



CLIPPINGS

Preserving the Echoes

Over the
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By Lori Price



Kendra Ward with photos of her father and grandmother, on her lap rests her grandmother's 1894 dulcimer.

For three generations the bright notes of traditional dulcimer music have danced along the ripples of Upcreek. Kendra Ward, who lives near the creek on the 200 acre family farm near Bidwell, Ohio lovingly fingers the age darkened dulcimers her father and grandmother played. Although her father and grandmother are gone now, their music still echoes through these rolling hills.

Kendra has never taken any formal lessons to learn how to play the hammered dulcimer. She just plays the way her father taught her, echoing the pure and untamed sound of rural Ireland from which her ancestors emigrated. But Kendra worries that she will be the last in this line of musical inheritance. She fears the old songs and ways of playing might be lost amidst all the modern technology and rushing about. "Nobody sits on the front porch and plays music anymore. Too many distractions nowadays," Kendra laments.

Kendra need not worry. Thanks to Karen Bump this musical heritage will be saved. She coordinates the Traditional Music Project, based in Athens, Ohio. Karen and several volunteers are working with Kendra and others to obtain video tape recordings to document the songs and techniques that characterize their distinctive traditional style. These materials will be made available to libraries, museums, and schools to preserve the precious and irreplaceable music unique to the area known as Appalachian Ohio. Karen's face lights up when she talks about the Project. "This was something I wanted to do for 20 years but didn't have time until I retired.

This music has such a grip on my heart and soul. I absolutely love it and couldn't continue to stand by and let it slip away."

In 1998, Karen and volunteer Curt Cable began to identify and record musicians who played and sang traditional music in southeastern Ohio. "I am after that pure, raw, original sound, unspoiled by formal lessons," Karen smiles when she explains. This music celebrates the heritage of the residents of Appalachian Ohio. It is rooted in our ethnic ancestry, reflects our history, and helps bind us together." A local shape-note singing group, for example, is the only one in the world that is dedicated to the rich body of shape-note compositions that sprang up in Ohio in the 1800's.

The value of her efforts was quickly recognized by the Rural Action organization, which helped her obtain a start up grant from the Ohio Arts Council and provided VISTA volunteers to assist. Currently the Project benefits from the assistance of VISTA volunteer, Nikos Pappas, a musicologist and accomplished musician himself. Video equipment and student technicians are provided by Hocking College in Nelsonville, Ohio. Project archives now include traditional music by fiddle, mandolin, guitar, banjo, hammered and mountain dulcimer, harmonica players, and shape-note singers. Additional Project components such as public education activities and open jam sessions further realize the Project's intent to make this special music accessible to the public.

Music history specialist Nikos Pappas, adds that, "This music helps to provide a link between urban and rural, between past and present. It is a great way to promote a spirit of both community revitalization and individual self-esteem and is an example of grass

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roots effort at its best.”

John Hollback is one of the musicians video taped for the Traditional Music Project. “I just like this music so well, I think it is really good to preserve the old time music, but then I may be prejudiced since I’m an old timer myself.” He modestly explains, “I don’t give lessons, I don’t really know much about how to teach, but I don’t mind a bit helping people to learn how to play a tune or showing them a short cut or a better way to play something.” John lives on a farm in Scioto County as did his father who taught him to play fiddle, and his grandfather who played fiddle and banjo. “This music has a history. It has been a way of life for a lot of good people.”

“People who are interested in this Project shouldn’t hesitate to take the first step,” Nikos invites. We want them to feel free to explore ways in which they can join in and participate. We see traditional music as an integral part of the greater community of southeastern Ohio, not as an anomaly. We would like to see everyone included.” Karen is quick to add that it is never too late to pick up an instrument or join a choral group. But those who are not musically inclined can be a part of this special heritage by attending the frequent festivals and showing support for local bands and musicians. She adds, “We hope this Project is in the beginning stages of its life span and will

continue to grow and thrive as more people become aware of its existence. We can not allow such a precious resource to be lost.”

Thanks to the Traditional Music Project, southeastern Ohio’s precious

heritage of sound will not disappear. It is being captured and made accessible to all who would listen or learn. Those who were taught by previous generations are now able to make that knowledge available to a broadening circle of new enthusiasts. Kendra’s music and John’s music and that of others like them are pieces of southeastern Ohio’s history that have been firmly anchored in the present, tied to the future, and will not be lost in the fading echoes of the past. ☞

People interested in obtaining the CD and supporting the Traditional Music Project should contact Karen Bump at: 7 Utah Place, Athens, Ohio 45701, (740) 592-1488 or Steve McDaniel, Rural Action, (740) 767-4938, email: mcd@frognet.net.