



Traditions

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SUSQUEHANNA FOLK MUSIC SOCIETY



Early Fall 2020

Bil Lepp.....Page 2

Sun, Oct 4 • A champion of humorous “liars” contests who has regaled audiences across the country with his tall tales will present a virtual storytelling workshop at 2 p.m., followed by a live-streamed performance and conversation at 4 p.m.



Jay Ungar and Molly Mason.....Page 3

Sat, Oct 17 • An iconic folk music duo will share their vast repertoire in a pair of virtual events for SFMS, beginning with a fiddle-and-rhythm guitar workshop at 2 p.m. Then we’ll join them at 7:30 p.m. for a live-streamed concert and conversation.



“Checking In”: Natalie Haas and Aaron Jones.....Page 4

In the first installment of a new interview series, staff writer Peter Winter spoke with two SFMS favorites — celloist Natalie Haas and Aaron Jones of Scotland’s Old Blind Dogs — to see how they are holding up during the coronavirus pandemic.



Folk Arts Center.....Page 6

SFMS’s new online Folk Arts Center is a regional hub for traditional artists, projects, information and arts events.



Le Vent du Nord kicked off SFMS’s 2020-21 season in fine fashion on September 4 with a live-streamed concert from the Centre Culturel Desjardins in Joliette, Québec. Fans from across the U.S., Canada and Europe watched the concert, which was jointly presented by SFMS and the Creative Alliance of Baltimore. (concert image courtesy of Gail O’Connor)

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SFMS Office

Executive Director Jess Hayden
378 Old York Road
New Cumberland, PA 17070
concerts@sfmsfolk.org
(717) 319-8409

More information at
www.sfmsfolk.org



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Bil Lepp, Sunday, October 4

Yarn-spinner extraordinaire Bil Lepp charmed audiences at the 2019 Susquehanna Folk Festival with his wild and witty tall tales. On Sunday, October 4, the Susquehanna Folk Music Society welcomes Lepp back (virtually) for a storytelling workshop for adults at 2 p.m. and a performance of verbal hijinks with conversation at 4 p.m.

Growing up in a family where the truth was fluid, Lepp became adept at conjuring fact-challenged stories and exaggerating circumstances from a young age. A nationally renowned storyteller and five-time champion of the West Virginia Liars Contest, Lepp's outrageous, humorous tall tales have earned the appreciation of listeners of all ages and from all walks of life. Be it a hunting trip, a funeral or a visit to the dentist, Lepp can find the humor in any situation. Though a champion liar, Lepp seeds his stories with kernels of truth that shed light on universal themes in clever and witty ways. As he explains, while his stories may not be completely true, they are always honest.



**“... Lepp, a cross between
Dr. Seuss and film noir...”**

~ Charleston Gazette

An in-demand performer, Lepp has been featured 15 times at the National Storytelling Festival and has performed at other major storytelling festivals, as well as at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, on Comedy Central's Hudson stage, and at corporate and school functions across the country. Lepp has produced 16 audio collections of his work. He is also the author of six books, including the highly regarded children's book, *The King of*

Little Things, which has won numerous literary awards, including the PEN Steven Kroll Award for Picture Book Writing.

Lepp's work as a storyteller, recording artist and author has earned him plaudits and recognition from organizations such as the National Storytelling Network, Parents' Choice Foundation and Public Library Association and from publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Publishers Weekly* and *School Library Journal*.

Lepp's 90-minute storytelling workshop for SFMS will be conducted via Zoom and is titled “Chaos Doesn't Happen On Its Own.” Lepp's stories often move from simple, everyday occurrences into complex, layered tall tales. Through a few careful, but easy, steps, Lepp will explain how to generate the chaos inherent in a good storyteller's yarn. The workshop will look at avenues of exploration and research to help one build the foundation for well-told lies, falsehoods and exaggerations – so that one's audience walks away giggling and thinking, “Yep, that's what would happen if...”

Lepp's later, live-streamed performance will feature truth-stretching, shaggy dog stories and outright whoppers, plus a chat with Janet Bixler, director of Central Penn College's Capital BlueCross Theatre.

