



# Musically Speaking

*The Newsletter of the Bellingham Music Club*

*April 4, 2007*

*10:30 A.M.*

*Faith Lutheran Church*

## TODAY'S ARTISTS Presented by Clyde Hiss

### *Millie and the Mentshn*

A program of Chamber Klezmer Music from Yiddish folk, Russian, Ukrainian and Israeli traditions under the direction of Millie Johnson

What can we say about this morning's program except that we strive to bring you exceptional entertainment, talented performers and a surprise or two... This morning you will be amazed, entertained and surprised! For more information about the history of the band, log on to <http://www.millieandthementshn.com/>

Shame on you if you missed our March program! Mary Somerville, soprano, and her accompanist Nancy Heyer were fabulous in their interpretation of French poems by Louise de Vilmorin and Jean Moréas set to music by Francis Poulenc. Following that (in English) Clyde Hiss, narrator, and Robert Palmieri, pianist, tickled our childhood memories with a stunning musical performance of "L'histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant" from the text by Jean de Brunhoff. Rumor has it that Robert and Clyde have been asked to repeat their performance of "Babar" at the Firehouse in Fairhaven!

Speaking of surprises, Editor Isabelle Cormier performed computer magic and produced a magnificent, professional-looking program in March. (We not only sounded good, we looked good!)

By a vote of the Executive Board, the following Club members will receive certificates of Honorary Membership today for long-standing and exemplary service: **Hazel Brown, Peggy French, Pat Hite, and Verdi Watson**. Congratulations and many thanks for your good work!

Many thanks to our "cookie fairies" and to Kristin and Hank Van Schelt, Virginia Glover, Randy Sasnett, and Paulette Casey for making today's Spring Tea such a beauty. (Clean-up help would be very welcome!)

If you wish to show **your e-mail address** in the handbook, please e-mail Lynn Belling at [LFBelling@aol.com](mailto:LFBelling@aol.com)

Awards Coordinator Carolyn Wilhite reports that the **WWU Music Awards** auditions were held on March 12 and awards will go to Justin Lee (Flute), Gavin Hayes (baritone), and Lisa Douber (violin). All three will perform at our May meeting.

**BMC auditions will take place at Faith Lutheran Church on Saturday, April 21 as follows:**

9 a.m. **Nicholas Bussard Instrumental Awards**

1 p.m. **Lena Montgomery Vocal Awards**

**We are saddened** by the loss of our long-time member Mary Blake, on March 17. We extend heartfelt sympathies to her family.

**Deep sympathies** also go to Sue Gault and her family for the loss of her husband, Alan Gault, on March 19.

**A memorial service** for Dan Addis will be scheduled for early May.

Puzzled by the "deductibility" and the need to keep records of individual cash donations for your Income Tax Return? Alan Wilhite assures us that you can donate up to \$200 to anyone nonprofit organization without the need for verification. (This would include "Basket" donations.)

Your Editor received a gracious letter from Addis Chapman listing reasons she could not volunteer to write our monthly newsletter! (shucks!) But if you did not receive a notice lately about concerts/operas through **Friends of the Music Library** at WWU, call Addis or Marian Ritter (WWU Music Librarian), or call Dorothy at 733-8537, and we will mail you a copy. Thank you Addis; you are doing an incredible job in the community!

**"Honoring Diversity"** is this year's theme of the second annual Sue Boynton Poetry Contest, open to Whatcom County residents of all ages. Entry deadline is 5 pm Friday April 27. Submit your entries by e-mail at [poetry@nas.com](mailto:poetry@nas.com), by regular mail to Poetry Contest, P.O. Box 2605, Bellingham 98225, or deliver by hand to Allied Arts Gallery, 1418 Cornwall Avenue. Call Susan Erickson (733-0693) or George Drake (734-9757) for contest rules and information. Awards will be presented on June 15 at 7 p.m. at the Whatcom Museum of History and Art. **Sue Boynton, the mother of Ethel Crook**, was a poetess and community leader in early Bellingham days.

## Biographies

### **Millie Johnson, Vocals, Musical Arrangements**

Millie was raised in a musical family, where long car trips were an opportunity for nine-part harmonizing. After a 25 year hiatus from her original training as an opera singer, Millie joined a local Klezmer band, What The Chelm, and found herself instantly transported back in time to her childhood. Born in St. Paul, MN, she was raised in a household of 10, including her grandfather, an immigrant from Vilna, who ran a fruit and vegetable business.

*"There was always plenty of squash soup for breakfast! Visitors were always welcome in our bustling home and there was always a large pot of something cooking in the kitchen."*

Returning to the present, the more Millie immersed herself in the music, the more she became interested in her past. Luckily her ancestors kept very detailed and literate diaries, stories, and pictures of their life in Lithuania and immigration to America. Founded in 2002, Millie and the Mentshn began to perform musical programs interspersed with stories from her ancestor's journals. More enlightened and proud of her heritage as time goes on, Millie continues her musical, historical labor of love by night. By day, a mathematics professor for over 33 years, Millie and her loving book-hound husband Jerry, are getting used to their empty nest and thinking about retirement, so they have more time for their hobbies.

