

A Special Series of Music Concerts devoted to **THE MASTERS OF HEARTLAND TRADITIONS**

Friday, February 3

Missouri Fiddle Champion

TAYLOR McBAINE

with Cathy Barton & Dave Para

Friday, March 3

Slovenian and Armenian Music

CHICAGO SLOVENE BUTTON BOX CLUB

TAKSIM WEST

Saturday, March 18

Irish Music Masters

JOE SHANNON & JOHNNY McGREEVY

KEVIN CARROLL & LIZ CARROLL

Friday, April 7

Illinois & Indiana Ballads & Fiddle Tunes

LOTUS DICKEY

REVEREND JIM HOWIE

Friday, May 5

Scandinavian American Music

K. WENDELL WHITFORD

with Bob & Becky Wernerehl



Friday, June 2

Country & Urban Blues Masters

DAVID "Honeyboy" EDWARDS

ALBERT LUANDREW aka. "Sunnyland Slim"

All concerts will take place at 8:00 P.M. at the Libertyville High School Studio Theatre, 708 W. Park (Route 176), Libertyville, IL. For tickets or other information call: The David Adler Cultural Center at 367-0707.

This series is sponsored in part by funds from the Libertyville Rotary Club, The National Endowment for the Arts and the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

DAVID ADLER
CULTURAL CENTER

1700 N. Milwaukee Ave. • Libertyville, IL 60048

TAYLOR McBAINE AND
TRADITIONAL FIDDLING IN MISSOURI

Back in 1910, when telephones first came to rural Pulaski County, residents of south central Missouri devised a way to use the telephone lines to broadcast musical entertainment into their homes on Saturday nights. The telephone operator would open all the circuits and Uncle Jim Haley, a Pulaski County fiddler, would play into his telephone. It wasn't long before listeners discovered that if they put their telephone receivers into a milk pail the sound would be amplified for all in the household to hear. This early experiment in broadcasting-- a kind of folk mass media-- came ten years before the first radio station went on the air, and nearly fifteen years before the WLS National Barn Dance in Chicago and the WSM Grand Ol' Opry in Nashville began to rule the airwaves on Saturday nights.

A few counties to the north, in Boone County, Missouri, two other old-time fiddlers had already discovered how they could send their music across the miles. Henry Lee McBaine and George Marsh lived on opposite sides of a valley in Cedar Township, eight miles north of Columbia. They could trade tunes across the valley on a summer evening while each sat and fiddled outside his cabin door.

It was in this valley, perfuse with old-time fiddling, that Taylor McBaine was born in 1911. At the time, Boone County and neighboring Callaway County, Missouri were reported to have the highest density of fiddlers per acre than any other place in the country. Not only was Taylor's father, Henry Lee McBaine, included in that census, but so was his uncle, Richard McBaine. And it was from them that Taylor learned to play by "listening and copying." When asked when he got his first fiddle, he responded: "I always had a fiddle. I cut my teeth on one." Raised in the middle of a rich fiddling tradition, he was five years old when he scratched out his first tunes. And after seventy-two years of playing, he still specializes in the same kind of old-time fiddle tunes.

Through the years, Taylor played wherever there was a gathering of his fellow Missourians who wanted to have a good time. In the old days, that usually meant community socials at which folks would form sets to dance. But even when old-time square dancing became less common, old-time Missouri fiddlers like Taylor never lacked places to play. Fiddle contests have more recently become the most common setting for the performance of traditional fiddle music in Missouri and elsewhere. Taylor won his first contest in the 1920s when he was only a teen. Since then he has earned over a hundred trophies from contests, including three Senior Division championship trophies from the Missouri state contest.

He is active in the Missouri State Old Time fiddlers Association, an organization that promotes fiddlers through contests and jam sessions. At jam sessions, each fiddler is allotted a time on stage to play tunes of his or her choice. After each fiddler in attendance has played, the jam starts in earnest with a bunch of fiddlers playing together, one after another starting a tune which the rest follow. Taylor enjoys gatherings of fiddlers, and will travel anywhere within two hundred miles of his home for a contest or jam session.

