

Round Barn Jam

Folks travel through the cold winter night of January 20, 2007, to arrive at Grace Church in New Berlin. In a warm basement room, musicians assemble and tune a variety of acoustic instruments for the Round Barn Jam. Herman Bednarz brought several new harmonicas and said his brother Gene Bednarz, who plays a mandolin, couldn't attend because he is out dancing. Frank and Melva Johnson from Hartland are newbies who heard about the Jam from friends. People catch up on news because the Jam schedule skips December.

John King has white hair and a mustache, wears pants with cuffs and brown suede shoes with blue laces. He just performed the *Fabulous Folk at The Coffee House* on Sunday. John sits holding his guitar, near the middle of concentric circles of folding chairs. At 7:00 p.m. John stands up and with his big booming voice welcomes everyone to the Round Barn Jam. Activities are underway for an enjoyable evening of live music.

The first tune is **Jumbalaya** (in A), followed by **Yellow Rose of Texas** (G), **Where Could I Go?** (D) and **Just A Closer Walk With Thee** (C). Next CC Westgaard and Barbara Hilbert, on their unusual bowed psalteries, play the introduction to **Amazing Grace** (G). Everyone intently listens as their pleasant music fills the room. It is so calming that we imagine snow flakes falling outside. CC had earlier described that she wood-burned the letters of the various keys into her psaltery to quickly find them while playing.

Next is **Red River Valley** (G), **Sloop John B** (G), **This Train** (G), **I Got a Home in Glory Land** (G), and **Don't Think Twice It's All Right** (C). While quietly strumming, John tells a story about Dallas, Texas, where the floppy-eared rabbits live, the water falls, and most importantly there is a street named Elm, originally pronounced El-Um. We segue to play the tune **Deep El-Um Blues** (A). The chance to ask for requests moves around the room. Walter Roob wants the *Service Songs*. There is a moment of hesitation and someone shouts that Walter would rather like the **Salty Dog Blues** (C). We all play Salty and even the clarinetist takes a solo with this snappy tune followed by **Where Have All the Flowers Gone** (C). **Mama Don't Allow** (G) is fun for all instrumentalists, while the singers counter the melody by repeating the word "Hallelujah" as directed by John. More tunes: **Streets of Laredo** (D), **Roll in my Sweet Baby's Arms** (G), **River** (D) and **Careless Love** (D) which John said Carroll Brown must have made a mistake in listing Wood Hayes as the composer. **After Rocky Top** (G), John looks at his watch and makes a short announcement about the collection plate (a free-will donation to help pay for the evening's church space). During the break, Steve disassembles and describes construction of his amazing big-bass one-string bucket. Folks compare instruments and talk about music.

After the break we play: **Skip to My Lou** (D), **I'll Fly Away** (D), **I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry** (G) and **This is Your Land** (G) with a chorus by the seven harmonica players. John lifts his right leg to signal the last chorus is being played and then adds a double ending just to be sure. More fun tunes are: **Mansion Over the Hilltop** (A), **Will the Circle Be Unbroken** (G) **Unclouded Day** (G), **I Saw the Light** (G), **Irene Goodnight** (E).

Another rendition of **Just a Closer Walk** is requested, but this time in G followed by **Tom Dooley** (G). The **Grandfather's Clock** (G) has an excellent banjo introduction and ending. John lightly taps his fist on his guitar to make the sound of a ticking clock. A recording of this song performed tonight could have sold millions. John on guitar and Peter with autoharp move together to sing a tune by the Beatles: **Here, There and Everywhere**. By now we have gone around the room for requests once, which includes several people who said "pass." More music: **I'll Be Somewhere Listening** (G) and **Battle of New Orleans** (G) which Joe Boxhorn says, "This battle in 1814 did not have to take place because the war was over!" and **City of New Orleans** (G). **Cleanse Me** (F), tonight's first tune with a flat, is played by a lady on harmonica. The last tune is John's guessing game, soon recognized as **Five Foot Two** (C).

I count 37 tunes and 45 people, but could be off a bit since I am busy playing music rather than counting. Three hours go by in an instant. Conversations resume, many people help with tables and chairs, the parking lot has a bright light and we find there is no extra snow on the roads.