



Field Notes

News from Traditional Arts Indiana

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The Sounds of Summer Cross Plains Jam Session

Summer will soon be upon us. And with the return of fair weather, the many outdoor gatherings we put aside last fall will start back up again.

The sounds of those gatherings will accompany us through summer: fairs and festivals of every kind — purring car engines, excited young 4-H kids and animals, barking auctioneers, gospel sings, and, in places all across our state, the busy, round sound of bluegrass music.

In Cross Plains, a tiny little town south of Versailles, the sound of bluegrass has probably already begun. Just about every Sunday afternoon, a crowd gathers at the Cross Plains Feed Mill to laugh, talk, tease, and play.

Things usually start off slowly. Cars arrive, one by one. People gather in groups of two or three, exchanging the latest local news and gossip and offering commentary on the weather. The groups slowly shift from the front to the side of the building, where fiddle, guitar, mandolin, and banjo cases lie scattered about on tables, chairs, and old wagons. Each picks up his instrument and begins to tune, and for a moment the air is filled with the swirling sounds of greetings, laughter, and plucked strings.

There is no signal to start. The first song just rises out of the tuning. The second song follows on the heels of the first, as does the third. There is a



Bill Gabbert (right) laughs with Roger Huron (left). The folks who gather at Cross Plains share a love for music and a delight in each other's company.
— Photo by Beth Campbell

false start on a fourth song and all laugh and tease the false starter. He laughs too, more players arrive, more tuning follows, more songs rise up and so does more laughter. The rest of the day will be just like this.

The folks who gather at Cross Plains share a love for this music and delight in each other's company. Across our state this summer, others will gather in much the same way. Some will gather to sing and play music, others to make quilts, foods, and crafts, still others to celebrate heritage and ethnicity. We look forward to the sounds — and sights — of this “gathering” season. Tell us about the gatherings around you. Perhaps we'll see — and hear — you there.



Roy Gentry plays guitar. An historian of music and a prolific songwriter, Roy peppers the afternoon with stories both sung and told.

— Photo by
Beth Campbell

Sampling of old-time, bluegrass jam sessions:

Jackson County — Wednesdays and Sunday evenings at the Norman Conservation Club in Norman Station.

Orange County — Saturday mornings at Wal-Mart in Paoli.

Ripley County — Sunday afternoons at the Cross Plains Feed Mill in Cross Plains.

On the Road . . .

Family Day at the Indiana Historical Society

March 15th, during the second annual Share-A-Legacy Family History Day, TAI sponsored four traditional arts demonstrations. Over 200 families attended this event at the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis. TAI artists included Barry Clarke, fly-tier from Unionville, Jim Cooper, catfish hoop-netmaker from Evansville, Anu Ganith, rangoli artist from Indianapolis, and Krista Wright, hair braider from Bloomington. Children tried their hand at tying a knot with a shuttle, braiding hair, creating rangoli, or putting together a mock-up of a fly. TAI thanks all the artists and their families and friends for the day's success. Indiana University graduate student volunteers Meryl Mistick and Mike Pierce helped with the children's activities.

New Website for TAI

TAI's website has acquired a new look. In addition to information about TAI programs, the website offers a virtual tour of Indiana's cultural landscape. Two additional features set the website apart: a set of slide shows and an artists' directory.

The slide shows feature specific arts, artists or themes, drawn from TAI's archive. Enhanced by images, text, audio and video, these slide shows are



A boy examines some fly-ties created by Barry Clarke at the Family History Day. Barry is a life-long resident of the south shore of Lake Lemon.
— Photo by Erin Roth



Krista Wright crochets extensions onto her friend Heather's hair at the Family History Day. Wright learned hair braiding from her mother when she was nine years old.

— Photo by Erin Roth

an educational and entertaining way of learning about artists who keep traditions alive in Indiana. Right now you can learn more about the Indian art of mehndi and the work of master tamburitza maker Milan Opacich. Soon, new slide shows will feature Jim Cooper's hoop-net making, the songs of Doris Jean Coil, the canjos of Eli Jackson, and the gospel singing of Robert Turner.

The artists' directory lists individuals and groups available for performances, demonstrations in schools or at festivals, or selling their arts. Teachers, museum educators, arts organizations, festival planners, tourism professionals, etc. planning to present the traditional arts across the state can search TAI's artists' directory. Artists interested in being included in the directory may use the application on the website (www.indiana.edu/~tradarts) or contact TAI.

We welcome your reactions and suggestions for improving the site to meet the needs of artists, educators and the general public.

