

HTMA President's Notes

May 2009

Is this the new golden age? I think it may be, at least for musical instruments. I'm not sure I totally understand why, but it seems to me that there are more fine instrument makers all over the world, but particularly in our country, making fine guitars, mandolins, dulcimers, and other instruments. I started thinking about this after the last HTMA meeting, where one member brought a new dulcimer, which a local artisan had made, in part, from wood taken from a Bradford Pear tree that fell in her yard.

The surge in availability of fine instruments is surprising in a way – the supplies of the finest traditional woods for instrument building, like Brazilian rosewood, pernambuco, ebony, and koa, are all becoming limited, mostly as rain forest sources are depleted. I think three effects are driving the increased availability of fine instruments. First, of course, there are a lot more people who want and can afford to buy instruments above the basic student grades. Second, the art of instrument making is becoming less of a closely held secret – plenty of books have been published showing critical details of making instruments – I've seen a website containing photographs of the bracing used on dozens of fine guitars and the way the photos are lit, you can detect the difference in thickness of the guitar top. You can see for yourself at (<http://www.frets.com/FRETSPages/Musician/Guitar/XGallery/xgallery1.html>). It's amazing how many "flat-top" guitars actually have tapered thickness of the top material. The third key is the availability of low-cost very accurate production tools.

In the old days of Cremona violin making, the fiddle tops were laboriously scraped to size and thickness, with the violin maker tap-tap-tapping on the wood as he worked, listening for the notes that he knew from experience to indicate the proper compliance so the top would vibrate well when stimulated by the strings. Today a lot of that time-consuming effort can be performed by automated machines.

(Continued on page 4)



The Huntsville Traditional Music Association meets on the third Sunday of each month. Our next meeting is on:
Sunday, May 17th
2:00 - 4:30 PM

Huntsville Public Library Auditorium



Nashville songwriter Davis Raines at a 2008 coffeehouse

Inside this Issue:

- Page 1:** President's Notes
Page 2: Calendar of Events / Executive Board/ Mr. Bill's Gigs/Report from the R.H Circuit
Page 3 : Notes from the Berry Patch
Page 4: Call for Volunteers

www.HuntsvilleFolk.org

Calendar of Events for May

Saturday, May 9th, 1:00 - 4:00 PM

Traditional and Old-time Jam (Free admission for musicians, regular admission for non-musicians) at Constitution Hall Village

Sunday, May 17th, 2:00 - 4:30 PM

Regular HTMA member Meeting / Jam session at the Huntsville Public Library Auditorium

Thursday, May 21st, 7:00 PM

Coffeehouse featuring Huntsville songwriter Jim Parker and friends

At the Old Church at Burritt Museum on Monte Sano.

For more information on all HTMA meetings, concerts, coffeehouses, and other events, visit our website at

www.huntsvillefolk.org.

HTMA Executive Board

President: **Jerry LeCroy** 880-6234
alabamahoss@bellsouth.net

Vice President: **Jim England** 852-5740
jengland@knology.net

Sec/Treasurer: **Pat Long** 539-7211
plong@hiwaay.net

Publicity Chair: **Claire Mikkelsen** 883-7919
homeschoolnan@yahoo.com

Public Service Chair / Pres. Emeritus:
Bill McCampbell: 882-2400
mccampbellwm@bellsouth.net

Performance Chair: **Lou Beasley** 859-5016
lrbeasley@mchsi.com

Newsletter Editor: **Position Available!** (Great Pay and Benefits)

Operations Co-Chairs:
George Williams 880-6234
george.p.williams@pobox.com
Steve McGehee 858-2032
catwithnotail69@aol.com

Mr. Bills Gigs

April 2009 NURSING HOME GIGS

Nursing Home Gigs are on Saturdays at 3:00 PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

MAY 2 3:00 PM
WILLOWBROOK COURT
(NOTE: Part of Magnolia Trace, formerly Carlton Cove)
One Clubhouse Ave. Huntsville 35802

MAY 16 3:00 PM
WHITESBURG MANOR
(NOTE: Formerly Whitesburg Gardens)
105 Teakwood Dr. Huntsville 35801

MAY 30 3:00 PM
GRANDVIEW AT REDSTONE VILLAGE
12000 Turnmeyer Dr. Huntsville 35803

If you have any questions or suggestions, contact Bill McCampbell at 882-2400 mccampbellwm@bellsouth.net

Report From The Retirement Home Circuit (Willowbrook CT)

We did it again. We spent an hour making musical noises at a group of very attentive listeners, who had some very nice things to say to us after we did our hour. We had a good turnout of our members also. They like being there and show it.

