

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

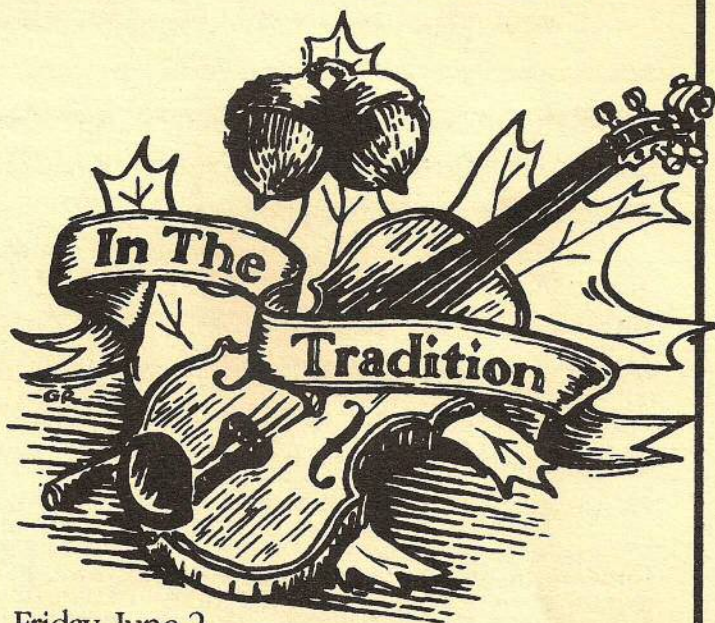
Friday, February 3  
Missouri Fiddle Champion  
**TAYLOR McBAINE**  
with **Cathy Barton & Dave Para**

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



## SONGS FROM THE HEARTH:

### REV. JIM HOWIE AND LOTUS DICKEY

Rev. Jim Howie was born in 1934 in Randolph County in southern Illinois, where his great-great-grandfather settled before the Civil War. His family's roots are in South Carolina and in Northern Ireland. They were a singing family, and so it was at the hearth that Jim acquired his love for old songs. His father and grandfathers played guitars while they sang. The women in the family usually sang unaccompanied, mostly because they sang while doing chores. Sometimes all would sing around the pump organ in the house after supper.

Music was also a community affair. It was common for neighbors to gather with guitars, fiddles, and mandolins for a music party at someone's home. There would be singing and hoedown music, "the kind played for quadrilles" or square dances. There was, however, little or no dancing. It wasn't because there were moral or religious strictures against dancing. Dancing just wasn't done.

Jim's legacy is a tradition of vocal music. His repertoire includes a number of long ballads, such as "The Blind Girl," "Fair Charlotta," "The Jealous Lover," and "Mary of the Wild Moor." Some of these tragic songs, he explains, "are from the British Isles; some are from wars; some are about accidents and murders." He also knows "some humorous and nonsense songs."

The radio was the source for many of his songs. He sings a number of songs made famous by WLS star Bradley Kincaid, though the Howie family seldom listened to the National Barn Dance from Chicago. They did, however, regularly tune in WSM in Nashville for the Grand Ol' Opry. Bluegrass Roy Freeman, a country music star from central Illinois in the 1930s and '40s, was another favorite.

There is another side to Jim Howie's musical heritage: that is, the sacred music of the Scottish Covenanters. This denomination, which retains the old ways of the Scottish Reformation, prohibits the use of musical instruments in their worship services. In addition, the Covenanters sing only biblical psalms, they reject hymns which are non-biblical or "uninspired." Within the Presbyterian mainstream, musical instruments and modern hymnody have been gradually accepted. For some older, rural Presbyterians in Illinois, these are changes that have taken place within their lifetimes.

Though Rev. Howie is a Presbyterian minister, currently serving five small, rural churches, his mother's people were Covenanters. Thus, he was raised with a style of sacred music that forms a part of the earliest musical tradition in America. In fact the first music book published in North America was The Bay Psalter, a songbook of the type used by the Covenanters.



Many of these books contained no tunes, only texts which were retranslations from Old Testament Hebrew. The song texts were rendered in the "long" and "common" meters popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even though many of the tunes were commonly known, among the Covenanters the presenter would "line" the song for the congregation; that is, each line would be first sung by the presenter, then repeated by the assembly.