From the spoken word to the hand-made object, individuals express themselves in ways firmly grounded and deeply connected to community. Traditional Arts Indiana, a partnership of the Indiana Arts Commission and the Indiana University Folklore Institute, works locally with individuals and

organizations to promote and facilitate cultural documentation and public programming. The National Endowment for the Arts, the Indiana Arts Commission, Indiana University, and private donations support the work of TAI. For more information, contact Erin Roth, Manager, (812)855-0418, eroth@indiana.edu.

The TAI Team

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Fieldworkers 2003: Ilze Akerbergs, Beth Campbell, Inta Carpenter, Erin Roth



Robert Turner and the Silver Hearts. L-R: Linda Bush, Diane Brodley, Charisse Hamilton-Moses, Robert Turner. — Photo by Beth Campbell

Indiana Artists Perform in Washington, DC

Robert Turner and the Silver Heart Gospel Singers have been invited to perform at the Library of Congress and the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC in August as a part of a summer concert series, "Homegrown: The Music of America." The series, presented by the American Folklife Center, showcases outstanding performers from across the U.S. and the work of state folk art programs such as TAI. Robert Turner and the Silver Hearts represent over forty years of great gospel music in Indianapolis, home to a thriving gospel music scene and one of the most important African-American gospel recording studios in the U.S. TAI will travel to Washington, DC to introduce the Silver Hearts, meet with Indiana's legislators, and perform a taped interview with the group for the American Folklife Center's Archive of Folk Culture.



Participant in Family History Day delights in learning to make hoop-nets from Jim Cooper. — Photo by Erin Roth

TAI in the University Curriculum

The spring semester in the senior capstone folklore seminar (F497) has been particular fun; eight students teamed up to prepare slide shows for TAI's website. Guided by co-teachers Inta Carpenter and Sandra Dolby, students selected a traditional artist to feature, then combed through transcripts, fieldnotes, and slides, as well as listened to interviews and CDs to find compelling audioclips.



Folklore seminar at Indiana University critiques fellow classmates' slideshows. — Photo by Ilze Akerbergs

Students drafted scripts for TAI's technical assistant, Ilze Akerbergs, to use in putting together the final slide show, which will soon be public. In doing this hands-on work, they put their folklore knowledge — about concepts like genre, tradition, performance, and creativity — to work. But most importantly, they developed affection for the creative individuals they met.

The Bulletin Board

- June 28, Saturday, 7pm — *Good Ole Summertime Series: Bluegrass at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater in Bloomington.* TAI is sponsoring an evening of bluegrass.
- August 9, Saturday, 10am — *TAI's State Fair Fiddle Contest.* Indiana State Fairgrounds at the WFMS stage.
- August 14, Thursday, Noon-6pm — *TAI Day at the Fair.* Musical performances and a ceremony honoring the 2003 State Fair Masters. Indiana State Fairgrounds.
- August 20, Wednesday, Noon-6pm — *Robert Turner and the Silver Hearts perform at the Library of Congress' Homegrown series in Washington, DC*

Creating, Changing, Renewing Portraits of Indiana's Traditional Artists *The Gabbert Twins: Indiana Bluegrass*

Bill Gabbert and his twin brother, Benny, were born near McKee, Kentucky, where many of eastern Indiana's old time, bluegrass and country musicians

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Singer and guitar player Bill Gabbert has a particular fondness for old time music. — Photo by Beth Campbell

The Gabbert Twins — continued from page 3

trace their roots. They spent their early years chasing snakes, hogs, and cliff rats through the wilds of Jackson County, Kentucky, and soaking up the music that would surround them for all of their lives.

Bill and Benny played guitar and sang together from an early age. After WWII, when the Gabbert family came to southeastern Indiana, Bill and Benny began playing at parties and “joints” in places like Osgood, Versailles, and Lawrenceburg. They became

instantly known for their harmonies, which they played on WLW’s Midwestern Hay Ride out of Cincinnati. When an offer came to go to Nashville, both decided against becoming professional musicians. Benny and Bill returned to Indiana so that they could farm, work in a local factory and raise their families — and, of course, hunt ginseng, catch bluegills, raise hogs, and play bluegrass. Five years ago, a tragic accident left Benny paralyzed. On occasion, Bill and Benny still get together to sing, and over the years Bill has been a faithful participant at the weekly Cross Plains jam sessions bringing his clear, high lonesome voice, wide smile, and ready laugh.

The TAI Apprenticeship program: Passing it on

TAI encourages traditional artists who are teaching an apprentice to apply for the Master Apprenticeship program. Master artists receive a \$2000 honorarium to teach qualified apprentices.

Those who apply are evaluated according to the traditionality of the art form, excellence of the master, the promise of the apprentice, and the significance of the art form to the master and the apprentice’s community or group.

To apply, go to the TAI website at (www.indiana.edu/~tradarts/programs/maapcriteria.htm) and download an application, or contact our office.

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