

Dulcimer Players Bring Sounds of the Hills

Brian DeNeal

Experience, like a pale musician, holds a dulcimer of patience in his hand.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The hollows ring with birdsong, trickling brooks and the whisper of wind in the canopy. A human element cannot keep from creeping in, too.

We imagine these scenes to a soundtrack of fiddle, banjo and guitar playing lonesome ballads of old. Among those instruments might also be the dulcimer, a more subdued sound coming from the lap of a musician rocking on the porch, smoke exuding from the chimney in a remote valley. Shaped like a tear drop or hourglass, the instrument of four to six strings lays flat on a lap with one hand fingering the frets and the other plucking the strings.

The Salt Well Dulcimer Players of Equality know their dulcimer band is not destined for international fame. They've never considered a professional recording. The band's venues will be local churches, community events and area dulcimer festivals.

At 4 p.m. each Monday the group gathers for rehearsal at the Ohio River Visitor Center in Equality. They bring their dulcimers, music stands and binders of music and wait for Jackie Maxson to call out the next number.

Maxson's daughter bought her a dulcimer for Christmas in 2005 and she began learning it.

"I started teaching LeAnn at the church and she was playing with me," Maxson said.

That was LeAnn Cremeens and the church was Pisgah General Baptist on state Route 1 in Gallatin County near the Hardin County line.

The band grew to include Maxine York on percussion and Donna Hunt, Gayla Roe, Mark York and son, Gareth York.

The band plays at Presbyterian community dinners, the Equality Community Christmas Program, the summer lunch programs at Shawneetown, for Coleman Tri-County residents, Brookstone Estates in Harrisburg, Bethany Church at Eichorn and regional music festivals.

The repertoire is mostly gospel along with some bluegrass numbers like "Camptown Races" and "Little Liza Jane" and Christmas songs.

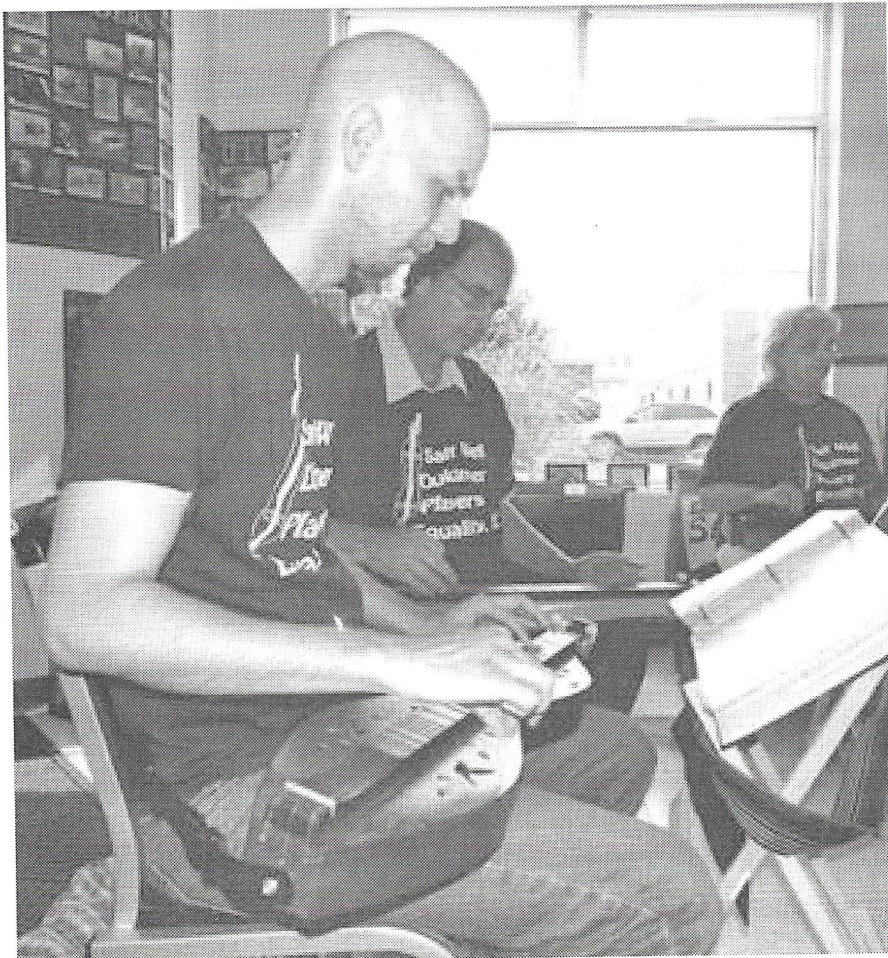
"We play a variety, but I think we like the hymns best," Maxson said.

Mark and Gareth York occasionally sing with the majority of the songs being instrumentals.



From left, Maxine York plays percussion and LeAnn Cremeens and Jackie Maxson play dulcimers during rehearsal at the Ohio River Visitor Center in Equality.

Brian DeNeal photos



**"We play a variety, but
I think we like the
hymns best."**

Jackie Maxson

Above, the Salt Well Dulcimer Players practice at their regular 4 p.m. Monday time at the Ohio River Visitor Center. From left are LeAnn Cremeens, Jackie Maxson, Gareth York, Mark York, Gayla Roe and Donna Hunt. At center is Hunt's daughter, Jamie Hunt, a regular at the rehearsals.

At left and from left are Gareth York, his father, Mark York and Gayla Roe.



Gayla Roe, left, and Donna Hunt play their dulcimers. Roe plays a bass dulcimer.

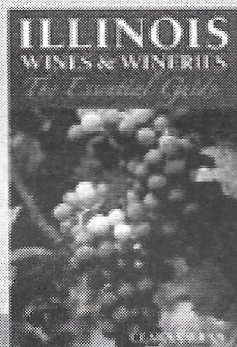
Band members described the dulcimer sound as a "mountain sound" and a "soothing sound." As long as the dulcimers are in tune with each other, there is no playing out of key since like an autoharp, harmonica or concertina they remain in one key.

LeAnn Cremeens plays a soprano dulcimer, Gayla Roe plays a bass dulcimer and sometimes a member pulls out a ban jammer — a dulcimer with a banjo-like drum head built in for higher volume.

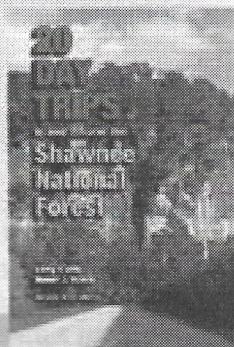
On a recent Monday rehearsal the band played through "I'll Be Listening", "Shooting Creek", "Boil Dem Cabbage Down" and more. They were preparing for their Sept. 6 performance at Pisgah Church, followed by the Red Hill Dulcimer Festival in Sumner, Ill., and another festival in New Harmony, Ind.



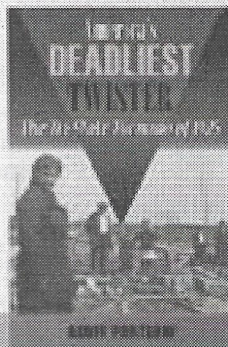
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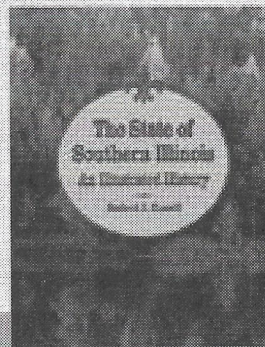
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