



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

# Quarter Notes

www.plankroad.org ♪ Winter Issue, January 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

### 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!



Bob O'Hanlon

## President's Message – Winter 2010

Happy New Year, everyone! I hope you enjoyed the holiday season and are looking forward to a great 2010. Looking back on 2009, Plank Road had a very successful year, starting with our annual meeting at the log cabin in January and ending with our Christmas party in December. In between, we had three barn dances, attended four folk festivals, had a music by the yard, a campout, and, of course, our usual Saturday sing-arounds and jam sessions. We increased our membership, updated our web site and published four excellent editions of *QuarterNotes*.

I hope you all participated in several of these events; they are all member friendly and you are the reason we do what we do. Our main goal for 2010 is more member participation in our activities. We want you to look forward to the events and give us feedback on them. Are there things you would like to see more of? (or less?)

The first special event of the year is the annual meeting on January 16 at the log cabin in Lombard. At that function, the 2010 Plank Road board and officers will be introduced, and we will have a nice long sing-around, a warm fire and food for you to enjoy. This is also a perfect time and place to renew your annual membership. See the renewal form enclosed with this issue. There will be a barn dance on February 13 and on April 24, we will host a major event celebrating the 25th anniversary of the founding of Plank Road. We hope to see every member there!

There is detailed information on all these events in this *QuarterNotes* and on our web site. As the 25th event draws nearer, you will hear more and more about it.

On a personal note, I have enjoyed being president of the organization in 2009, and pending the approval of the board, will continue in that role in 2010.

I hope to see you all soon. — Bob O'Hanlon

## Upcoming Events

### PRFMS Annual Membership Meeting and Jam

January 16th, 2010  
Doors open at 7:15pm  
Music starts at 7:30pm  
See bottom right for details.

### Old Time Barn Dance Party

February 13, 2010  
8:00pm  
See page 3 for details.

### Folk Alliance International Conference

Memphis, TN  
February 17-21  
[www.folk.org](http://www.folk.org)

### SAVE THE DATE! PRFMS 25th Anniversary Celebration

April 24  
[www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org)



## PRFMS Annual Membership Meeting & Jam

Everyone is gearing up for the PRFMS Annual Membership Meeting and Jam session at the log cabin in Lombard on Saturday, January 16th. It'll be a fun evening so don't miss it!

- Bring a dish, dessert or snack to share and your instruments for a night of music and munchies.
- **Doors will open at 7:15pm and the music jam will start 7:30pm**, with George Mattson as our jam leader.
- You can help by not arriving too early so the board has time to get the cabin ready, the fire roaring, and conduct our board meeting.
- This is the time to renew your annual PRFMS membership. You can "pay your dues" at the meeting, so don't forget to bring your membership renewal form and payment (either cash or check - not credit cards) with you.
- The Annual Membership Meeting is primarily an event for members to celebrate another grand year at PRFMS. If you do bring a guest, we hope they will consider joining our organization while they are at the meeting.

**7:30 pm Music Jam Session**  
**Doors open at 7:15 pm**

Lombard Park District's Log Cabin is located in Four Seasons Park on Main Street in Lombard between Roosevelt Road and 22nd St.

[http://www.lombardparks.com/facility\\_list.htm](http://www.lombardparks.com/facility_list.htm)

Please google: usda, potluck safety. Read the brochure if you plan on bringing a dish to the potluck! Help keep us all safe and healthy.

Jan. 16th



## Inside the Heart of Bryan Bowers, the Early Years - Part 1

As part of researching Bryan Bowers' career, in preparation for what turned out to be almost a two-hour telephone interview with him, I searched the web using "Bryan Bowers, autoharp" and came up with over 2,000 hits. I turned then, instead, to two articles about Bryan, one written in 1993 (Bluegrass Unlimited) and the other written in 2007 (Dirty Linen). With typical humor, Bryan said of the Dirty Linen article, "If I believed every thing they said in there, I'd think I was a genius. It was a really beautiful, complimentary article... the other one too..." I told Bryan that I wasn't looking for a repeat of the information contained in those two articles, but, if he wanted to, he could take the questions a step further. I think he did. **-Vicki**



Bryan Bowers at Lynn Garren's House Concert, Co-sponsored by PRFMS and the Fox Valley Folklore Society.

**Vicki:** Do you want to talk about the early days a little bit, growing up in Virginia, hanging out around the railroad tracks and being around the music of the gandy dancers?

