

## **Autoharp Clearinghouse - June 1991 - Paul and Win Grace and Family**

This issue of the Autoharp Clearinghouse is dedicated to Paul and Win Grace and Family. Paul and Win have been performing together for over fourteen years. Although daughters Leela and Eleanor were always around and often participated in performances, in the last three years they have officially become part of the group. The Graces make their living as a family band, traveling all over the U.S.A. and Canada. They have played for folk festivals, craft fairs, concerts, weddings, square dances, conferences, schools, colleges, folk life festivals, banquets, day care centers, senior centers, and on radio and television.

Their repertoire includes a large variety of American old time music. The Graces also feature traditional and contemporary folk music. They like to keep their music varied and have been known to throw in, where appropriate, a little Cajun, country, bluegrass, Irish and gospel music.

Paul Fotsch Grace got his first guitar at the age of fourteen and was soon playing and singing Kingston Trio songs. He has been a vocalist all his life...singing in church choirs, barbershop quartets and school musicals. He is a by-ear, self-taught musician. Sixteen years ago Paul began to teach himself mandolin, and two years later he began on the fiddle. Having previously played folk and soft rock music on the guitar, he soon discovered the joys of American old time music on the fiddle and mandolin. His love of singing led him to work on mastering singing and fiddling simultaneously...an initially painful but eventually rewarding skill.

Paul lives, breathes, and has fun with his music. When Paul and Win were first courting, their walks in the woods were accompanied by Paul on the harmonica. (Perhaps this was to slow him down a bit so that Win could keep up with him!) The harmonica has recently been added to performances and was used on the most recent recording. Paul plays the mandolin and guitar in a cross-picking style and plays a rhythmic Appalachian or shuffle-style fiddle.

Win Horner Grace studied piano as a child and sang at every possible chance. She continued to play piano from written music, to sing in plays and choruses and to be a music lover while obtaining a degree in theater. Sixteen years ago, she saw the autoharp being played in concert for the first time. After the concert, she slept in her car waiting for a music store to open, whereupon she rushed in and bought her first autoharp. Win initially taught herself to play in the standard pinch style from a book, and subsequently went on to develop the back-and-forth or cross-picking style. She rebuilt and redesigned the autoharp, calling her design the "chromatonic" autoharp. Win began to play with Paul and learned, with his help, to play by ear.

Twelve years ago, Win began to teach herself piano accordion. On the accordion she plays old time fiddle-type music as well as country and folk, using it to provide the bass sound, a rhythmic accompaniment, and a fiddle-like melody sound. With only the fiddle and accordion, Paul and Win make toe-tapping music for old time country dances.

Music has been a part of Leela and Ellie's lives since they were just a twinkle in their parents' eyes. As toddlers, the only place they would sleep during a late-night jam session was on a blanket on the floor in the middle of the music circle. In 1985, they took six clog dance lessons and became overnight clog dance fanatics. They began writing their own dance routines in 1987,

and today they perform precision clogging as only two sisters could! They learned to play bones (both hands!), spoons, limberjack and Cajun-style triangle from the fine musicians that they met in their travels. The three and four part harmonies that were created by the addition of their vocals has added a whole new dimension to the band.

In the past year, the music bug has really bitten both of the girls. Leela is heavily into the autoharp and just starting on the banjo. Ellie is working on mandolin and guitar. They'll be making their performing debuts on autoharp and mandolin this month.

Win says that one of the things that she loves the most about playing music is that you can never say that you've learned all that there is to know about, and everything that can be done on, any instrument. She feels that there is always something new to learn and play just around the corner and, if you'll just keep playing, you'll reach it.

As of this writing (1991), Paul and Win Grace and Family have three cassette recordings available. They are *Fifty Miles Of Elbow Room*, *A Place In The Choir* and *Carved Out Of Time* (Leela and Eleanor are only on the latter). Having listened to these tapes time and time again, I'd describe this group's repertoire as traditional songs with a little bit of an edge. Instrumentally, the band is able to showcase solos without sacrificing the ensemble quality of the work. Many of the songs incorporate messages and the band's vocal line fits well into their instrumental accompaniment. These recordings are highly-recommended. **ER**

August 2008 Update: As the date indicates, the above article was first published more than seventeen years ago. Paul and Win continue to perform together, with Leela and Ellie having branched out on their own. Information regarding subsequent recordings, performance schedules, updated biographies, et cetera, may be found via the family website at: <http://gracefamilymusic.com/paul-win/index.html>