



Reel Times

Newsletter of

The Austin Friends of Traditional Music

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The 2023 Austin String Band Festival was a great success!



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Upcoming AFTM Events

January 20, 2024

The monthly **AFTM Old Time Jam** will be held at a new location
in January,
Lazarus Brewing, 4803 Airport Blvd in Austin, TX
from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm

January 31, 2024

Lonesome Nights at the Sahara, founded by our friends at KOOP
radio, will feature an AFTM band in January,
Everett Wren and the Bird Calls!
Doors open at 7:00 pm, music starts at 8:00 pm
The Sahara Lounge 1413 Webberville Road Austin, TX

April 26 - 28, 2024

This year's edition of the very popular AFTM Camp Jam will
be held at Camp Ben McCulloch. There's no admission fee
whatsoever, the only cost is the camping fees that Camp Ben
Charges.

AUSTIN

STRING BAND FESTIVAL

2023



The Joymakers cutting loose on Saturday night!

AFTM members and others enjoyed a beautiful, warm weekend for the 16th Austin String Band Festival, and the event was a great success!

Festival campers started arriving as early as Wednesday, and the sound of picking in the campground continued throughout the weekend.

Starting Friday night, two fine food vendors, Texas Street Crepes and Big Frank's Tacos, offered their delicious fare to the assembled festival-goers!

Friday's main stage activities included two square dances called by Rich MacMath, and great old time music from Last Shot Got Him, the Two Goat String Band, and the Nokosee Fields trio. In between sets, we were entertained by Two Fosters; One Price, and the Slaughter Creek Draught Busters!

For the first time ever, Saturday morning at the ASBF featured a yoga class from Lucy Weberling, who brings her Festival Yoga to events across the country! Our musical workshops followed the yoga class, and twelve different workshops were offered, featuring several types of fiddle music, Cajun dance, accordion, banjo, singing, and guitar to name just a few.

Young festival attendees were delighted on Saturday afternoon by the Texas Juggling Society, crafts with Natasha La Gitana, and face painting by Doodle Bug!

Saturday's main stage performances included the Old Time duo of Lloyd and April Wright, the phenomenal bluegrass fiddling of Luke Bulla, and the traditional Tejano fiddling of Belen Escobedo.

Alley Grass from Lockhart, TX played, you guessed it, hot bluegrass tunes and were followed by the brilliant Austin area duo, Lost Patterns - Beth Chrisman and Silas Lowe.

The Lost Pines bluegrass band, who last played at the ASBF in 2008, played a fantastic set of original and traditional bluegrass, and "The Most Laughable Band in Show Business", the Austin Lounge Lizards, played original material from their over thirty years of performing together.

The Nokosee Fields Trio, from Lafayette, LA, played an exquisite set of Old Time tunes, and The Joymakers blew the roof off the stage with their traditional jazz from the 1920's.

The festival's headliners, the Dacquiri Queens, finished the evening with a powerful set of Cajun tunes, which captivated the assembled crowd!

In between the main stage performances, we were treated to great mini-sets from Stubble In Mind, Creekbed Carter Hogan, Don't Messa With Vanessa, Rusty Nut and the Wheel Ruts, the Dog Days String Band, George Rios and Friends, and Everett Wren and Bird Calls!

The 2023 Austin String Band Festival was, as always, a wonderful experience for all who attended. Mark your calendars now for the 2024 ASBF which will take place on October 18 & 19, at beautiful Camp Ben McCulloch!

On the following pages, John Stansell's photographs capture the spirit of the Austin String Band Festival, 2023!



The Lost Pines band played a hot bluegrass set on Saturday night!



Rich MacMath called a dance on Saturday afternoon!



Belen Escobedo played beautiful Tejano fiddle music with her husband, Ramón Gutiérrez



Lloyd and April Wright, from Kennard, TX, got Saturday's program off to a great start



Saturday we heard mini-sets from The Dog Days String Band, and...



