

# *The Folklore Society*

O F G R E A T E R W A S H I N G T O N

P. O. Box 19174 • 20th Street Station • Washington D. C. 20036

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Geo. A. Simpson, Acting Editor

## PROGRAM OF NEGRO MUSIC AND SONG MARCH 10

The Society will present a program of Negro music and song by local performers in Pierce Hall at 8:30 p.m. Friday, March 10. Admission is free to members with membership cards and \$1.00 for non-members. The entrance to Pierce Hall is on Harvard Street between 15th and 16th Streets NW. There is a lighted parking lot, free to patrons of the hall, on Fuller Street just east of 15th. The hall is located just behind All Souls Unitarian Church.

Helen Schneyer, herself a singer of Negro song, is arranging the program. Performers will be John Jackson, John Cook, Amos Barnes, Willie Mae Stanley and Christine Walker.

John Jackson was born in 1924 in Rappahannock County, Virginia, and lived in and around Woodville and Sperryville until 1950. At that time he came to Fairfax to work as a houseman and chauffeur. After his employers' deaths he continued on as caretaker of the estate until 1964 after which time he made his living as a gravedigger, caretaker, janitor and in doing odd jobs for many of the Fairfax County friends of his deceased employers, the Barbours.

In 1964, John met Chuck Perdue, a geologist by profession and amateur folklorist by avocation, who recognized John's abilities as a traditional musician and presented him to audiences at the Ontario Place and at events of the Folklore Society of Greater of Greater Washington. An appearance at the Ontario Place brought John to the attention of Chris Strachwitz of Arhoolie Records, Berkeley, California, who was excited by John's performance and recorded him the very next day. The record, Blues and Country Dance Tunes from Virginia, subsequently has been released. John has appeared on the blues workshop at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, given concerts for the Human Relations Council of Fairfax County and for the Society, sung at the Cellar Door, been interviewed and performed for Radio Station WAVA in Arlington and WSB-TV in Atlanta, Georgia, and has recently returned from taking part in the 1966 Georgia Festival of Folk Music in Helen, Georgia.

John Cook, age 47, born in Newberry, South Carolina, plays mouth harp and jews harp and sings in a style characteristic of the part of the rural countryside from which he comes. He has developed a technique of blowing the harp and singing in a style sometimes reminiscent of Sonny Terry - voice alternating between a sweet tenor and clear falsetto, spiced occasionally by a forceful whoop or "holler". His outstanding characteristic is his creativity. Although he sings many traditional blues, hymns and spirituals, the most effective style he has is that of a blues form which, although he follows it unswervingly, varies in the content. His blues are all self-composed on the spot and concern themselves with topics or feelings of the moment. They are often poetic, musically well-balanced between voice and harmonica, and are always moving - sometimes to the point of tears for both John Cook and his listeners. John takes his music with deadly seriousness. He is self-critical of his playing and works at it.

John Cook has played the harmonica since he was a boy but feels he did not really begin to play properly until seven or eight years ago when he began to develop his current style. He explains his emphasis on doing things musically his own way, only on the

basis that if he sang or played a song exactly as he heard or found it it would not really be a true expression of his feelings. It becomes essential therefore for him to change anything he learns to fit his own needs.

Amos Barnes, age 42, has lived in or around Gum Springs, a rural area outside Alexandria, Virginia, since 1941 with occasional trips back to Beaufort, South Carolina, where he was born. He comes from a large family, all of whom played one kind of a musical instrument or another. His father played mouth harp, jews harp and accordin. One brother played banjo, another guitar, and so on. Amos Barnes learned guitar when he was about six years old by "messing" with his brother's guitar and he's played ever since. He has backed a trio of singers, been a member of a five-piece band (which the Army "broke up"), and most recently has been making music for the pure pleasure of it with John Cook. Having given his guitar to his oldest son, who plays and sings in church back in South Carolina, Amos Barnes has not played as much guitar recently as he would like, since he has to use other's instruments. Nonetheless, he is still able to pick out the old blues and traditional hymns and spirituals. He is particularly adept at playing back-up guitar for almost any instrument or voice and on occasion can be induced to play and sing blues of his own composition. He has a rich, clear voice with a firm, happy quality when singing hymns and a gravelly, sensual and sly quality when singing blues.

Willie Mae Stanley, born in South Carolina, lives now in Washington. She sings spirituals and blues and is active in church choir and choral groups. Christine Walker lives in Gum Springs. Mrs. Walker plays guitar and sings hymns and spirituals only. She has spent all her life in Gum Springs, is the mother of two children and self-taught on the guitar, which she plays almost in a Dobro position. Usually she plays electric guitar.

(Notes on performers by Helen Schneyer and Chuck Perdue.)

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#### CLANCYS RETURN, PAXTON IN SIGHT

The Society will celebrate St. Patrick's Day this year on April 1, when with Stanley-Williams Presentations it again offers the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem in their distinctive concert of Celtic poetry and song at 8:30 p.m. in Lisner auditorium. The Clancys' last concerts here were sold out.

Tom Paxton, one of America's foremost young songwriter-singers, will appear under the same auspices in Lisner on April 29 at 8:30 p.m.

Tickets for the above may be obtained by sending stamped, self-addressed envelope and check or money order to Stanley-Williams Presentations, 1715 37th St. NW., Washington, D.C. 20007. Prices are \$2.50, \$3.00, \$3.50 and \$4.00. Society members receive a 25 percent discount. Prices for members are \$1.85, \$2.25, \$2.60 and \$3.00.

