



Reel Times

Newsletter of
The Austin Friends of Traditional Music
Vol. 50, Number 3, July 2024



Jerron Paxton

One of our featured performers at

The Austin String Band Festival

October 18 & 19, 2024

Camp Ben McCulloch, Driftwood, TX

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Upcoming AFTM Events

Saturday, July 20

AFTM Monthly Old Time Jam - 10:00 am - 2:00 pm
Lazarus Brewing, 4803 Airport Blvd, Austin, TX

Friday, August 2

AFTM World Music Night - 8:00 pm
Batch, 3220 Manor Road, Austin, TX

September 19

AFTM Night at Batch - 7:30 pm featuring:
Slaughter Creek Drought Busters
Dog Day String Band
Bright Leaf Warblers
Boyer, Yellman, & Keough

All day, October 18 & 19

Austin String Band Festival
Camp Ben McCulloch, Driftwood, TX

AUSTIN

STRING BAND FESTIVAL

October 18 & 19, 2024

Camp Ben McCulloch, Driftwood, TX

Though the Austin String Band Festival is more than three months away, planning has been underway for some time, and things are coming together!

Musical performances are the heart of our festival and we'll be featuring performers in several genres: two fine Old Time bands, a hot Bluegrass band, a killer Western Swing trio, a traditional blues artist, an excellent Cajun band, as well as a 1920's Jazz band!

This issue of Reel Times contains photos and listings of many of the performers - do check them out!

To make this festival a success, we need volunteers to manage several important areas and, if you're willing to devote a few hours to helping make the ASBF a success, we would love to hear from you!

Send an email to gary@aftm.us for more details!

Jerron Paxton



Jerron "Blind Boy" Paxton has earned a reputation for transporting audiences back to the 1920's and making them wish they could stay there for good. Jerron Paxton may be one of the greatest multi-instrumentalists that you have not heard of. Yet. And time is getting short, fast.

This young musician sings and plays banjo, guitar, piano, fiddle, harmonica, Cajun accordion, and the bones (percussion). Paxton has an eerie ability to transform traditional jazz, blues, folk, and country into the here and now, and make it real. In addition, he mesmerizes audiences with his humor and storytelling. He's a world-class talent and a uniquely colorful character that has been on the cover of Living Blues Magazine and the Village Voice, and has been interviewed on FOX News. Paxton's sound is influenced by the likes of Fats Waller and Blind Lemon Jefferson. According to Will Friedwald in the Wall Street Journal, Paxton is "virtually the only music-maker of his generation—playing guitar, banjo, piano and violin, among other implements—to fully assimilate the blues idiom of the 1920s and '30s."

Steamboat



Libby Weitnauer, Sami Braman, and Emily Mann are Steamboat, a new old-time stringband based in Nashville, TN. Their driving music breathes new life into old tunes and songs, mostly collected from recordings of unheralded female fiddlers, singers, and banjo players.

Skillet Licorice



Skillet Licorice is the latest project from San Francisco Bay Area roots-music luminaries Elise Engelberg and Matt Knoth. Essentially a musical consortium, Matt & Elise are the core of an All-Star lineup featuring many of California's hottest old-time musicians. The result is a full fledged proto-swing orchestra capable of expert musicianship in a dizzying array of folk genres. Whether they're playing hot fiddle breakdowns, slinky blues, sparkling banjo breaks, ragtime or dreamy waltzes, Skillet Licorice displays an impressive command of styles and techniques that comes from deep study and loving dedication to America's folk traditions.

With the help of their talented friends they've put together an incredible repertoire that is essentially traditional, yet with a modern approach that is anything but stale. Skillet Licorice is hot, sweet, and just a bit greasy!

Western Flyers



Powerhouse Western Swing band The Western Flyers serve up an irresistibly hot, unmistakably Texas-style sound popularized by Bob Wills in the 1940s with an electrifying energy all their own. Featuring a fresh, all-star lineup led by guitar slinger Joey McKenzie on archtop guitar & vocal, **2024 National Grand Champion** fiddler Ridge Roberts on fiddle & vocal, and upright bassist Matthew Mefford, the award winning Flyers are guaranteed to have even the shyest of wallflowers tappin' their toes or swinging on the dance floor.