**Bryan:** The stunning part of the call and answer music, whether it was from the field hands working with their hoes in their hands, hoeing the weeds out of the cotton and the tobacco and soy beans and peanuts... or the gandy dancers (working) with the big 16 pound sledge hammers and pry bars and grabber bars on the rails and the cross ties, settin' the tracks - there was this stunning, loud, strong, vibrant music, in a call and answer form, that filled both those work places; (from workers) in the fields with the hoes in their hands and in the railroad beds with the 16 pound sledge hammers in their hands. There was this amazing music bein' done and while it was bein' done, all this work was gettin' done. It was a way to pass the time and have a little fun in the midst of workin' their brains out, with heavy sweat runnin' off of them and muscles flexin' and tensioning and releasing. It was amazing. Just amazing to see it be so much a part of both things - part of the work, part of its own self.

So, I was mesmerized by it. The railroad guys (actually one of the best things happened was - you know, I used to sit up on the railroad bank), they wouldn't let me sit down in the railroad bed with them, cause they were hittin' those hammers on those steel pins sometimes and chips of steel would fly.

There were sparks flyin' all the time, chips of steel would fly - they wouldn't let me down in the railroad bed. They would be hittin' the hammers on the big pins and they'd give it the (Bryan sings this part):

*"Whoa boys, can't you line 'em? 'chack a lack',  
Whoa boys, can't you line 'em? 'chack a lack',  
Whoa boys, can't you line 'em? 'chack a lack',  
See Eloise come down that track."*

Well, the words made sense, but the 'chack a lack' didn't make sense. So, I asked the guys one day, sittin' there (they'd let me come down and talk with 'em, when they were eatin' lunch). So, I'd come down there and they're eatin' their lunches, and I would stand around and talk with 'em, you know - and they were huge and big and friendly... So, I say, "What does that mean, that 'chack a lack' that you sing in that song?" And they said, "Oh," one of the guys holds up his thumb, "pretend that is the pin we're gonna hit with the hammer," he said. "The hammer comes down on the top of that pin and hits. When it hits, it makes a sound - the 'chack'. 'A' is the bounce back, where the hammer bounces back from the pin... then it falls back down again, from gravity, 'lack'. So, each stroke has three pieces: hit, bounce back, and fall back down on the pin," he said. "So, we call that what it sounds like: 'chack a lack'..." It was just mesmerizin' to me. I had a little hammer made of wood and a little wooden peg and a little wooden board with some holes in it. I would sit up on the railroad bank and while the guys were doing the 16 pound sledge hammers, I had my little wooden outfit and I would pound on my little stake and I would pound it into the hole with my little wooden hammer and go "whoa boys, 'chack a lack'..." I was about 7 years old, 6 years old. And I thought, you know, I'll be big one day, I'll have me a big hammer, you know. (Bryan laughs.)

**V:** How did that work its way into your music?

**B:** I do a few "call and answer" songs every night in the shows, with families. And I do them in the kids' shows too.

**V:** What do you do in your kids' shows?

**B:** I do a little show and tell. I bring the harp in and... I go into depth about how the harp is constructed... I show them how felt blocks the sound out so they get the whole thing about the left hand. And then I show them about the right hand, what the right hand does. So, they love that.

Then I do call and answer songs like Liza Jane, some single time and double time hand clappin', while they're singin'. You should hear them go from timid to vibrant to stunning in a matter of six minutes. They just really get outside themselves and realize they get it. Soon as the clappin' is propelling, giving propulsion to the song, then they forget all their inhibitions they get so caught up in the moment. They start singin' louder and they start getting exuberant and laughin' and then that's when the magic of call and answer singin' occurs. I see it regularly in these kids shows.

**V:** That's beautiful. Mention has been made that you left college just 3 hours short of getting a degree in order to pursue music. You have said things like, "Music was a healing thing for me, it saved my life." I wonder if you'd give us your take on all of that now, the urgency you had as a young man to play the autoharp, the 'why' behind it all.

**B:** When I first started playin' music, Vicki, playin' an instrument, I was in my junior year in college - I was already a husband and a father. I was workin' at the campus exchange 40 hours a week at the college, managing it, sellin' hamburgers and balancin' the books and whatever, orderin' materials. I was

## MUSIC INSTRUCTION

### Finding Your Best Voice

By Gail Weston-Roberts



Gail R. Weston-Roberts

*I met Gail through the Oak Park Farmers' Market music group many years ago and was immediately impressed with her singing. Gail is a formally-trained vocalist and voice teacher, and, a lovely folk singer. She now resides with her family in Massachusetts.*

**-Vicki**

Want to sing better? In a nut shell, get plenty of rest, drink lots of water, sit up straight and take a deep breath - expand those lower ribs... hold it... Well, maybe it's not quite that simple, but some general principles like these will get you further than you think.

