



Dedicated to the preservation of folk, traditional and acoustic music.

# Quarter Notes

www.plankroad.org ♪ Spring Issue, March 2010

## Plank Road's Regular Events

### SING-AROUND

Two Way Street Coffee House  
1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays - 2:00-4:00PM

### BLUEGRASS JAM

Two Way Street Coffee House  
4<sup>th</sup> Saturday - 2:00-4:00PM

• Except 4-24, hope to see you at the jam held at the PRFMS anniversary party, [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org)

### Plank Road All Volunteer String Band Practice

Jones Family Music School  
(630) 889-9121  
2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday - 2:00-4:00PM

### LAST THURSDAY Open Mike

@ Two Way Street Coffee House  
7:00 - 9:30 PM

Last Thursday of every month. A monthly unplugged open mike for high school and college age students only.

Go to [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org) and/or [www.twowaystreet.org](http://www.twowaystreet.org) for full details!



## Upcoming Events

April 9-10, 2010

### The Fourth Annual University of Chicago Dance Weekend

Band, ELIXIR; Caller, Niles Fredland  
<http://fac.uchicago.edu/danceweekend.html>

Saturday, April 24

### PRFMS 25<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary Party

2:00 - 9:00 PM  
First Church of Lombard  
220 South Main Street, Lombard  
See page 7 for details.  
[www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org)

Sunday, June 6

### Sing Out! Fundraiser

6:30 - 9:00 PM  
The Two Way Street Coffee House  
Artists: Anne Hills,  
Sons of the Never Wrong,  
Eric Noden and Joe Filisko, \$15  
See: (708) 763-9864  
See page 5 for details.  
[www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org)

Saturday, June 12

### Music By The Yard (MBTY)

3:00 PM - Held inside if it's hot.  
Carol: (630) 768-8932 or [carolspan1@hotmail.com](mailto:carolspan1@hotmail.com)  
See page 9 for details.



Bob O'Hanlon

## President's Message – Spring 2010

Hello Everyone. On January 16, we had a terrific annual meeting at the log cabin in Lombard. I think those in attendance would agree that everyone was in a festive mood. The fire was warm, the food was good and the sing-around was enthusiastic... George did his usual masterful job of leading us and getting everyone involved. At the business break, I thanked the three departing board members, Carol Sommer, Chris Kuhn and Jeanne Halama, for all their work and dedication to Plank Road, then welcomed a new board member for 2010, Carol Spanuello.

We also recognized the *Quarter Notes* and publicity staff for the excellence of their work all year long: Vicki Ingle, Jen Shilt and Charley Smart received well deserved applause from the group. At the end of this article, I will list the officers and board members for 2010.

We will now focus on a major upcoming event to celebrate the 25<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary of Plank Road! On Saturday, April 24, I hope every member of our organization will gather at the First Church of Lombard (220 South Main, Lombard), beginning at 2:00PM, for sing-arounds and jamming; folk, bluegrass and old-time music will be played all afternoon and folks can join in or just listen and socialize. At 7:00PM we will have a great concert by popular, original founder and long-time Plank Road member, Mark Dvorak. There will be food available for those who want to spend the afternoon and evening at this event. This is all free to members of Plank Road (except your food). Guests are welcome at no charge in the afternoon and can attend the concert for only \$10.

Please mark your calendar and plan to attend the 25<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary Party! Don't miss it! Bring your family and friends. Watch the Plank Road website and your email inbox and snail mail box for further details on this event.

In the meantime, I hope we see the end of winter soon and the wonderful emergence of spring. I hope to see you all soon. — Bob O'Hanlon

2010 Plank Road Board of Directors: Bob O'Hanlon, President | Charley Smart, Vice President | Cathy Jones, Treasurer | Cheryl Joyal, Secretary  
Dave Humphreys - Jennifer Shilt - Kristen Shilt - Carol Spanuello

# PRFMS

Saturday,  
April 24,

2:00 - 9:00 PM

# 25<sup>th</sup>

# Anniversary Party

SPECIAL CONCERT  
featuring Mark Dvorak

SING-AROUNDS  
JAMMING

See page 7 for all the details

# 25

prfms

SAVE  
THE  
DATE!

## Winning at the Big Top!

### Heather Styka's story about winning the Big Top Chautauqua Songwriting Contest!

As a general rule, I don't place much faith in songwriting contests. From the perspective of a performing singer/songwriter/folkie, contests can emphasize the less pleasant aspects of the music industry. Some are pricey and disappointing, and yet, for all the tension of competition, no single contest can make or break anyone's songwriting career. That having been said, sometimes you come across an artistic community that seeks to highlight and showcase talent while maintaining the warm and fuzzy atmosphere that belongs at the center of folk. I'd say the Big Top Chautauqua Songwriting Contest does this successfully.



Heather Styka performing "Prairie Song" at the Big Top Chautauqua.

Contestants were encouraged to send in two songs, which were blind screened by a panel of judges. The judges then chose ten finalists who were invited to perform at the Big Top Chautauqua near Bayfield, WI. And much to my surprise - I had submitted vaguely hoping for an excuse to take a vacation up to Bayfield - I was chosen as a finalist. The northernmost tip of Wisconsin is unlike any other place in the Midwest. Although the Bayfield area is often compared to Door County and Mackinaw Island, it's half as touristy, twice as beautiful, and home to a small but vibrant arts community. Songwriting competitions aside, I would recommend the area to anyone.

The Big Top has a magnificent sound system, it's primarily run by volunteers - oh, and did I mention it's inside a gigantic blue and green canvas circus tent? Some decades back, Warren Nelson decided that he'd prefer a tent to a theatre, in the style of the old Chautauqua assemblies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Now, the Big Top is a venue that has seen the likes of Johnny Cash, Emmylou Harris, Leo Kottke, Dar Williams, John Prine, and Susan Werner, to name a few, and home to the syndicated program "Tent Show Radio." The songwriting contest was part of Big Top Chautauqua's "Celebration of the Song" Festival, which included workshops and performances by songwriters such as Darrell Scott, Adrienne Young, Johnsmith, Karen Savoca, Greg Brown, and

Bill and Kate Isles. The prize for the songwriting contest was an opening slot for Suzanne Vega (of "Tom's Diner" fame).