### **Lou Lippman, Piano**

Lou is a well known musician in town who plays at many events in the community, as he is a member of What The Chelm (Klezmer), Halleck Street Ramblers (New Orleans jazz), The Prawns (classic jazz), and is often recruited as an accompanist. A master at improvisation and old time swing, ragtime, and jazz, he has deliberately attempted to become so busy with music that he will be forced to abandon his day job as a psychology professor. Blessed with two grown children who are also gifted musicians and beautiful wife Marcia, who also serves as a constructive music critic, Lou is happily nearly submerged in his musical pastime.

### **Warren Palken, Drums**

Warren began music lessons at age four, banging pots and pans on the kitchen floor, after which he attended Seattle's Cornish Institute and received his Bachelor's degree from Fairhaven College, Western Washington University. From the age of ten, he has played a variety of musical styles--reggae, swing, avant-garde, fusion, ska, punk, big band, blues, orchestra, country, Latin, and Klezmer. As a full time musician, artist, and sound engineer, Warren is also a member of The Prawns (classic jazz), Motown Cruisers (dance R&B), The Kooks (reggae), and What The Chelm (Klezmer). Warren's innovative approach to percussion, eclectic array of instruments, inquisitive nature, and soft touch make him an invaluable addition to the Mentshn.

### **Ken Bronstein, Oboe**

Ken has both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Music and his performing experience includes extensive work in both orchestral and chamber music settings. Ken currently juggles Klezmer (also a member of What The Chelm) and classical music, in addition to holding down not one, but two day jobs. He also tries to find time to spend with his very supportive wife Marla, and their children Zoe and Caleb, and occasionally practices and makes reeds. By day, Ken doubles as a business professor in addition to working as the finance manager for a local non-profit organization.

### **Phil Heaven, Viola, Violin**

Phil started playing Suzuki method violin at age four and switched to viola in high school. He attended the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival with a string quartet under scholarship from the Philadelphia String Quartet and toured Europe with the Collegium Ensemble from Western Washington University. He has his Bachelor's degree in Music and Audio Engineering from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, OH. A sound engineer during the day, Phil also plays in an ensemble with Lydia McCauley, whose repertoire is inspired by Appalachian folk, Medieval and Celtic music. With Millie and the Mentshn, Phil plays a solid body electric 5 string violin, which gives him the ability to play both violin and viola voices. The fact that the instrument happens to be bright green is just an added bonus! Phil and his lovely wife Toby have two large dogs and one very tough cat.

**The Bellingham Music Club Presents:**  
*Chamber Klezmer Music From Shtetl to Swing with Millie and the Mentshn*  
April 4, 2007

Ken Bronstein,  
Oboe

Phil Heaven,  
Piola

Millie Johnson,  
Vocals, narration

Lou Lippman,  
Piano

Warren Palken,  
Drums

1. *Shir Habokrim* – Cowboy Song (Nozyk/Orland)  
Israeli 1954

This song is about the barren Arava, in the Negev area in Israel

Arava, Arava endless and barren as the cowboys'  
eyes sweep over you.  
No juniper, no thistle, no tree, the wind blows across  
the desert  
The song of the cowboy spreads across the endless  
stretches  
As the sun rises and sets

Mysterious Arava, the cowboy of old has returned to  
you  
Riding along paths which breath again. Wake up  
fields of peace!  
Make way for the cowboy, wild and strong. The song  
of the cowboy rises and spreads  
As the sun rises and sets

Answer Arava, do not sleep, for we bring back to you  
your past glory.

2. *Zayt Gezunterheyt* – Farewell (Words published in  
1901 by S. Ginsburg and P. Marek; music arranged with  
words in 1909 by J. Engel. Sergei Prokofieff used this  
melody in his Overture on Hebrew Themes, Opus 34,  
composed in 1919)

Farewell my beloved parents.  
I'm going far away where no wind blows  
Where no bird flies and no cock crows

Stay well my beloved parents  
I'm leaving you  
May G-d grant you health and a long life and me a  
happy journey

3. *Skotshne* (traditional)

Skotshne, which is Polish for 'hop,' is like a freylekh, but  
is usually more technically elaborate and at a faster  
tempo. The dances include hops in the steps.

4. *Dremlen Feygl* – Birds Slumber  
(Yampolski/Rudnitski) Vilna Ghetto

Born in 1916 in Lithuania, Leah Rudnitski moved to Vilna  
to write for the newspaper Vilner Emes (Vilna Truth).  
Her poems are full of agony, but still laced with hope. As

a partisan, she was caught by the Gestapo and died in  
1943 at the age of 26. This poem was set to music of an  
earlier Yiddish song.