Separate registration is required for the Zoom workshop and live-streamed performance. Ticket prices for the workshop are \$13 for SFMS members, \$15 for general admission, and \$20 for supporter-level participants. Voluntary donations are requested for the performance, with the suggested donation for each viewer being \$15 and the supporter-level donation being \$20. To register for the workshop, performance or both, please visit SFMS's webpage for this event at www.sfmsfolk.org/events/Bil_Lepp.html. This event is being presented in partnership with the Lititz Storytelling Festival.

Jay Ungar and Molly Mason, Saturday, October 17

On Saturday, October 17, folk icons Jay Ungar and Molly Mason will present a lovely day of online music for the Susquehanna Folk Music Society from their home in New York's Catskill Mountains, beginning with a fiddle-and-rhythm guitar workshop at 2 p.m. followed by a live-streamed concert at 7:30 p.m. with conversation afterwards.

The celebrated pair's vast repertoire spans 19th-century classics, lively fiddle tunes from Appalachia to Scandinavia, favorites from the golden era of country and swing, and their own roots-based songs, tunes and orchestral compositions.

The two hail from opposites sides of the continent, Ungar from the Bronx in New York City and Mason from Washington State. They hit it off musically during a chance meeting while performing together in upstate New York. They collaborated from time to time before Mason headed off to Minnesota to become a member of the house band on Garrison Keillor's new radio show, *A Prairie Home Companion*. Meanwhile, back in New York, Ungar formed the acclaimed string band Fiddle Fever. Mason later signed on as bassist, and Fiddle Fever went on to record a pair of classic LPs in the early 1980s.

That time period also saw the beginnings of Ungar's Catskill-based Ashokan Music & Dance Camps, which have become a world-renowned destination for enthusiasts of American music and dance traditions. Several years later, Mason became a full partner in designing and running the camps.

In 1982, Ungar composed "Ashokan Farewell," written in the style of a Scottish lament, to mark the sense of loss and longing he felt when the Ashokan Music & Dance Camps had come to an end for the season. Two years later, documentary film-maker Ken Burns heard Ashokan Farewell on Fiddle Fever's second album and was so taken by its evocative, haunting quality that he used it as the main theme for his 11-hour PBS miniseries *The Civil War* in 1990. The soundtrack album won a Grammy, Ungar earned an Emmy nomination, and Ashokan Farewell went on to become



an American "folk" classic, played by fiddlers world-wide.

Over the past 30 years, Ungar and Mason have continued to perform and to compose and record music. They have produced and hosted musical specials for Public Radio International; have been heard on most of Burns's PBS documentaries; have been guests on NPR's *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered*; and have appeared on CBS's *This Morning*, PBS's *Great Performances* and BBC's *Transatlantic Sessions*.

In their appearance for SFMS, Ungar and Mason will jointly lead the afternoon fiddle-and-guitar workshop via Zoom. For classes like this, they often teach "The Lovers' Waltz," a popular tune they composed. The 90-minute workshop allows time for questions and answers, some styling details to enhance the tune, and possibly a bit of personal attention that could benefit all participants.

After starting together, participants will be split into two "rooms," one for fiddle and one guitar, before coming together at the end to play along with Ungar and Mason. The workshop is geared for intermediate and advanced players, but since the participants can't hear each other play, even beginners can attend without feeling self-conscious.

Ungar and Mason's live-streamed evening concert will be followed by a chat with SFMS Board member Autumn Moore, a bluegrass musician who works as an administrative assistant at Ashokan Music & Dance Camps.

Separate registration is required for the workshop and concert. Ticket prices for the workshop are \$18 for SFMS members, \$22 for general admission, and \$27 for supporter-level participants. Voluntary donations are requested for the concert, with the suggested donation for each viewer being \$20 and the supporter-level donation being \$25. The workshop and concert will not be archived for later viewing.

To register for the workshop, concert or both, please visit SFMS's webpage for this event at sfmsfolk.org/concerts/JayUngar_MollyMason.html.

“Checking In” with Natalie Haas and Aaron Jones

While the Covid-19 pandemic has affected every member of our society, those making their living in the music world – be they musicians, venue owners, promoters, or recording engineers – have had to navigate an utterly different landscape in 2020. In the first installment of his “Checking In” series, staff writer Peter Winter spoke with two SFMS favorites to see how they are holding up. Celloist Natalie Haas currently lives in California and is most known for her celebrated collaborations with Scottish fiddler Alasdair Fraser. Aaron Jones is the guitarist, bouzoukist and lead vocalist with the esteemed Scottish folk group Old Blind Dogs.