The evening of the contest, I was getting over a terrible chest cold, and I didn't think I stood a chance against the other talented songwriters. But I drank a Leinie's Honey Weiss (official beer of the Big Top - and honey is good for the throat!) and took my time with "Prairie Song," a tune from my latest album that narrates the story of my great-grandmother and grandmother before my grandmother left the farm and moved to the city.

There were six judges who rated us all on melody, lyrics, and overall appeal: one reporter from Duluth, a few venue owners and program directors, and singer-songwriters Corey Carlson and Adrienne Young. Claudia Russell - a kind soul and remarkable songwriter from California who completely blew me away - was named the alternate, Scott Kirby from Rhinelander, WI was the runner-up, and despite my cold, I ended up winning the contest. That evening, after the contest was finished, all the musicians headed over to the bar to swap tunes in a song circle, which further proved that the finalists were as friendly as they were talented.

It was exciting and surreal to open for Suzanne Vega, who I admired as a child. What a treat to play such a great-sounding room - or more accurately, tent. Vega's songwriting is as strong as ever, subtle and full of vivid images. But perhaps the most memorable part of the whole experience occurred the day after the contest. I was standing with my family on the deck of a ferry to Madeline Island, a misty drizzle pouring down around us. Suddenly it felt like everyone on the boat was staring, and a few ladies pointed towards me, nodding to each other. After a woman came up to me and congratulated me on my win at the Big Top, I realized that a tour bus from Appleton had attended the contest and was now making its way over to the island. The boat was completely filled with folks who thought I was a celebrity! Of course, it was a fleeting moment. I suspect one of the nicest aspects of folk stardom is that you can go to the grocery store without wearing a disguise.

The broadcast from the competition will air on Tent Show Radio, dates and times yet to be announced. You can watch footage from the competition as well as opening for Suzanne Vega on YouTube - just search for "Heather Styka" and "Chautauqua."



Claudia Russell, who was chosen as the alternate winner, Heather, and Scott Kirby, runner-up

*Congratulations, Heather, from your friends at the Plank Road Folk Music Society!*



## MUSIC INSTRUCTION

### Practicing So It Matters

By Bruce Holmes

Imagine you're going to be living in the middle of a forest, and in every direction you look it's shrub and bramble. You're going to have to be able to move about, but you don't have a



Bruce Holmes

machete or anything to clear brush with. However, you do have a magical elf standing behind you, and you discover that as you push through the thicket he follows behind and does a quick cut or two to clear the path. So the next time you take that path you've created, it's a little easier. By the hundredth time the "path" is now paved and ready for speed. And the only drawback is that the elf is stupid. If you go in a direction you regret and announce, "Well, that was a bad idea." The elf isn't listening. He's still going to

improve the path. And the problem then is that the next time you're out in the woods you're liable to mistake that path for a good idea. And when you once again go down it, the elf will be right there with you, clearing even more of the brush. Making it even more inviting for the next walk.

To make the most of your practice time, it helps to understand a little about how your brain learns. When attempting a new activity a few new connections between neurons may be required, but what takes you from novice to expert is the myelin sheathing that gets wrapped around nerves each time you practice. The myelin improves the nerve's ability to transfer impulses, and as a result the behavior that particular nerve supports can become more precise and quick. But, like that elf, the oligodendrocyte cells that build the myelin sheathing are

stupid. They respond to whatever you do. So here's the first important lesson we can glean from this. If you practice doing something poorly, you will get very good at doing it poorly. However, if you practice doing something really well, you can get very good at what you're doing. Another important understanding is that the neural pathway which governs a movement does not care whether you do it fast or slow, you're always using the same pathway. If you do a movement slowly, the myelin gets reinforced. If you do a movement quickly, the myelin gets reinforced. However, if you do a movement quickly and sloppily the myelin gets reinforced for a sloppy movement complete with errors. Have you ever been practicing a musical line and made a mistake? Have you noticed that from then on it's increasingly possible to make the same mistake? To go down that same path? And each time you make the mistake, it gets harder to eliminate. Each time you fired that wrong neuron, the myelin got reinforced, and it doesn't just go away because you realize that choice is wrong. In time, if not used, a myelin pathway can deteriorate, become once again overgrown with brush, but it doesn't happen overnight. Best not to create it in the first place.

#### So we can now describe our goal when practicing.

Play the piece impeccably with no mistakes. We also know that it doesn't hurt to play the piece slowly. So we can go as slowly as we need to in order to play really well with no mistakes. The speed we crave will come later. In the beginning, go for quality.

This deliberate practice is not fun and it's not easy. It is exhausting. It's certainly not picking up your instrument and running through a few tunes so you can say you've practiced. Just futsing around on your instrument won't do much for you except reinforce all you're doing wrong. Deliberate practice requires you to work past the edges of your ability. To take on pieces you can't play well and make them better. It requires intense concentration and a striving for excellence. So any time I'm playing anything, I'm trying to do it perfectly. And when I make a mistake? Ah hah, now I've found my focus for the next five minutes. I'm always trying to improve, not just put in the time. So I stop. I play the notes slowly, perfectly. No fuzzy notes, no mistakes, slowly, really paying attention. What part of this is hard for me? I start at the note where I stumbled. I play the short phrase around it: just a handful of notes. I really focus. I slowly expand the context. I play it over and over again, as slowly as I need to. I'm building myelin. And at the end of those

Continued on page 8

## Part II: Inside the Heart of Bryan Bowers

### Excerpts:

Bryan Bowers: *"It's not just the songs, it's not just the instrumentals. Although I've won awards for instrumentals and I've had people record my songs. That's only the nuts and bolts. The fabric that holds it together is me, the human being and all the stories..."*

*"To this day, 40 years later, I still play probably, a couple three hours a day. And that's whether I'm workin' or not. And, if I'm workin' I play more. 'Cause I play during the day, even before I'm workin', you know. There was a breakthrough to realize the hours do add up....they add up really good in terms of your playin' ability. If you don't keep count, but if you just play for the love of it and play for the love of the tune you're learnin' that moment, that day, that hour - man oh man, you know, that takes on a different life of its own..."*



For the entire Part II, see [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org), Favorites, Reader's Write!

