34th ANNUAL NEW JERSEY FOLK FESTIVAL CELEBRATES GERMAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Fans of all ages can enjoy traditional folk dancing, music, storytelling, and much more at the 34th annual New Jersey Folk Festival on Saturday, April 26, 2008, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., rain or shine. Admission is free for this all-day family event held on the lawn of the Eagleton Institute, George Street and Ryders Lane, on the Douglass campus of Rutgers, the State University, in New Brunswick.

The New Jersey Folk Festival will be highlighting German-American heritage and traditions through an array of music, art, food, and crafts demonstrations, while accomplished bluegrass singer-songwriter Jim Murphy will be honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the festival. Murphy, distinguished front-man of Jim Murphy & the Pine Barons, will receive the award in honor of his contributions to the local and national music scene. A native of Brick N.J., Murphy became the Garden State’s first inductee into America’s Old Time Country Music Hall of Fame in 2007, and was recognized by the National Traditional Country Music Association (NTCMA). This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the founding of Murphy’s band. The singer-songwriter has written an assortment of original songs in his journey around the tri-state area over the past four decades. The Pine Barons were voted Band of the Year and its front-man Male Vocalist of the Year in 1998 by the Traditional Music Association, while his album NewBilly Music was its 1998 Album of the Year. The band has been featured in several local and national media outlets, including The New York Times, The Star-Ledger, New Jersey Monthly, and on New Jersey Network (NJN) news.

Murphy’s illustrious music career started in 1963 with his radio program “Country and Folk Concert” on WJLK, based in Asbury Park. In addition to writing and performing his own material, Murphy pays homage to the country music scene through his involvement with the Hank Williams International Society. He still performs in the area with his band and is a fixture at the legendary Albert Music Hall in Waretown, N.J.

In celebrating the German-American experience, the festival will feature the Goschenhoppen Strolling Fiddlers, demonstrating Pennsylvania-German folk culture. Goschenhoppen is one of the oldest Pennsylvania-German communities in the country, and the group began playing at the Goschenhoppen Folk Festival in 1990. Since then, it has aimed to provide a glimpse into 18th and 19th century instrumental music, by relying heavily...
on collections of fiddle tunes that have grown over the years. Many of them are of German origin or were collected in Pennsylvania. Instruments as wide-ranging as the fiddle, penny whistle, banjo, guitar, and cello are expertly performed by the group’s current members.

The Bayern Verein Newark Dance Group, of the Bayern Verein club located in Newark, N.J., descends from a small group of Bavarian immigrants who came to the United States in the 1930s seeking to organize and preserve their Bavarian heritage in a new land. Drawing from several Bavarian and Austrian performances, many of which involve audience participation, the group’s dance repertoire is comprised primarily of Schuhplatter traditions. The culture of the group is preserved over the years as members of the Bayern Verein children’s group eventually go on to fill executive board positions, and the traditions and dance styles are passed down to subsequent generations. The group also travels to Germany throughout the year to participate in dance festivals and in the annual Oktoberfest celebration.

Bernie’s Orchestra, from Piscataway, was formed in 1967 with three young musicians performing German-American dance music. The band has since evolved into a five-piece ensemble, combining accordion, percussion, guitar, trumpet, trombone, saxophone, clarinet, flute, baritone horn, alpine horn, and vocal talents.

Another festival performer, the Ong’s Hat String Band, hails from a town in the Pine Barrens with a long history of legend and lore. The town of Ong’s Hat is believed to have gotten its name from a resident, Ong, who threw his hat in the air, where it caught for years on a tall pine tree and became a subject of local storytelling. The string band was born out of American traditional music with roots in jazz, classical, and acoustic. The band’s three members combine guitar, mandolin, fiddle, banjo, and bass with original vocal stylings.

The Dukes of Destiny, another festival performer, have attracted a large following – particularly in the Philadelphia area, over the past 25 years. Combining their own blues tunes with powerful original songs, the Dukes’ style is ever-changing. Even closer to home, hailing from Somerset, N.J., the group Gospel Ways demonstrates a full, rich, and heavily instrumented sound, reminiscent of the “hard gospel” singing of the late 1950s. There is a powerful lead singer accompanied by sincere testimonials from the group. Gospel Ways was a winner at the Music Workshop held by the Reverend Brenda Lumzy at the Voorhees Chapel on the Douglass campus at Rutgers in June, 2004.

Philadelphia native Saul Broudy, a 2008 festival participant, has performed around the world over the past 35 years. His music covers a wide range of grassroots American music, from traditional ballads to bluegrass, country, blues, Cajun, and rockabilly. He has lent his harmonica, harp, and guitar talents to the recordings of such famous musicians as Steve Goodman, Mick Maloney, and Loudon Wainwright III throughout his career. Accompanying Broudy at the festival will be his long-time bassist Dennis Gormley.