While the greatest vocal gains will be realized with the help of a teacher, there is a lot you can do yourself to protect the voice you have and improve it... nearly everyone can sing better by employing some general principles. They're about vocal health—your 'instrument' is a permanent installation, so it's vital to protect and defend those vocal folds!

So, let's talk about mucous! Sorry, but it's unavoidable. As long as your mucous is thin, as it's meant to be, it's the perfect protection for your membranes (mucous membranes, remember?). The way to keep it thin and hydrate your tissues is to drink lots of water the day before you are going to be singing.

On the day you sing, drink water but don't "load up"; you don't want water-swollen tissues, and you also don't want to have to run to the bathroom frequently during a gig or jam session! If you're feeling dry or gunky despite best efforts, resist the

temptation to clear your throat with fruit juices or alcohol. Contrary to popular belief, sucking on fresh lemons is counter-productive as the acid strips mucous off the throat, which increases dryness and swelling. Diuretics such as caffeine and alcohol can also increase inflammation and dehydration and should be avoided. A little wine is okay, but avoid hard liquor altogether if you have dryness problems. You may also want to watch out for dairy products, too, because they seem to cause the opposite issue: increased mucous production!

If you feel the need to "move stuff along" in your throat before you sing, try eating an apple. This is a gentler throat clearer, and the chewing action also relaxes the jaw and throat muscles you use in singing, which is always a good thing.

Trickier to describe in writing are approaches to breath support. A voice teacher watches how you breathe while you sing and can give you invaluable feedback on areas where singers tend to have problems: over-or under-inflation of the lungs, and frequently jaw, tongue and/or neck tension. There are many schools of thought on breath control and I hesitate to enter the fray, but will offer what has been taught from the classic, "Italian school" and found to be effective for those who practice it.

Rather than focusing on the diaphragm or upper chest expansion, try breathing in so that you fill your lungs instantaneously and have to expand the LOWER side ribs. Inhale WITHOUT expanding the upper chest, or raising the shoulders AT ALL. Watch yourself in a mirror for this; it is a very unaccustomed sensation for most people after early childhood. You can also get a sense of this by lying on your back on the floor—no shoulder lifting occurs this way. You have to open your throat wider to let in that quantity of air rapidly; then sing (or breathe out) in an even flow while keeping those lower ribs in the same expanded position. (You should also maintain that slightly larger opening at the back of the throat also; it's referred to as the "gola aperta.") The goal is to prevent the ribs from sinking inward as the air leaves, because the air flow is relatively unhindered this way. Your ribs stay out of the way, like a barrel, allowing maximum lung capacity and avoiding pressured airflow out, which can push your pitch sharp and create unnecessary pressure on your throat structures. Overall, this approach is like martial arts: you use just enough force (air and muscle pressure) to achieve your goal (your best sound) and no more than that, because that's when damage starts to occur. Belting is always dangerous (that distinctive "Broadway"

Continued on page 7

## Winter Old Time Barn Dance Party

### and Downers Grove Annual Ice Sculpture Festival

Saturday, February 13, 2010 at 8:00pm - \$5.00 admission for everyone 5 years of age and older  
Doors open at 7:30pm - Musicians arrive at 7:00pm to warm-up

Two Way Street Coffee House, 1047 Curtiss St., Downers Grove, IL (Across from the Public Library)

Enjoy a fun-filled evening of music and dancing for the entire family. Dance the night away and/or play with the Plank Road All Volunteer String Band. Dances are informal, with no costumes needed. In fact, you don't even need to bring a partner! Refreshments available.

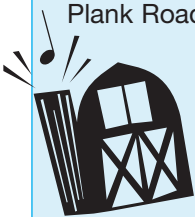
### All You Can Eat Pancake Breakfast

Saturday, February 13, 2010 at 8:00am to 11:00am

First Congregational Church in Downers Grove | 1047 Curtiss St., Downers Grove, IL

The Plank Road All Volunteer String Band will play from 9:00 am to around 10:30 am

After the Pancake Breakfast and before the dance, be sure to check out the amazing ice carvings and fun events happening at the **Downers Grove Ice Sculpture Festival**.



For more information visit  
<http://www.downtowndg.org>





## LAST THURSDAY Open Mike

Part 1: Planting the Seed, by Tricia Rush

When Vicki asked me to write an article about how the *LAST THURSDAY Open Mike* started, I was a little nervous about telling my part of the story. But as I thought about it, I realized that (for better or worse!) I would like to share the events that led up to my involvement in it. *LAST THURSDAY* has come a long way since 2000 and has changed and developed into what it was meant to become. I am glad I had a part in making it all happen.

