

Autoharp Clearinghouse - November 1991 -

David Holt

The *Autoharp Clearinghouse* is honored to dedicate this issue to David Holt. David is a musician, storyteller, historian, television personality, four-time Grammy Award winner, musical ambassador, and, above all, a multi-talented polished entertainer.

Holt is well known for his shows on The Nashville Network (TNN), PBS and American Public Radio. He is a frequent guest on *Hee Haw*, *Nashville Now* and the *Grand Ole Opry*. It should also be mentioned that David is one of very few people seen playing the autoharp on national television. He developed a loyal following as host of *Fire On The Mountain*, *Celebration Express* and *American Music Shop*, all seen on TNN, and the PBS *Folkways* series. David says, "Television can help keep traditional music alive in the modern world by reminding people what a wonderful treasure this lore is".

For American Public Radio, David is currently hosting *RIVERWALK: Classic Jazz From The Landing*. Created by the producers of *A Prairie Home Companion*, this live broadcast from San Antonio, Texas combines stories of jazz greats told by Holt and the hot music of the Jim Cullum jazz Band.

IBM and *Good Housekeeping* Magazine together are presenting the *Tell Me A Story Celebration* of which David is the national spokesperson. Children from elementary schools around America are collecting stories from their communities in this national competition. David will take the winning children to Washington, DC for the awards ceremony and presentation to the media.

A native of central Texas, Holt moved to California during high school. He recalls his early musical and storytelling influences: "I grew up in a family of informal storytellers, and there was plenty to tell about our wild and woolly Texas forefathers. The only homemade music in our home was played by my father on a set of bones and spoons that had been passed down in our family for five generations. Later I sought out Carl Sprague, the first of the recorded singing cowboys. Mr. Sprague taught me to play the harmonica and regaled me with old time cowboy stories. This experience introduced me to the excitement of learning from the source...the old timers themselves."

After graduating from the University of California Magna cum Laude in biology and art, David turned toward the southern mountains to pursue his growing interest in traditional music and storytelling. He moved to western North Carolina to immerse himself in a vital, living folk culture. While collecting the traditional music of the mountains, Holt discovered folk tales and true-life anecdotes which he began presenting in his concerts. He has been exploring and performing this unique form of entertainment, using traditional music and stories, ever since.

In 1975, David founded and directed the Appalachian Music Program at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina. It is the only program of its kind in which students study, collect and learn traditional music and dance.

Since 1981, David has pursued a full-time career in entertainment. Today, he brings to the concert stage the fun and spirit of old time music and storytelling. An evening with David Holt offers tales, ballads and tunes told, sung and played on the banjo, hammered dulcimer, autoharp, squeeze box, guitar, harmonica, spoons and jaw harp. His audience is constantly involved, learning to play the paper bag, applauding the vitality of his clog dancing, listening to the haunting sounds of the hammered dulcimer, or being unnerved by a ghost story.

For nearly twenty years, Holt has collected songs and tales from the southern mountains which have become a part of the permanent collection of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. He was awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to learn the unique music of the South's last traditional hammered dulcimer player, Virgil Craven. Holt says, "Many of the people I learned from saw wagon trains; now they are watching space shuttles. They're the last of the pioneer generation. Their music and stories still hold a great deal of meaning and pleasure for us today."

As of this writing, Holt has five award-winning music and storytelling recordings. His storytelling records, *Hairyman* and *Tailybone* have both received the American Library Association's highest honor, the A.L.A. NOTABLE. His first two musical recordings were *Reel and Rock* and *It Just Suits Me*. *Grandfather's Greatest Hits* is his newest music recording, a collection of the greatest hits of early country music. Featured on the album are the legendary Chet Atkins, Duane Eddy and Doc Watson. There is autoharp behind Doc's rendition of *Wildwood Flower*.

As well as performing concerts of mountain music and stories, Holt is touring in two other productions. *From Here To Kingdom Come* is a one-man show which takes the audience on a music adventure from the Grand Ole Opry to the lost world of Kingdom Come, Kentucky. In *Banjo Reb And The Blue Ghost*, a new musical about the American Civil War, Holt appears with daytime television star William Mooney. (Mooney played Paul Martin in *All My Children* on ABC.)

The U.S. State Department has sent Holt to many parts of the world as a musical ambassador, taking the sounds of American folk music to such diverse cultures as Nepal, Thailand, Burma, South America and Africa.

David is a three time winner of the *Frets* magazine poll for "Best Old-Time Banjoist". *Esquire* magazine selected David for its first "Annual Register of Men and Women Who Are Changing America". Called the "best of the new generation", those chosen included such notables as Steven Spielberg, Sally Ride and Meryl Streep. All were selected for personal vision, originality and service to others.

If at all possible, try and find the cover story about David Holt in the October 1991 issue of *Banjo Newsletter*. *ER*

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For updated information, I recommend that you visit the following two websites:

<www.davidholtmusic.com>

<www.davidholt.com/about/>