Creekbred Carter Hogan, like many others, played a fine mini-set!



The Nokosee Fields Trio gave an excellent workshop on Saturday, as did...



Belen Escobedo and Ramón Gutierrez



Luke Bulla's set on Saturday was a master class in Bluegrass fiddling



On Saturday night, the Lost Pines Bluegrass band cut loose!



The Texas Juggling Society entertained on Saturday afternoon



Todd Sloan from the Westbank String Shop was on hand all weekend for repairs and setup



A fine mini-set was performed by Rusty Nut and the Wheel Ruts



Adam Brodtkin and Aaron Zischkale accompanied Sharon Sandomirsky in her workshop



The Silent Auction found new homes for some lovely instruments, boots, records, etc.



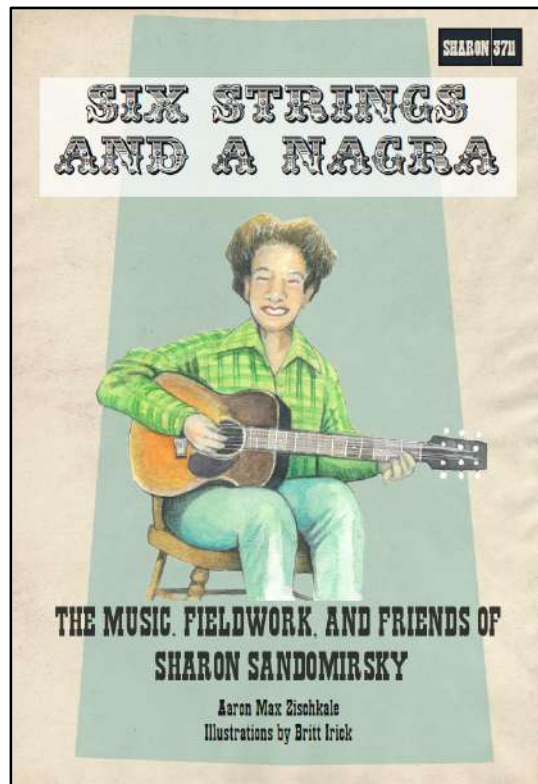
Working at the Merchandise Booth was non-stop fun!



The Green Room was a magical place after dark



Georgia, Sharon, and Angie led the Sunday morning Gospel Jam



Local musician Aaron Zischkale recently published a heartfelt and beautiful 'zine celebrating the life and work of Sharon Sandomirsky. She was the driving guitar force behind The Fuzzy Mountain String Band back in the day — early 70s to be more precise — and has lived in Austin since the early 90s.

Sharon is also one of the hosts of the excellent "Strictly Bluegrass" show on KOOP radio (91.7 FM) that brightens Austin's airwaves on Sunday mornings at ten.

I got a copy of the 'zine, "Six Strings and a Nagra," at our recent String Band Festival at Camp Ben, and was immediately charmed by the warmth and dedication of the project. Evocative illustrations by Britt Irick, and the detailed notes for guitarists on Sharon's unique walking bass style made this a publication that deserves readership and lots of attention. —
Darrel Mayers

Can you tell readers about your musical background, Aaron. Where are you from, and how did old-time music arrive in your life?

I can trace my love of music back to my nine-fingered dad. When I was a kid he lost his left ring-finger climbing the ladder of a power plant boiler (he was an engineer at the Dallas utility company that became TXU), but that didn't deter him from picking acoustic guitar at home.

Mostly it'd be the melody from "Needle and the Damage Done," or a little rock shuffle in A, but he also wrote a couple instrumental lullabies he'd play for me, picked in a simple two-finger style. He's the reason I'd eventually pick up the instrument, and passed down an appreciation for the guitar-driven music from his time: Creedence Clearwater Revival, Zeppelin, a little Frank Zappa.

I grew up in a pretty insular Southern Baptist culture in Sherman, TX, so my musical tastes didn't really get to blossom until I was a college student with a high-speed internetconnection.

