



## 2026 COFF Retrospective

NEW VENUE WOWS ATTENDEES

BY DORI SMITH

With 5 main jam tents, 3 stages, 3 workshop tents, 2 closing circles – one for singing and one for drums – as well as a whole area for children in the largest venue the Central Ohio Folk Festival has been in, 2026 COFF offered a lot of promise. It was a promise it quickly lived up to, with crowds arriving early. I ran into the head of logistics and sound, Don Caudy, who told me he was amazed at the big turnout despite the rain and road closures. I had driven through a bad thunderstorm on my way to the Bank Run Metro Park, navigating the detours cautiously as rain pounded down and lightning lit up the sky. By the time I reached the park, the storm had stopped, but the sky would open up again that night, right before the headline event which was moved from the Kirby Main Stage to the Showcase Tent on the other side of the festival so everyone could stay safe and dry.

Bank Run Metro Park was designed by Columbus Metro Parks with festivals in mind. The Columbus Folk Music Society has been looking for a new, larger, venue for a couple of years to replace one we were using at Highbanks. In addition to the

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*As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting: This land was made for you and me.*

*This Land is Your Land - Woody Guthrie*

## A Different Strummer Newsletter Highlights

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*Photo Credit David Maywhoor*

spacious layout, permanent stage and buildings, accessibility seemed to be at the top of the list when Metro Parks designed the new park. Caudy had something to say about that: "I talked to a lot of people and veterans and people with mobility issues and I said I think we really need to push this that this is going to be mobility friendly and handicap friendly and it is. It's much better than other facilities that we've had. I'm really pleased that that's worked out that way." He went on to add, "Metro Parks staff need a big tip of the hat because they've done an amazing job. They've been so friendly and welcoming, it's just all [gone] really well." As a part-time wheelchair user myself, for events such as these, I found the park to be extremely navigable. I also saw many people using wheelchairs, rollators, walkers, and strollers. Knowing how inaccessible Highbanks could be, especially after a lot of rain when mud was common, it seemed that many people noticed the change and felt enabled to come where they may not have been able to before.

Folk covers a large range musical styles. Old-time, Americana, and Bluegrass are just some of the types of music which can

be described as Folk. Traditional Irish, rebellion songs from the world over, African American Spirituals and so much more have a place in the pantheon of Folk. There is something for everyone, and that was reflected in the incredible array of musical talent who came to perform at COFF 2026, including sweet Rastafarian tunes drifting over the festival Sunday morning, blues duos, singer-songwriters of different genres, traditional folk performers, and others, and of course the amazing performance of the COFF headliner, The Tray Wellington Band.

It also comes as no surprise then that there were all types of workshops available. Saturday, workshops included sessions on songwriting, on instruments such as the bodhran, tin whistle, and clawhammer banjo as well as histories of bluegrass and lessons on songwriting and playing in a jam session. Sunday's workshops included learning about instruments such as the Mountain Dulcimer, Ukulele, Autoharp, harmonica, and tin whistle, as well as an open mic survivor's guide and techniques for blues guitar.



*Photo Credit Larry Fowler*



*Photo Credit David Maywhoor*

I talked to a man named Albert More who took the workshop about the history of bluegrass on Saturday morning, put on by Rich Baker and Brent Davis. He told me he was interested in the genre because he had grown up in West Virginia and heard it a lot. We talked about the differences between country and bluegrass: "Country music is so sad I couldn't take it." He told me, but "I like the traditional instruments in bluegrass." I suspect had I stopped a dozen people at the festival, I would have gotten a dozen different answers about what type of folk music they liked the best and why. Most people I didn't have to stop and ask. They showed their preferences through the jam tents they spent their time in. Of the five jam tents, two were very busy early Saturday afternoon. The bluegrass tent was full of musicians and more arrived while I was there: instruments such as the double bass, violin, mandolin, guitar and banjo were all making wonderful music together. I saw multiple players of each instrument, each passionate about playing and sharing the music. Anyone unsure of what bluegrass music sounded like only needed to go sit or stand in or near that tent.

The harmonies and strings jam tent was

hosted by the Cbus Jammers. This group of musicians played many different instruments, with some musicians playing more than one. I saw guitars, banjos, an oud (a fretless stringed instrument from Syria), a clarinet, harmonicas, a ukelele, and a flute. Everyone who entered the tent was asked if they had a particular song they wanted to play. There were plenty of extra chairs if you wanted to sit and observe or get out your own instrument: singing was encouraged also. Both of these tents felt welcoming whether you wanted to make music or just listen.

Another tent which was also welcoming was the Old-Time jam tent. For music which is a little older than bluegrass and can include lyrics as well as breaks for instruments to have solos, this music had a real Americana feel. While at the tent I spoke with banjo player Hannah Meixner and guitar player Eric Bobbitt. The smallness of the group at the time meant we were able to talk a little about the definition of old-time music and how it compares to bluegrass. Hannah, a long time banjo player who has toured in the past, had not known about the festival and



*Photo Credit David Maywhoor*

happened to be visiting family in central Ohio from Michigan. She said she was glad to have brought one of her instruments!