These interviews were conducted separately and then combined for this article.

How has the pandemic impacted you as a musician?

Natalie Haas: It’s completely changed our lives! How we make a living, how we live day to day. This has pluses and minuses – although we are without income, it has also provided a much-needed break for many of us, giving us a chance to see what it’s like to be home for a significant amount of time! Cooking, gardening, practicing, learning a new skill, etc. – many things musicians don’t have time to do with a busy touring life.

Aaron Jones: Covid has had a huge impact on Old Blind Dogs, on us each as individuals and on the creative Arts generally in Scotland. I was actually on a ferry to Ireland to tour with



flautist Steph Geremia on March 13th, 2020, when Ireland locked down, and almost overnight I had several tours cancelled. As March continued and Scotland shut down, more and more tours and concerts cancelled until it became clear that everything I had in the diary – two USA tours and tours in Germany, Denmark, Spain, Ireland and China not to mention countless stand-alone shows in Scotland and the UK – were all gone. What makes it bleaker – if that’s possible – is that there is no clear pathway to return to live performance with many venues unable to function with limited numbers and social distancing. Thankfully, there seems to be a good sense of community amongst the creative Arts in Scotland and we’re all working together to find a way forwards and keep as many of our artists and venues functioning as possible.

Have you played any virtual gigs yet? What was your experience like?

Natalie: I’ve been involved in a few live-streams of online fiddle camp performances, and done some prerecorded video for British TV. It’s no replacement for performing live for people in the same room, but it’s all we’ve got right now – at least it keeps us connected to our audiences and provides a much-needed escape for people right now.

Aaron: We’ve all done a few as individuals. Feis Rois, Edinburgh’s Tradfest, Stonehaven Folk Club and Hands Up For Trad, amongst others, have all run online events that featured members of Old Blind Dogs. It’s been a sharp learning curve for those of us less engaged with technology and a learning experience for us all, *(Continued on page 5)*

Natalie Haas and Aaron Jones *(Continued from page 4)*

but we're all trying to learn as we appreciate that this might be the way we showcase what we do for a while to come. One of the strangest things is the lack of feedback / audience reaction you get with online performance. Live performance is a two-way interaction, with a good audience fueling the musicians, and so we're having to learn how to generate that energy all over again. We're mostly just thankful that we have these outlets for our music, and our aim going forwards is to generate more of our own online content – concerts, EP's, a new studio album and workshops – remotely from home until such times as we can all perform again in front of live audiences.

What is the best way for us music fans to show you our support right now?

Natalie: Sign up for online lessons! If you're a player, this is a great way to keep yourself motivated through this quarantine time – as performer / teachers, it's our only source of income right now and hopefully it's fun for both parties! [Natalie is currently offering virtual lessons over the site www.stringmasters.com.]

Aaron: The best way for music fans to support us just now is to buy product as directly from us as possible. Spotify, YouTube and the like pay musicians peanuts so the best thing is to head directly to our website and buy from us. If there are live online events, then please consider buying a ticket, even if you can't watch it. These things are usually archived to watch later, and generally the tickets are far less than attending an actual concert, so if you can support those shows – even 'in kind' – then you are really helping out. Alternatively, Bandcamp is waiving their fees on the first Friday of each month until the end of 2020, so consider downloading the new Old Blind Dogs album there. Their website allows you to donate more for the album than the minimum price, so if you're feeling generous, then do it knowing you are literally keeping the lights on in Scotland!

Any upcoming projects / live streams?

Aaron: We have plans for lots more online content going into the fall and winter. . . . Otherwise, we're all involved in various other projects including recording on several other people's albums, music for a BBC TV drama and online / distanced teaching so trying our best to keep busy and keep the home fires burning. All our latest OBD news and info on other projects can be found at www.oldblinddogs.co.uk or www.aaronhjones.com.

* * *

Information about how to support independent music venues during this time can be found at www.nivassoc.org.

Rob Kronen Returns to Susquehanna Folk

Susquehanna Folk ONLINE



A little more than a month after winning the Emerging Artist Showcase competition, singer-songwriter and blues guitarist Rob Kronen returned to SFMS's virtual stage on September 12 as a featured performer. Kronen's 90-minute show included a Q and A session with SFMS Board members Peter Winter and Sara Willard.