Some time in grad school I bought a dirt-cheap resonator banjo from a maintenance guy at UNT Denton (inspired by hearing a three-finger part in a Raging Slab song). When my uncle found out he admonished me for it, saying everybody plays Scruggs. I should be playing something called "clawhammer"!

So I picked up an arrangement of "Under the Double Eagle" to play for my grandmother (a relative used to flat-pick it on guitar for her), and went down the rabbit hole from there. Started taking the banjo to the Dallas Heritage Village (big thanks to Dean Barber and Eric Clum), and after moving to Austin met all my great musician buddies at the Sixth Street Rio Rita jam that Britt Irick was keeping alive in 2015.

When did you first hear the Fuzzy Mountain String Band? And when did you notice Sharon's unique style of playing?

BanjoHangout was full of lovable cranks and a ton of fantastic music recommendations. I'm sure that's how I wound up buying that Rounder reissue of the Fuzzies. One of the resident experts was Tony Spadaro (aka the Old Woodchuck), who had this great detailed post delineating the "Old Dead Guys" from the second generation of counter-culture academics like the Hollow Rocks, Highwoods, Indian Creek Delta Boys.

As I relay in the zine, it was JT Harechmak who switched me onto Sharon's driving guitar work on that second Rounder LP. His taste in music is pretty impeccable. You tend to listen when he points out a detail like that.

It must have been quite a surprise when you learned that Sharon was living in a house just off MoPac!

Yeah, I remember being very impressed by the connection. But it wasn't shocking in a place where there is such a rich legacy of old-time music.

We've been really blessed getting to spend time and hear stories from folks like Tim and Angie Wooten, Gene and Marynell Young (Marynell's always been such an inclusive presence in a jam, and she's got a great story about Clyde Davenport choosing to watch wrestling on TV instead of play, when she was all geared up to record him), Nancy and Robert Griffith, Dan and Christy Foster, and Jeanne DeFries.

There's all this opportunity to learn from folks who have lived this music. I just hadn't gotten the chance to meet Sharon yet. It's been a huge honor to pick her brain about her life, and a delight getting to know her.

Apart from being with "the Fuzzies," Sharon has been in many other groups since, such as the Decibelles with Elizabeth Pittman and Christie Foster, and Friends of Big Ernie with Jerry Hagins. Do you have a favorite?

I mean, that Herald Angels tape really does need a reissue. Hearing her sing with Alice Gerrard and backup that fantastic banjo song "Drunkard's Dream" is really wonderful.

My favorite has to be Friends of Big Ernie, having gotten to watch them play a reunion show a few weeks back under the big purple stage lights at Sagebrush.

She really made us proud. Despite all the trouble with that picking hand she just dove headfirst into those killer backup runs, and did some great harmonizing along with Wolf's rendition of "Ragged But Right." String Band Heaven. Let's see her link up again with Elizabeth and Christy some time soon!

At the end of the zine you go into some detail about Sharon's playing style. Can you talk about that for Reel Times's guitar playing readers out there? What is the key to being an effective guitarist in an old-time music setting? You describe Sharon as being "in-the-pocket but unpredictable."

If you find a good fiddler like our buddy Tim Keough, who can call out chord changes while he plays, you're in great hands! A budding guitar player needs a tasteful fiddler who can give feedback while letting them develop their own style.

You can tell Sharon did a ton of listening in those early days, but once she was comfortable she took off. "Peter Francisco" really is the hallmark for me. Listen to how much character her part lends to that tune!

What's fun about old-time is so many of the rules are unwritten. But there's a balance. Start with what supports the tune (be "in-the-pocket") and once you've got that, get wild with it (be "unpredictable").

If the kid from Carter Brothers and Son can do it, you can too. If all else fails just play those angry grinding runs on the Lewis Brothers "Sally Johnson" and hope you aren't kicked out the back door.