## LAST THURSDAY Open Mike

Part II: Our First Decade, by Dave Humphreys

In Part I of this series on Last Thursday, Tricia Rush traced the origins of our monthly high-school/college open mike at the Two Way Street. In Part II, I'll describe how it has evolved over ten years, and share a few experiences.

One of the fascinating things about an open mike, especially with this age group, is we never know what, or who, to expect! We unlock the doors, and prepare ourselves to be surprised. One month we may have a large, diverse turnout of ages, genres, and volume levels, and the next month a trumpeter and a poet.

We welcome all performance arts: music of all genres, poetry, dramatic reading...once we even had a mime! There's also a wide range of skill levels, from rank beginners to those approaching professional quality. But, that's the purpose and excitement of an open mike!



Help us spread the word: distribute flyers, Facebook updates, tweets, and be a fan on *our* Facebook page: Last Thursday @ Two Way Street!



- a young man who approached the stage very nervously, and read an intense and very personal original poem in which he acknowledged, apparently for the first time, that he was gay. His poem was met at first with brief



Heather Styka | [www.heatherstyka.com](http://www.heatherstyka.com)



Kristen Shilt



Jay Mathes | [www.jaymathes.com](http://www.jaymathes.com)

As Tricia mentioned in Part I, one of our pleasant surprises is the way the kids listen attentively and support each other, applauding and offering encouragement even when a performer isn't quite "ready for prime time."

It's also fun to see kids collaborate. We often see performers arrive and perform solo, and by the end of the evening, they're jamming with others. They may return the next month as a new duo, or even a band. Sometimes a spontaneous song circle develops. New personal friendships also result, and we've heard of several marriages!

We're especially gratified when a young performer comes for the first time as perhaps a shy and tentative beginner, and then rapidly develops into a confident and skilled artist. We've seen many continue on to study music (and the music business) in college and make it their career. Examples include Kristen Shilt, Jay Mathes and Heather Styka.

A few exciting, and sometimes poignant recollections:

- a cheerleader who was an accomplished poet and became our MC for almost a year.
- an angry young poet who invited her parents, and then told them from the stage (in verse) how she received affirmation from us and her peers at Last Thursday instead of the disparagement she felt at home. I was quite nervous when her father approached me as he was leaving, but he thanked me profusely, saying that he saw his daughter in a new and very positive way. Whew! She returned many times, noticeably less angry.

silence, then strong, prolonged applause. He emailed us several years later, saying that he had been elected the student body president at a major university.

- the many "thank you" emails we've received. One simply said: "What you are doing for us is very important."

Last Thursday has been recognized widely in the press and elsewhere as an innovative program, and we often are consulted by others. Several schools, some venues, a YMCA, and the Old Town School of Folk Music now have similar events. We've had our ups and downs in popularity, and are always seeking new ways to publicize Last Thursday. We recently started a Facebook page, and send periodic announcements to schools and newspapers.

As we begin our second decade of Last Thursday, you can help us spread the word. Pick up a few flyers and distribute them to schools, churches, libraries and other places where kids hang out. If you have other ideas, let us know.

Because, as the young emailer said, what we're doing "is very important."

**Note:** *LAST THURSDAY* is held monthly at the Two Way Street Coffee House, and is co-sponsored by Plank Road. In order to maintain a low-pressure and welcoming event, participation and attendance is limited to high-school and college age folks.

## Fundraising Concert for Sing Out! Magazine

featuring **Anne Hills**

along with

**Sons of the Never Wrong**  
**Eric Noden and Joe Filisko**

Cameo Appearance by Ella Gill

**Sunday, June 6 - 6:30 - 9:00 PM**

First Congregational Church of Downers Grove Auditorium  
Home of the Two Way Street Coffee House

1047 Curtiss Street, across from the public library  
Downers Grove, Illinois 60515



All proceeds will benefit *Sing Out!*, a not-for-profit organization committed to preserving the folk music tradition. Co-founded 60 years ago by Pete Seeger, *Sing Out!* has struggled to weather these difficult economic times.

The Plank Road Folk Music Society, the Two Way Street Coffee House, and the Fox Valley Folklore Society have teamed up to sponsor the concert, inspired by an email that 14-year-old Plank Road member Ella Gill received from *Sing Out!*

Co-founder Pete Seeger wrote:

*"A little over 59 years ago, I helped to co-found a wonderful little magazine called Sing Out! Today, in these changing and challenging economic times, Sing Out! is struggling to survive. As we head toward our 60th anniversary next year, we need your support more than ever. I ask you to consider making a contribution to help Sing Out! get through this very difficult year AND to ensure another 60 years of sharing songs that we need to learn and sing."* -Pete Seeger

Ella, a performer and folk music enthusiast, brought the idea of a fundraiser to the Plank Road Folk Music Society, asking for their help in making the event a reality. Her belief in *Sing Out!* as a worthy cause, combined with her energy and delightful personality, made it easy for area Folk Music organizations to pull together and support her request to one of her favorite folk musicians, Anne Hills, about performing at a benefit concert. We envision the fundraiser as a night to lend support to *Sing Out!* and to honor its tradition of sharing music at the same time! – Please come and share in this wonderful evening of song!

**Tickets are \$15** Advance Ticket Purchase Recommended | Tickets will be Available at the Door

Questions and Advance Tickets: Checks and Credit Cards Accepted | Call Sue Gill (708) 763-9864 | Email: jimgillmusic@earthlink.net  
Checks and Cash are Accepted for Advanced Tickets at the Two Way Street Coffee House

Sponsored by the Plank Road Folk Music Society, the Two Way Street Coffee House, the Fox Valley Folklore Society, Midnight Special, WFMT, 98.7 FM, Folk Festival, WDCB, 90.9 FM

### Anne Hills Featured at a Fundraising Concert for Sing Out! Magazine

Anne Hills will perform in the BEAUTIFUL auditorium of the First Congregational Church of Downers Grove on Sunday, June 6, 2010 from 6:30pm to 9:00pm; doors open at 6:00. Area favorites, Sons of the Never Wrong, and, Eric Noden and Joe Filisko will share the stage with Anne at this event, which will be emceed by Dave Humphreys of the Two Way Street Coffee House, with an appearance by Rich Warren, WFMT, 98.7. Sound will be provided by Maurice Smeets, Studio A Recording and Sound. This concert is made possible by the generous contribution of time and talent by the musicians, sound engineers, community organizers and fans that support acoustic music. Our thanks go out to everyone!