When the Columbine tragedy occurred in 1999 it hit me hard, as it did most people, I'm sure. I wanted to do something positive for young people, something they could look forward to in the future. That September I had an opportunity to visit Scotland and while I was there, I went to a Ceidlah - a music gathering, usually open to everyone. However, this one was different in that two older gentlemen ran it like an open mike and the performers were young people between the ages of 12-23. Some of them showed talent and others step-danced like elephants, sang loudly and off key and lacked a sense of rhythm! But the one thing that made everyone stand out was their enthusiasm, an apparent passion for their culture and a drive to share it with anyone who was interested. We forgot about the varying degrees of talent displayed by the performers when their love shone through.

On the plane ride back home, it suddenly hit me that we need an event like this here, a place where kids can feel free to express themselves, to talk about what's on their mind and get involved in the community. I figured if a program similar to the one in Scotland could be started here, we could get them involved and perhaps contribute to a positive, safe environment for youth in our community. I started writing down ideas and ways to incorporate them. By the time the plane landed, I had a pretty good plan of action ready to go. It was similar in format to the late 60's-70's coffeehouse scene.

I began sharing my idea with others and soon a team of interested people was formed; Steve Castle, Dave Humphreys, Dave Reynolds and Jennifer Shilt. The four of us met to iron out the details and my large program was whittled down to a manageable size, a monthly open mike called *LAST THURSDAY: It's OUR Turn!* The idea was to introduce folk music to young people and get them involved in the community while bringing new faces into an aging subculture.

After four months of preliminary work, the first open mike debuted in February of 2000. Everything seemed to fall into place. We were written up in local papers and caught the eye of the music industry organization Folk Alliance International. We had a steady 20-30 youth coming every month and there was quite a bit of diversity! As I watched these young people, I noticed that as different they were from one another, they started forming a bond with each other and never ridiculed or disrespected the others. They were very encouraging to each other and open to jamming with everyone, regardless of the level of talent. I was pleased at these wonderful friendships that were forming each month. Eventually I needed to focus my energy elsewhere and withdrew from the committee. I am happy to see how far *Last Thursday* has come and how much the people involved have poured into it. Thank you to all who have been a part of it. —Tricia



From the early days of *LAST THURSDAY Open Mike*



### Transitions:

## I'll Fly Away...

Mary Travers, November 9, 1936 - September 16, 2009

In 2005, Mary Travers was diagnosed with leukemia and though a bone marrow transplant slowed the progression of the disease, she died from complications arising from chemotherapy. Mary was a singer-songwriter and member of the 1960's popular folk group, Peter, Paul and Mary. The Songwriters Hall of Fame, which honored the group with a lifetime achievement award in 2006, said: "Travers' soaring voice and signature harmonies were instrumental in (the group's) achievement of a rarefied level of commercial success without compromise, while continuing a centuries-old tradition of people raising their voices in song for the sake of freedom." The group collected five Grammy Awards for their three-part harmony on enduring songs like *Leaving on a Jet Plane*, *Puff (The Magic Dragon)* and *Blowin' in the Wind*.

"Bandmate Peter Yarrow said that in her final months, Travers handled her declining health with bravery and generosity, showing her love to friends and family with great dignity and without restraint." (Boston AP)

## Christmas Caroling Party

Nine folks braved the cold weather and gathered at the Two Way Street Coffee House to enjoy the Plank Road Caroling Party this year. Bundled up in scarves, hats and mittens (and armed with Little Hotties packets to keep our hands toasty, thanks to one thoughtful caroler) the carolers headed out to Main Street on the coldest night of the year. And there were shoppers out. Although many were rushing past the singers, some folks did stop to listen to a verse or two, or to wave from their car, or to wish us all a happy holiday! Back at the coffee house, everyone enjoyed hot drinks along with cookies and one of Jeanne Halama's famous bundt cakes. Our last song for the evening was singing Happy Birthday to Jeanne, who celebrated her birthday by singing carols outside in 9F degree weather! A grand time was had by all, warmed by the opportunity to visit with good friends. I hope you will make plans to join us next year!



—Cathy Jones



Look for Part II: an update on the *LAST THURSDAY Open Mike* from Dave Humphreys, in the March QN!

**"BRYAN BOWERS" Continued from page 2**

carryin' an 18 hour course load, 15 hours was supposed to be normal, I was carrying 18 hours. And I had made it onto the basketball team as a walk-on, after having never played in high school, 'cause my mother was sick and I had to take care of her. I never played any games, but I was a practice junkie and he let me be on the team, as a walk-on. So I was doin' all that.