Also, go read "Guitars Have Feelings Too" by Cameron Knowler

What musical projects are you working on right now? Also, are you working with Britt on any other 'zines?

Looking forward to making a lot of music in '24. Britt, Rose Griffith, Adam Brodtkin and I have been working up a repertoire as the Dog Day String Band (very glad I'm not the only one obsessed with cicadas), I've got my duo with Adam as the Slaughter Creek Drought Busters (I'm always overly proud of elaborate names, would love to see this on a t-shirt at some point), and got a couple other projects in the back of my head that I'd love to see the light of day.

Can't stress this enough, there's no "Six Strings and a Nagra" without Britt's fantastic watercolor art throughout. I also had a great time figuring out the cover layout with him.

We went pretty over the top on this zine (both on color artwork and content), so my next project would probably be a little lower-key and smaller in scope, but we'll see. Exhibiting our work at Austin's Lone Star Zine Fest was a lot of fun though.

As an aside, go buy a copy (or several) of San Antonio-resident Shelby Criswell's Lazy Mr. Poole. Had the pleasure of meeting them at Zine Fest, and their minicomic tribute to Charlie Poole is a wonderful bit of old-time memorabilia that you need in your collection.

Where can readers of Reel Times get a copy of "Six Strings and a Nagra" for themselves?

Eventually I'd like to have copies for sale online. But for now, please feel free to reach me at zischkale@gmail.com and I'll get ya taken care of. We're planning on printing another run soon.

Thanks for the time, y'all!

Thank you very much Aaron! I can't wait to see, and hear, what you come up with next!



Aaron Zischkale and Sharon Sandomirsky give a workshop at the 2023 ASBF



"Bird Calls" at the Sahara Lounge Lounge

As the latest edition of the AFTM's ongoing joint venture with KOOP Radio, the AFTM is proud to present *Bird Calls: Everett Wren on fiddle, David Rabinowicz on guitar, & Taylor Turner on upright bass* at **Lonesome Nights at the Sahara** on January 31, 2024.

We had the opportunity to hear the Bird Calls at the Austin String Band Festival in October, where the band closed out the mini-set program on Saturday night.

KOOP Radio created the monthly Lonesome Nights at the Sahara event, and offered to the AFTM the opportunity to "curate" two programs each year.

In past months at Lonesome Nights at the Sahara, the AFTM has presented such local artists as Lost Patterns, Two Fosters, One Price, the Joymakers, and the Two Goat String Band.

The Sahara Lounge, "Austin's East Side Gem", is located at
1413 Webberville Rd, Austin, TX

More Info about "Bird Calls"



