Jim Craig
- Thu, July 28th, Song Circle w/ Tricia Alexander - \$5- @6:30pm
- Fri, July 29th, Cash Box Kings - \$18



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

Misc

Old Time Jam

Monthly - 3rd Sunday of every month, 4 to 6pm

EVP West 3809 Mineral Point Road

Coodinator: 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



wpr.org

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.



wortfm.org

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



98.7 FM - THE VOICE OF MONONA

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

In the last issue of Mad Folk News, the Farley Center announced its lineup for the Summer Concert series at the Farley Center. We regret to announce that one of the bands, Squirrel Gravy, is no longer able to perform on July 30.

We are however delighted to inform everyone that the Honey Pies, will perform on July 9, Common Chord on July 16, and Cris and Ann Plata will wrap up the series on August 6.

All concerts start at 5 PM. Admission for concerts is \$15. All ticket sale proceeds benefit musicians. Farley Center honey (\$10) and organic vegetables may be available, (Please bring cash for those items). The Farley Center is located at 2299 Spring Rose Road, Verona, Wisconsin. Concerts are outside, pack a chair or blanket, beverages and/or picnic. All are invited to tour the Farley center before or after the concert. There are no rain dates for these events. For any questions, please contact us a 608-845-8724 or e-mail us at programs@farleycenter.org . Concert series is co-sponsored by Natural Path Sanctuary and Southwest Wisconsin Area Progressives (SWWAP).

Walking the Polk-Dotted Line (Front Page)

For more to explore:

Deep Polka: dance music from the Midwest. (1998) Smithsonian Folkways, Washington DC.

Deeper Polka: more dance music from the Midwest. (2002) Smithsonian Folkways, Washington DC.

Raise It! Happy Schnapps Combo (1992) Manitowoc, WI.

March, Rick and Blau, Dick. **Polka Heartland: Why the Midwest Loves To Polka.** (2015), Wisconsin Historical Society Press. ISBN 978-0-87020-722-8.

Leary, James (2015). **Folksongs of Another America: Field Recordings from the Upper Midwest, 1937-1946.**

University of Wisconsin Press. ISBN 978-0299301507.

"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

Visit www.madfolk.org and click on "Join MFMS"

Way #2 – unplugged

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