

David Holt: “An Appalachian Musical Journey”



APPlause! Series Performance October 28, 2015

As an integral part of the Performing Arts Series, APPlause! offers a variety of performances at venues across the Appalachian State University campus that feature university-based artists as well as local, regional and world-renowned professional artists. These affordable performances offer access to a wide variety of art disciplines for K-12 students. The series also offers the opportunity for students from the Reich College of Education to view a field trip in action without having to leave campus.

Among the 2015-2016 series performers, you will find those who will also be featured in the [The Schaefer Center Presents](#) along with professional artists chosen specifically for our student audience as well as performances by campus groups.

Before you arrive:

Familiarize your students with what it means to be a great audience member by introducing these theatre etiquette basics:

- Arrive early enough to find your seats and settle in before the show begins (20-30 minutes).
- Remember to turn your electronic devices OFF so they do not disturb the performers or other audience members.
- Remember to sit appropriately and to stay quiet so that the audience members around you can enjoy the show too.

PLEASE NOTE:

***All audience members arriving by car should plan to park in the Rivers Street Parking Deck. There is a small charge for parking in the deck. Buses should plan to park along the side of Rivers Street – Please indicate to the Parking and Traffic Officer when you plan to move your bus (i.e. right after the show, or after lunch) so that they can help keep everyone safe.**

***Adults meeting a school group at the show will be asked to sign in at the lobby and wait to be escorted to their group by an usher.**





About David Holt:

When David was 10 years old, his father taught him to play the spoons and the bones. The rhythm bones had been handed down in his family for five generations by his Texas forefathers. When David's family moved to California, he started playing drums and continued to play in rock and roll and jazz bands until he went to college. In college he met banjo player, Steve Keith. The two of them traveled to the southern mountains in 1969 and found a world of living traditional music. David began learning the old-time clawhammer style banjo. In 1973 he moved to Western North Carolina to learn about mountain music first hand from the old-time mountaineers.

In 1975 David founded and directed the Appalachian Music Program at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, NC. In 1980 he began performing full time. Many people know him for my television and radio series. For the Nashville Network he has hosted "Fire On The Mountain," "Celebration Express," and "American Music Shop" and for PBS, "Folkways." Currently, he is hosting American Public Radio's "Riverwalk: Live From The Landing." David maintains a full time concert schedule and still collects and researches music of the southern mountains.

About the music:

The southern mountains are a treasure trove of traditional music and song. This music is a unique blending of Anglo and African-American traditions. The early settlers to the region came from England, Scotland and Ireland in the late 1700's and early 1800's. They brought their ballads and fiddle tunes with them which formed the basis of traditional mountain music. Many of the old songs and tunes from "across the waters" still exist in the region today.

The mountains created a natural isolation for the people there and the music changed very slowly compared to the rest the country. But changes did occur. The musical influences that affected other parts of the nation during the 1800's also affected the mountain folk. You can still see the early influences of blues, jazz, minstrel and sentimental songs in modern mountain music.

The early settlers came to the mountains with European ballads and dance music, but almost immediately began creating new pieces like "Cindy," "Black-eyed Susie" and "Mole in the Ground" that told of life in their new home. The Civil War introduced the African banjo to mountain people. They also began to hear minstrel songs, which were some of the first blending of black and white musical ideas. Medicine shows began to tour through the mountains. They would often have an African-American entertainer with the show who would sing songs like "C-H-I-C-K-E-N," "The Cat Came Back" and "Who Broke The Lock." It was in the medicine shows that many mountaineers first heard the guitar and harmonica played in a blues style. Roy Acuff, Uncle Dave Macon and many other early country performers got part of their musical training in the medicine shows.

In the early 1920's, recordings and radio spread southern old-time music throughout the United States. Fairly obscure folk songs became widely known and played because of their exposure through this new media. Songs like "Keep on the Sunnyside," "When the Train Comes Along" and "Sail Away Ladies" became known in the mountains in this way and are still played today. The beginnings of commercial country music started with folksongs like these. Gradually, newly written songs and "stars" began to be the driving force in popular country music so that by World War II, the old-time folksongs had been displaced in the media.