And then I got to a point one night, drivin' home, with my straight A grades in my pocket and my other pocket had my check in it from the campus exchange and I'm goin' home to my wife and young son. I should have been on top of the world... and, I had a scholarship to be at school... I was drivin' across the bridge and I thought, "I'd just like to drive this car right through the bridge... but, I don't want to do this." And, I didn't of course, but I thought, "Damn, what the hell was that?" So I went to see the Dean of Men the next day and told him the story. And, he asked me what I was doin'. I told him what I was doin' and he said, "Well, that's just too damn much." And, he said, "You got straight 'A's,' huh?" I said, "Yeah." He said ok and he calls up the Dean's office there and he says, "I want to check some grades on this student... what are we givin' him? (There was a pause.) I want to triple that. He's showin' his worth here, lets not lose him."

So, they gave me triple the scholarship I already had. So, I was basically getting a free ride, at that point. But, he said, "Quit the campus exchange. You don't need the money now, 'cause, I'm giving you the scholarship. But that's (a job) too much." He said, "Keep the basketball, and keep your grades up." So I quit the campus exchange and all of a sudden I had time on my hands and somebody said to me, one evenin' when I normally would have been workin' my brains out at the campus exchange, lets go into town and hear some folk music.

I said, "Folk music, what's folk music?" "Oh, you know, kinda like Peter, Paul and Mary." And I went, "Oh, that's folk music, huh?"... So we go into town and there's this little coffee house, there's all these people singin' songs and stuff. And, I heard these people singin' and I was kinda hummin' along. This guy who had brought me said, "You got a nice voice, you're hummin' right in pitch and right in time, you should get a guitar." I said, "No, not me, man. No guitar for me."

So, the long and the short of it, is I did get a guitar. And, as soon as I started playin' the guitar I got into this amazing realization that my life was empty. And, that music put me in touch with that fact. I looked at my being in college as paying a debt to my deceased parents, who wanted me to be in school at all costs. I didn't want to be there. I was trying to live up to their memory, to their wishes. You know, (I thought) they're both gone and I'm still trying to honor them. That's why I'm in college. And then I thought, well, I'm married and I got a beautiful wife and a young son. I thought, yeah, if you had taken precautions you wouldn't have gotten her pregnant and you wouldn't have stepped up and did what you tried to do, doin' whatever they call the right thing... I just felt empty inside.

My grades didn't make me fulfilled. The basketball - I didn't really play, I was just a practice junkie... And the marriage - I was just tryin' to do the best I could. But, it was, like, difficult. I stayed 8 years in the marriage... I gave it as good a shot as I had. But, anyway, it was during that time when I realized the emptiness inside of me, in spite of all the trappings of supposedly doing well in my life, that other people might have thought I had. I realized I kinda had this vision of my interior as a dry lake bed, the interior of my body, my soul, whatever the most vibrant part of me is, the interior of me I likened to a dry lake bed. And, every time I learned a song or an instrumental on the guitar, or a song just to sing, it was like a little, tiny crystalline drop of clear water ran down out of the hills and into that dry lake bed. And, at first it was just barely enough to catch

your eye, enough to shimmer in the sun. But it kept slowly fillin' and slowly fillin'. And the more songs I learned, the more it filled. And, I'm tellin' you what, it was an epiphany to me, to see that and to realize that (songs) could hold so much importance to me in the face of all these things that should have importance, which didn't seem to.

And my wife, meanwhile, was at this point noticin' I became obsessed with music. My grades started to drop off, I quit the basketball team. I was playin' music morning, noon and night.



Lynn Garren, Vicki Ingle, Bryan Bowers, Juel Ulven at the December House Concert

And she started in with the, "You know, you need to get over this and start putting that guitar in your hands once a month, for an hour, for fun, but this playing 8 and 10 and 12 hours a day - this is not what you are supposed to be doin'. You're here to go to college..." Blah, blah, blah.

So, that was the long and short of it. So, I limped out of college with this vision. It was shortly after that I got a job at this brickyard... And, I'm playin' music all the time that I can. It was during this period that I saw the autoharp. After I saw the autoharp, within 4 months the guitar was gone... the autoharp just took precedence. I immediately started dreaming music I couldn't play and hearing music in my head that I couldn't play, and playin' and playin' and playin' all the time, every morning and every evening and at lunch time I'd bolt my lunch and try to play. It was just the way I was, tryin' to get better. I could never get better soon enough to suit me. I could feel my progress, but it was miniscule. But then the break through came cause I got out of the brickyard job and I got a job delivering copy for the newspaper in Richmond, Virginia. And that was the best thing I could have done. I didn't have a boss over me, I was my own boss... I was self-motivated, anyhow...

