

Should FSGW Sponsor an Open Mike for Traditional Music?

by Paul Goland

Background. In 1964, I helped others start the Agora Coffeehouse in a storefront on Delmar Avenue in Saint Louis. When we came to Washington in 1966, we looked for something similar, found little, and tried to put one together. The upshot of these efforts was the Odd Friday Coffeehouse at the Ethical Society. Dick Rodgers often came, and at the 1972 FSGW Getaway, he approached me with the idea of having the Odd Friday Coffeehouse host the FSGW Open Sing. He said that there had been several attempts to have a series of open sings before, and they had fizzled. This combination clicked, and the format has endured for over a decade. Several years ago, a "theme of the month" and a FSGW coordinator were added to the formula. The FSGW Open Sing, hosted by the Ethical Society the first Friday of every month, is valued by many FSGW members and friends.

This experience led me to follow up on Ellen Maske's suggestion of starting an open mike for traditional music at the Woodside Deli on Georgia Avenue. I approached K.C. and the others mentioned in my one-page proposal, which I read from at the July FSGW board meeting. Appended is a new version of that paper incorporating several of the points raised at the July board meeting.

Issues and Answers

- FSGW can't control the type and quality of music at an Open Mike.

Answer: FSGW can set the standards and the MC can be charged with seeing they are conformed to. Adding the words "for Traditional Music" to the name of the event will help. We are also prepared to have the MC make a short statement, with wording subject to your approval, at the beginning of each set about the type of music expected.

- The FSGW treasurer would have to be in charge of collecting any admission money. Answer: There is a clear precedent to the contrary, at the Open Sing.

- Why is it important for FSGW to sponsor such an Open Mike? Answer: Many more people will attend if you allow use of the name, "FSGW Open Mike for Traditional Music", and MC's and sound crew will be more comfortable donating their time and energy if it is FSGW-sponsored.

- How important is it to make available FSGW sound equipment? Answer: There are several alternatives. Bruce and Charlie are willing to bring the equipment available to them whenever they come to the Open Mike, at least to get it started. If the Open Mike for Traditional Music is a financial success for the owner (in this case Gus Haris), we would try to persuade him to invest in his own equipment. Another possibility would be to get your approval to collect at the door a dollar or two admission with the stated purpose of eventually buying sound equipment primarily for such events, which FSGW may use for events other days of the week (Friday, Saturday and Sunday, perhaps).

- Would FSGW members get any admissions discount? Answer: This may be impractical, although it is a possibility. There is no such discount at the

How successful are they?

Open Sing. An alternative would be to publicize the FSGW Open Mike for Traditional Music only in the FSGW newsletter, which could have the effect of making the event more club-like. This restriction could be introduced later, if the event is very successful.

- If FSGW sponsors the Open Mike for Traditional Music, shouldn't FSGW make a profit? Answer: The FSGW board could ask for a cut of any admission charged. FSGW also could gain a sound set, as described above. On the other hand, the Potomac River Jazz Club takes pride in the fact that their traditional music is offered in pubs, pizza parlors and other commercial establishments every night of the week in the area, without a cover charge about 90% of the time. The main profit would be cultural, in that we would be promoting more folk music in Greater Washington, widening the spectrum of folk music offerings in the community. Nonetheless, we will be willing to include a cut for FSGW if you so decide.

We firmly believe your sponsorship is important to the viability of an open mike for traditional music. We haven't decided whether to go ahead if you turn down our request for your sponsorship of this worthy project.

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(Version #2)

Open Mike for Traditional Music

There are two parts to this item:

- (1) Getting an open mike for traditional music going at the Woodside Deli, on Georgia Avenue at Seminary Road, 2 blocks inside the beltway, and
- (2) Deciding the extent of FSGW involvement in this project.

First, the Woodside Deli:

Open Monday-Friday until 10, currently. Thursday and Friday are busy evenings. Food is good, and they serve beer. Decor is memorabilia, very nice and very appropriate for traditional music. It was Ellen Maske's idea to have an open mike there. Seats about 75 at table.

I've talked to K.C. King, and he, Nancy and Bob Hitchcock have been there. I talked to the owner/manager, Gus Haris, and he is receptive. I talked to Charlie Bryant and Bruce Hutton. K.C., Bob, Charlie and Bruce are all interested in sharing the work of putting on the Open Mike, and Charlie and Bruce have each said the sound systems they have access to are available when they are for this Open Mike for Traditional Music. Ellen said she will arrange publicity. I also talked to Jeff who is running the open mike on Mondays at Gallagher's - he has no problem with another open mike as long as it isn't on Mondays.

K.C. and I want FSGW to lend its good name to this Open Mike for Traditional Music.

MOTION: That FSGW sponsor an Open Mike for Traditional Music at the Woodside Deli on Georgia Avenue.