

## Music at Prairie

Back porch variety.. participatory, non-professional. " I could never play my mandolin at the First Society".variety of pianists..variety of people sometimes children performing the Prelude and the Offeratory...choir ..director Barb Park..practices every Sunday but does not sing every Sunday.

We have a grand piano which came from the basement of Rev. Michael Shuler's house where it was sitting unused.

One professional...Elizabeth Alexander..composer..Minneapolis

in the early days we didn't have the money or inclination for standard hymn book...George zeroxed hymns and folk songs and created these Prairie Song Books.. Metje Butler created new lyrics for an old hymn tune.

Lot of musical groups over the years.. with tongue-in cheek-names.

Prairie Chicken Pluckers..old-timey and blue-grass..mandolin, violin, guitar, banjo, guitars. 1970

Prairie Shape- Note Singers early American hymn tunes

Another tongue-in -cheek Martin Buber Trio..playing folk and Latin American I Thou rather than I-It.. I Thou and It.

Marty Drapkin...claimed he couldn't carry a tune but loved to sing..formed the Prairie Bad Singers.....and led a Kazoo Band..mostly children at retreats

Prairie Recorder Group formed in 1972 met weekly and performed often

Members involved in groups that play at Prairie but also in the wider community

Ethnic Impurities 1982. another tongue-in-check.4 people...changed name to Ethnic Connection,, . Dan Proud 's Welsh choir called the. Cambrian Singers..Mary Mullen's Dark of the Moon I see Gary Giorgi in a group called Moldy Jam playing a lot of Irish tunes...Mike briggs..

Musicale fund-raisers

Warren Hagstrom' services on individual composers..Instead of playing recorded music Wartren solicited and..handed out music to singers and musicians in the congregation. Often there would be 10 different pieces performed in one of his composer services.

Prairie is open to anyone's talents so if you are new and can sing or play an instrument....let your little light shine.

**DOLETA + Barb Park**

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Someone once asked, "Do you have to be a musician to belong to Prairie Society?" That was after a music service in which most of the congregation performed in one way or another. Of course, newcomers are not screened for perfect pitch or sight-singing ability. But our society does encourage various forms of participation and we have always had an enthusiastic representation of musicians. This September musicians of all ages will surprise us with solos, ensembles and humorous routines at our annual retreat's talent show.

It is especially rewarding to watch Prairie UU children develop musicianship through participation. For example, two teenaged pianists, who have played for us since they could barely reach the pedals, now confidently perform classical preludes.

Last Sunday we were treated to Schubert waltzes by a talented woman who is, well, old enough to be my big sister. She inspires me to keep performing as long as I can move my fingers and see the notes.

Prairie's grand piano is a joyful symbol of cooperation between UU Societies. It had been residing, unused, in what was then Michael Schuler's basement. Thank you again, First Society, for this valuable

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and most welcome donation. It vastly increased our music possibilities including our choir's repertoire.

This spring choir members outdid themselves by quickly preparing Brahms' "How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place" to honor a long time society member who passed away. Some of our singers had never read a note of choral music before joining the choir. In addition to breaking in new choir members, we even grew our own choir director and have been blessed with Barb Park's leadership for several years.

## **BARB**

Prairie's music scene varies depending on available talent. Early in Prairie's history a member organized the Prairie Shape Note Singers. At about the same time, several tooters and plunkers formed a blue grass band calling themselves the "Prairie Chicken Pluckers." Recorder players discovered each other and created the "Prairie Winds."

For several years current member Mary Mullen directed a band made up of instrumentalists of all ages. A group of male vocalists, enthusiastic, if not always tuneful, dubbed themselves the Prairie Bad Singers. They were probably on a par with the Prairie Kazoo Band.

Over 20 years ago the Ethnic Connection, a four-piece folk ensemble, three of whom were Prairie members, was sponsored by Prairie in order to apply for a grant to play on the Capital Mall. They were awarded the grant and still perform at Prairie and in the Madison area.

Other members currently perform with groups they organized, including The Dark of the Moon Band and a Welsh choir called the Cambrian Singers. Both groups have performed at Prairie.

## **DOLETA**

Perhaps our most exotic musical performance in recent years was the Prairie Gamelon made up of scavenged instruments that sounded surprisingly authentic regardless of their appearance.

For the first time in Prairie's history, a society pledge drive turned out to be a humorous mini musicale complete with an impersonation of Peggy Lee and a rendition of "Brother Can you Spare a Dime."

Currently, Prairie is blessed with several pianists and guitarists who can lead or accompany congregational singing. We accompanists tacitly agree to disagree on tempo and styles. The congregation kindly supports our idiosyncrasies.

A number of solo singers have blossomed in our small society, helped by in-home music parties and Prairie musicales. Warren Hagstrom, a music history buff, has researched and coordinated a number of participatory programs focusing on a single composer. Others have presented programs ranging from Woody Guthrie's social commentary to the positive messages of rock and roll. Our members insist that such programs include congregational participation.

## **BARB**

Early on, Prairie founding member George Calden created a song book for the fledgling Society, totally ignoring any copyright considerations, but providing a much needed guide for singing. Later, the songbook was revised by several members including Doleta. We purchased the UUA hymn books once we could afford them!

We have had several services on the fascinating history of tunes and lyrics in our hymn book "Singing the Living Tradition." We are learning additional songs from the newer book "Singing the Journey

Recently, a Prairie member visited family members in New Orleans who were affected by Hurricane Katrina. The family sent

warm “thank you’s” for money Prairie musicians raised in a well-attended New Orleans Musicale.

This month at a national choral festival, Madison’s Perfect Harmony Men’s chorus sang a commissioned piece by former Prairie member Elizabeth Alexander. Elizabeth, now a professional composer living in Minneapolis, honed her composition skills on another Prairie member’s piano.

Our Membership and Music Committees make a point of discovering and utilizing musical talent among old and new members and friends and members with emerging skills. Thus we acknowledge the worth and dignity of every musician and every music lover who enters our doors. We also appreciate those who don’t particularly care for music but respectfully endure our performances.

We will now sing Melvina Renold’s song “God Bless the Rain” from the Prairie Songbook in loving memory of George Calden.