#### Anne Hills

As a singer, actress, writer, and musician Anne Hills has continuously built a reputation of merit. During her career, she has received numerous honors including, most recently, the 2006 Pennsylvania Partner's in the Arts Project Stream grant award (for the 2007 premiere of An Evening of James Whitcomb Riley). In 2005 she received the same grant for her premiere of The Heartsongs of Opal Whiteley. She was also the recipient of the WFMA 2002 Kate Wolf Memorial Award, and The Kerrville Music Foundation's Outstanding Female Vocalist of the Year Award (1997).

*"Hills has carved a distinct niche by performing contemporary folk songs in a stunning voice ... Experimenting with country, blues and jazz techniques, she brings a fresh vision to many of the finest folk songs being written today."* - Michigan Daily

[www.anehills.com](http://www.anehills.com)

### Sons of the Never Wrong

The Sons of the Never Wrong has been creating original "turbo-charged folk music" for over 18 years to a cult-like international following. With their outrageous approach to 3-part harmony on top of original, witty, whimsical songs, Sons' style has turned familiar musical traditions inside out! In performance this trio's energy can power up an entire town, and in this day and age of global warming, we all could use some wattage like the Sons of the Never Wrong.

*"Folk Music Reinvented: Sons of the Never Wrong keep pushing the genre forward."* - Southwestern Observer

[www.sons.com](http://www.sons.com)

[www.myspace.com/sonsoftheneverwrong](http://www.myspace.com/sonsoftheneverwrong)

### Eric Noden and Joe Filisko

The early blues and roots songs performed by the guitar and harmonica duo of Eric Noden and Joel Filisko reflect the influences of musicians such as Sonny Terry, Daddy Stovepipe, Fred McDowell and Gwen Foster. The duo's first CD's success led to several European tours as well as festival and workshop appearances in the US. Their new release "I.C. Special" continues to draw on American music from the 1920's & 30's.

*"Two marvelous musicians who have captured not only the sounds but the emotional spirit of some of the richest bloodlines in American music."* -Kim Field (author of Harmonicas, Harps and Heavy Breathers)

*"Joe Filisko & Eric Noden make a thoroughly convincing case that this music is the real deal, and their spirited performances make it sound both fresh and contemporary"* - Dirty Linen

[www.ericnoden.com/Filisko\\_Noden](http://www.ericnoden.com/Filisko_Noden)

## Music Camps

By George Mattson



Each summer since 1999, I've gone to one of several old-time music camps that are offered across the country. Usually these camps run for a week and often have a specific style of music as a theme such as "Old-Time", "Celtic", "Swing", etc. Throughout the day, classes and workshops are given and the evenings are filled with concerts, formal and informal jams, dances and other special events. Generally, these camps are given on a college campus, so the housing is provided in a dormitory and meals are cafeteria style. I find that these weeks can be the highlight of my year and they recharge my musical internal batteries. Below are some links to various music camps and some of my observations as to the best of the programs.

### The Augusta Heritage Center

Weekly thru the summer at Davis & Elkins College, Elkins West Virginia: Theme Weeks include July 11-16: Cajun/Creole Week, Early Country Music Week, Guitar Week; July 18-23: Blues Week; July 25-30: Irish/Celtic Week; Aug. 1-6: Bluegrass Week, Swing Week; Aug. 8-15: Old-Time Week, Vocal Week, Dance Week. The end of the final week coincides with the Augusta Festival Aug. 13-15, a terrific Old-Time festival that draws national and regional folk artists. In addition, they offer a week of programs in the spring and fall.

I've attended the Old-Time week twice, so my observations only apply to that theme week. It runs concurrently with Dance Week and Vocal Week, and participants may attend classes and workshops given by those programs as well. An attendee will sign up for a instrument (fiddle, guitar, bass, etc.) and a level (beginner, intermediate, advanced). The morning is then spent in a class of your instrument and level in a relatively small class. Each day after lunch, the program presents a "Master Artist" Concert, in which they bring in highly accomplished regional folk artists for a hour-long concert. Following the Master Artist concert, they offer workshops in various areas of interest (for example, Missouri fiddle-tunes, unaccompanied ballads, etc.) and the attendee can choose to attend any of several that are offered each day or use the time to jam with others or practice what they've covered in class. The evenings are very high energy with multiple events occurring such as instructor concerts, a nightly dance, and jamming that goes on through the night. This is a very intense program and is recommended to anyone who really wants to get intense instruction on their instrument since the morning class runs for several hours (usually with a short break). The teachers are uniformly excellent and are often some of the most accomplished and well-known performers in their genre of music.

<http://www.augustaheritage.com>

<http://www.augustaheritage.com/otw.html> (Old-Time Week)

### The Swannanoa Gathering

Weekly Theme Weeks thru the summer at Warren Wilson College (about 10 miles east of Asheville, NC). Theme Weeks include July 4-10: Traditional Song Week, Fiddle Week; July 11-17: Celtic Week; July 18-24: Old-Time Week; July 25-31: Guitar Week, Contemporary Folk Week; Aug. 1-7: Dulcimer Week.

Again, I've only attended Old-Time Week and each week may schedule things a little differently. (Check out the various other weeks.) I've been there 5 times and I'm signed up again for this summer, so obviously I can highly recommend it. OT Week offers a schedule of 3 classes every day; 2 in the morning and 1 in the afternoon. In addition they have a Guest Master Artist perform each day and offer afternoon workshops that they call Potluck Sessions that vary each day. Jams, concerts, dances and other events occur in the evening. This is probably the

most activity-filled camp of them all, in that so much is offered each day, you are torn between which activity to participate in. I also think that this program is the most satisfying socially, in that you meet lots of different people in the various activities that are scheduled. Since this program offers two classes in the morning, it does not give as in-depth instruction on your instrument as the classes at the Augusta Heritage Center in W.Va. However, there is more of a social aspect and your circle of friends seems to build faster since you have attended two morning classes before your first lunch on Monday and therefore you get your networking going more effectively. As at Augusta, the types of classes and quality of teachers are consistently excellent.