Birds slumber on the branches,  
Sleep, my dear child.  
By your cradle at your little nest  
Sits a stranger and sings:  
Liu-liu, liu-liu, liu.

Somewhere your cradle once stood  
Surrounded by happiness,  
But now your mother, oh your mother  
Will never return.  
Liu-liu, liu-liu, liu.

I saw your father running  
Under a hail of stones,  
Over the fields there echoed  
His mournful cry.  
Liu-liu, liu-liu, liu.

5. *Brother Can You Spare A Dime* (Gorney/Harburg)  
1931

Jay Gorney (1894-1990), born Abraham Jacob  
Gornetzsky in Bialystock, Russia, fled with his family to  
the US after a pogrom. Ira Gershwin introduced Jay to  
Yip Harburg (formerly Isidore Hochberg, whose family  
also immigrated to the US). Yip wrote the lyrics to this  
song, which was adapted from a Russian lullaby that  
Gorney had learned as a child in Russia. This song  
became an anthem of the Great Depression.

6 *Yablatchko* – Apples

Traditional Russian dance

7. *Unter Dayne Vayse Shtern* – Under Your White Stars  
(Brudno/Sutskever) Vilna Ghetto

Brudno perished in forced labor camp Kloge, in Estonia.  
Sutskever (1913-), a well known poet before the war,  
joined the partisan fighters. He survived the war and  
lives in Israel.

Under Your white stars,  
Extend Your hand to me.  
My words are flowing tears,  
They want to rest in Your hand.  
See how they've lost their gleam  
From the vantage of my cellar –

And I haven't even a corner  
In which to reflect them back to You.

And yet I want, my dear God,  
To entrust in You all that I possess,  
For a fire burns inside me  
And the fire consumes my days.  
Only in cellars and pits  
Can I find tortured rest.  
So, I run higher, over rooftops  
Looking for You. Where are You?

I am chased by evil spirits.  
They goad me on stairways and in courtyards.  
There I hang a broken violin string  
And that's how I sing to You thus:  
Under Your white stars,  
Extend Your hand to me.  
My words are flowing tears,  
They want to rest in Your hand.

8. Der Alter Tsigayner – The Old Gypsy (Ellstein/Jacobs)  
1942

As emigrants came to the US, the Yiddish Theater followed. This song was featured in the musical "Bublitski."

There on a mountain under the free sky  
Far from the noisy town  
There stands a cat alone on one spot  
An old gypsy lives there  
There, hear a sweet tone that cries in a minor key  
When on the fiddle, the old gypsy forgets himself  
With all his fire and burning  
As only a gypsy can

A gypsy melody is so beautiful  
Hear it and you won't forget it  
It is warm, full of heart and charm  
His playing holds a strange power  
He plays of love and suffering  
Hear it only one time and you will not rest  
The melody will keep you spellbound

When you hear it, it seems so simple  
And you have no idea  
How deeply it moves the soul  
For each time  
It fills you with the yearning for freedom  
Yet, you want to hold on forever  
To the strains of the melody

When the gypsy plays his melody  
Your heart beats faster  
The sound from the fiddle  
Awakens your soul  
Your blood boils  
When he bows the strings  
The heavens swing  
One finds joy in life  
Life becomes so good  
So fiddle on  
The gypsy melody that brings happiness  
This is the old gypsy's song

9. A Freylekhs Fun Der Khupe – A Dance From the  
Wedding Canopy (traditional)

Freylekh is from the Yiddish word freyd, 'joy.'  
Freylekhs are the most common melodies played at  
weddings and often become quite lively as they pick up  
the beat.

10. Yidl Mitn Fidl – Yidl With His Fiddle  
(Ellstein/Manger) 1936

Title song from the film with the same name. A pre  
WWII Eastern European comedy about a father (who  
plays bass) and daughter (who plays the fiddle) traveling  
as klezmerim (musicians) and the daughter is disguised  
as a boy for safety reasons. Yidl falls for another  
musician, but the usual confusion ensues due to her  
impersonation.

Over fields and roads on a hay wagon  
In the sun and wind and rain, two musicians ride  
What a surprise! Tell me who they are

Yidl with his fiddle, Arye with his bass  
Life is a song, so why get angry?  
Hey! Yidl, fidl, shmidl, hey, life is just a joke!

A goat stands in a meadow and bleats sadly, "meh!"  
Hey, you goat. To be sad is silly  
So the goat shakes his beard and agrees it's silly

A bird flies by and says "Good morning to you!"  
"To blazes with sadness and worry!"  
Laugh at the wind Yidl, and ride on!"

See **Millie and the Mentshn** at these local venues:

Skagit Valley Tulip Festival: Art in a Pickle Barn, April 14, 2007, 1-4:00 p.m.

"Songs Never Silenced," April 22, 2007, 3:00 p.m., Performing Arts Center Concert Hall at Western  
Washington University (free parking)

For more information on upcoming concerts or to purchase CDs please visit our website

<http://www.millieandthementshn.com/>