

### **DACC's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Old Time Fiddlers' Reunion**

The Adler House Folk and Ethnic Music Program has had a long love affair with old-time fiddling. In 1984, the DACC gave it's first annual Illinois Traditional Music Award to octogenarian fiddler Harvey "Pappy" Taylor of downstate Effingham. At the award concert, Pappy was joined by an "apprentice" of his, Garry Harrison of nearby Oakland.

In 1989, in the first of four *In the Tradition* concert series funded by NEA grants, senior fiddlers Taylor McBaine of Missouri, Lotus Dickey of Indiana, and K. Wendell "Wendy" Whitford of Wisconsin were among the eleven regional and ethnic artist featured. Also presented in that first *In the Tradition* series were several masters of ethnic fiddle styles, notably the elder John McGreevy--who was an earlier recipient of the Illinois Traditional Music Award--and the younger Liz Carroll, from Chicago's Irish community. A 1991 *In the Tradition* concert brought to Libertyville Vesta Johnson, matriarch of a St. Louis-based fiddlers association. In 1992, Dan Verble, a country music veteran from downstate Anna, Illinois was joined in a program by Lynn "Chirps" Smith, a younger generation fiddler from Grayslake. And in 1994, western swing artist Junior Daugherty, a New Mexico native who had moved to rural Illinois, was featured at our last NEA-sponsored *In the Tradition* concert. Since then, we have also presented Swedish, Cajun, and Mexican fiddlers.

Support from NEA grants also enabled us that year to stage the first *Old Time Fiddlers' Reunion & Jamboree*. The first two Reunions began with concerts honoring two senior masters of traditional fiddling. Les Raber was 84 years-old when he made the trek from his farm in Hastings, Michigan to join with septuagenarian Francis Geels of



Decatur, Indiana. Two of their generational peers were honored in 1995 (when we flew on our own without any NEA financial support): Tim Stokes from Buncombe, Illinois and Lloyd Lalumondier from Festus, Missouri.

This year's *Fiddlers' Reunion* concert will honor two fine musicians who represent a younger generation. Both were very influential in sparking a revival of interest in the oldest of traditional fiddling styles and in the rarest of tunes that were dangerously close to passing into obscurity. Many old-time fiddle enthusiasts regard **Bruce Greene** and **Garry Harrison** as tune collectors par excellence. As a folklorist, I like to think of them as musical craftsmen who have completed their apprenticeships under the careful tutelage of master artisans like Pat Kingery and Gusty Wallace of Kentucky, or Pappy Taylor and Jesse James Abbott of downstate Illinois.

However, we should not let these labels get in the way of fully appreciating the music of either of these younger (now 40-something) representatives of the old time arts. Both Bruce and Garry are, in their own rights, true traditional masters of the fiddle. They can offer up the solid, driving rhythm that makes you want to dance all night. And just as easily, the richness of the tones they produce can tug on your soul, while their mastery of melody and phrasing will show you the secrets hidden in those archaic and exotic, but oh-so-natural, modes favored by the finest of old time masters.

It would be good to say a word or two about those other labels used here: 'old-time' and 'traditional.' Some may regard these as limiting. However, this event is named after **Old Time Fiddlers**, not because we want to exclude those who dabble in the improvisations encouraged by bluegrass, swing, and contemporary contest styles; but so that we can pay homage to those whose artistry serves their local communities. The musicians this Reunion honors are true creative artists. They don't direct their energies towards the whims and fads of the mainstream musical marketplace. Rather, they are court musicians for the royalty-free American community. They hold forth at the hearth, at the Grange hall dance, the village diner jam session, and at the local civic festival.

Caught here in the paradox between individual and communal creativity, I like to remember my own fiddling mentor Lotus Dickey. Once when Lotus had it thrust upon him that he was the representative of a whole regional tradition of folk music, he wrote a song called "I Only Want to Be Me." Nevertheless, on another occasion, we joked with him that he knew so many tunes and songs and sayings and stories that he should be elected president of the very-scholarly American Folklore Society. Momentarily leaving his true humility behind, Lotus whimsically proclaimed "I am American folklore."

Sit back now and enjoy not only the personal artistry of Bruce Greene and Garry Harrison, but also the fascinating experiences they will share about how they came to be keepers and bearers of an American tradition.



### **Bruce Greene**

Born in New York City in 1951 and raised in New Jersey, Bruce got his first fiddle when he was 18 years-old. But as was the case with so many college student folk music enthusiasts, there was no one around to help him get started. Guitars and banjos were in abundance in the urban folk revival of the 1960s. Fiddles and fiddlers were much harder to find. Still, Bruce knew he wanted to learn more about fiddling, so he enrolled at Western Kentucky University where he could take courses in Folklore.