<http://www.swangathering.com>

### Mars Hill College

Blue Ridge Old-Time Music Week: June 6-12 in Mars Hill, NC (about 15 miles north of Asheville, NC)

This program is becoming a real favorite of mine. I've attended in it twice in 2007 & 2009 and I'll definitely be going back in future years. It has two things to recommend it: it's less intense and it's the least expensive of the full-week programs that I've attended. The schedule is not as full as Augusta Heritage Center or the Swannanoa Gathering, but that can be an advantage. You go to your class 9-12 in the morning and the afternoon offers various optional workshops in the afternoon. Instead of afternoon workshops, you may opt to take an additional class that runs all week and require an extra fee. But they also have a couple of daily workshops that vary from day to day for no charge. Or you can take the afternoon off to practice, jam or nap. The program is only about half the size of Augusta or Swannanoa and the average age is probably a bit older. As a result, most evening jams seem to end sometime after midnight, rather than going on through the night, but if you find willing participants, you can continue as long as you like. I think the program is more laid-back, because the town of Mars Hill, NC and the campus are dry where at Augusta and Swannanoa, beer is available for sale in the evenings and fuels lots of youthful energy. I certainly enjoy that energy, but I as I get older, I also appreciate getting to bed before the sun rises.

<http://www.mhc.edu/oldtimemusic/index.asp>

Also check out their other Bluegrass Theme week:

<http://www.mhc.edu/administration/events/index.asp>

### Midwest Banjo Camp

June 4-6 (Olivet, MI; near Lansing)  
(Optional Pre-Camp day on June 3)

If you want to start out attending a shorter program closer to home, the Midwest Banjo Camp, sponsored by Ken Perlman and Elderly Instruments hosts a 3 or 4-day week-end program at Olivet College. This program does not offer daily classes, but rather a large collection of workshops, principally for bluegrass and old-time banjo, but it does offer a small series of workshops for guitar, fiddle and bass. Through the weekend you choose from a large number of workshops given by some of the finest instructors and musicians in the country. Each workshop runs about 75 minutes. In addition, there is a teacher concert on Friday and Saturday nights and extensive opportunities for jamming. For an additional fee, you can start the weekend

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# PRFMS 25th Anniversary Party

Saturday, April 24, 2:00PM - 9:00PM

All activities are FREE to PRFMS members

Non-members pay only \$10 for the evening concert.

Held at the First Church of Lombard

[www.firstchurchoflombard.org](http://www.firstchurchoflombard.org)

220 South Main Street Lombard, Illinois 60148



7:00PM: Concert, featuring Mark Dvorak

## ANNIVERSARY PARTY SCHEDULE

2:00 - 6:00PM: Sing-arounds, Jam Sessions:  
Folk, Bluegrass, Old-time Music

5:00 - 7:00PM: Evening Meal (for a charge)

7:00 - 9:00PM: Concert, featuring Mark Dvorak

Sing-Arounds

OLD-TIME  
MUSIC

Jam Sessions  
FOLK Bluegrass



### "MUSIC CAMPS" Continued from page 6

early by attending Pre-Camp on Thursday for an additional day of workshops and jamming. The weekend program is excellent, however, my main complaint is that it is only for a weekend. I leave wanting more. However, this year I am registered to go, but I shouldn't be as disappointed since I know I'll be attending Swannanoa in July.

<http://www.midwestbanjocamp.com>

There are many other camps throughout the US that may offer what you're looking for. I haven't been to them but you may want to check out Ashokan Fiddle & Dance Camps, Pinewoods Camp, Northeast Heritage Music Camp, American Banjo Camp, Suwanne Banjo Camp, and I'm sure many others.

My only disappointment was at the RockyGrass Academy in Lyons, CO. The camp occurs the week before the RockyGrass festival (which is Great!) and is strictly for bluegrass instruction. I found that the teachers (at least the year I was there) were better known musicians than the instructors at the other music camps, but as a whole were not as good as teachers. It was more like a Baseball Fantasy Camp, where you got to jam with your favorite Bluegrass musicians as opposed to getting good class instruction on your instrument. Also, no room and board were provided; it is truly a camping experience. There is also a song camp before the folk festival in the same location.

I hope this overview helps encourage some of you to participate in this type of vacation. If you have any additional questions that the websites don't answer, please feel free to contact me at the sing-arounds or drop me an email at [mattsong@att.net](mailto:mattsong@att.net).

**"PRACTICING"** Continued from page 3

five minutes, I'm a little bit better than I was. Plus I've taken a weak moment and turned it into a strength.

You're eventually allowed to increase your speed, but you must do it without making mistakes. First build the myelin pathway. That's what will make the speed possible. The final ingredient in becoming excellent is not quality, but quantity. The myelin gets reinforced each time you play the piece. There is no substitute for time spent on your instrument. There may be a point in each day's practice when you'll reap diminishing returns. But the very best practice for several hours a day. How many of us practice for even an hour a day? One of the realities of myelin is that its production is triggered by using the circuit. If you don't put in the hours, it isn't going to happen. And if you stop practicing the circuits don't get maintained, the brush grows back: in time you'll see slippage in your abilities.

One last point, a good coach helps. If you're far enough along to design your own practice, fine. If not, a great teacher can make a huge difference.

### Getting Older

When you're older, this becomes even more critical. The ability to create myelin is greatest in children. Think of all they have to learn. After thirty it begins to diminish. If you've got some years behind you, it's still possible to learn new tricks, but it won't be as easy. I can still remember taking fiddle lessons along with my daughter, she was 6 years old and leaving her father (a musician with years of experience) in the dust. So if you're getting on in years, all the more important that you practice well. (You also might want to get an exercise program going, it stimulates the brain in the same sorts of ways that learning something does, a fountain of youth for the brain if you will. And I wonder if it might not make learning easier as a result.) I do have one bit of good news amid the gloom of aging. If one continues intense practice, always striving to be better, the normal aging doesn't happen in that area of endeavor. You may creak and shake as you walk on the stage. But once you take your instrument in hand, it's possible to perform at a high level even if you are 80 years old. As long as you keep striving for excellence.

