

Staff-Led Workshops

Brian Miller's Workshops:

Learning a Song From the Archives: Learning a song from an archival recording or manuscript and making it your own can be a challenging but rewarding process. In this workshop Brian will share tips on finding material, deciphering lo-fi recordings, working with printed texts and transcriptions and combining and altering versions to create satisfying and special songs worth singing.

Irish Influence in the "Woods" Song Tradition: In the mid-1800s, a distinct tradition of singing developed in the pine woods of New England, Atlantic Canada and the Great Lakes. Men supplemented summer work on farms and sailing ships with winters in logging camps where they sang to pass the evening hours in the bunkhouses. The rich repertoires possessed by the many immigrant Irishmen in the early camps had a defining influence on this evolving musical style. Over time, those born into tight-knit logging communities in the east carried songs westward as the industry cut its way toward the edge of the prairie. Songs imported from Ireland persisted alongside new songs that told of life in the north woods. Brian Miller explains the historical context of the north woods song tradition and delves into the fascinating lives of some of the singers from that era, illustrating the talk with songs from the archives.

Michael C. Dean: Singer, Saloon-Keeper, Lumberjack: Mike Dean was an Irish-American singer, songster-publisher, saloon-keeper and lumberjack from northern New York who lived most his life in Minnesota. Dean was a source singer for both Franz Rickaby and Robert Winslow Gordon and Dean's own Flying Cloud songster has long been viewed as one of the most important and representative collections of songs prevalent in the north woods logging era. Brian has researched Dean's life for a decade and has uncovered forgotten wax cylinder recordings, hand-written letters, unpublished song transcriptions and fascinating insights into Dean's life and music.

Susan Pepper's Workshops:

Appalachian and Old-Time Hymns: "I love the rawness of these simple and very singable hymns and look forward to sharing them in a secular but communal space." This workshop will delve into intimate songs of worship that have been used in people's living rooms and on mountaintops for centuries. Susan will share and teach a few gems she learned in North Carolina drawing mostly from the Primitive Baptist and Camp Meeting song traditions as well as African-American Spirituals.

Songs from the Source: Hazel, Pearl and Zora: In this workshop, Susan will give background about how she found and befriended several mountain singers in North Carolina including Hazel Rhymer, Pearl Hicks and Zora Walker. Susan will share stories from the singers' lives—and we will sing several songs she learned from their family traditions. This workshop will explore the value of learning songs directly from another person and how to go about doing it.

Ballads and Folks Songs from Beech Mountain, North Carolina: Susan spent time learning ballads, dulcimer and fretless banjo from descendants of this long-standing music community that has inspired song collectors since the 1940s. Learn about a few special folks from this area while singing their songs. Emphasis will be on singing unaccompanied ballads and songs as well as using folklore to add meaning to our singing practice.

Martha Burns' Workshops:

Old-Time Songs: Did you think southern old-time music was all fiddle tunes and dance music? Not so! In the 1920s and thirties, Uncle Dave Macon, Charlie Poole, Samantha Bumgartner, the Carter Family, Blind Alfred Reed, and countless others recorded everything from Child ballads like “Barbara Allen” to songs of social criticism, like “How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?” The old-time repertory includes a lot of very funny songs, songs with great choruses, and sentimental songs to melt the heart. This is a participatory workshop, so bring a song or learn a new one. Instruments optional.

Cowboy Songs: True cowboys were singers. “Singing was company to us,” a retired trail hand once explained, “just as it was to the cattle.” In this workshop, Martha will share some of her favorites from the great body of songs that came out of the cowboy era – roughly 1865 to 1930. These are occupational songs, pre-dating the pop tunes of Hollywood's singing cowboys. Some chronicle the hardships of a months-long trail drive. Others extol the beauty of the Plains. You'll hear how the songs came into being – a surprising number started as poetry sent to newspapers like the Miles City (Montana) Stock Growers' Journal – and learn where you can find them.