The concert / chat has been archived on the SFMS website for convenient viewing anytime. To access it, please visit the archived online events webpage at www.sfmsfolk.org/events/events-hub.html?archived.

Explore SFMS's New Online Folk Arts Center

On August 31, the Susquehanna Folk Music Society launched an online Folk Arts Center, which will serve as a regional hub for traditional artists, projects, information and arts events.

The Folk Arts Center is an outgrowth of SFMS's first year as a folk arts partner with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. PCA provides financial and administrative support to a network of folk arts partners that serve regional areas across the Commonwealth. SFMS's Folk Arts Center serves Cumberland, Dauphin and Lebanon Counties.

A central feature of the Folk Arts Center is the Folk Artists Gallery, which showcases traditional musicians, craftspeople, storytellers and other guardians of cultural heritage in SFMS's three-county region. By the end of February, SFMS will have documented the work of 12 traditional artists whose profiles will appear in the Folk Artists Gallery. Each profile represents the culmination of extensive fieldwork by SFMS folklorist Amy Skillman. The profiles of four folk artists are currently available for viewing in the Folk Artists Gallery. They are Seamus Carmichael, traditional Irish singer; Ho-Thanh Nguyen, Vietnamese cook; Mônica Teles, Brazilian musician; and Susan Leviton, Jewish cultural artist.

The Folk Arts Center will be a resource for traditional artists who need assistance identifying and applying for grants and other funding opportunities. These include PCA's apprenticeship program, which offers annual grants of up to \$4,000 to cover time and supplies for a master artist to work with a qualified apprentice in acquiring the necessary techniques and artistry for carrying forth a treasured tradition.

The Folk Arts Center will also help broaden public awareness of the work of traditional artists through announcements about their upcoming performances, exhibitions, demonstrations and other public events. Many of these activities will be sponsored or arranged by SFMS.

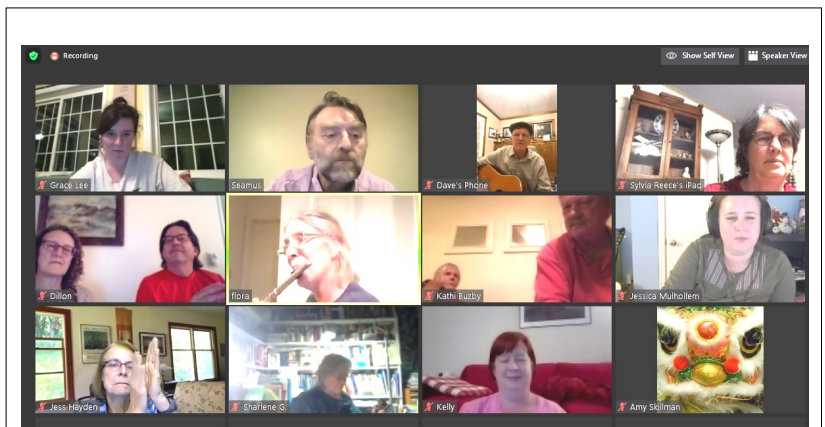
In addition to funding from the PCA, SFMS's Folk Arts Center is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

To access the Folk Arts Center, please visit its webpage at www.sfmsfolk.org/folkarts/center.html.

Looking Ahead

- Sunday, November 1, 4 p.m., **Fall Coffeeshouse**
(Performers to be announced)
- Saturday, November 7, 7:30 p.m., **Del Rey Concert**
- Sunday, November 15, 4 p.m., **Del Rey Ukulele Workshop**
- Saturday, November 21, 7:30 p.m., **David Jacobs-Strain Concert**

For more information, please visit SFMS's website at www.sfmsfolk.org.



"Hup" for Irish Session Workshop

On September 20, Lebanon's Seamus Carmichael led a lively SFMS workshop via Zoom on the traditional Irish session, or musical gathering. Originally from County Derry in Northern Ireland, Carmichael is a highly accomplished Irish singer in the traditional *sean-nós* (unaccompanied) style. Carmichael spoke and answered questions about how a session works, where sessions are held locally, and the etiquette for joining in as a newcomer. Carmichael sang a couple of songs, and individual participants chimed in with their own songs and tunes.