Photo by Chris de la Rosa, at the O4 Center

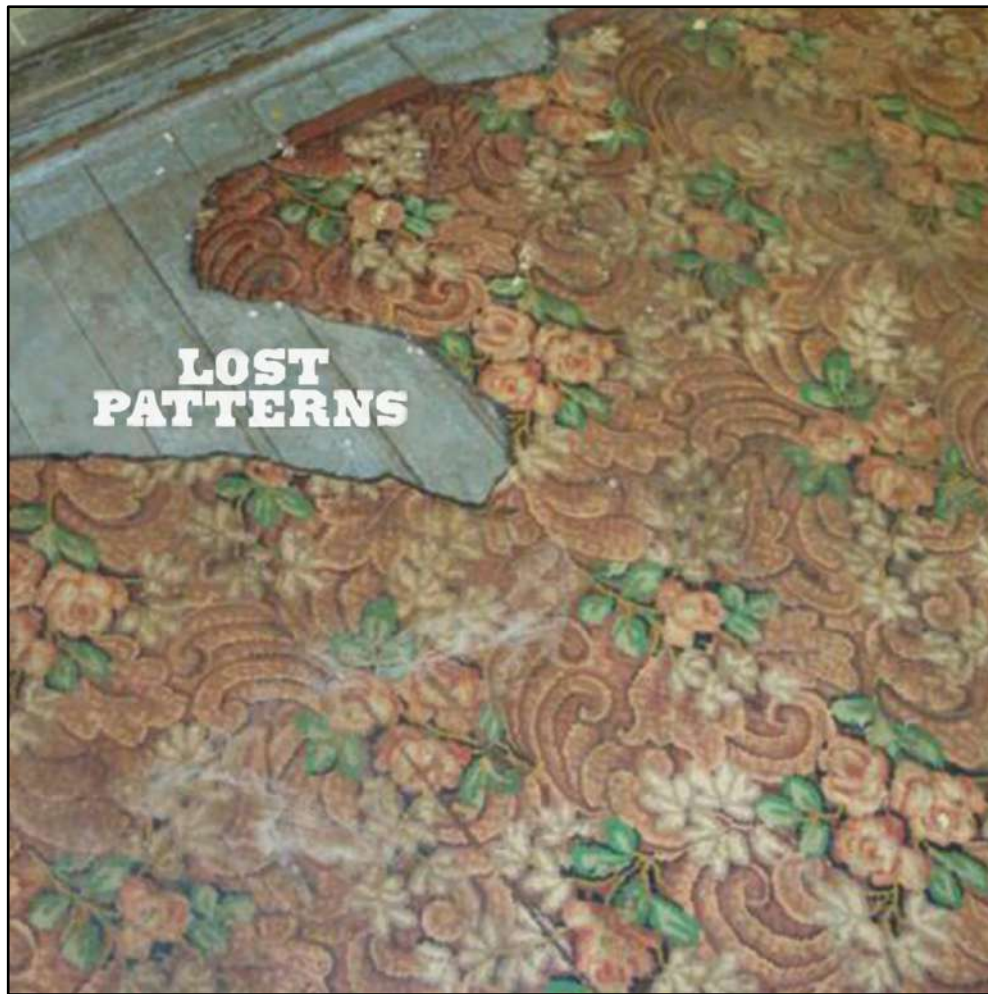
Bird Calls hail from Austin, Texas, with Everett Wren on fiddle, mandolin, percussion, and vocals, David Rabinowicz on guitars and vocals, and Taylor Turner on bass and vocals. They play high energy bluegrass and fiddle tunes, with a bit of jazz and vocal harmonies.

Everett began performing at age four in his family's band, took home an Arkansas state fiddling championship in his teens, toured the USA with an Americana band, and co-founded the Austin bands Lost & Nameless and Chalkboard Poets, before focusing on releasing his own solo record called Porchlight in 2022.

David was born into a multi-cultural family, and the different languages and traditions that surrounded him helped shape his guitar-playing, singing, and writing.

Taylor is a native Austinite and has been playing professionally for 15 years, touring internationally with rock, folk, and bluegrass bands. He graduated from UT Austin with a degree in Jazz Performance and since then has continued to explore every kind of music. They love the Sahara Lounge and have performed there several times over the years. Bring your dancing feet and join the fun 8 pm Wed. Jan. 31st, 2024!

[instagram.com/wearebirdcalls](https://www.instagram.com/wearebirdcalls)



Lost Patterns

A CD Review by Tim Wooten, AFTM President

Beth Chrisman and Silas Lowe are a twosome that has been described as playing roots music, which is true but doesn't begin to describe the variety of songs on their album with the same name as their duo - Lost Patterns. Classic country, folk, bluegrass, blues, and traditional mountain music are all represented. Silas and Beth wrote some of the songs, while others are from great songwriters hailing from Texas and parts beyond.

Anyone wanting a tutorial on duet singing should listen to this album. Silas and Beth have been singing together off and on since 1976 and you can hear and feel it in the tightness of the harmonies. Silas plays mandolin and guitar, while Beth plays fiddle, banjo and guitar. Jerry Hagins on banjo and Lindsay Greene on bass join them on certain tracks.