I, all of a sudden realized one day, as I was drivin' around, I was only talkin' to people about two hours a day. The other six hours I'm drivin' around on pretty, country pastoral roads around Richmond, Virginia, at 30 mile an hour. So, I went to the junkyard, got steerin' wheel knobs - what they call suicide knobs - and I placed them on the steerin' wheel at 5 and 7 o'clock... Now I could steer with my knees while I played the autoharp for 6 hours a day and got paid for it. And that's when I started to make progress...



**Look for the rest of Bryan's story in future issues of the QN and on the website.**



## Thank You to our Sustaining Artists



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

## 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)
- **February Sky**  
Phil Cooper and Susan Urban  
[www.februarysky.com](http://www.februarysky.com) or  
[www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk](http://www.myspace.com/februaryskyfolk)

### 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.

- **Comfort Food**  
Vicki and Rich Ingle  
708-795-0695
- **Rick Neeley**  
Rickety Music - Rick Neeley, Chris McNamara  
McNamara & Neeley and, "The Songs of Bob Gibson,"  
[www.ricketymusic.com](http://www.ricketymusic.com)

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

John J. Allan  
Midge and Dan Anderson  
Sheila and Joseph Gut  
Lilli and Robert Kuzma  
Gregg and Elizabeth Morton  
Elizabeth Weir




*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)

 **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 "Winter 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)

**"BEST VOICE"** Continued from page 3

sound where one sings very loudly by pushing the air out thru a narrower throat opening) and is likely to produce the dreaded vocal "nodes" that have ended many singers' careers. Simply put, you develop calluses on the vocal folds from the friction and pressure. Some folks get away with murder because they don't callous easily, while others are not so lucky and lose their range and tonal control.

Body posture becomes a very important factor in breath support since it shapes the space with your ribs and the space for your lungs. People who play a stringed instrument and sing at the same time are at a distinct disadvantage in that their body is forced out of the best alignment—one arm, and frequently the head, is stretched over and in front of the body and instrument, in order to strum. The goal is to have a straight neck and spine, and the top of your head should be parallel with the ceiling. Many pickers crouch over their instruments as they bend into the music, with their ear to the sound hole and their eyes on the fingerboard. I play mandolin and recommend that you begin your practice by standing, pretending that the top of your head has string attached to the ceiling by which you're suspended, so you can observe what the straight, yet relaxed, spine posture is like. Then pick up your instrument and try to maintain that alignment and feeling as much as you possibly can. If possible, stand when you play and sing - it will help your posture. Sitting is always worse as we tend to slump around our guitars and such.

Let's talk about some pitfalls of folk singing and see what we might learn. Folk singers sometimes fall into the habit of singing in a somewhat choppy fashion, which isn't always pleasing to the ears and increases friction in the throat. Think legato - string the tones of a musical line together, smoother rather than broken up into short phrases by frequent breaths or emphases. Singing more legato also gives you more tonal control. Another pitfall of the folk singer/bluegrass singer is lifting the jaw, which curls the neck. This posture strains your voice by compressing the pharynx (voice box), resulting in tonal sharpness. It's like the sound produced by someone who is standing at the bottom of a staircase talking to someone at the top. Sometimes we prefer the timbre we produce when we do this, but if you combine lifting your jaw with excessive volume your voice may crack, a sign of strain. This is, again, dangerous to long term vocal health.

Another 'occupational hazard' for folk singers is the song circle: we "sing out" to be heard over all the instruments—without a microphone, mind you!—and strain our voices, simply trying to hear ourselves sing! This is tough to avoid if you have a large group and no amplification. If your voice is scratchy and tired after you sing, your throat is telling you something: reduce your volume. Once again, some folks seem to get away with a lot of 'abuse' of their instrument, but you don't want to find out too late that you're one of the less lucky mortals.

Relaxing the neck and shoulder muscles before you sing is always a good thing, and here are a couple of exercises for that. First, jog in place, being sure to include your arms in the motion. Next, do the trunk twists—not too hard if you have disk issues. Do arm circles, small and larger, reversing direction a couple times. Roll your head gently from one side to the other, dipping down in the front (but skip to the back, it's not helpful). Pretend you are chewing some juicy steak (or tempeh?), or are biting and chewing an apple. All of these loosen the muscles that are connected to your vocal apparatus, which frees you up from the usual tension we tend to carry through the neck and shoulders.

