

No. 118 Autumn 2024

OLD TIME NEWS

The only UK publication dedicated to American Old Time Music and Dance



Murder Ballads - A Songwriter's Perspective
Spotlight on Robin Gillan – Part Two
The Mandolin

Old-Time Conversations



Finding Health, Happiness and Community
Through Traditional Music

CRAIG R. EVANS

Foreword by CLARE MILLINER



Old-Time Conversations – Finding Health, Happiness and Community through Traditional Music

Published by McFarland

Available: Amazon.co.uk and other outlets.

Craig has put terrific amounts of time, effort and love into filming interviews across North America with significant banjo-builders, performers, teachers, historians and authors in the old-time world, creating a series of documentaries which have been snapped up by Smithsonian Folkways for posterity, and enjoyed at Clifftop festivals. Readers will be treated to Craig's messages of joy and hope and be invited to join in the fun of the old-time music and dance community to find health and happiness.

He has created a genuinely optimistic and heart-warming book here, inspired by the emotional and physical benefits proven by these people living in the old-time music and dance community.

Clare Milliner says about Craig in her very enlightening foreword "Yes, he's got rose-colored glasses on, but don't you have to be able to imagine heaven in order to get there? Thanks Craig for pointing out the way to heaven and helping us know when we're here."

There is a wealth of positive messages in this book. Craig is from a small farming community in Iowa and his mother played hymns in churches and chapels, stimulating his initial excitement about music. Later in life, he won material success through clever marketing in the TV and web media. However, at age 50, he realised he had lost the enthusiasm for what he was doing and decided to revive his interest in music...in particular, by learning to play open-back clawhammer banjo, from Dwight Diller.

Over the next ten years his interest in playing banjo deepened and his new partner encouraged him to discover why...he did a course on making film

documentaries, bought the necessary equipment and went out to film and interview banjo builders.

Since there is not space here to go into the details that the book reveals, I'll just summarize quickly that you can read about: - Amongst many others, Jeff Menzies (tack-head banjos), Patrick "Doc" Huff (he reveals a startling use for a Nylgut banjo D string), Peter Ross (of Jubilee Gourd Banjos), and Bill Rickard with an extraordinary story of coincidence, bravery and ingenuity.

But the book is not just about banjos. Craig had been struck by the smiling creativity of all those who revere, relish and revel in old-time music and dance, so he went on to do more films. A shortened list of performers, teachers, historians and authors you can read about includes; Rayna Gellert (Dan Gellert, and her great grandfather's violin), James "Sparky" Rucker (a powerful performer, historian and educator), Clare Milliner (lawyer, fiddler and main contributor to the Milliner-Koken Collection of American Fiddle Tunes. Clare's partner Walt Koken of Highwoods String Band fame makes an appearance too), Mac Benford (another levitating Highwoods String Band stalwart!), and Sheila Kay Adams (a seventh-generation ballad singer and claw hammer banjo player).

And, Dwight Diller ("Don't ever forget that everybody you meet is standing in a pool of tears"), Dom Flemons (Carolina Chocolate Drops, Smithsonian Folkways African American Legacy series), and Tim Brooks (Presentism, Historicism and the difficult subject of minstrelsy, "Elvis Presley was in a minstrel show"), amongst others.

Next up is Craig's writing on Clifftop festivals. You'll read of Hilarie Burhans contributions to Clifftop, John Herrmann, Phil Jamison, Tricia Spencer, and John Hoffman with Steve Arkin. Craig has produced highlights of recent Clifftop festivals which you can enjoy on his YouTube channel @craigevans4010.

With references to neurodiversity, neuroplasticity, and the Harvard Happiness Studies, Craig backs up his ideas for improving health and happiness through traditional music.

His hope is that the ideas in the book will help readers find satisfaction in life. His route to health and happiness, via traditional music and the community that celebrates it, has worked for him, and it may well work for you too.

Craig signs off with "See you at the jam! I'll be one of the many smiling"

<https://oldtimeconversations.com/>

will give you access to all of Craig's films, this book and other offers, and you'll be amazed by the huge numbers of people he has interviewed.

Jan Howard