Dry My Eyes, written by Silas, has a pure classic country sound and feel – “if you’re saying that you’re leaving, don’t try to dry my eyes”. This is contrasted by Fall on My Knees, a traditional mountain appeal to a girl that has told so many lies that she’ll never get to heaven, and by the sad and haunting Sorrow Bound waltz, written by Beth and Silas.

They cover the iconic John Deere Tractor Song by Austin favorite Don Walser, and the traditional Rabbit in a Log, a fast bluegrass tune with great fiddling and picking. Butch Hancock fans will love When Nights Are Cold with its stirring lyrics and visual imagery. Beth’s smooth fiddle and Silas’ liquid mandolin are perfect on this one.

Beth and Silas offer one of the best examples of duet singing you’ll ever hear on Only the Lonely by the revered Hazel Dickens played with only an elegant guitar accompaniment that ends before the last line of the song to showcase the singing.

These are just some of the highlights of Lost Patterns, an album well worth listening to!



Lost Patterns, Silas Lowe and Beth Chrisman, performing at Lonesome Nights at the Sahara, at the Sahara Lounge in East Austin

AFTM Camp Jam 2024



A few years ago, the AFTM came up with a new kind of event, and called it the Camp Jam.

It's much like a festival, but there are no stage shows, no schedule, and no admission charge!

The whole purpose of the Camp Jam is to give acoustic music fans a chance to get together and play the old tunes, meet up with old friends and make new ones, set up their tents and RVs, cook meals, stay up late, and have a great time! The only cost will be the camping fees that Camp Ben charges.

This year's Camp Jam will be held on April 26 - 28, 2024 -
As usual, the site is beautiful Camp Ben McCulloch in Driftwood, TX.



Another Way to Create Songs

by David Polacheck

I have been a singer of folk songs for more years than I care to remember. During that time, I have loved and learned hundreds of folk songs.

There is much disagreement over the question of what is or is not a folk song. The definition I have arrived at over the years is simple: folk music and folk song can be performed well by people who are in no way professional musicians and who don't need a professional to direct them. I think you will find that this definition includes everything that we would want to include and excludes everything that we would want to exclude, which, I feel is the point of a definition of anything.

Now, the reason I don't call myself a folksinger as such, is that I grew up an urban, middle class intellectual and the origin of the songs and tunes I love is quite different from the environment I was raised in. One thing that resulted from this is that I always felt a certain exotic flavor in the pieces I loved and learned. Since they arose in a setting where they were part of the daily life of the original performers, it is clear to me that this aura of the exotic was more about my perceptions and less about the songs themselves. This is one example of how the difference between a folksinger from a tradition matrix and a singer of folk songs can be profound.

After so many years of learning traditional music and learning about tradition, I felt the urge to create new songs that worked within the context of the music I had immersed myself in. There are several approaches to this goal that have been put into play. The first, very frequently used, is to write new lyrics to traditional tunes. Many songwriters, known and unknown, have taken this route. Many traditional tunes have three, four or more sets of texts associated with them. For example, the Scottish tune for the song "Come All Ye Tramps and Hawkers" has been used for at least two other texts: "The Ballad of Peter Amberley" and Bob Dylan's "I Pity the Poor Immigrant". Woody Guthrie was well known for writing new lyrics to traditional tunes: "Union Maid" used the tune to "Pretty Redwing" and "The Ruben James" used the tune to "Wildwood Flower" to mention just two examples of his work.

The second approach is to compose new words and music in the folk style. This approach started to be widely used from the 1920's on, expanded greatly starting in the 1960's and continues today. One reason for the popularity of this is undoubtedly economic, as such compositions qualify for writer and composer royalty payments, should they become commercially popular. Noteworthy songwriters in this mode are numerous, among them Joe Hill, Hank Williams, Willie Dixon, Cindy Walker, Carol King, Joni Mitchell, Phil Ochs, Janis Ian, Leonard Cohen, and John Prine.

