



MAKING IT BETTER

Folk Arts in Pennsylvania Today

Audio Transcriptions

Mensura Berberovic

“Sevdalinka is everything and when I’m singing I’m crying because my heart does that. For me, Sevdalinka is like therapy. It helps me more than go see therapist. When I sing, I talk. When I sing I feel my home. I feel my family. I feel people, I miss them a lot, when I sing. That is Sevdalinka for me. And when I sing I’m at my home, but before- what I had- in life, what I had. And when I sing, I don’t feel I’m far away.”

David Castano

“The approach I’ve always had to working in wood, carving little figures was more of ah, not so much to create a piece of art, but to have something that represents, if you want to, a miniature totem and, like, Native Americans in the northwest would have family totems. I often thought of the figures that I would do were kind of like little individual totems for families. They meant something to people. When I first was carving, I gave carvings away just as gifts, simply because when you begin carving it becomes a very steady thing to do. You continue to carve, you always have something on the workbench, and if you keep all of your work, you start running out of living space. So I would give carvings away, and I found that if I had something that related to people that I knew or that befriended me, it meant a lot more to them.”

Antonella Dilanni

“I come from a town in Pescocostanzo in Abruzzo region, it’s a very touristic town, they will do filigree for jewelry and bobbin lace and agriculture. Most are dairy product mozzarella and caciocavallo and the bobbin lace was one of the best. All the women in my town, they made lace, I was taught to make lace when I was seven years old, not only me, but all the girls in the town. Like here, in the morning you go to school, then in the afternoon, people for piano lesson or something. In Italy, in my town of Pescocostanzo in the afternoon we go to learn to make lace. And from infancy in the crib you hear the grandmother or mother making the sound with the bobbin, which is like music.”

Joe Grkman, from the Grkmania Polka Ensemble

“The Slovenian button box music features a diatonic button accordion, push and pull two different sounds. Basically, it’s a happy music, you don’t hear too many minor keys played in, it’s pretty much your major keys dominant, sevenths and so forth. Steve, who pretty much plays button box exclusively in the band, brings a whole bunch of button boxes along with him so that he can play in all the different keys. The Slovenian music features the accordion; too, it’s the primary lead instrument, at least the American Slovenian that is familiar here in western Pennsylvania. That’s kind of unique to western Pennsylvania, too. The music that we play came originally from Slovenia- the roots of it- but really, it’s very western Pennsylvania, it evolved in western Pennsylvania, in the coalmining towns and the steel towns. One writer labeled our music, ‘poor man’s Prozac.’ And that’s kind of what it is, you know. The people work very hard in the coalmines and steel mills and at home they relax in the evenings and on the weekends with the polka music, it was happy music. It really is happy music. That’s really what it’s about.”

Jymm Hoffmann

“One of the first people, especially in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th century, normally were some of the first people that were out into the frontier areas were blacksmiths. They were doing trade with the Indians as the cultures were competing and the native were being introduced to iron and steel. So blacksmiths were one of the first people to go into areas because of the trades and many times, the black smiths moving towards the natives were actually there to repair the tools that were broken, whether it was the iron knives or axes or whatever, and a lot of guns. So they were able to repair things. And then, obviously, with the discovery of coal and iron ore and those elements in Western Pennsylvania and the growth of the steel industry, blacksmiths again are there again because they’re the guys making the tools for everybody else.”

Jerry Jumba

“It’s ‘Morning Glory.’ It’s very oral tradition. Ah, Blahodarim Boha. It’s eight verses, and the whole text is to the Holy- it’s to the entire Trinity. It’s sort of, like, the text is actually cosmic in that it addresses the entire presence of God, God’s presence through Christianity, through the Trinity. We thank you, God, most high. We bless you, God, the King of Heaven- that’s literal- the King of Heaven (inaudible). You provide us enlightenment. On this morning, we sing to you.”

“This is really good when you’re driving in the car and waiting in traffic and you can do the drum on your steering wheel, and go: (singing). The traffic light could be red forever, you don’t mind, it’s that kind of thing it fills your time up. So. Keeps you out of trouble. That could be the title of this. You know. Keeps you out of trouble. (singing)”

Yolanda Lorya

“My name is Yolanda Lorya and I am doing this work because we have our Latuko traditional dance here so I will make them (the costumes) so we can wear like we do back home. I like to have African things around me. And it is good to have the one thing to show my grandchildren. They don’t see (what it is like back) home. Sometimes they ask, ‘Grandma this one is for what?’ I say, “That is for our tradition.” And I make for them too, my grandchildren. Sometimes, in Africa, we women can sit around under the tree and we make and we help each other. And I remember this, and I remember that, and I remember my mom, too, teaching me.”

George Orthey

“I decided at some point that maybe some people would be interested in a kit. And I worked up a whole set of designs, full scale drawings and everything else in a kit. And then we had to figure out if the average person would be able to figure out how to do that, how to build it. So, my wife and I sat there, we were looking at all of them without saying a word, I was like, ‘why are you looking at me?’ I said we were looking for the most dumbest, most unable person we can think of to prove there could be (inaudible). And he did. And he still very proudly plays that instrument for his college service, and it’s made out of marine plywood, it has a dangerously good sound. We published the whole file in the old Autoharp Quarterly magazine and I know there are hundreds of people who’ve homemade an autoharp off that set of plates. And marine plywood happens to make a pretty good sound.”