Rev. Howie can sing many of the Covenanters' psalms, but prefers not to perform them. Such music is meant for worship, not for entertainment. But then, most folk music is generally not meant for public entertainment. It is music that springs from the hearth; music that belongs to the community that gives it life.

Born in Muncie, Indiana in 1911, Lotus Dickey moved with his family to the southern part of the state when he was only a few months old. The youngest of five children, he grew up on a small farm on Grease Gravy Road in Orange County. Singing was a regular activity in the Dickey household. After a day's work, as the family was assembled around the fireside, someone would start singing. Often the whole family gathered at the pump organ to sing hymns, sentimental songs, and humorous ditties in four-part harmony. The family's favorite songs came from several song books obtained through a mail order catalog.

There were other treasures in the family's repertory. Lotus learned several old ballads from his parents. Some, such as "MacDonald of Glencoe" and "I'll Hang My Harp on the Willow Tree," could have come from England with Lotus's great-great-grandfather in the eighteenth century. Others, such as "Barbara Allen," may have come north in the early nineteenth century when his great-grandfather loaded the family onto a covered wagon and brought them out of the Carolinas to western Ohio. And perhaps his grandfather or father learned Stephan Foster's "Farewell to Old Tennessee" or the jubilant "Nicodemus" when they were new songs in the years around the Civil War.

The family singing tradition continued with Lotus's generation, as they added to the already sizeable store a number of new popular songs, such as "Gallagher and Sheehan" from vaudeville and Tin-Pan Alley's "Girl of My Dreams." And in the 1930s, when the family purchased a battery-powered radio, Lotus learned country songs like "More Pretty Girls Than One" and "Columbus Stockade Blues" by listening to Saturday night broadcasts of the Grand Ol' Opry from Nashville.

His life perfuse with song, it was only natural for Lotus to compose his own lyrics and melodies. By anyone's standards, he is a prolific songwriter, even if you count only the songs he deems good enough to share with others. His output is wide-ranging, covering his memories ("Such a Long Time Old Friends"), his experiences ("The Spirit of St. Louis"), his world view ("Go Hoe Hard Your Garden"), bible stories ("David Loved Bathsheba"), love ("The Very First Time"), family values ("Hush While the Little Ones Sleep"), and current issues ("Heaven Left the Door Ajar").



Lotus has also made his mark as a fiddler. When he was eight years old, his brother Cyprian, eight years his senior, told their father, "If I had a fiddle, I could learn to play it." Their father complied and both brothers learned to play. Lotus started out by fingering all the notes with just the index finger of his left hand, until he noticed that the older fiddlers in the community used three or four fingers.

Together, the Dickey brothers began to soak up tunes from the many older fiddlers in Orange County, such as Albert Daugherty, a miller; John Colter, a storekeeper; Poindexter "Deck" Ainsworth, a farmer originally from Arkansas; and Allen Downey, a note-reading fiddler originally from Robinson County, Illinois. Cyprian also ordered several books of reels and hornpipes through the mail, and both brothers learned a number of tunes from these books. Cyprian turned more to popular songs learned from the sheet music he collected, while Lotus became inspired by the playing of Grand Ol' Opry star Fiddlin' Arthur Smith. Besides learning many of Smith's pieces, Lotus also began to emulate his style by dressing up some of the simpler, older tunes with more densely-noted runs and smooth, but fancy kicks of the bow.

Through the years, Lotus has been much more of a public player than has Cyprian. Both were working men-- Cyprian, a farmer; Lotus, a farmer, factory worker, and laborer. Besides playing for local square dances and entering fiddle contests all over southern Indiana, Lotus made several attempts to succeed in the world of country music. An audition at the Grand Ol' Opry yielded no positive results, but he did sell several of his songs (one was recorded by the Wilburn Brothers).

Since 1981, Lotus has been a favorite at folk festivals and country dance events from coast-to-coast. He continues to write new songs and to mine his memory for old, forgotten ballads, pop songs, and fiddle tunes. Two cassette albums of his music have been produced: The Pride of Glencoe features his traditional repertory, while The Very First Time contains a sampling of his original songs. An album of fiddle tunes is forthcoming. These are just some of the ways Lotus Dickey has shared both his artistry and traditions with an ever-growing network of admirers that he treats as cherished friends.

--by Paul L. Tyler

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