I spoke with Paul Race at the Folk Mix jam tent, with his autoharp and a mountain dulcimer, also called the Appalachian dulcimer. We talked about playing both instruments and he let me try them out. While that was going on, a few more people came into the tent and the instrument sample session continued. The whole tent ended up having a small jam session with modern pop music, before breaking up and going our separate ways.

If you have kids, you want to make sure they are also entertained. There was a large section set aside just for this called the Kids' Village. It included tents where kids could jam or listen to stories as well as a craft tent, a coloring tent, an Instrument Petting Zoo where children young and old could try out loaned instruments, and a MetroParks tent which provided bubbles and bubble wands. Bubbles flew freely and the craft tent hummed with activity. Kids and adults alike worked on crafts involving making flower crowns, egg shakers and drums.

The festival would not be the same without the mascot, Darby Duck. Darby was around the festival both Saturday and Sunday afternoon, greeting people and making the atmosphere a little more cheerful. It truly was a great kick-off year for COFF at Bank Run Metro Park.

## CFMS Member Sylvia Miller performs for Ohio's America 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary kick-off

BY STEVE ING

**CFMS:** Big congratulations, Sylvia, on your original song, "The Ohio Song" – you were chosen to perform it at the Ohio kick-off celebration for America's 250th Anniversary. What were your impressions of that day and the lead up to it?

**Sylvia:** I was thrilled to perform at the Atrium of the Capitol on Jan 7th. There were 400 people, including the governor, commissioners, senators, representatives, and friends in attendance. What a thrill to receive a standing ovation and a personal handshake from the governor. Many people were humming my song on their way out.

**CFMS:** That catchy tune is now an earworm! What's the back story on how you came to write it?

**Sylvia:** It is a catchy tune, an earworm! Some years ago, I received a grant from the Ohio Humanities Council to write and produce an audio travelogue of the National Road across Ohio. I was invited to be on their Speakers' Bureau and gave speeches across Ohio for a few years. This experience exposed me to many areas of Ohio and inspired me to write The Ohio Song.

**CFMS:** How did you become a songwriter?



Photo Credit Linda McDonald

**Sylvia:** I didn't play guitar until I was an adult after my husband bought me one for a birthday present. I took a few lessons and soon found out that I could play and hear the chords. Later, I had to write something to type onto the computer for a word processing class. I turned it into a simple song, and this prompted me to start writing songs. I took a song writing class from Marji Hazen. She had a folk band and asked me to join her band. When this band folded, several of us formed the One More Time String Band. We played festivals, libraries, etc. around Ohio for over 27 years.

**CFMS:** These days, you are really involved with the CBUS Jammers, right? How did you get involved, and what activities are you doing now?

**Sylvia:** I like to jam with the CBUS Jammers, especially the Claremont

Retirement Center. They have a very good audience and enjoy a wide selection of music.

**CFMS:** You are certainly getting some really great traction. I saw a piece that featured you in *Stroll Muirfield Village: Muirfield Resident Is a Local Treasure*. I hear this rock star is not quite done with performing this piece. What's next?

**Sylvia:** I am elated to be included in a few activities of the 250 Celebration of our country. I have been asked to perform at the Governor's Ice Cream Social on June 14 (Flag Day) in his homestead in Cedarville, Ohio, and on on July 4th evening at the start of the Columbus Symphony program of patriotic songs at the Columbus Commons. Wow!

You can see Sylvia performing The Ohio Song at <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/DTsYKRQQqM4>



Photo Credit Linda McDonald

# The Magpie Consort and Friends deliver a spring Cornucopia

BY ROB POTTER

The meaning of the word *cornucopia* is 'horn of plenty' and it's often associated with an outpouring of fresh flowers and produce from a horn shaped basket. But for the hundred or so people in the sanctuary of the Columbus Mennonite Church the evening of the first Friday and Saturday of May, the word meant a plentiful helping of American music. The Cornucopia concert, performed by The Magpie Consort to help celebrate America's 250th birthday, also featured 9 musicians from the Cbus Jammers. The Magpie Consort is a group of 16 Columbus singers led by Artistic Director Sheena Phillips who said that "the collaboration between Cbus Jammers and the Magpies felt like a really good match—both groups are largely amateur and interested in a wide range of music." Also joining in the Cornucopia shows were pianist Phil Brown Dupont and four dancers from The Yellow Rose Cloggers of Ohio.

In what one attendee called "a convergence of so much creativity and artistry," the evening was divided into two sections, each featuring a wide bounty of musical styles. The first section kicked off with *The Moon and Seven Stars* – a Revolutionary War-era fife tune penned in England, and then shifted to spirituals and hymn sings, with Phillips leading the audience in hearty singalongs of the chorus of *Shall We Gather at the River*. Just before intermission, the cloggers' fun and enthusiastic performance had everyone in attendance tapping to the beat of *Shady Grove*.

