



Taking Folk Music to the People

*Remember when the music
Came from wooden boxes
strung with silver wire
And as we sang the words,
it would set our minds on fire,
For we believed in things, and so
we'd sing.*

**-Harry Chapin
"Remember When the Music"**

By Lori Russell

Thanks to Dan Ross, the music Harry Chapin describes in his song is not just a memory: It is a melody of hope and heart that still plays for audiences today, spilling out across the airwaves and filling the seats for live performances.

For the past six years, The Dalles

musician has produced the popular live radio show, *Singer Songwriters On Sunday*. The show, which airs from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on KACI-FM 97.7, features "music off the beaten track"—most of it by artists who sing material they compose.

"Folk can be a four-letter word to a lot of people," says Dan. "When they hear the word, some think Burl Ives. They don't think of Bruce Springsteen's tribute to Pete Seeger."

Springsteen's album, *"We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions,"* was the 2007 Grammy winner for Best Traditional Folk Album.

The folk genre includes a range of music—from Americana, acoustic and roots to bluegrass and Celtic.

Dan's playlist averages about 25 songs, along with notes about the

artists and their albums. Listeners can hear anything from local favorites Moe Dixon, Django's Cadillac and The Trail Band to lesser-known tunes by crossover artists such as Springsteen and Van Morrison.

Folk music gained in popularity thanks to performers whose lives were rooted in folk traditions. Woody Guthrie sang songs he had learned from his mother. He later collected folk songs and composed his own, as did Seeger—the son of a professional musicologist.

Public interest in the genre grew as commercial recordings became available in the 1950s, making way for singer-songwriters such as James Taylor, Joni Mitchell, Cat Stevens and Harry Chapin, who hit the charts in the 1960s and 1970s.

Contemporary folk musicians have kept the tradition alive.

Many folk artists build their fan base through word of mouth, concert tours and the Internet.

The playlist from Dan's show and those from 189 stations from Australia to Israel helps make up the Top 70 airplay list each month for FOLKDJ-L—an online discussion group for DJs and others interested in folk-based music on the radio.

*Oh all the times I've listened, and
all the times I've heard
All the melodies I'm missing, and
all the magic words,
And all those potent voices, and
the choices we had then,
How I'd love to find we had that
kind of choice again.*

Dan's show exposes listeners to artists and songs they might not hear elsewhere. A concert series he produces brings performers and audiences together in an intimate setting to share the experience of live music.

With a nod to the line in Chapin's song, Dan and his wife, Crystal Davis-Ross, named their company Silver Wire Productions.

It is a volunteer gig for the couple, who books the talent, prints the tickets and promotes the events.

"If we didn't do this, it would cost us more," admits Dan. "We'd be driving back and forth to Portland to see these same acts."

Every show is a benefit. That means everyone involved in the project—from those who take tickets and set up chairs to those who provide the sound equipment and performer accommodations—do so without compensation.

"It takes a network to make this happen," says Crystal.

A performance by Dave Carter and Tracy Grammer six years ago launched a series of concerts in the Fireside Room at The Dalles Civic Auditorium. Over time, the Singer Songwriter Series has built a reputation for appreciative audiences and a setting with great acoustics.

"Musicians often hear about us from someone else who played



Above, Dan Ross and Crystal Davis-Ross of Silver Wire Productions surrounded by music memorabilia at their home. Opposite page, Dan hosts the Singer Songwriters On Sunday radio program.

there," says Dan. "Everyone who has played here wants to come back."

The Thursday evening slot helps secure artists who may be booked to play a weekend gig elsewhere.

"We take it very seriously when we say to the artists that we'll have a good crowd," says Dan. "We want them to take some money home. We want every show to sell out."

Most do. Part of Silver Wires' formula for success includes an extended intermission, where artists can sell and sign their CDs.

Artists receive 70 percent of every \$10 ticket, with the rest of the revenue and sponsor fees benefiting the Civic Auditorium.

While producing the series is a lot of work, Dan says the performers and their music make it worth it.

"We've met and made so many friendships with these people," he says. "You know where they've

Singer Songwriter Series Resumes

Silver Wire Productions presents the Singer Songwriters Series Thursday nights at The Dalles Civic Auditorium. Concerts run February through June and again in October and November.

Tickets are \$10 and can be purchased at Columbia River Music, Klindt's Booksellers or at the door.

All shows begin at 7 p.m. Upcoming concerts include:

- Terry Robb, opened by Wasco Brothers, March 8.
- Small Potatoes, March 29.
- Dennis McGregor, April 12.
- Laddie Ray Melvin, May 17.
- Eric Taylor, June 14.

Chuck Pyle will appear May 5 at the Erin Glenn Winery at The Mint in a benefit for Celilo House at the Celilo Cancer Center. ■

To receive announcements of upcoming concerts, contact Dan and Crystal at silverwireproductions@gmail.com.

been, and then here they are at the Fireside singing the lines they wrote that knock you over. With live music, it takes a lot to keep it going, but it's completely different than a recording. It's pretty magical."

*And I feel that something's
coming, and it's not
just in the wind.*

*It's more than just tomorrow, it's
more than where we've been,
It offers me a promise, it's telling
me "Begin,"*

*I know we're needing something
worth believing in.*

Dan says his dream is to one day have a Columbia Gorge Folk Festival in The Dalles. ■