We are accustomed to hearing our own voices and therefore have to learn how to hear ourselves objectively. Think about it: unlike ALL the other instruments (except the rattle?!), we've been using and listening to this instrument since we were

babies. So, learning to hear ourselves more accurately is one of the primary goals in voice study. It's difficult to get where you want to go, traveling down the vocal path, until you know where you really are. By paying closer attention and working with a good teacher for feedback, you can dismantle the idea of what you thought you sounded like and learn how to hear the effect of how you sing. Then you can learn how to alter your sound. But fundamental is your vocal health—the foundation for everything you can sing. Good luck, relax and happy singing!

**To hear Gail sing**, email Vicki at [vingle@comcast.net](mailto:vingle@comcast.net) and ask about the *Long Gone* CD - available for your listening pleasure for the cost of packaging and shipping.

**Advanced Vocal Students:**

*On the Art of Singing*, by Richard Miller; this book addresses expressive issues in singing.

*The Structure of Singing*, by Richard Miller; this book is highly technical and covers the anatomy and mechanics of the voice.

*Gail graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio, studying with then-student soprano Lisa Saffer and successfully auditioning for vocal studies in the Oberlin Conservatory her senior year, where she studied with Marlene Rosen. Years later she resumed voice study with Sarah Beattie of Concordia University in River Forest and benefited tremendously from taking part in Oberlin Conservatory professor Richard Miller's vocal workshop and master class.*

## Readers Write!

- > [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org)
- > click on Favorites
- > The Next Generation



Ella Gill and Tavi Gevinson, 8th graders from Oak Park, perform folk music from the 1960's and their own original folk songs on the stage at Val's Halla Records, located in Oak Park, IL. To see more photos, read some of their original song lyrics and hear their story - see Reader's Write, "The Next Generation."

*Tavi is an internationally-known author of the Style Rookie blog! See the Sunday Styles section of the December 27th New York Times.*



**SAVE  
THE  
DATE!**  
April 24

For information about the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and more on the history of PRFMS, click on the Anniversary logo on the home page of the website - [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org)



Congratulations Heather!  
Heather Styka wins the 2009 Big Top Chautauqua Songwriting Contest and opens for Suzanne Vega! Look for her article in the next issue of QN to read all about it.



**Folk Resources Next Door**  
See [www.plankroad.org](http://www.plankroad.org), click on Favorites



### 2009 PRFMS Officers

**Bob O'Hanlon - President**  
mimioh@hotmail.com

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

**Cathy Jones - Treasurer**  
cathy@jonesfamilymusic.com

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

**2009 Board Members**  
Jeanne Halama, Dave Humphreys, Chris Kuhn, Jennifer Shilt, Kristen Shilt and Carol Sommer



Jeanne Halama plays at a jam session at the Tennessee Fall Homecoming Festival in Norris, TN; her pictures are on permanent display there.

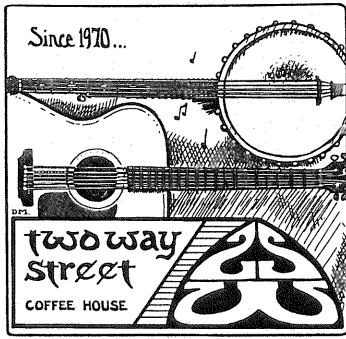
**IMPORTANT PRFMS Membership INFORMATION**  
JANUARY 1st - 31st is The Annual PRFMS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME.  
All memberships renew annually at this time. Your membership renewal date is in the top corner of your mailing label.  
**Included in this issue is your membership renewal form. Please update it and renew your individual (\$10/yr) or family (\$20/yr) membership by bringing the form and cash/check to the Annual Membership Meeting or by sending them to:**  
PRFMS  
P.O. Box 176  
Downers Grove, IL 60515  
**Don't let your membership lapse -** To keep receiving the *Quarter Notes* don't forget to renew your membership for 2010. Thanks!



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

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





## TWO WAY STREET COFFEE HOUSE

1047 Curtiss Street • Downers Grove, Illinois 60515

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

(Across from the Public Library)

*Folk Music Every Week since 1970!*

### ENTERTAINMENT SCHEDULE

#### Our 40th Anniversary — Save the Date!

#### SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2010

An afternoon and evening celebration for all our musical community, performers and audience! Lots of jam sessions, an old-time barn dance, open mike, sing-around, and of course, a concert! Details to come, but mark your calendar now!