Joymakers



Texas jazz, blues, ragtime and old time roots will be on full display when this powerhouse of traditional musicians arrives on the String Band Festival stage. The aptly-named Joymakers came together two years ago when two groups - Hancock's Jazz Serenaders, and The Revelators - joined forces. With an album already underway for New York label Turtle Bay Records, and talk of a post-release midwestern tour, the Joymakers are off to a roaring start to their career. "Texas style jazz, or jazz from the territories (i.e. not NYC, Chicago, or New Orleans)," is bandleader Colin Hancock's favorite description of their sound. They are not to be missed!

Guy Forsyth



Guy Forsyth grew up in KC but has been a denizen of Austin, TX for the past couple of decades. He's a true renaissance man musically, and is very difficult to pigeon-hole. He was a co-founder of the Asylum Street Spankers, has released adrenaline-fueled rock 'n' roll records, and is probably best classified as a performer with very deep rootsy/bluesy musical roots. Guy's music is eclectic – in the best sense of the word. He's also a multi-instrumentalist, being a fantastic slide guitar and harmonica player, and also playing guitar, baritone guitar, ukulele, and saw (yes, musical saw!) There are messages in the lyrics of most of Guy's songs, or if not outright messages, then deeper meanings of life as he sees it playing out around him.

Hot Pickin 57s



The Hot Pickin 57s offer an energetic and thoroughly enjoyable mix of Bluegrass, Classic Country, and Americana music.

The band members have deep roots in the Austin music scene, reuniting in 2016 after their musical educations at Berklee, South Plains College, and Texas State. They've played in well-known bands like the Bastard Sons of Johnny Cash, Whit Smith's Hot Jazz Caravan, and Rosie and the Ramblers and have had the privilege of performing alongside notable artists like Sierra Hull, Kym Warner, Alun Munde, Billy Bright (Wood & Wire), and Mark Cosgrove (David Bromberg).

So & So and the Swamp Sizzle



Austin Cajun music stalwart Michael Perron has formed a great new Cajun band, including members of Gumbo Ce Soir, The Red Stick Ramblers, Chansons et Soûlards, featuring Josh Huval on accordion!

Up Around the Sun with Bosco!



Austin old time music innovators, Tim Kerr and Jerry Hagins, are joined by the talented old time fiddler from Kyoto, Japan - Bosco!

Funyun Creek



This powerhouse old time dance band will kick off the Friday stage shows. The band is named after a small tributary that runs from Alaska to Austin, by way of Terlingua!

Members are Jerry Hagins-banjo, Beth Chrisman-fiddle, Joe Dobbs-Guitar, Amanda Chisholm-bass and, all the way from Japan, the legendary Bosco on fiddle!

Complaints, we've had a few...

It's always gratifying to hear the nice things festival-goers have to say about the String Band Festival and our Camp Jam, but we've received a couple of complaints recently and we'll be addressing them at this year's ASBF.

By far, the most complained about issue at the festival is that of children cavorting on the dance floor during performances. This behavior is a major distraction to those who have come to listen to the music, and our performers have let us know that they don't care for it one bit either.

This year, kids will not be allowed on the dance floor unless they're participating in organized dancing and accompanied by an adult.

The other problem behavior that has generated many complaints is the playing of electric instruments in the campground. We've come to the conclusion that electric and acoustic instruments just don't mix well, and the String Band Festival and the Camp Jam are acoustic music events!

So, please, don't bring your electric guitars, pedal steel guitars, or other amplified instruments. Your campground neighbors will appreciate it!



AFTM Monthly Old Time Jam

Again in July, the AFTM Monthly Old Time Jam will be held at the Lazarus Brewing Company, 4803 Airport Blvd, in Austin.

The July Old Time Jam will take place on Saturday, July 20, from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm.

The monthly Old Time Jam at Lazarus Brewing has proven to be very popular, with a consistently strong turnout at a wonderful venue!

Don't forget, Lazarus Brewing has full coffee service and serves delicious breakfasts and lunches!

The Austin Balkan Singers



The Austin Balkan Singers in 1995:

Back row l - r: Gilda Ginsel, Cynthia Mull, Shirley Middleton, CB Stephenson.

Front row l - r: Susan Hovorka, Jane Lindsey, Harriet Dinerstein, Olga Popova.

THE AUSTIN BALKAN SINGERS CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF HARMONY

It seems that 1974 was a seminal year for folk music in Austin, Texas. Joining AFTM in celebrating its golden anniversary is this extraordinarily beautiful eastern-European choir. An interview with founder/director Susan D. Hovorka.

