

MUSICAL TRADITIONS

Where Have All The Audiences Gone? (Musicians, Venues, & Audiences Revisited) By Stewart Hendrickson

"Where have all the audiences gone? / Long time passing, / Where have all the audiences gone? / Long time ago. / Where have all the audiences gone? / Gone as relics, every one. / When will they soon return? / Oh when will they soon return?" (Frank Hamilton)

As I mentioned in an earlier column (*Musicians, Venues, Audiences* – May 2008), the most trying moments for a concert producer are those between the sound check and the performance. When will the audience come? Will they outnumber the performers? Or for the performers. Will we make any money for this gig? Or will it be just another rehearsal?

I recall from my early days with Victory Music, the late 1990s, we had audiences of sixty or more at our monthly concerts at Valdi's Ballard Bistro. I don't think we would get that now. I have been to some coffeehouse gigs where the musicians outnumbered the audience. That was even the case with a solo musician (I wasn't there)! Our Haller Lake audiences have varied from as many as 60+ to as few as 15 or 20 – mostly the latter – in a hall that seats 200.

In the September issue of Victory Review Wes Weddell made a good case for live music. And as Dan Roberts, long-time Victory member, has said, "in music, local is best." But live, local music doesn't seem to draw audiences anymore. Our musicians want more venues in which to perform. We have more venues now, but the audiences have not kept up and rather seem to have declined.

As I said in my column last May, I think communities are the key to providing audiences. Victory Music has created a community of acoustic musicians through its open mics and the Victory Review. The Seattle Folklore Society has built up a community of folk music concert goers over many years. And small towns often have the best audiences because they are close knit communities.

Take for example Skamokawa, a town of about 600 on the Columbia River in Wahkiakum County (SW Washington). They support the Wahkiakum Acoustic Guitar Society of at least a dozen or more active members. I've played a house concert there at a B&B (The Inn at Lucky Mud, run by a couple of folk musicians) with 20-30 local people in attendance, and a potluck and great jamming afterwards. It's a real community.

My friend Ebbie tells me about the music scene in Juneau. "Juneau, Alaska is a smallish (30,000) town but it is a vital community, one that offers many facets and levels of the various arts. For instance, we have five different levels of live theatre here, ranging from a professional troupe down to high school productions; we have painters and writers, publishing houses, music studios, professional music teachers, a symphony and more."

"We have music from lyric opera to folk, we have concerts in halls, concerts in houses, music jams and sessions, we have song writers and song stylists, we have music festivals ranging from folk to jazz and classics, we support many bands and orchestras in this town."

"Just about everything is well attended. Three years ago I was one of four people who started a monthly folk music club which is going strong and two years ago, on a top-of-the-mountain venue reachable on foot or by tram, we started a 'mountain music fest where we offer 10 twenty-minute performing sets. Last year, the manager told me, they sold 212 tickets for the fest; he was pretty happy about it. I anticipate no less this year."

In large cities like Seattle we need to develop neighborhood communities and communities of people with similar interests. It takes time to develop these communities, but this should help bring the audiences back.

SOME UPCOMING CONCERTS AND A NEW VENUE PNW FOLKLORE SOCIETY AND HALLER LAKE ARTS COUNCIL

The **Pacific Northwest Folklore Society** (pnwfolklore.org) has a new venue for its **2nd Friday Coffeehouse Concerts**. Our last concert at the Crown Hill Bistro was in September. We have now booked the Wayward Coffeehouse (8570 Greenwood Ave N, Seattle) for October and November. October's concert at the Wayward Coffeehouse featured **Mick Knight & Orville Murphy**. If this venue proves satisfactory we have the possibility of continuing there on a monthly basis.

November's **PNWFS Coffeehouse Concert** at the Wayward Coffeehouse (Friday, November 14th, 8 pm, free, donations welcome) will feature **PAUL MICHEL & SALLY ROSE**. Paul Michel grew up in Ohio, where he learned to play fiddle, mandolin and guitar from local players, old 78s and tradition "revivalist" players in the 1960s and 70s. He moved to Seattle in 1981, and has played off and on in old-time, bluegrass, Irish and Balkan bands for the past quarter century. Sally Rose grew up in Yakima, WA. She has been singing since childhood. She plays mostly guitar and sometimes banjo. A longtime Seattle resident, she has recently relocated to the pastoral paradise of Snoqualmie, WA, where she sits on her porch and sings for her husband Warren, her fiddling daughter Tori and her guitar playing son Shawn.

On Saturday, November 8th the **Haller Lake Arts Council** will present **TANIA OPLAND & MIKE FREEMAN** at the Haller Lake Community Club (12579 Densmore Ave N, Seattle). This Anglo-Alaskan duo have been on the road together since May '95 in a unique collaboration which combines their distinctly separate musical backgrounds, bringing their exuberant music and wild tales to audiences around the world. Instruments will include hamered dulcimer, guitar, violin, cittern, Native American flute, percussion, with songs in many languages and rhythmic roots from Siberia to Morocco. For more information see hallerlake.info/artsevents.html.

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