### Practicing for Performance

I've seen trained and coached singers prepare for an audition. They break the song down. They plan where they're going to breathe. Every inflection is rehearsed. They know exactly what they're going to be doing at every moment. Your songs should be that well rehearsed. You should know what you'll be playing every step of the way. You should know when you'll breathe. You should have clarity about how you're going to hit your notes.

### Replicate Conditions

If you'll be standing, practice standing. Set up a sound system somehow. Put a mic on a stand and send it into some sort of mixer and sound system and out through some speakers. Even if you don't have a real PA system, you can put something together. Get used to singing into the mic and hearing your voice bouncing back at you. If you've got foot pedals to use, practice using them. If you'll be plugging your guitar in, practice using the freedom that gives you. Move away from the mic on your guitar solos. Move back when it's time to sing. Work the imaginary room in front of you. Practice your between song patter. Turn on a radio and see if you can still perform without letting the radio distract you. You don't need to do this all the time, but you should do it some of the time. If I've got a half hour slot within a larger show, I rehearse it and time it.

### Practice Until the Myelin Sheaths Are Thick

Unfortunately, you're going to need to practice your performance pieces time and time again, all the while not letting

yourself go on automatic. You want to get to the point where you can play these songs during utter panic, and the only way to get them hardwired into your nervous system is to play them over and over and over again. If you can stay interested in what you're doing on the hundredth time you've played the piece, you'll continue to improve.

I found these same ideas apply to singing. I took a new song and started singing it at half speed and suddenly I had time to make sure the notes were landing correctly. After a few times through-taking my time, going slow, isolating a word or phrase when needed-the full speed version was suddenly a lot cleaner.

### Listening To Yourself

It's easy to live in a fantasy of how good you are. But every once in a while I've had the chance to hear and see myself in concert. Some fan will send me a video, and I'll watch it. And I'll start noticing all the things I'm not doing well. It's a painful education, but also a wonderful way of motivating yourself. If you're like me, you might not be quite as good as you imagine yourself. Best to find that out and start making improvements instead of resting comfortably in the fantasy. Listening to yourself means recording yourself as you practice and then listening to the recording or watching the video. You will notice dozens of flaws that you're not aware of as you performed the songs. It's sobering. I never used to feel I had time for the listening. It was hard enough finding the time to do the practice itself. But I think it's essential. It's fun to imagine yourself good enough to be a star. But if you actually want a chance at making it you have to confront your weaknesses and master them.

### Resources:

*Talent Is Overrated*, by Geoff Colvin

*The Talent Code*, by Daniel Coyle

**Note:** Bruce told us that the best advice he ever heard on the subject of practicing was from the guitarist Dan Crary. For more information, see *Dan Crary: Flatpicking Legend*, by Joel Stein, *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*, Volume 2, Number 1 (November/December, 1997).



Scenes from the popular January 16th annual meeting at the Lombard Park District's log cabin!



## “Crossing the Stream,” Trillium

A CD Review by Dave Reynolds



Trillium, one of our favorite Midwestern bands, has released its third CD titled “Crossing the Stream”. The recording is a loose concept album of songs and tunes inspired by the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln’s birth, the centennial of Daniel Burnham’s Chicago Plan, and the soon to

be sesquicentennial of the Civil War. The well-chosen tunes are complemented by the fine musicianship of Mim Eichman, Ed Hall, Jonathan De Souza and Doug Lofstrom.

I particularly enjoyed their version of Soldier’s Joy / The Star Spangled Banner. I guarantee you’ll be tapping your toes at the end of the tune. They also perform a nice combination of “Soldier, Soldier, Will You Marry Me?” Alternating with “The Girl I Left Behind Me”. The backup on the song has a nice swing feel to it. The CD concludes with an original song written by Mim Eichman and Doug Lofstrom called “Along the Path” which according to the liner notes was based on a Navajo prayer. The song has a haunting melody and moving lyrics.

“Crossing the Stream” offers a fine collection of 13 tunes representing some of the pivotal events of our nation. This recording should be of interest to the history buff as well as the music lover. Don’t cross this stream, jump in, the water’s fine.

## Transitions: I’ll Fly Away...

Anne E.W. Kierstead, April 23, 1922 to March 7, 2010

Anne Kierstead passed away peacefully at her home on Sunday, March 7, from complications of a stroke in 2008. Plank Road members will remember Anne playing harmonica at the Saturday sing-arounds and from the barn dance band. Her daughter, Sarah, said that most people will recall her as the lady who spoke out frequently with the question, “What key is this in?”!



Anne’s first instrument was the harmonica, playing since she was 8 years old, but she also played the bugle and violin at different points in her life; she was well known in her hometown of Scranton, Penn as the bugler for military funerals and for welcoming in the New Year from her porch at midnight with reveille. Sarah, whose main instrument is the mandolin, said their home was always filled with music. Anne put her great-grandson to sleep at night by playing the harmonica for him, with taps being the last song of the night. Sarah bid her mother farewell by playing the only song on the harmonica that she knew - taps - as her mother left the house for the last time. She will be missed. It was Anne’s wishes that donations be made to the Plank Road Folk Music Society in lieu of cards and flowers. Checks should be payable to Plank Road FMS with “Anne Kierstead memorial” in the memo field, and mailed to Plank Road at PO Box 176, Downers Grove IL 60515. Thank you.

**Saturday June 12 at 3PM - Head over to Carol and Fred Spanuello’s home!**

## PRFMS Music By The Yard (indoors if it’s hot)

**It’s one of our most popular events!**

■ **Music and socializing will start at 3PM.**

Bring your instruments of course: no pressure to play, but we’d love to have you join in. If you prefer to listen, you can always request your favorite tune or song from the group.

■ **We’ll fire up the grill about 5PM. Please bring your own food to grill and your own beverages of choice for yourself**

and others if you want to share; Also bring a potluck dish to share: a salad, side-dish, dessert, snack or what have you.

■ **Bring lawn chairs for yourself, and a bathing suit and towel if you want to take a dip in Carol & Fred’s swimming pool.**

■ **RSVP requested for planning purposes**

(but feel free to join us at the last minute if your plans allow). To get directions to Carol and Fred’s home in Willowbrook, IL email: [carolspan1@hotmail.com](mailto:carolspan1@hotmail.com) or phone **630-768-8932**.