— by Darrel Mayers

Hi Susan. Can you take Reel Times readers back to 1974, and the formation of the Austin Balkan Singers?

In the sixties and seventies, when folk music became very popular, some of us were enjoying dancing to music from around the world at international folk dancing, and we started craving to learn music from the Balkans, with those exotic rhythms and killer harmonies.

Our group started at the University of Texas under sponsorship of Dr. John Kolsti, and then became a community group after we graduated. We started swapping lyrics and hunting in bins for remnant records written in Cyrillic letters. It used to be hard to find a recording and the lyrics for the same tune; they were like rare treasures from afar washed up on our shores.

Now we can just Google and get a dozen or more historic and modern versions of a song, run the text through Google translate, and refine the tune with a Zoom call to a distant expert. But we keep recruiting new people who want to sing.

So let's talk about the geography of this region. "The Balkans" iare a dozen countries that jostle against each other on the Balkan Peninsula in eastern Europe. There's Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, part of Turkey, Serbia, Croatia and Romania. Do you choose your material evenly between all the countries... or do you favor one country over another?

Each region or even each district has its own musical tradition, and we love the diversity. Christy Foster does a great oom-pah version to a Czech tune, and we know some obscure table songs from Albania where we take turns singing *aaaj-ooo* against each.

Some of our favorites are Bulgarian tunes with single note "drone" harmonies. But we also love the 3 and 4-part close harmonies from Croatia and the fun-to-sing parallel thirds harmonies in pop tunes (from 1910) from Macedonia.

What is your personal connection to the Balkans? Did you grow up in one of the dozen countries?

Most of us have only visited via music and have never been there in person. Just like here, Balkan folk music is not nearly as popular now as it was in the past, so you have to find the equivalent of AFTM there to hear this music now.

How do you go about learning a song? There's such complex polyphony going on!

We love the harmony. However it is not so complex, just a bit exotic. We know many songs that are a melody against a single or two-note lower part. Of course some of those archaic scales like *hijaz* make some intense harmonies against a single note. You can feel the harmonies vibrating inside you when you sing them.

What is the strangest time signature that you've ever played? And, for people who rarely stray from those good ol' workhorse signatures of 4/4 and 3/4, what advice can you offer on how to count, say, 11/16?

Here is one in 11/16: 12-12-123-12-12, called *kopanica*. Fun. Macedonians call tunes in 7/16 *lesnoto* which means easy rhythm, because it is easier than 12/16 I guess.

I like *pajduško*, in 5/8, which you can synchronize with your heart, lub-dubb lub-dubb . To make crazy long meters you just string the basics together. Balkan music enthusiasts compete to get the biggest collection of specialty rhythms, each one with nuances that merit a special name and have a regional significance.

There is something thrilling and primal about the “open throat” singing that you practice - offering such a wondrous array of overtones. Can you give readers a quick primer on how to sing in this style? I read somewhere that it begins with a yawn. . .

I think it starts with howling! To do some styles you energize your whole body from your ribs to the top of your head. We don't do those precise pitches that break glass, more like loud enough to . . . rattle windows? Suitable for singing at traditional settings like harvesting in the fields, but also useful at bars.

During your 50 years together, there must have been countless highlights. Can you share a few? Have you toured, and visited the Balkans as a group?

We would consider south Austin being on tour! Many good times. We did one of our first performances at AFTM's open mic at the old Armadillo World Headquarters.

And there was a memorable time when we were sort of misplaced at Pioneer Farms, and our main and enthusiastic audience was several sows and piglets. We have our best times every week just doing those harmonies at someone's house. So if anyone wants to come over and try it, we like visitors.

Have there been difficult times too?

COVID-19 was hard for choirs because group singing was on the high hazard list. We kept going via Zoom by arranging ourselves in a complex scheme of taking turns singing different parts and muting ourselves, so you could at least sing duets with all the parts. But it sure was good to get back together vibrating the same air again.

In AFTM we face some challenges with succession — passing the torch to younger, upcoming generations. For your choir, do you have a junior choir, or some younger members ready to join?

We have multi-age women, even some singing girls sometimes. Folk traditions are not having as high popularity just now, but AFTM's work in making traditions live is valuable. People don't know how much pleasure making music yourself gives you, even without an audience.

Thank you very much Susan. . . and hearty congratulations from AFTM to you, and to the rest of the choir: Christy Foster, Harriet Dinerstein, Robin Butter, Jane Lindsey, Mary Fero, and Irina Marinova.