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#### FOLK MUSIC AT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Welfare and Recreation Activities office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with the National Folk Festival Association, is presenting a spring series of four folk music concerts as follows:

Thursday, March 9, Traditional American Folksongs and Ballads with Chuck and Nan Perdue, Joe and Lynn Hickerson, John and Ginny Dildine.

Thursday, April 13, A Program of Negro Music and Song, moderated by Helen Schneyer, with John Jackson, John Cook, Amos Barnes, Willie Mae Stanley and Christine Walker.

Thursday, May 11, A Programme of Old Time Barn Dance Music and Song, moderated by Guthrie Meade, with Speedy Baker and his K-Y Band, Aubrey Smith and his Barnstormers, Roy Tolliver and Ken Ball (The Washington County Melody Hoppers), Blackie Morgan, Alberto Vasquez, and others.

Thursday, June 8, Grant Rogers - Songs and Fiddle Tunes from New York State

All programs will be \$1.00 each and will be held at 8:00 p.m. in the Thomas Jefferson auditorium in the South Building of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Independence Avenue between 12th and 14th Streets SW.

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#### FOLK GET-AWAY

The FSGW Folk Get-Away II is now definitely set for May 5 through 8. We already are over-subscribed for cabin camping but there are over 100 tent camping sites in Prince William Forest Park. These are available from the Park Service on a first come - first served basis but there probably will be a plentiful supply of sites at this time of year. If you want to come to the Get-Away you should: 1. Sign up with Nan Perdue (273-0762) in case of cancellations; 2. In case there is no cancellation, plan to tent camp (you prepare your own food) and come to the daily workshops, programs, etc; or 3. Camp at home, bring a picnic lunch, and drive down to the daily events. Prices are as follows: Cabin camping for the week-end\*: Adults - \$12.00, Age 12-16 - \$8.00, Age 1-12 - \$4.00. Daily workshops: Saturday or Sunday - \$1.00 for all ages. Evening Program: Saturday square dance or Sunday concert - \$1 50 for all ages. Daily workshops plus evening event: ~~Saturday~~ or Sunday - \$2.00 for all ages.

\*You bring ~~your~~ keeping bag, guitar, etc. and your own food for Friday evening. We furnish cabin, bunk, food for Saturday, Sunday and Monday through 4 p.m. and a convivial week-end that you will long remember.

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#### KICK<sup>ICK</sup>ING MULE...

Sometime our mental processes do strange things. Last week I was driving along in my car and all of a sudden a name popped into my mind that I had not thought of for at least 25 years. SoapSally! I thought hard for a long while before I remembered the significance of that name but when I did all sorts of remembrances came tumbling into my mind. SoapSally (I suppose she must have had another name but that's all I ever knew) was the Negro wash woman who used to come on Mondays to wash our clothes. This was in the early 1930s. We had a big black cast iron pot in the back yard and SoapSally would get a roaring fire going under it, add soap and clothes, bring to a boil, and stir with a big paddle until done. I looked forward to Mondays because SoapSally would bring her little boy who was about my age with her and he and I invented games to play while the clothes bubbled and boiled...SoapSally reminds me of Evangeline, another Negro woman who lived in the neighborhood. She could be seen every day of the week walking up the road in the morning and back down in the afternoon. She always carried a sack over her shoulder and there was one spot on the road where she would stop and gather clay to eat. She would eat some there and take some home for later. What sort of dietary deficiency was back of that I don't know...Then there was Old Major who lived in a cabin down by Dooless Creek. Sometimes when I'd stop by his cabin he would tell stories and talk to me about the time when he worked for my grandfather. Old Major is dead; electricity and the washing machine took SoapSally's job, and a bulldozer has wiped out Evangeline's clay supply. As for SoapSally's son...someday I'll meet him and we'll sit down and talk about the games we used to play on those hot summer days when life was simple.

Chuck Perdue

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BRIEFS...

Open Sing at 8:30 p.m. Saturday, March 25, Union Methodist Church, 814 - 20th St. NW., general admission - 50¢, members - 25¢. Executive Board meetings, 8:30 p.m., first and third Tuesdays, Suite 710, 1346 Connecticut Ave. NW. Coffee House meeting: All interested in opening local coffee house to meet at home of Joan Peterson, 4207 River Rd. NW., 3 p.m. Sunday, March 12. Papers for May meeting: Anyone who wants to give about a 20-minute talk (paper) on any topic related to folklore at the Society's meeting Friday evening May 12 please contact Joe Hickerson in care of the Society's P.O. Box by March 11. Florida Folk Festival, March 16 through 18, Ft. Lauderdale, featuring The New Lost City Ramblers and Tom Paxton: for information write The Florida Folk Foundation, 2319 Sea Island Dr., Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. North Carolina Old Time Fiddlers Conventions: March 11 in Catawba and in Highfalls, March 25 in Connelly Springs and in Mooresville and in Union Grove, and March 27 in Advana; (those interested in these fiddlers conventions are advised to write to the respective towns for confirmation and complete details; a card or letter addressed to the chamber of commerce probably would suffice). Folk Music Religious Service: Rev. C. Lewis Robson of Union Methodist Church, who has been presenting a series of Abendmusik concerts at his church and at whose church our monthly open sings are held, has asked that any folksinger or folk-instrumentalist who may be interested in cooperating on a religious service incorporating folk music please contact him at the church (FE 7-8299).

The Folklore Society Newsletter is not forwarded automatically by the postal authorities. Kindly keep the Society informed of your current address or preferably your permanent address (as opposed, of course, to your temporary or transient address).

Society membership dues for the year remain \$7.50 family and \$5.00 single. Dues cover the duration from the month you join to anniversary month of your joining.

Nomination for next year's officers, 8:30 p.m., Fri., Apr. 14, Pierce Hall (Free films).

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