The third approach is to compose music for previously "stand alone" poetry. This way overlaps with the province of the classical composer and has been done many times. A modern "folk music like" example is "The Golden Apples of the Sun" aka "The Song of Wandering Aengus" by William Butler Yeats, which was set to original music by Bud Dashiell and Travis Edmonson. Another is "The Cremation of Sam McGee" by Robert Service, set to music by Kirk Kempter.

For various reasons, I have largely taken a fourth approach, which is to match "stand alone" poems, mostly old, by known poets, with traditional tunes of the European American tradition. I have also used tunes from the Early Music repertoire, since I find many of them to be close in style to the traditional folk music I love. This has been done much less often, but it is not unprecedented. Yeats' poem "Down by the Salley Gardens" was set to an Irish traditional tune "The Mourne Shore" by Herbert Hughes, after the poem's original publication. It is still sung this way today.

The reasons I liked this method of song creation over the others are: first, because it allows me to sing the poems I love to tunes I love, second, because I didn't think I could come up with lyrics any better than those of Shakespeare, Yeats, John Keats, Emily Dickenson, William Blake or John Masefield, among others and third, because matching this great poetry with a great tune that makes the poem singable is a very satisfying endeavor to me. Having played this music for as long as I have, I have accumulated a large number of tunes I can choose from for this process. For instance, for "The Song of Wandering Aengus" (Yeats' original title for his poem), in place of the Dashiell/Edmonson melody, I used Carolan's great harp tune "Colonel John Irwin", which I like much better for this poetry. One of the factors that helps me decide on the tune matches, is that the poetry itself has its own music when read aloud. The cadences, the rhythms, and the intonation of the words suggest melodies, and the tune I choose must work with, and not against, these. Of course, the notes of the tune have to fit the syllables of the lines of verse, and sometimes a part of the tune can be used to match part of the verse that may have fewer lines. For example, when I did some of Shakespeare's sonnets, I had to use the last two lines of the tune to go with the final couplet of the poem, since the sonnets consist of three quatrains followed by a couplet.

Another example is Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night", which has mostly three-line stanzas. I discovered it went perfectly with the tune for "Pretty Polly" which also has three-line stanzas. The final couplet of the poem was accommodated by the last two lines of the tune. In addition to the "serious" poems, I have also made singable poems by Ogden Nash, Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, Christopher Morley and Eugene Field. Try Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" to the tune of "Reynardine".

My hope is that at least some of my creations will be sung by others and maybe pass into the folk music tradition. Why not, after all?

You can view some more of my poem/tune pairings on YouTube under my channel

"David Polacheck".



AFTM Old Time Jam

For January's jam, we'll be trying out a new location: Lazarus Brewing at 4803 Airport Boulevard. They've got an inside space for us ("the casita") if needed.

Bring a jam chair just in case. Lazarus has breakfast and lunch food, coffee, tea, and -- of course -- beer.

The jam will take place on January 20, 2024,
from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm

The 9th Annual Festival of Texas Fiddling



Felipe Perez and his band performed on the main stage at the Twin Sistes Dance Hall

On the first weekend of December, many AFTM members made the trek to Blanco, TX to enjoy and participate in the 9th Annual Festival of Texas Fiddling.

This great yearly event brings fiddlers from all over Texas and beyond to the beautiful Twin Sisters Dance Hall.

The Festival features all day and night dancing to bands playing a variety of styles of Texas fiddle music inside the hall, as well as showcase concerts, instrument and dance workshops, jamming, and a symposium on Texas fiddling.

The following pages display photos of this year's event - somehow, the weather is always great!



Fiddles galore in the Hill Country!



Howard Rains, Tricia Spencer, Brian Marshall, and Frank Motley give a workshop



Heidi Labensart and her son, Mason, perform



Britt Irick, Tim Keough, and Dan Thompson make beautiful music!



Bird's eye view of a hot jam!



Notice this isn't a Louisiana license plate!

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