REVIEW OF WORLD MUSIC NIGHT AT BATCH

By Darrel Mayers

The first AFTM World Music Night at Batch early in May brought together a rich diversity of talent from our international city! The evening began with Kis Kis Maca, a trio led by Neri Osmanovic from Serbia. They focussed tightly on the rich melodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, featuring the fleet-fingered accordion legend Don Weeda, and trumpeter David Gilden (Mazel Tov Kocktail Hour), while Neri filled in tastefully on electric guitar. Half way through their 11-tune set, the dancing began, much to the delight and surprise of the musicians!

Set list: Maca Hora (Kitty Hora) - Kis Kis Maca original, Hora Veche, Hora ca la Caval, Corman's Bulgar, Boogich Bulgar, Odessa Bulgar, Kishinever Bulgar, Heisser Zib, Geamparala, Serb. Cocek, and Bosansko Kolo.

The May 2nd String Band brought together many talented musicians well-known in the AFTM community: Tim Keough, Britt Irick, Cody Campbell and Adam Brodtkin. Together they crafted a beautiful, blended sound that was a treat for all at Batch.

Setlist: Chadwell's Station; Redican's Trip to Appalachia; Billy in the Lowground; Kash Kersey; Creek's all Muddy and the Pond's all Dry; Gunboat; and Sweet Marie.

Indrajit Banerjee transported us to his home country of India with incredible displays of virtuosity on his sitar. He was on fire, as was his accompanying tabla player Sai Kiran.

Setlist: Jhinjhoti Raga set to a Teen Tala (a rhythmic cycle of 16 beats): Happy Shakti; (based on Raga Bhopali)

The Austin Balkan Singers completed the circle, taking us back to the lands of Kis Kis Maca. This group, founded 50 years ago (see Reel Times article in this issue) took us on a thrilling trip through Croatian, Dalmatian, Macedonian and Bulgarian choral music. Deep gratitude to all in this talented choir.

The setlist: Pusta mladost; Aj Lipo tilo; Cresnica; Junak Jodi; Sto si goro; Prsten mi padna; Vrlicko; and Od granka

Many thanks to all at Batch for making this happen, and for being so welcoming of this new venture!

Austin Friends of Traditional Music presents. . .

World Music Night at Batch

Aug 2, 2024

7:30 Kiko Villamizar (Colombia)
8:00 Mortensen & Duplissey (aftm)
8:30 Go Yotai Klezmer Trio
9:00 Ibrahim Aminou (kora)
9:30 open mike



3220 Manor Road, 78723

\$7 suggested donation

Coming soon: August 2nd at 7:30 p.m.

AFTM's Second World Music Night.

At Batch Craft Beer & Kolaches: 3220 Manor Road, Austin, TX

Suggested donation: \$7.00

7:30 p.m. Kiko Villamizar plays the folk music of Colombia

8:00 p.m. Mortensen & Duplissey; our AFTM friends perform big band numbers, western swing and early jazz in a bluesy, rootsy style on guitar and dobro.

8:30 p.m. Go Yotai Klezmer Trio features Gabriel Lit (clarinet) Wen Chang Lit (violin); and Constantine Caramanis (accordion)

9:00 p.m. Ibrahim Aminou will cast a magical spell with this 21-stringed African Kora (harp)

9:30 p.m. Open Mike

We need you!

In this year of 2024, it's both exciting and gratifying to realize that our small organization, the Austin Friends of Traditional Music, has been in existence for fifty years! We owe a sincere debt of gratitude to those individuals who had the initiative and energy to create this organization and who have kept it going through the decades!

But those AFTM founders back in 1974 were mostly in their twenties then; they're now in their seventies. In fact, the average age of our current AFTM board members is about seventy, and that's not by design. Many of us are ready and willing to transfer the leadership of the AFTM to a younger generation.

The board's efforts to recruit younger members to its ranks has so far not been successful. The last Reel Times newsletter contained a message specifically aimed at recruiting new board members, and the response was minimal.

I know that we all have time-consuming responsibilities that make it difficult to commit to volunteering for a small non-profit like ours but, if the AFTM and the String Band Festival are to continue, a younger generation of traditional music enthusiasts needs to step up, get involved, and provide the energy and leadership we need to keep this organization growing and thriving.

If you'd like to learn about joining our board or volunteering for the String Band Festival, email me at:

gary@aftm.us

Gary Mortensen

Reel Times Editor

ASBF Director

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