

Autoharp Clearinghouse - April 1993 - Jim Hendricks

Jim Hendricks first came to my attention via my twelve year old grandson. While shopping with his other grandmother in an Ames discount department store, the youngster spotted a cassette tape with an autoharp on the insert (I teach them well!). Turns out it was *20 Appalachian Hymns Vol. 2*, played on guitar, mandolin, dobro and autoharp by Jim. His address and phone number were included, so I made contact and we were tentatively scheduled to get together the end of September at the IBMA Trade Show in Owensboro, Kentucky. Thanks to an airline foul-up, I arrived five hours late and Jim, thinking I wasn't coming (who could blame him?), went on back to Tennessee. In still another missed connection, Jim had performed last fall at my church here on Kent Island at a time when I was out of town. But, the third time apparently is the charm because we were finally able to get together in January of 1993 in Nashville so that I might interview Jim for this story. It is one I think you will enjoy and, as *AC* begins its fifth year of publication, I take great pride in dedicating this issue to Jim Hendricks.

Jim was born and raised in Nebraska. The area was sparsely populated and, with the exception of one movie house that was only open in the summer, there was no entertainment available other than what you made for yourself. Social activities were limited to church functions and Saturday night get-togethers with relatives and neighbors. Anyone who had an instrument would bring it along, resulting in music almost always being the nucleus of these gatherings. In those days, folks seldom ever went out and bought a new musical instrument. Instead, you had to wait until one was "handed down" to you and then learned to play it, regardless of what it was. (I recall hearing Bill Monroe say that he took up the mandolin because, being the youngest child in his family, it was all that was left by the time he came along.)

In Jim's case, his inherited acquisition was a guitar. During those early introspective years, he learned to sing and play the altar-call classics of his church as well as traditional melodies that expressed the heartbeat of a large sector of the population of rural mid-America. Jim's family moved to Washington state for a while when he was in the fourth grade. While there, his folks got him started playing a lap steel guitar. He was doing pretty well on it until they moved back to the ranch in Nebraska...where there was no electricity. That was the end of that...at least for the time being. Jim continued with his schooling in both Hastings and Lincoln, eventually studying classical music and earning a degree in that field. After college, he taught school in Omaha in the early 1960s. By then, he had become acquainted with folk music, and it became his heart's desire.

While on stage at a club in Omaha, Jim came to the attention of Mama Cass Elliot and Tim Rose. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to join them to form a folk trio known as The Big Three. They performed the coffeehouse and college circuit for several years but, when the Beatles came on the scene, nearly every music group put down their acoustic instruments and went electric, and that included The Big Three. Tim Rose left at that time and Cass and Jim, being joined by John Sebastian and Zal Yanovsky changed the group's name to Mugwumps. They were guests on the television show, Hootenanny, and had some recording success as well. Jim recalls that John Sebastian played harmonica at that time. Then, John and Zal split off and formed The Lovin' Spoonful. Jim and Cass became the Mamas and Papas. So, two very important folk groups had evolved out of the Mugwumps, after having achieved many career milestones together.

Later, Jim also moved on so that he might expand his horizons and further develop his talents as a songwriter. Pop music and rock were gaining a stronghold and Jim felt that the time was right for a change. Meanwhile, he had met a folk musician in New York named Len Chandler. It was Len who taught Jim how to play finger-picked guitar. Previously Jim had been a flat picker. And, Len was also responsible for introducing Jim to the autoharp. Jim says he remembers being amazed by how much melody it was possible to get on the instrument. He soon added one to his growing collection of instruments and, while he was exposed to a number of players during the folk era such as Elizabeth Cotton, John Sebastian and Mike Seeger, Jim's style is basically self-taught. Today, he plays a 21-chord Oscar Schmidt Autoharp.

Retracing our steps a bit, Jim went to work for Johnny Rivers after leaving the Mamas and Papas, and was with him for five years, during which time Johnny recorded quite a few songs that Jim had written. In 1968, he wrote a #1 hit for him called *Summer Rain*. As a token of his appreciation and friendship, Johnny gave Jim a dobro for Christmas, enabling him to finally benefit from his childhood steel guitar skills.

Then in 1970, Jim met Michael Parks, who had just finished a pilot for the television series *Then Came Bronson*. He wrote the theme song for the series, *Long Lonesome Highway*, and went on to produce three albums with Michael--all of which included songs written by Jim.

Sadly, despite having reached his goals of fame and fortune, it all came to naught as Jim succumbed to the temptations of drugs and alcohol. He found himself separated from his wife, his money gone, and living in an empty apartment in Hollywood, a hopeless alcoholic. It was at this point that Jim turned his life over to the Lord and learned how powerfully God can resurrect a life, free you from addiction, and restore what the enemy has stolen.

Having been given a new lease on life in the late 1970s, Jim's own heartfelt preference was to reciprocate by playing gospel and other sacred music exclusively for some years. During that time, this consummate musician widened his instrumental dimensions by learning to play the mandolin. Some time after that, Jim was contacted by Ken Pennell of the Benson Music Group in Nashville. Knowing that Jim was an accomplished multi-instrumentalist, Ken asked him if he'd be interested in doing a series of recordings featuring acoustic traditional music and stirring renditions of well-known hymns. Jim jumped at the chance, and says that it was here that his degree came in handy in respect to arranging the music. Jim's "reading" of a melody is wholly innovative, and the resulting interpretations are as memorable as they are distinctive. Jim not only arranged and produced these recordings...he played all the instruments except for bass.

