



## 2nd Annual Old Time Fiddler's Reunion

With a Concert Honoring Two Midwestern Masters

### LLOYD LALUMONDIER

One distinctive cultural region often neglected in the examination of Missouri fiddling is the district now comprising parts of Washington and St. Genevieve Counties which was first settled by the French around 1800. Today the French influence in the region remains a strong one. Until the 1930s, French was the primary language spoken by many of the area's inhabitants, many of whom have French surnames. "La Guignolee", a musical begging ritual similar in some ways to Mardi Gras, is still performed each New Year's Eve by a group of men in St. Genevieve and Old Mines. The repertoires of fiddlers in the region almost always contained several older tunes which were identified as "French tunes". Lloyd Lalumondier remembers hearing many of these tunes in his youth and plays several himself to this day.

Lloyd was born to Albert and Mary Lalumondier on May 23, 1924 in Bloomsdale, Missouri, located in St. Genevieve County about sixty miles south of St. Louis. The family lived on a small farm and raised crops and livestock for themselves. When Lloyd was growing up, people found their entertainment close to home. He and his father both played the French harp (harmonica), and there was an old pump organ in the house. His two oldest sisters, Erline and Ethel played violin and guitar at home and for house dances. The family did not get a radio until 1938, but they did have a phonograph and records, including some of fiddlers playing tunes like "Golden Slippers", "Spinning Wheel", and "Ragtime Annie".

Dances were, by far, the most popular form of entertainment in those days. Around Bloomsdale, dances took place in homes and at a local establishment in town called Sycamore Hall. It was at Sycamore Hall that Lloyd first saw his neighbor, Jess Drury, playing the fiddle for a dance. According to Lloyd, it was seeing his neighbor play that made him want to learn to fiddle. He would get right up to the edge of the stage and watch as Jess and his band, usually a guitarist and a bowed bass player,



played the night away. When a guitar player was not available, a second fiddle played by one of Jess's brothers, Emmett or Louis, provided accompaniment. Lloyd recalls that the most popular dances were couple dances, and accordingly, Jess Drury played mainly waltzes, two-steps, and schottisches.

Lloyd's early exposure to music was not limited solely to old-time fiddling, however. He recalls visiting his sister in St. Louis and seeing two black musicians playing bottleneck guitars on a street car. "I rode the car from one end of the line to the other just to listen to the music," says Lloyd. "I thought that was about the best music I ever heard."

Lloyd wanted to play fiddle, and so was a bit disappointed when his mother bought him a piano accordion. He made the best of it, though, and took lessons from local nuns. From them he learned to read music. It was not the type of music he wanted to play, however, and when his mother was gone, he would play tunes he liked--"Sheik of Araby", "Bill Bailey", and fiddle tunes. Eventually, Lloyd was able to buy his first fiddle with fifteen dollars his mother sent to him for his birthday. By this time, around 1945, Lloyd was working as an airplane mechanic at Scott Field, near Belleville, Illinois. (Lloyd worked in the aeronautics industry until his retirement nine years ago.) His music-playing friends came from diverse backgrounds and influenced Lloyd's playing from the start. Early on, Lloyd was playing a variety of tunes--polkas, waltzes, pop tunes, and plenty of hoedowns--mostly for his own enjoyment, although he played for an occasional square dance. A list of Lloyd's favorite fiddlers at this time reads like a Who's Who of country fiddling greats and includes Paul Warren, Chubby Wise, Howdy Forrester, and Tommy Jackson. He especially liked Jackson's straightforward approach and notes that there was "no foolishness about him".

In 1952, Lloyd began an association with a country band, Jerry Hopkins and the Southern Playboys, that lasted for several years. Lloyd and his wife Jean, who now lived in Festus, Missouri, went down to the local radio station, KJCF, to watch the Hopkin's band play in the studio. Afterwards, Lloyd went up to Hopkins and told him he ought to have a fiddle player. Hopkins offered him a job on the spot, stating that he wanted a fiddler that could play a couple of square dances each evening. Soon Lloyd was playing with the Playboys, fronting the band during the square dance tunes and quietly learning to play fills and back-up while the band played their other numbers. Lloyd kept busy with this group, playing radio shows on KSGM in St. Genevieve and a station across the river in Chester, Illinois. In the early 1950s, they often backed up stars of the Grand Ole Opry and other barn dance shows who often toured without their bands. Among those whom Lloyd recalls playing for were Little Jimmy Dickens, Billy Walker, Skeets Yaney, and Johnny Rion. A high point for the band occurred in 1953 when they went to Nashville and broadcast over WSM from Ernest Tubb's Record Store. Though the Playboys eventually disbanded, Lloyd continued to play with local musicians. He also played for the Bloomsdale "La Guignolee" each New Years Eve all through the 1960s until it



died out around 1970. About this time, due to family- and work-related obligations, Lloyd put down his fiddle for several years and did not play much until he retired in 1986.

