

***Voices of Freedom, Voices of Love, Voices of Faith***  
**Rev. Baylies and the Susquehanna String Band**

**October 19, 2008**

**READING: Voices of Freedom**

They told me Beethoven was deaf. Yet he crafted music. He labored to remove the sounds from his head and lay them on paper.. The perfect songs that played in his heart, he left for us to know.

I could not do this, not many of us can; to take the notes that repeat themselves inside us and make a symphony. It is our miracle but only one of nature's gifts.

There is no life without music. Nature has its own chorus. The stars hum their own score unimpeded through the blackness calling to one another. The planets harmonize in remarkable sequence as they pass. The sun lashes forth with vibrations of light spewing plums of fiery strings, harboring its own song.

The earth seizes and rumbles the intrepid bass notes of ceaseless motion.

The tenors lift the waves to lap the shore. The altos rattle the pebbles upon its return to the sea. The sopranos screech and writhe overhead in circles of feathery dissonance.

Music is the story of our God of our creation, our comings and goings, beginnings and endings. made from sticks and stones, from voices calling, bodies dancing... mourning, rejoicing,

We sing for the newborn, for the birthday, the wedding day and the death day.

We play in raucous celebration for the coming of the seasons, for the holidays and holy days. We sing for the memories, stories of love gained and lost. Our instruments are everywhere...

the rhythm of the morning shower to greet a new day, the moments alone encased in our vehicles waiting to move ahead...each hearing our own song... the song of our life's breath and blood, moving...

always moving through our laughter and through our tears...

Music is the story of our ancestors, passed on in times of trial in the desperate haunting blues of enslavement and hidden messages of freedom imbedded within the chorus;

The warnings of apartheid, the popular song "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" is symbolic of the night train that takes the men of the village away from their families to their death.

Follow the Drinking Gourd, which is hymn # 152, was disregarded by slave owners as a harmless tune, the words point escaping slaves to freedom by following the northerly direction of the Big Dipper when it reaches its apex, right to the safety of the underground railroad.

"When the sun comes up and the first quail calls, follow the drinking gourd. For the old man is awaitin' to carry you to freedom, if you follow the drinking gourd." Prisoners on death row in the deep south wrote and sang the blues to endure the heat and the ravages of prison life.

There is no human condition that does not tell us of our living and our dying through song and dance. It is the story of our lives, the music of our very soul,

awakening, responding to the trials and joys all our lives while seeking, finding, ultimately...living.

### ***Susquehanna String Band “No More Auction Block for Me”***

#### **READING: Voices of Love**

I grew up with two musicians, a flutist and a trombone player. They both played for The Mc Dowell Club, predecessor to The Boston Pops, conducted by Arthur Fiedler. Actually, he introduced them. Myself and my four siblings grew up with music all around us and we all tried very hard to master something besides complaining. The living room was a depot for orphan instruments, none of which ever had a chance to make music together. There was a violin, a trumpet, a melodica, a flute, assorted trombones a lyric grand piano and of course my kazoo, which I mastered with great finesse.

We failed all of us, not one took up an instrument with any resemblance of expertise. My parents quietly endured the endless attempts, the screechings and blating, the dissonant tones when there should have been harmony. There was no pressure or anxious cajoling, just acceptance that this generation would not become musicians. In time the instruments adjourned to the attic permanently.

Music in my childhood home lay dormant, except for the occasional sonata, patiently played on the piano by my dad. He always wore a suit, an overcoat and rubbers, just in case, and while waiting for my mom to ready herself to go out, he would slip onto the piano stool and play.

As we grew older we would stop and listen, really listen and hear the notes as we never could make them sing the way he did, and we would feel the love that flowed across the keys... Bach and Benny Goodman, Beethoven's Opus 13 and Elton John, Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto # 2, hymns for church, The Best of Joan Baez, Ave Maria and ...There was nothing he didn't play... sitting there in his overcoat and rubbers, just waiting.