Taylor's playing is firmly within the tradition of central Missouri fiddling. Though he names Howdy Forrester-- a Tennessean who made a career for himself as a professional fiddler in Nashville-- as his favorite, Taylor's most important influences were other amateur fiddlers from the district where he grew up and lived most of his life. He names his father and uncle and his neighbor, George Marsh as those he learned from. He is not the sole fiddler from his generation; Cleo Persinger, Gene Wells, and Jake Hockemeyer are some of Taylor's fiddling peers from central Missouri.

Missourians readily claim that Missouri fiddling is a distinctive style of old-time fiddling rooted in the musical experience of the nineteenth century pioneers, honed to perfection in the square dances of the first half of the twentieth century, and preserved today in fiddle contests. Of contests in Missouri, Dave Para (Taylor's accompanist) says, "If you don't play Missouri style, you won't win."

What is Missouri style fiddling? It is a kind of old-time fiddling that must be distinguished from bluegrass fiddling. The latter features faster tempos on instrumental numbers and improvised "licks" or half-strains that fill out the vocal phrase. In the old-time style of playing, in Missouri and elsewhere, the fiddler and his or her accompanists all play continuously through each repetition of the tune. Bluegrass instrumentalists, on the other hand, swap "breaks" or solos that are alternated with sung verses.

It is a bit harder to pin down exactly what is distinctive about old-time fiddling in Missouri, because fiddlers from the "Show-Me" state share with others throughout the United States and Canada an American fiddling tradition that is largely British in origin. To this Anglo-Celtic core, American fiddlers have developed a substantial homegrown body of tunes, stylistic features, and technical innovations. Similarities between fiddlers from different sections of the country are plentiful, but finer stylistic distinctions are also apparent. While it is difficult to describe a particular musical style with any verbal precision, the experienced listener can easily identify the difference between a fiddler from the upland South and one from New England.

Taylor McBaine's fiddling has been described as representative of Missouri fiddling: it's "hard-driving," closely connected to the rhythmic demands of a floor full of square dancers. To use Dave Para's words once again, Taylor, like other Missouri fiddlers, plays

"basically straightforward melodic tunes with not much added to it." What is not added in Missouri are the syncopated bowing patterns common among Southern fiddlers or the melodic ornaments found in the playing of Northern fiddlers with closer ties to Scottish and Irish fiddling. Missouri fiddlers in general play densely noted melodies using long bow strokes. Taylor, in particular, makes use of the whole length of his bow.

Taylor plays mostly breakdowns, waltzes, and a few rags. Like most Missouri fiddlers, he knows a number of hornpipes played at the same tempo as other breakdowns. His repertoire is a characteristic sampling of the tunes found in a number of important collections published in Missouri: W. H. Morris' Old Time Violin Melodies (1927), E. F. Adams' Old Time Fiddlers' Favorites Barn Dance Tunes (1928), and R. P. Christeson's Old Time Fiddler's Repertory (Vol. I, 1973 and Vol. II, 1984). But let it be noted that Taylor McBaine is solely an ear player and has not learned any tunes directly from these books.

More than likely you'll hear Taylor play "Marmaduke's Hornpipe," a tune which is emblematic of fiddling in Missouri. Taylor says that there were two fiddlers in the past who claimed to have brought the tune to Missouri; but he knows who is really responsible, a fiddling former governor named Marmaduke. In central Missouri, however, the tune was also known as "Dan Jones' Tune," a favorite piece of Boone County fiddler Daniel Boone Jones, who represented Missouri at one of Henry Ford's national fiddling contests in the 1920s.

Dan Jones, George Marsh, and Henry Lee McBaine are no longer here to fiddle for us. But Taylor McBaine is, and he's made sure that he's passed Missouri-style fiddling on to those in the next generation who have shown an interest. Charlie Walden of Columbia is one such young fiddler. He formally apprenticed under Taylor after Taylor was designated a Master by the Missouri Arts Council through its Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program. From Dan Jones to Taylor McBaine to Charlie Walden, the tradition of Missouri fiddling will continue into its third century.

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