The second section of the evening began with *John Brown's Body* from the American Civil War era and the poignant *Wayfaring Stranger*, led by Cbus banjo player Jack Halada. After that, Brown Dupont's performance of Scott Joplin's *Solace* edged the audience toward better times with each keystroke. Then came *De Colores*, the Spanish-language Mexican folk song and a reading of the Native American *Eagle Poem*. Woody Guthrie's *Gonna Get Through This World* (with a clarinet solo from Jim Legg) came next, and at one point you felt like the bounty would never end. But eventually it had to, but in grand style, with two short hymns *I'll Fly Away*—arranged by Columbus composer Craig Courtney—and *The Gospel Train*.

As a key part of the national celebration that was central to Cornucopia, the Magpies made sure the audience had historical context for each piece. Jim McHie, a Cbus guitarist who performed that night, said "My daughter who is a history major at Kent State loved the way the songs all had historical backgrounds and meanings, she enjoyed that aspect of the concert almost as much as the music."

While it won't be the same as catching the live performance in person, you can watch a video of the Cornucopia here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-G5O1oKyTQ>.

Plus, check out these upcoming Magpie/Cbus Jammers combo performances this summer under "Save the Date!"



## Welcome NEW Members

Rich Grunenwald      Marie Boozer  
 Jan Grabill              Bruce Mortland  
 Denis Grabill          Greg Myers  
 Betsy Bullock          James Revelos

...and Welcome Back RENEWING Members!



## Save the Date!

### Americana/Folk Concert Series

**Sat, July 11th - Micah Kesselring**

The Reeb Center 280 Reeb Ave,  
 Columbus, OH 43207 - Join us at 2  
 p.m. for a community gathering of  
 food and song. Micah performs at  
 2:30 p.m.

### Magpie/Cbus Jammers

**Sun, June 28th - 2 pm**

Parsons Avenue Library, 1113 Parsons  
 Ave, Columbus OH 43206

**Sun, September 27th - 3 pm**

Hilliard Library, 4500 Hickory Chase  
 Way, Hilliard, OH 43026

### Zoom Jam Sessions

**Mondays and Thursdays, 10-11:30am.** Contact Jane for Zoom logon info: [vanaukj@gmail.com](mailto:vanaukj@gmail.com)

### In-Person Jams

**Mondays, 6 - 8pm** - various locations during summer - contact Jane at [vanaukj@gmail.com](mailto:vanaukj@gmail.com) for location

**Wednesdays 3:30 - 5pm** - Gillie Senior Center, 2100 Morse Rd. Jam is in community room just to right as you enter from parking lot. (THIS IS A TIME CHANGE)

## NEWSLETTER TEAM

**Editor:** J. McHie / Contact Jim at

[editor@columbusfolkmusicsociety.org](mailto:editor@columbusfolkmusicsociety.org)

**Regular Writers:** M. Hughes, Dori Smith

**Layout:** C. Lin

**Distribution:** E. Smith, Eric Clemens, P. Insabella

**CFMS Photos:** L. McDonald, D. Maywhoor

## In-Person Jams, Continued

### SUMMER SATURDAYS

**9 - noon** - Worthington SE Village Green during farmers market - may need a chair

**9:30 - 11am** - Outside rear entrance to Whetstone Community Center just off the parking lot. May need a chair.

## Americana/Folk Concert Series, Continued

**Sat, Aug 1st - Bridges to Wonderland (Paisha Thomas & Chris Shaw)**

The Reeb Center 280 Reeb Ave, Columbus, OH 43207

Join us at 2 p.m. for a community gathering of food and song.

Bridges to Wonderland performs at 3 p.m

Whether a CFMS member or not, a monthly concert goer, or one of the thousands attending our May festival, your donation to the Columbus Folk Music Society yet this year may be doubled!

Donations may be made via the website:

<https://www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/contact-donate.html>

via the Columbus Foundation's Giving Store:

<https://columbusfoundation.org/the-giving-store/nonprofit-directory-listing/ColumbusFolkMusicSocietyInc/6505>

or by check payable to Columbus Folk Music Society and mailed to: CFMS, PO Box 20735, Columbus, OH 43220. Please write "matching challenge" on your check or online donation note.



## The Columbus Folk Music Society

P.O. Box 20735  
Columbus, OH 43220  
VMB: 614-470-3963



[www.campusprinting.net](http://www.campusprinting.net)  
[info@campusprinting.net](mailto:info@campusprinting.net)  
(614) 261-7991

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General Age Range – Born:  1930s-40s  1950s-60s  1970s-80s  1990s-2010s

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell) \_\_\_\_\_ If Band, website \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_ Additional e-mail (if a household or band) \_\_\_\_\_

We are also a growing, vibrant community of volunteers; the awesome force behind our work! Please  at least 1 box.

- |   |  |  |   |
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OR click here: <https://tinyurl.com/CFMS-Join>

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