- |        |          |    |   |
|--------|----------|----|---|
| Friday | January  | 1  | <b>CLOSED</b> — Happy New Year!!  |
| Friday | January  | 8  | <b>PETE NORMAN'S Post-Christmas Blues Fest!</b> — 25 <sup>th</sup> annual show (!) sure to banish <i>your</i> post-Christmas blues! Great songwriter Pete, DK and guests present folk, blues and fun songs. Guitar, Dobro, fiddle, banjo, more!   |
| Friday | January  | 15 | <b>JOHN HASBROUCK &amp; the Northside Southpaws</b> — Virtuoso fingerstyle & bottleneck guitar evokes Delta blues, roots, and moderns Michael Hedges & John Fahey, plus great old-time guitar/mandolin duets with Matt Gandurski.   |
| Friday | January  | 22 | <b>CHRIS PROCTOR</b> — National fingerstyle guitar champion and Rounder and Windham Hill recording artist (10 CD's!), he's one of the best and most innovative performers/composers for the 6 & 12 steel-stringed guitars!  |
| Friday | January  | 29 | <b>DREW NELSON</b> — Michigan native with a gruff/sweet voice & smart percussive guitar. Passion, energy and inspired songwriting won acclaim at the Kerrville, Falcon Ridge & Telluride competitions and across US & Europe. New CD!   |
| Friday | February | 5  | <b>DAVID HAWKINS</b> — Singer/songwriter/guitarist who says "I write what I want to hear." Variety of styles: haunting melodies, soulful vocals, strong poetic sense, and intermittent injections of humor! Latest CD: <i>Driven to the Strings</i> .   |
| Friday | February | 12 | <b>DAVID CLARK</b> — Georgia storyteller, songwriter, syndicated columnist and guitarist who's heard on NPR's <i>All Things Considered</i> . He returns with nine albums, three books, new stories, and a warm, insightful, entertaining show!  |
|        |          |    | <i>(Ice Sculpture Festival!)</i>  |
| Friday | February | 19 | <b>NATURAL BOB &amp; MICKY HOLDSWORTH</b> — Performing songwriters offer original songs plus modern folk ballads & traditional tunes with a modern slant! With guitar, mandolin and bass. Critically acclaimed CD: <i>Just Be You</i> .   |
| Friday | February | 26 | <b>CLAUDIA SCHMIDT</b> — Legendary performing songwriter brings a contagious spirit of joy to her shows! Folk, blues, & jazz styles; maybe a hymn, torch song or bawdy verse! Acclaimed guitar & mountain dulcimer. 14 albums!  |
| Friday | March    | 5  | <b>OPEN MIKE</b> — 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. <b>Show starts 8:00.</b> For more information, phone 630-968-5526. |
| Friday | March    | 12 | <b>*TIM GRIMM with Jan Lucas</b> — Acclaimed singer/songwriter, actor & Indiana hayfarmer, appearing with Carrie Newcomer & Harrison Ford. He's compared to Cash, Guthrie & Springsteen. Jan adds vocals & harmonica. 7 great CDs!  |
| Friday | March    | 19 | <b>SPARKY &amp; RHONDA RUCKER</b> — Throughout the US, they present original and traditional American songs and stories. Appalachian, railroad, blues, Civil War, work & slave songs, with guitar, banjo, harmonica & more!   |
| Friday | March    | 26 | <b>CURTIS &amp; LORETTA</b> — They're known all across the country for their exquisite harmonies, incisive songwriting, and skill on numerous instruments including Celtic harp, mandocello, guitar, mandolin, banjo and ukulele.   |

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

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Saturday February 13</b><br>8:00 pm \$5<br><i>(Ice Sculpture Festival!)</i>   | <b>Old Time Barn Dance Party!</b> — Reels, squares, line dancing, waltzes and more, plus music of our great live band. Fun for the whole family! All dances taught and called by our expert leaders. No experience, costume or partner needed. Plank Road Folk Music Society is co-sponsor.   |
| <b>Saturdays</b><br>Jan 2 & 16<br>Feb 6 & 20, Mar 6 & 20   | <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.   |
| <b>Saturdays</b><br>Jan 23, Feb 27, Mar**  | <b>Bluegrass Jam!</b> — Musicians of all experience levels gather to improve skills, learn/share tunes, & have fun! 4th Saturdays, 2:00-4:00pm. **We'll skip Mar 27. ( <i>Naperville Bluegrass Fest</i> )   |
| <b>Thursdays</b><br>Jan 28, Feb 25, Mar 25   | <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 7:00-9:30 pm <b>Free!</b> 7pm – first come, first served. Info at <a href="http://twowaystreet.org">twowaystreet.org</a> , on <b>Facebook</b> , 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 <i>Two Way Street Coffee House</i> 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> |   |