Even though you rarely see it in the media today, traditional mountain music is still very much alive. Through folk festivals, fiddlers conventions, square dances, front porch picking sessions and professional entertainers, the music continues to be carried on. Uncle Dave Macon in the 1920's

Songs you might hear at the show:

A sample of some of the songs that you can expect to hear at the APPlause! Series concert at the Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts:

Black-eyed Susie

The Drovers Song on the Mouth Bow

Raincrow Bill –Harmonica and Washboard

Railroad Bill- Learned from Etta Baker

Roll On Buddy- Learned from Doc Watson

The Fishing Blues from Doc Watson

The Rhythm Bones

Georgia Buck-Played on an old 1860s banjo from Boone, NC

Talking about Ray Hicks

How to play the Spoons

Tailybone

The Blues on Slide Guitar

Instruments David uses:

Banjo, guitar, harmonica, ukulele, jaw harp, hambone, spoons, washboard, mouth bow. David also sings and uses clog dancing (clogging) in his performances and on his recordings.

Questions often asked of David Holt:

1. When did you start playing music?

David: I started drumming on the furniture when I was in elementary school. At 14 I actually started taking drum lessons. I began learning the banjo when I was 22. Music has always been important to me, but I have college degrees in biology, art and elementary education.

2. Why did you start playing folk music?

David: I fell in love with the sound of the old-time banjo. I just wanted to learn to play for my own enjoyment. It slowly grew into a career.

3. How many instruments do you play?

David: I play banjo, guitar, slide guitar, ukulele, bantar, hammered dulcimer, lap dulcimer, autoharp, bones, spoons, harmonica, jaw harp, mouth bow, washboard and paper bag.

4. Why do you play so many?

David: I really like the sounds they make. Each one creates a different mood. When I came to the mountains I was surprised to see the variety of instruments that people played. I want to show that diversity in my programs. I try to play even the very basic ones like the spoons or washboard as musically as possible and not as a gimmick.

5. Who did you learn from?

David: When I first came to the southern mountains, I was surprised to see how many people still played this music. Many of them were old-timers and were more than happy to show a young person like me how to play. As it turned out, I learned a lot more than music from these men and women. They became my heroes and mentors.

6. What is your favorite instrument?

David: The old-time banjo is still my favorite and best instrument.

7. Do you have a family?

David: Yes, I live with my wife Ginny outside of Asheville, NC. My son Zeb lives in Chapel Hill, NC and performs with me as much as he can. Our wonderful daughter Sara Jane died in an automobile accident when she was 10. We miss her every day.

8. Where have you traveled playing music?

David: I have played in almost every state. For the U.S. State Department I have traveled to Africa, South East Asia and Latin America.

9. Do you always wear a hat?

David: I love hats. I've been collecting fedoras from the 1930's and 40's for a long time. When I started playing on television the hat became a trademark. Now, I always wear a hat when I perform. I also collect neckties from the same period.

How to Play the Spoons:

Hold the first spoon between your thumb and your first finger. It should go across the middle bone of your index finger. The index finger wraps around the back of the spoon and holds it tightly against your palm. The thumb should press down on top giving you a firm grip. Turn the second spoon upside down and place it between your index and middle fingers. The bottoms of the spoon bowls should be back to back. Your middle finger wraps around and holds the edge of the second spoon tightly against your palm. Basically you're making a fist around the spoons.

There should be a space of about a half an inch between the bottoms of the spoons so that when you hit down on your leg they will click together. Put your opposite hand, palm down about seven inches above your leg. Start playing by hitting your spoons down on your leg and up on your palm. Go back and forth, hitting down on your leg and up on your hand, getting a click going each direction. Put a slight accent on the 2 and 4 beats by hitting a little harder on those beats.

To make a roll, spread the fingers of the opposite hand wide apart and make them rigid. Let the spoons bounce down across each rigid finger in a rapid motion letting the last beat hit on your leg. Use the roll as an occasional flourish, always going back to the basic rhythm.

Remember, if you are having trouble keeping the spoons in line, you are probably not holding them firmly. Keep your index and middle fingers pressed against the edge of the spoons and pressed tightly against your palm. HAVE FUN!

Want to see more from David Holt?

David Holt's photography exhibition is on display through Monday, October 26 at the Jones House Community Center on King Street in downtown Boone. Please contact Mark Freed, at the Jones House to plan your visit, 268-6282.
<http://www.joneshouse.org/>

Much of this study guide was borrowed with permission from David Holt's Activity and Study Guide to accompany the recording, "I Got a Bullfrog: Folksongs for the Fun of It."