

Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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Musical Preview

Written by David on October, 21 2009

The following review does not express the opinion of the Strand Theatre.

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Fans of folk songs, both traditional and electric, have two opportunities to exercise their passions for this quintessential American musical style this week at the Strand Theatre.

On Thursday evening, a more "traditional" variety will take center stage, at 7:30, as the "The Cobbler Gobblers" perform their "old-time, Appalachian" songs. Then Saturday night, at eight, "The Complete Unknowns", will present a more contemporary version of the roots of this most variable and resilient of musical styles. The price to attend each musical exploration is \$5.

American folk music, often called "roots music," first captured popular attention in the United States during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl of the 1930's. This initial incarnation took many forms such as Appalachian, Bluegrass, the Blues, Cajun, Country and the songs of social protest by Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. A generation later the genre was reborn and revitalized for newer audiences amid the social and political turmoil of the 1960's by the beatnik bard Bob Dylan and a host of others such as The Band. So it should not seem strange that this populist form should again come to life during the current Great Recession and that several of the strains mentioned above should be taken up with vigor by local musicians. After all, the term folk music originally was coined to describe the "musical folklore" of a variety of people and cultures.

Each of the locally-connected bands showcased this week at the Strand Theatre are returning to Shelbyville for encore reprisals of popular past performances.

"The Strand Theatre has great acoustics for the Gobbler's old-time fiddle tunes and rich three-part vocal harmonies," multi-instrumental musician, Kent Lockman, said on "The Cobbler Gobbler's" web page.

Lockman and his bass-playing and singing wife, Marianne, are the local connections this five-piece band formed in 2002 at a folk festival in Tennessee. The two are also teachers at Hendricks Elementary School. The band's literal Appalachian roots are personified by two musicians from the Carolinas: banjo player Linda Cabe of North Carolina and singer, guitarist and fiddler Joey Neal of South Carolina. The other "Cobbler Gobbler" Hoosier link is provided by lead vocalist and guitarist, Dee Capozzi, a Whiteland native and hammered dulcimer player in a different musical incarnation.

"The Cobbler Gobblers" are very talented musicians who share their love of traditional music in an entertaining way," said Mary Kay Pitts, a local hammered dulcimer player.

All proceeds from "The Cobbler Gobblers" jamboree of mountain music will be donated to the Strand Theater for the continued renovation and restoration of this community arts center and cultural venue. Additionally, copies of the band's CD "Eat more Cobbler Play More Tunes," will be sold during the show. The CD, is also available locally at "Three Sisters Books and Gifts," located on the circle.

"The concert should be a fun down-home evening of music for all who attend the performance," Lockman added.

In a rather sideways route, traditional Appalachian music was also a root-influence the legendary folk poet, Bob Dylan, who incidentally is the muse and inspiration of "The Complete Unknowns" the local band that will grace the Strand's stage Saturday night.

This five piece, folk-rock band was "drawn together by the appreciation and sometimes love of the music of Bob Dylan and The Band," said guitarist and harmonica player Mike Kruse. "Decades of music experience and a few music degrees are mixed in there too."

The choice of both Dylan and The Band as inspirational mentors uniquely highlights the modern evolution of folk music. Each equally draws attention to the fusing of American folk genres into modern Rock-n Roll, especially the socially-relevant protest songs of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. Dylan, in particular, is credited with melding the many various strands of "roots music" into popular music, while simultaneously and notoriously tackling controversial subjects in his poetic lyrics that recall the 1930's songs of Guthrie, "the Dust Bowl Troubadour."

"The thing about Rock and Roll is that for me anyway it wasn't enough," said a 19-year old Dylan in a Greenwich Village coffee-house in 1962. "There were great catch phrases and driving pulse rhythms, but the songs weren't serious or didn't reflect life in a realistic way. I knew that when I got into folk music, it was a more serious type of thing." Three years later, this young New York hipster would completely revolutionize folk music by electrifying it in a manner akin to Rock and Roll and create a new genre: folk-rock.

The other musical mentors mentioned by Kruse, "The Band" were also legendary performers of electric folk and recorded and performed frequently with Dylan, especially when the Minnesota -born bard took his big-city beats down to the capital of country music in Nashville to work on "The Band's" initial album. "Their first album, "Music from Big Pink" changed my life," said legendary guitarist Eric Clapton, who dissolved his band "Cream," during an attempt to join the "The Band."

The five-piece ensemble, known as "The Band," was a short-lived (1967-76) effort of "musician's musicians," comprised of Robbie Robertson, Levon Helm, Richard Manuel, Garth Hudson, Richard Danko and often featuring Dylan, in his many guises, as singer, musician and songwriter extraordinaire

They were and are, in fact, praised and cited as influential by musicians ranging from the Beatles, the Grateful Dead, Neal Diamond, to the Black Crowes. "The Band's" last concert in 1976, aptly called "the Last Waltz," was a virtual who's who of rock, folk, R&B and blues musicians. Both Dylan and "The Band" are previous inductees in The Rock and Roll Museum for both their musical innovations and influence.

Kruse is joined in "The Complete Unknowns" by his son Adam, the bassist, who also serves as band director at the Shelbyville Middle School. Joining the Kruse's in this folk-rock celebration of electric and eclectic protest ballads are guitarist Rod Cotter, fiddler Nicole Smith and drummer Glen Allman. As an added bonus, several of Adam Kruse's middle-school students will perform as the opening act at Saturday's concert.

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