His first scholarly undertaking was to learn about Henry Bandy, an exceptional Kentucky fiddler who had been an early recording artist, but who was no longer living. This project gave Bruce the a good excuse for knocking on the doors of local musicians around the Penny Royal region of South Central Kentucky. He soon made the transition from learning about traditional fiddling, to learning fiddle music in a traditional way. That is: he was learning first hand, by observing and imitating masters of the tradition. This is the nature of oral (or aural) tradition. Bruce's search for traditional fiddlers, banjoists, and singers took him to all parts of the state, especially to the mountainous regions of Eastern Kentucky.

One of Bruce's great discoveries was the family of John Salyer in Magoffin County. Salyer was a true giant of a fiddler who's distrust of the commercial music industry had kept his music a secret from the world outside. However, the Salyers had home recordings of their departed patriarch, which they let Bruce listen to and learn from. For a number of years, the old time music revival community were treated to these tunes through Bruce's playing, without ever getting to hear the true source. But Bruce's long friendship with the family has recently paid off for the rest of us, since the family gave permission to the Appalachian Center of Berea College to issue a cassette album of John Salyer himself.

Bruce has recorded four self-produced cassette albums: *Vintage Fiddle Tunes*, *Fiddler's Dozen*, *Five Miles of Elem Wood*, and *Fiddle and Fife, Together Again After a Hundred Years Gone* (with Bob Butler). He has also produced *Old Time Pickin'*, an album featuring traditional fiddler Red Wilson of North Carolina, whom he accompanies on banjo.

Since 1978, Bruce has lived in the mountains of North Carolina. He has continued to work with and learn from older musicians. But he has also found his own outlets for passing on traditional tunes and playing styles. He is a frequent staff instructor for the August Heritage Workshops in Elkins West Virginia and at the Swannanoa Gathering, a adult music camp in North Carolina.

### **Garry Harrison**

Born in Coles County, Illinois in 1954, Garry's family included several old-time musicians. His father Clifford was a fiddler who had played in several string bands during his younger days in Illinois and California. His mother Pauline played the guitar and sang. During her



younger days she performed on a local radio station as "The Singing Cow Girl." Her father, John Mason (whom Garry never knew) was a fiddler who played in a string band around Bushton, Illinois.


Garry didn't pick up the fiddle till he was 18 years-old. His father showed him a few things, but the real stimulus for learning to play was the shared interests of a group of friends in Charleston, Illinois (this group of traditional music enthusiasts included Lynn "Chirps" Smith, who was then a budding young mandolinist). By 1972, the group had coalesced into a full-fledged string band, the Indian Creek Delta Boys.

A few years later, the group met Jim Olin a young tune collector from Missouri. His experience started them wondering about what fiddlers and tunes they might find in their own area of Illinois. One of the "Crik Delters" obtained a fiddle that had been made locally by Pappy Taylor of Effingham, who they thought was long dead. But a chance meeting one night sent Garry and his friends off to hear the still quite able elder perform at a country tavern. This was a fortunate first encounter, for Pappy knew hundreds of rare old tunes, and was quite willing to share them with the eager young musicians from Charleston.

Through most of the mid- to late-1970s, Garry and his cohorts searched out and visited senior fiddlers all over Southern and Central Illinois. From Bill Clerc in Prairie du Rocher on the Mississippi, to Pete Priest of Mattoon in the East, and down south to Jim Reed in Benton, the Crik Delters soaked up all the local, traditional music they could find. Most were hard-driving dance tunes with colorful names like "Best Timber" and "Run Down Boot." During this period, the Indian Creek Delta Boys (a string band that ranged in size from four to seven members) recorded several dozen of these tunes on three LPS: *Vol. 1 & 2* on Davis Unlimited and *Late for the Dance* on Prairie Schooner records. Many of their original field recordings are archived at the Tarble Arts Center at Eastern Illinois University. In 1980, the Illinois Legislature recognized the Indian Creek Delta Boys as the "Official Traditional Old Time String Band of Illinois."

In 1991, after a decade-long hiatus, Garry reformed the Crik Delters as a trio. The new version has one cassette album to their credit: *Antiques, Primitives and Collectables*. The group is reportedly working on a new album of original tunes and songs in the old time style. Garry Harrison is also earning a considerable reputation as a maker of fine violins.

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