■ **This is a rain or shine event. We look forward to seeing you!**



## Thank You to our Sustaining Artists

# February Sky

PHIL COOPER & SUSAN URBAN  
Traditional, Modern and Original Folk & Celtic Music with  
Guitar, Cittern, Mountain Dulcimer, Banjo & Percussion



For details and touring schedule, see [www.februarysky.com](http://www.februarysky.com)  
or [www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk](http://www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk)

## A Special Thanks to our Membership Contributors!!

### Sustaining Artists (\$200 - \$399)

Benefits: Feature article and picture in one newsletter; 1/4 page reserved space in four newsletters for name(s), contact information and upcoming performances; individual membership(s) in PRFMS.

- Bruce Holmes  
[www.bruceholmes.com](http://www.bruceholmes.com)
- Comfort Food - Vicki and Rich Ingle  
[www.richingle.com](http://www.richingle.com) | 708-795-0695
- February Sky  
Phil Cooper and Susan Urban  
[www.februarysky.com](http://www.februarysky.com) or [www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk](http://www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk)
- Studio A Recording and Sound - Maurice Smeets  
[studioarecording@aol.com](mailto:studioarecording@aol.com) | 630-269-9668

### Supporting Artists (\$50 - \$199)

Benefits: Line listing in four issues with name of group, name(s) of member(s), contact information; individual membership(s) in PRFMS.

- Heather Styka  
[www.heatherstyka.com](http://www.heatherstyka.com)

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John J. Allan  
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Thanks

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**d** TIP: If you want to see this newsletter in color, it's worth the effort! The pictures and graphics are terrific. Go to [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org) and click on "Quarter Notes," then "Spring Issue, 2010."

## ON THE RADIO



90.9 FM, WDCB, PUBLIC RADIO  
from College of DuPage  
Online Streaming - [www.WDCB.org](http://www.WDCB.org)  
Folk Festival, Tuesdays 7 to 9 PM  
Strictly Bluegrass, Wednesdays 7 to 9 PM

## Quarter Notes

Vicki Ingle | Editor

Jennifer Shilt | Graphic Design

We welcome ideas for articles or photos you'd like to share, please send them to [vingle@comcast.net](mailto:vingle@comcast.net)



## Vicki & Rich Ingle

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*" In the grand tradition of Chicago singer/songwriters, Rich Ingle is the real deal."*

—Rick Kogan,  
Chicago Tribune, WGN Radio

[ringle001@comcast.net](mailto:ringle001@comcast.net) – (708) 795-0695

## Studio A Recording and Sound

Performers and audiences in northeast Illinois have benefited from Maurice Smeets' skill and talent as a sound engineer from many venues and events. He is the house sound engineer for Acoustic Renaissance Concerts, and for many years also held that position with the Maple Street Chapel Concert Series. He also provides sound for other special events like those at the Two Way Street Coffee House, the Downers Grove Heritage Festival Folk Stage, and the annual Gebhard Woods Dulcimer Festival.



**Maurice Smeets** has been the Main Stage sound engineer for the Woodstock Folk Festival for many years, and for good reason. The Festival is all about coming to hear the musicians and storytellers being featured, and Maurice excels at making sure they all sound their best.

In addition to providing sound for music events, Maurice has a 24-track recording studio located in Batavia, Illinois.

You can reach Maurice Smeets at:  
[studioarecording@aol.com](mailto:studioarecording@aol.com)  
or by calling 630-269-9668.

## PRFMS Christmas Party at the Two way Street Coffee House December 19, 2009



The prize for traveling the greatest distance to attend the Plank Road Christmas party goes to Linda Unger, a missionary from Nairobi, Kenya! Linda is a former student and teacher from the Jones Family Music School as well as a former member of the Jones Family Band.



George Mattson with Oddie Warr. Oddie's claim to fame is singing in a gospel group with the late, great Sam Cooke, when they were both teen-agers! You'll see Oddie at song circles in the western suburbs and an occasional Plank Road event.

# SAVE THE DATES!



**Sat., April 24**

For more information about the 25th anniversary party that includes a concert featuring Mark Dvorak, see page 7.

**Sun., June 6**

For information about the Sing Out! Fundraiser concert in Downers Grove with Anne Hills, Sons of the Never Wrong, and Eric Noden and Joe Filisko, see page 5.



## PRFMS Annual Meeting and Jam at the Log Cabin



Mimi and Dave clowning around for the camera



A big welcome to Ella Gill and Tavi Gevinson who are new Plank Road members!



## Folk Resources Next Door

See [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org), click on Favorites



## 2010 PRFMS Officers

**Bob O'Hanlon - President**  
mimioh@hotmail.com  
(630) 325-7764

**Charley Smart - Vice President**  
plankroad@comcast.net

**Cathy Jones - Treasurer**  
cathy@jonesfamilymusic.com  
(630) 889-9121

**Cheryl Joyal - Secretary**  
clmjoyal@aol.com

**2010 Board Members**  
Dave Humphreys,  
Jennifer Shilt, Kristen Shilt,  
Carol Spanuello



PRFMS Contact:  
Bob O' Hanlon  
Email: [mimioh@hotmail.com](mailto:mimioh@hotmail.com)  
(630) 325-7764

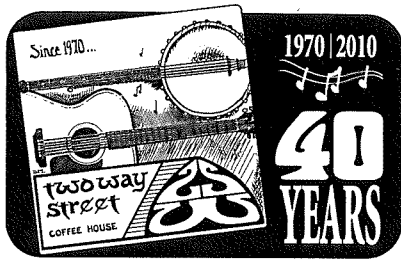
P.O. Box 176, Downers Grove, IL 60515

## PRFMS Membership INFORMATION

You can get an individual (\$10 year) or family (\$20 year) membership by sending a check to:

PRFMS  
P.O. Box 176  
Downers Grove, Illinois 60515  
Thank you!