We grew and went our ways. My brothers now pick up their guitars and play badly, so badly in fact that they named themselves, “The Out of Tuners” and are in great demand at neighborhood and family gatherings. It is not the music but the laughter that resounds throughout the neighborhood !

### ***Susquehanna String Band “All God's Creatures Have a Place in the Choir”***

A former co-worker and myself started a local choir. We aren't very good and some of us, at the peak of a chorus, sound like we have been stepped on by an elephant! We sing anyway. The choir has grown, it is for everyone who knows that once cannot worry when we sing. My sister took up jazz at the age of 40 and dances with a class of 5 year olds. At 5' 8" beside a gaggle of 4 footers, all piling into one another, she shines and glows with the joy of the dance, occasionally reaching down to lift a child back onto her feet without missing a single beat.

My Dad just smiled as he watched us, loving our music, singing playing oh so badly...with such intensity and joy as we each we awoke to the magic of our own song, far from perfect... and when he died and we bid him farewell to the sound of 76 Trombones, we mourn and laugh, we remember, oh so well, and we never stopped hearing the sweet tones of love.

### ***Susquehanna String Band "Psalm of Life"***

#### **READING: Voices of Faith**

Religious instruction for me growing up was once a time of great concern and anxiety. It felt alot like putting on a wet bathing suit. It was not going to church that bothered me, but my dress. My grandmother made my dresses and stitched the sizing right into the smocking in the front. It itched. Church was merely the day of itching and scratching and wishing for the comfort of my new official Davy Crocket outfit, which lay folded on the bed.

That day we had to stay in church. I don't know why, but it was going to be awful. Sitting quietly listening to the drone of the minister for what seemed hours and hours, a total life time of boredom, I just may not survive. Sandwiched between my parents, there was little opportunity to find ways to enjoy the experience; to loudly but innocently, drop a hymnal, or lean over the pew to check out the lady with amazing blue hair, or the kid with a cleverly concealed toy.

I could only concentrate on the crack in the floor which sported the passing shadows of coffee hour preparations... far from entertaining.

The service began and I settled down for a miserable morning of the dreaded exercise of practicing self discipline. The minister, droned on, something about what God has been up to lately. I wanted to meet Mr. God, for he never seemed to come to church...

I wondered what pew he sat in and why they needed to talk about him all the time. This was going to be a long morning. Then it became very quiet, the minister stopped talking and my whole indignant, impatient world of absolute quiet and droning talking heads came to a standstill.

In front of the pulpit stood a woman with a strange instrument I had never seen before. My Mother leaned over and whispered, "Honey, that's a violin, just listen."

#### ***John Kirk: Violin Concerto***

I listened, mesmerized by the amazing sound coming from that woman's hands. I felt the tears come, unlike any pain or joy I had ever experienced.

In a moment of exquisite rhapsody, I understood what church was all about. After the service I ran to the pulpit, to see this amazing instrument. The Violinist let me hold it and played a few notes and explained how it all worked.

How it worked didn't matter, what it did for me made all the difference.

It was a conversion, a sudden removal of ones arrogance, self centeredness and impatience...it was a tiny spark of understanding that we are not a product of

own making, but the result of something much greater that gives us the power to create and to share with one another a gift of profound significance. I first heard it played on a violin and only then did I begin to hear the words, spoken and unspoken, of how living the eternal flow of joy and sadness is the instrument of every faith.

***String Band: "Simple Faith"***

There was so much more to come, as I slipped on my scratchy dress week after week, hoping for just one more chance to hear and feel the sound of my spirit bubbling up, over the itching and impatience. I would feel it many more times, in years to come, often when least expected and most needed.

The music of our faith, of any faith comes in all forms, shapes and sizes, but most of all it comes from the way we pass it on from one to the next, allowing for all its variations, and means...

When one has heard such beauty how can we keep from singing?

***Susquehanna String Band and Congregation:***

**CLOSING HYMN:** # 108 How Can I keep From Singing

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