It is strange that we can get as much variety in our offerings with so few people, all playing strings, plus one harmonica. I guess it is because we do not plan. It is like Jim told the audience, we just get together and let things happen.

We were: George Williams, Jim England, WMM, Collier Rawls, Jerry McGough, Bill Cassels, Danny Davis. Thanks, Men.

Bill McCampbell



NOTES FROM THE BERRY PATCH:

John James Audubon (1785-1851), I wish I could have known the man that took oil and canvas, wedding nature and art. I wish I could have been there when the barber cut away his shoulder-length hair causing him to write, “This day my hair was sacrificed, and the will of God usurped by the wishes of man.”

I wish I could have followed his feet as they carried him on some of his one thousand mile treks with brush, oil, and canvas in hand. I wonder how he felt when, early on, his painting exhibition in Philadelphia was a dismal failure, not even generating enough money to pay his expenses, and being told by the “experts” to forget painting and find something else to do.

Audubon, forsaking his small clothing store in northern Kentucky, not to be either denied or discouraged in his quest to capture the birds “with their own lively animated ways seeking their natural food and pleasure” left his wife with family and friends, responding to the call of the wild. This illegitimate son of a French

naval officer walked, watched, listened, and painted his way into international fame.

Invited to speak to the Natural History Society of London, he stayed awake most of the night before, contemplating the habits of the American wild pigeon. His recollections took him back home, back to the American wilds, causing him to write, “So absorbed was my whole soul and spirit in the work, that I felt as if I were in the woods of America among the pigeons, and my ears filled with the sound of their rustling wings.” Even the honor and distinction of speaking to the famous Natural History Society could not divorce him from his love of the American Wild.

Yes, the man married nature and art; it was a good union. I wish I could have walked with him.

Joe M. Berry



HTMA president Jerry LeCroy and performance co-chair Steve McGehee at the 2008 North Alabama Folk Festival in Cullman.

Pre-Meeting Seminars Call for Volunteers

Last year we had several pre-meeting seminars on various facets of making and enjoying traditional music. We've been a little short on presenter volunteers this year, but the seminars are a tradition well worth continuing. If there is a subject that you'd like to present at a meeting, please call HTMA president Jerry LeCroy to get on the schedule. And many thanks to all the presenters who help continue HTMA's educational programs.

President's notes, cont'd from page 1

Bob Taylor and Kurt Listug have been pioneers in applying computer-numeric-control (CNC) technology to making guitars, and a hallmark of Taylor guitars has always been their light, thin, and remarkably consistent necks – consistent because every new Taylor guitar neck is made under computer control. But Taylor didn't start out that way. In 1974 Taylor started building guitars using traditional methods, and for the next seven years struggled frequently to pay the rent. Taylor turned to automated production in the early 80's in a desperate attempt to get ahead of a cost curve – up to that time every production increase cost so much in additional overhead and labor that the company profit, if there was any, didn't improve. But when Taylor bought CNC equipment in 1981, they were traveling a trail already pioneered by Charles Kaman, a helicopter designer and builder who in the 1960's decided to try transferring aerospace manufacturing and analysis techniques to making guitars. After two years of experimentation, Kaman began producing the first generation of Ovation Balladeer guitars, with molded thermoplastic backs, and CNC machined aluminum necks. Talk about sturdy!

So the freer flow of information and better tools are making it possible for us to enjoy really fine instruments, without mortgaging the house. For some of us, the best way to get that perfect instrument is to have it custom made (like many dulcimers) or build it yourself. HTMA member Dan Davis has built a pair of really fine guitars for himself and his son Ben, and guitar kits are available from several sources (Take a look at stewmac.com to see several great guitar kits that cost less than \$500).

And if you don't want to take the time to build an instrument yourself, or make the investment required

Top bracing used on an early 70's Gibson guitar



to secure a Collings or Froggy Bottom-class instrument, there are lots of terrific-sounding mid-price instruments to choose from – Blueridge, Carvin, Crafter, Seagull, and Martin are all making very affordable instruments with great playability. In some cases, the prices can be lower because the instruments are being made overseas in countries with lower labor costs. The Martin DX1 is made in this country, but achieves economy by material substitution, using high-pressure laminate for the guitar back and sides, and micarta synthetic for the fingerboard. This really is a golden age for acoustic instruments.

Jerry LeCroy



Carlous Kenshaw and band at a 2008 coffeehouse