Several New Jersey Folk Festival favorites will be returning this year, including Spook Handy, About.com’s “Best Folk Artist You’ve Never Heard Of” for 2006. Spook will bring along his genuine blend of personal, spiritual, and political music, showing others why folk legend and Spook Handy fan Pete Seeger would say, “Spook Handy really understands how to write a good song that says something important.”
Atlantic City native and Smithsonian Folkways recording artist Jim Albertson returns to the festival as an artist whose many musical talents are matched only by his captivating storytelling ability.

Organized jam sessions – in the form of bluegrass, old-timey, and traditional Irish seisuns – will be held on the festival’s Shore Stage, which will then transform into the Singer/Songwriter Showcase. There, each of the eight contest winners chosen from a pool of over 225 qualified applicants will be given a chance to perform their original songs in 20-minute sets. Those contest winners are Pat Cisarano, Annie Crane, Christine DeLeon, Thomas Earl, Dan Gonzalez, Alex Kim, Michael Patrick Phelan, and Dave Tutin.

A variety of piping will be on display in the form of Scottish, Irish, and Polish styles at the festival. Accomplished Highland bagpiper Frank Watson will perform his Scottish pipes, as he and his son open the festival as they have for several years with a ceremonial march through the festival grounds. Watson has competed successfully as both a solo performer and with various bands. He has performed at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts and at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, as well as at Carnegie Hall and Madison Square Garden in New York City. Watson’s piping was recently featured on a television documentary aired on the cable Smithsonian Channel, entitled, “The Ghosts of Duffy’s Cut.” Additionally, Watson piped in December, 2007 at Drumthwacket, the New Jersey governor’s mansion in Princeton.

Philip G. Mylod, a Uilleann Piper, will perform Irish tunes. A native of Ocean County, Mylod performs weekly in a local pub alongside fiddles, accordions, Irish drums, guitars, flutes, and tin whistles. As a host of traditional Irish Seisiun, Mylod is also schooled in the Irish whistle, low whistle, flute, and bodhran, and has been tutored extensively under master piper, David Power, of Waterford, Ireland.

Rounding out the pipers, Polish piper Rik Palieri hails from East Brunswick, in the backyard of the New Jersey Folk Festival, and now makes his home in the Green Mountains of Vermont. Palieri has played at some of the largest festivals in the world, including the Philadelphia Folk Festival, the Vancouver Folk Festival, the World Festival in Poland, and has performed at the Kennedy Center and Nashville’s Country Music Hall of Fame. He is also schooled in the banjo and guitar, the Native American Love Flute, and the Ozark Mouth Bow, and has worked with musical legends Pete Seeger, Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, Jimmie Driftwood, and Bruce Springsteen.

German heritage will also be showcased through the knowledge of Professor William Donner’s “Who Are the Pennsylvania Germans,” and Dr. Simon Bronner’s “The Pennsylvania German Story,” both informative and interactive lectures. Keeping up with the year’s current events, Roger Deitz will discuss “Political Songs in an Election Year” at the festival.

In addition to the three stages of music, dance, workshops, and both American and ethnic food vendors, the festival offers a diverse craft market of approximately 75 booths, craft demonstrators and a folk marketplace where performer CDs and information on area folk concerts are available. For children, there is a designated activities area with games, a clown, a juggler, and free crafts to make and take. The festival will feature appearances by the Rutgers Army ROTC and the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps.

Aside from German-American related demonstrations, the New Jersey Folk Festival is happy to provide
a venue for other cultural exhibitions, including several from Historic Cold Spring Village in Cape May, N.J. There, the festival will feature individuals who will demonstrate their respective crafts and talents. Donn Shearer will demonstrate chairmaking, while Patricia Zackey – a graduate of Rutgers University’s Douglass College – will show off her talents in spinning. John Fulginetti will showcase his woodcarving skills, and Merrill Miller will demonstrate his knowledge of bookbinding. Liz Miller will also showcase Domestic Arts of Early America, which includes herb drying, butter churning, and the preparation of fresh sun tea and lemonade. All of these guests are members of Historic Cold Spring Village.

The New Jersey Folk Festival is the oldest and largest continuously-held festival of its kind in the state. Wheelchair accessible, it offers selected programs with ASL interpretation; large-print program books and audio assists are also available. Preferred parking is a nominal $5 charge.

The festival is only five minutes off of exit 9 on the New Jersey Turnpike. For further details, including stage schedules and directions, visit the festival’s Web site at http://www.njfolkfest.rutgers.edu or call the festival office at (732)-932-5775 or Rutgers Campus Info Services at (732)-932-INFO.

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