Membership info is available online at [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org)



## TWO WAY STREET COFFEE HOUSE

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[www.twowaystreet.org](http://www.twowaystreet.org) • 630-969-9720

(Across from the Public Library)

*Folk Music Every Week since 1970!*

### ENTERTAINMENT SCHEDULE

- Friday April 2 **NAOMI ASHLEY** — A born storyteller — free spirited and very funny! Gorgeously sung songs drawing on American folk, blues and country. “Terrifically talented!” (Rick Kogan, *Chicago Tribune*). With Cathie Van Wert, fiddle. 8:15pm \$7
- Friday April 9 **AUBREY ATWATER** — Rhode Islander Aubrey Atwater returns presenting traditional Celtic and American folk ballads, stories and originals. Guitar, banjo, Appalachian dulcimer, tin whistle, spoons, bones, feet, and beautiful vocals! 8:15pm \$7
- Friday April 16 **CHRIS FARRELL** — Renowned singer/songwriter and professional actor, he’s played Chicago clubs since the Lincoln Avenue scene of the 70’s & 80’s. He’s also toured nationally, and teaches guitar at the Old Town School of Folk Music. 8:15pm \$7
- Friday April 23 **\*JIM PHOTOGLO** — Nashville performing songwriter has written for artists from Garth Brooks to the Everly Brothers! Also, numerous albums, a tour with the Beach Boys, and top songs on the Billboard and Folk DJ lists. With guitar. 8:15pm \$7
- Friday April 30 **ANNIE & ROD CAPPS** — Award-winning indie/folk/rock. Songwriting is relevant, wry, exuberant! Michigan duo sings with guitars, banjo, mandolin and fiddle with a rootsy vibe, a touch of twang, and a soulful groove. Great CDs! 8:15pm \$7
- Friday May 7 **ANDREW CALHOUN** — Famed songwriter/poet/guitarist with originals, folk songs, ballads, spirituals, hymns & poems. “One of contemporary folk’s top songsmiths.” (*Chicago Tribune*) Unpretentious, insightful, witty. 8 great CDs! 8:15pm \$7
- Friday May 14 **DAVID STODDARD** — Winner of Kerrville, S. Florida & Winterfolk competitions. Compared to Loudon Wainwright III and Randy Newman, his musically rich songs, with piano and guitar, range from contemplative to funny! 8:15pm \$7
- Friday May 21 **MOLLY & THE TINKER** — A rowdy, hearty, satirical, funny Irish duo with guitar, hammered dulcimer & more! In 25 years, 11 albums and 2 kids, they’ve been featured on WFMT, WGN, WJOL, WTTW, cable, and “Dr. Demento.” 8:15pm \$7
- Friday May 28 **STEVE JUSTMAN** — Roots of Americana: vintage folk & classic country plus bluegrass & country rock with guitar, banjo, & vocals. He’s performed at many of the best acoustic venues & libraries in Chicagoland and on WGN. 8:15pm \$7
- Friday June 4 **CHRIS McINTOSH & ALVIN McGOVERN** — Teachers at Old Town School and other schools, they present popular and obscure folksongs of many eras. Sweet ballads to fun English music hall songs, with guitar & banjo. 8:15pm \$7
- Friday June 11 **\*JAMES KEELACHAN** — “Canada’s finest songwriter.” (*Dave Marsh*). A masterful storyteller with a compelling voice, his passionate and exciting songs have won a JUNO, plus awards from Australia to Scandinavia. 8:15pm \$7
- Friday June 18 **DAVE MARTIN** — Good-humored traditional and contemporary songs and singalongs in the spirit of Si Kahn and Pete Seeger. He’ll make you laugh & sing, and he’ll make you think, too! Guitar, banjo, and a few bad jokes! 8:15pm \$7
- Friday June 25 **OPEN MIKE** — Anyone is welcome to perform, and we always have a great variety of acoustic performers! So popular we must limit the number of acts. 1-2 songs, 10 minutes max. Doors open at 7:30 for signups – first come, first served. **Show starts 8:00.** For more information, phone 630-968-5526. 8:00pm \$7

*\* Will be featured the next night on WFMT 98.7 “Folkstage” with Rich Warren.*

Sunday June 6 6:30-9:00pm \$15	<b>Gala Benefit Concert for Sing Out! Magazine</b> — Anne Hills, Sons of the Never Wrong, and Eric Noden & Joe Filisko. Advance Tickets and Info: 708-763-9864, jimgillmusic@earthlink.net
<b>SAVE THE DATE!</b> Sat. November 6	<b>40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration!</b> — An afternoon & evening celebration for all our musical community! Jam sessions, old-time barn dance, open mike, singaround, and a concert featuring Mark Dvorak, Small Potatoes, Kat Eggleston & Kate MacLeod, and Patchouli!
Saturdays Apr 3 & 17 May 1 & 15, Jun 5 & 19	<b>Sing-Arounds</b> — Our popular song circles where beginners and experienced musicians can learn and/or share songs. Listeners and singers welcome too! Songbooks provided. Plank Road Folk Music Society co-sponsors. First and third Saturday afternoons of every month at 2:00 pm.
Saturdays Apr 24*, May 22, Jun 26	<b>Bluegrass Jam!</b> — Musicians of all experience levels gather to improve skills, learn/share tunes, & have fun! 4th Saturdays, 2:00-4:00pm. *at Plank Road’s Anniversary in Lombard.
Thursdays Apr 29, May 27, Jun 24 7:00-9:30 pm Free!	<b>LAST THURSDAY!</b> — Monthly unplugged open mike for high school & college age students. Last Thurs of every month. Music, poetry, any performance art – 10 min. max. Signups begin 7pm – first come, first served. Info at <a href="http://twowaystreet.org">twowaystreet.org</a> , on Facebook, or 630-968-5526.
Live entertainment is featured every Friday night beginning at 8:15. Doors open 7:30. \$7.00 donation requested. Beverages and snacks available. The Two Way Street Coffee House is a not-for-profit community project of the First Congregational United Church of Christ, Downers Grove. Member: Plank Road Folk Music Society, Fox Valley Folklore Society, Old Town School of Folk Music, Aural Tradition, and Folk Alliance International. Please call us at 630-969-9720 for current entertainment listings and updates, or visit us on the web at <a href="http://www.twowaystreet.org">www.twowaystreet.org</a>	