Sing Along With the Carter Family: The Carter Family – Sara, Maybelle, and A.P – stand out among the pioneers of old-time music both for their expansive repertoire and for their trademark three-part harmonies. First recorded in 1927, their influence on the folk music revival has persisted into our own times. We'll listen to two classic recordings, break down the harmonies, and sing along with the famous trio. This is a workshop in harmony singing, close listening, and learning by ear. Fun is guaranteed.

Attendee-Led Workshops

Atheist and Agnostic "Hymns" and "Spirituals" (S, D)

A workshop to discuss what role these types of songs fill in personal lives and communities, and then to share songs that fill these same sorts of needs without reference to deities.

Bluegrass Slow Jam (P, T, S)

Remember the movie "Oh Brother Where Art Thou?" Basically that kind of music. Come and join the circle of casual, slow jams of traditional bluegrass music. From its roots in Appalachia in the early 20th century, Bluegrass music came to prominence as the popular music of the 1930s and 40s, before being eclipsed by Rock and Roll. However, it never away, and it has experienced a popular revival since being featured in the Cohen Brother's 2003 film. Popular songs included "Angel Band" "I Saw the Light" and "Man of Constant Sorrow."

Crankies! (P)

Crankies are "movies on paper". They're a wonderful way to illustrate a song and bring a group together. Julie will perform some of her song crankies (we'll all sing along!), demonstrate some materials and techniques, and answer questions about crankie making.

Elation and Devastation Expressed in Song (P, S)

Songs and singers compel me when they transmit emotional intimacy or intensity. I'll share my 30 years of musings on the inner compulsion that becomes song, what elder singers do/don't tell us about personal expression in "traditional" song styles, and some rules I have about how, when, and why to emote all over other people. We'll try to sing some songs with emotional honest.

Make a Mini-Crankie! (P, T)

Bring a song, make a Mini-Crankie! Crankies are a moving picture folk art, wherein a scrolling illustration is often accompanied by a song or spoken story. There's tons of room for invention and collaboration: illustrations can be literal or abstract, and they can be set to spoken word, sung ballads, or wordless tunes.

Misandry! (S)

Come sing songs where men get what they deserve! We all need some catharsis after 2017; let's share some songs where the men come to tragic ends instead of the women. All welcome as long as you can laugh at the fragility of masculinity.

Nigun Singing (P, S)

The nigun is a broad category of wordless Jewish semi-liturgical song. I'll speak briefly about the history and context of the nigun in Jewish religious music, and we'll spend most of the time singing some nigunim!

Old English Music Hall (P, S)

A brief history of English Music Hall followed by a brief performance of several songs by two members of The Old Howard Troupe. Join in the chorus or share your favorite!

Shape Note Singing (S)

Come sing traditional four-part hymns from the American shape note singing tradition! Bring a book if you have one, but we'll also have books for borrowing.

Shy Singers Workshop (S, D)

Bring your breakfast and chat in a supportive environment about the things that make us all at times hesitate to open up and sing in public. Feel free to sing snatches of songs- no need to remember all the words!- or just hang out and listen to/join in the discussion. A relaxing way to start the weekend of song and community.

Songs That Get to You (S, D)

Why and when are we drawn to songs that make us cry or otherwise move us so powerfully that it can be difficult to sing them? What sad songs do you sing? What draws you to them? How do you work through your emotional response to the point where you can lead the songs in public, particularly unaccompanied and emotionally naked? In this workshop we can say a few words about the choices we make when choosing what to sing, talk about a particular song, and then sing the song.

Sung Waltzes (P, T, S)

Come sing some of your favorite waltz, and dance to them, too! We'll have a brief waltz primer and then start singing; it'll look like a regular song swap, with participants leading songs and others joining in, except that in addition, people will be dancing!

What Does the Fox Sing? (S)

In honor of our t-shirt mascot this year, bring all your fox-focused or fox-adjacent songs! Fox hunting, chicken-thieving and all manner of wily hijinks welcome!