Since that time Lloyd has been quite busy with his musical activities, and has polished up many of his older tunes and learned some new ones. With his wife Jean, who often provides accompaniment on guitar, Lloyd may be found at fiddlers' conventions, bluegrass festivals, and fiddle contests throughout Missouri and the southwest. For the past several years Lloyd has spent most of the winter in Texas where he tours with Ben Greene's Bluegrass Band playing the festival circuit. As one might surmise from hearing Lloyd play, he enjoys all styles of music, from the blues he first heard in St. Louis as a child to the intricate playing of the younger fiddlers he hears these days at festivals and fiddle contests on his trips through Texas and Oklahoma. However, it is obvious that Lloyd still fancies the old-time waltzes, and that the fiddling of Jess Drury made an impression on a young boy that has lasted nearly half a century.

### **TIM STOKES and ED FRAVELL**

Tim Stokes was born on February 4, 1914. His parents, Matthew and Lucinda May Stokes had a farm located between Mt. Pleasant and Lick Creek, in Union County, Illinois. Except for a four year stint in the Army during World War Two, Tim has lived around this area his entire life. Sometimes referred to as the Illinois Ozarks, the region does share common traits, both geographically and culturally, with the Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas.

Though none of his family played any instrument, Tim was interested in music from an early age. As was fairly common for the times, Tim's first instrument was a French harp, on which he learned to play a number of tunes. Tim recalls that when he was about thirteen or fourteen, his father asked him, "How'd you like to try a fiddle?" Money was scarce, so Tim's father gave him a pig to raise. Tim sold that pig for ten dollars and used the money to buy his first fiddle, which he ordered from a Montgomery Ward mail order catalog.

Music teachers were also scarce in rural Southern Illinois in the 1920s, and as a result Tim taught himself the basics of fiddling. His first tunes were two that he heard his Grandmother Stokes, the widow of a Civil War veteran, whistling around the house--"Red Wing" and "Marching Through Georgia". Tim also took inspiration from phonograph records and other musicians in the area. In 1928, a man named Dolph Dunn from Cypress, Illinois, about ten miles to the south, stayed with the Stokes family for about a month. Dunn was known in the area as a good fiddler, and Tim learned a number of tunes from him, including "Five Cents Worth", "Little Betty Brown", and a couple of waltzes for which Dunn did not have names, but which Tim calls "The Cache River Waltz" and "Bradshaw Waltz". Tim says, "I just call 'em whatever I want to, like the rest of 'em do."



Tim's main musical outlet was playing at the music parties which were held "up and down the road" during the winter months throughout the 1930s and into the early forties. Square dances were also quite popular at the time. Things changed after World War Two. Musicians with whom Tim had played were scattered. This hastened the decline of local dances and music parties. Tim met and married his wife, Lettie Marie, and with his brother began operating a dairy farm. Finally, Tim put away his fiddle for what was to be the next thirty years.

In 1978, Tim met Ed Fravell, who was at Tim's place hunting arrow heads with a friend, and found out that he played guitar. The two of them began playing together, first once a week, then twice, and have done so every week since then. Tim has worked up many of the old-time numbers, including breakdowns, waltzes and popular numbers that he played as a youth. His playing reflects little, if any, influence of the popular radio fiddlers like Howdy Forrester and Arthur Smith who have had such great effect on many fiddlers of his generation. This may be because Tim learned to play before these fiddlers came to prominence, or possibly, because he was not musically active during the time of their greatest popularity.

Tim and Ed travel to fiddlers' conventions and contests at every opportunity. Tim has become well-known as the winner of numerous contests in the senior division. Every year, he and Ed travel to events in Clarksville, Tennessee, Harrison, Arkansas, and numerous other contests in Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri. Closer to home, Tim and Ed, as "Country Strings", maintain a regular schedule playing at senior citizen centers throughout Southern Illinois.

Ed Fravell was born in Orient on October 27, 1927 and, except for a few brief periods, has always lived in Southern Illinois. His father was a coal miner. Ed remembers that the mines were often shut down for long periods during layoffs and strikes and times were generally tough. After graduating from high school in West Frankfort, Ed attended the University of Wisconsin--Stevens Point. After graduating in 1957, he went to work for the VA and was a lab supervisor when he retired in 1985. Ed has been playing guitar for his own enjoyment since he was in high school. He is self-taught and bought his first guitar and a Nick Manoloff chord book from Sears and Roebuck. He has always had a preference for country music, his favorite performers being Jimmie Rodgers, Eddie Arnold, and Gene Autry. He grew up listening to live programs on WEBQ which broadcast from Harrisburg, Illinois. He also heard live programs from KMOX in St. Louis featuring Skeets and Frankie and Pappy Cheshire. Today, he mostly listens to recordings of fiddlers and counts Taylor McBaine, Graham Townsend, and Johnnie Gimble among his favorites.

Despite his love of country music, Ed did not play much old-time music until he started playing with Tim. Since that time, he has become one the most sought after accompanists on the contest circuit. In addition to playing old-time music with Tim, Ed also works with the Swinging Seniors, a group that plays popular music of the 1930s and 1940s at various senior citizen functions in and around Carbondale.

- Jim Nelson