The workshop has been archived on the SFMS website for convenient viewing anytime. To access it, please visit the archived online events webpage at www.sfmsfolk.org/events/events-hub.html?archived.



*Susquehanna Folk is
YOUR grass-roots voice
for folk music and dance!*

Member benefits include:

- ♦ substantial admission discount for most events
- ♦ family membership extends discounts to everyone in your household
- ♦ a FREE Sampler CD each season
- ♦ inclusion in SFMS's online Resource List
- ♦ the satisfaction of seeing traditional arts flourish in our community

*Please consider
becoming a member.*

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*Memberships and donations are tax deductible,
and will be acknowledged in writing. Your
membership extends one year from the date you
join. Multi-year memberships are welcomed!*

Get a membership form at:

www.sfmfolk.org/info/membership.html

A Word to Our Members About the CD Sampler

Every year about this time, SFMS issues a CD Sampler to each current member that contains an album cut for every performer on the season's concert schedule. However, the coronavirus pandemic has prevented us from confirming our full slate of concert performers for this season. Because of this delay, we regret that we cannot issue a CD Sampler this year.

In the coming months, we will be confirming additional concerts, including a free concert for the benefit of members only. We look forward to inviting you to this special event as details become available.

~ Jess Hayden
Executive Director

Thanks to These New and Renewing Members

New Members

Philip Horn - New Cumberland
Dennis Hurley - Elizabethtown
Eric Imhof - Austin, TX
Greg & Sydney Otte* - York
Diana Thompson - Enola

Renewing Members

John Bartholow* - Shippensburg
Diane Beible - Camp Hill
Richard Broadbent - Emmitsburg, MD
Jeff & Lynn Budgeon - Elizabethtown
Robert Colman - Harrisburg
David & Susan Craley - Lewisberry
Dale Darkes - Mechanicsburg
Helen Delano - York Springs
Joe & Venona Detrick* - Seven Valleys
Mark & Andrea Dundore - New Cumberland
Warren & Ann Fisher - Selinsgrove
Karen & Jack Green - Mountville
Robert Gutheinz* - New Berlin
Stacy Habecker* - Palmyra
Peggy Hampton - Camp Hill
Brian & Kathy Harrigan - East Berlin
Daniel Heacock - Marysville

David Hoover & Kathleen Wells* - Mechanicsburg
Hank & Jackie Imhof* - Hummelstown
Randy Kochel - Lancaster
Joanne & Francis Kosloski - Wernersville

Mike Krouse - Manchester
Jeffery Kuhn - York
Sue & Fred Landau - Harrisburg
Randy & Brenda Lee Family* - Harrisburg
Erica Meloy - Dillsburg
Stu Miller - York
Doug Morris - Mechanicsburg
Lennie Morris - Mechanicsburg
Jessica & Brian Mulhollem - Carlisle
Travis & Mink Neely - Red Lion
Ruth Ann Neubold - York Haven
Freya Qually - Fairfield
Bonnie Rannels* - Hershey
Dave Seace - Dauphin
Rita Snyder* - Whitehall
Steven Tenneriello - Philadelphia
Van Webster & Carol Heide - Harrisburg

Steve & Nancy Wennberg* - York Springs
Carol Whitfield* - Hummelstown
Randall Zwally - Mechanicsburg

A Special Thanks

*SFMS thanks these members and others who wish to remain anonymous for donating an additional \$1,699.

Are You Due to Renew?

Please note: If the expiration date on your mailing label has passed, or you haven't received any correspondence from us in a while, your membership has probably expired. To continue your membership, please renew now.

If you have any membership questions, please call me at (717) 763-5598 or email me at membership@sfmfolk.org.

Thanks for supporting SFMS.
~ Bruce Kolka, Membership Coordinator



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Susquehanna Folk Music Society Memories



Scenes from September events. Clockwise, from top left: Emmanuel Nsingani and Momo Baz at Fort Hunter Day (photo by Jess Hayden); Seamus Carmichael during online workshop; Le Vent du Nord's Simon Beaudry (foreground) and Réjean Brunet during online concert; Across the Pond's Dan Diviney, Mike Morrison and Chuck Krepley at Fort Hunter Day (photo by Jess Hayden); Rob Kronen during online concert; and Le Vent du Nord's Nicolas Boulerice and André Brunet during online concert.