He now has his own studio called Sound Barrier with a 24-track digital recording machine that results in state-of-the-art sound. Once the arrangements are in form, Jim goes in on rhythm guitar and, with a bass player, puts down all the basic tracks. Then, he can come back in and start "stacking things on."

Several of the more recent projects include hammered dulcimer player (and builder) Jim Miller. With this addition, special care had to be taken by sound engineer Trey Smith in order to keep the dulcimer in the proper relationship with the other instruments. After some experimentation,

Trey had Jim Miller use rubber mallets to soften the sound. In addition to his instrumental success,

Jim Hendricks has continued to make great strides as a songwriter. His sacred songs that have been recorded by such artists as Phil Driscoll, Hosanna and many others are *Mighty One Of Israel, From Glory To Glory, Call Unto Me, Shekinah*, and numerous additional songs of praise sung the world over. Jim's song, *New Wine*, was included on an album by the Gaither Vocal Band. It was later "covered" and released as a single by the southern gospel group Greater Vision, becoming a hit song in 1991.

An instrumentalist by choice, but a vocalist as a gift from God, Jim also continues to sing at concerts and on recording projects. *The Third Day* is a tape of inspirational songs, all of which were written by Jim, some in collaboration with his late wife, Ginger, who passed away in April of 1991. Their personal commitment lends an extra feeling of truth to the positive messages of these lyrically-significant songs. Jim's live performances today challenge young and old alike to allow God's miraculous power to change their lives. His calling is that of a Psalmist, and nearly every Sunday will find Jim traveling to a different church to share his music and to witness for the Lord.

The following recordings are available at many Christian Bookshops, Cracker Barrel restaurants and tourist areas (I found one at a western trading post in Montana). It should be noted that the autoharp is given respectful status on these recordings and not buried in an unsympathetic mix, as is often the case. These tapes/CDS represent far better than average programs bound to please even the most finicky listener. **ER**

20 Appalachian Hymns, featuring acoustic guitar, mandolin, dobro and bass (no autoharp on this one, but it's still a great recording.): *In The Sweet By And By, Leaning On The Everlasting Arms; This World Is Not My Home; The Unclouded Day; The Lily Of The Valley; My Jesus, I Love Thee; Savior, Like A Shepherd Lead Us; I Surrender All; Whispering Hope; Softly And Tenderly; Precious Lord, Take My Hand; When We All Get To Heaven; When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder: There Is Power In The Blood; In The Garden; Sweet Hour Of Prayer; The Old Rugged Cross; What A Friend We Have In Jesus; Near The Cross; Just As I Am.*

20 Appalachian Hymns Volume Two (guitars, mandolin, dobro, autoharp, bass): *Church In The Wildwood; Shall We Gather At The River; A New Name In Glory; More About Jesus; Love Lifted Me; Blessed Assurance; O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing; Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus; I Am Thine O Lord; I Feel Like Travelin' On; Nothing But The Blood Of Jesus; Victory In Jesus; How Marvelous Is My Savior's Love; Haven Of Rest; Have Thine Own Way Lord; Jesus I Come To Thee; At The Cross; There Is A Fountain; I Need Thee Every Hour; Tell Me The Story Of Jesus.*

Appalachian Memories: Traditional Melodies (hammered dulcimer, guitar, dobro, mandolin, high string guitar, autoharp): *Rocky Top; Wildwood Flower; Turkey In The Straw; Tennessee Waltz; Take Me Home, Country Roads; I'll Fly Away; I Like Mountain Music; The Entertainer; Golden Slippers; Carolina Moon; Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party; Red River Valley.*

Handcrafted Hymns (hammered dulcimer, dobro, mandolin, acoustic guitar, high string guitar, autoharp): *Amazing Grace; Send The Light; Morning Has Broken; Will The Circle Be Unbroken; Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee; Count Your Blessings; Where The Soul Never Dies; Fairest Lord Jesus; Just A Closer Walk With Thee; He Leadeth Me; Standing On The Promises; Faith Of Our Fathers.*

The Third Day (vocals with keyboards, drums, acoustic, electric and steel guitars, and bass): *The Third Day; The Captain Of My Salvation; The Communion Song; Who Has The Answer; Sticks And Stones; Mount Up With Wings As Eagles; I've Got A Friend In Jesus; Walkin' A New Walk; Salty Ol' Dog; I'm Free.*

Handcrafted Christmas (guitars, dobro, mandolin, autoharp, hammered dulcimer): *Joy To The World; O Little Town Of Bethlehem; O Holy Night; Go Tell It On The Mountain; Little Drummer Boy; Jingle Bells; O Come, All Ye Faithful; What Child Is This?; God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen; Away In A Manger; Hark! The Herald Angels Sing; Silent Night.*

20 Appalachian Hymns Volume Three (dobro, mandolin, acoustic guitar, high string guitar and autoharp): *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot; I Saw The Light; Turn Your Radio On; Bringing In The Sheaves; Standing On The Promises; Shelter In The Time Of Storm; Trust And Obey; I Love To Tell The Story; When I Survey The Wondrous Cross; Onward, Christian Soldiers; Send The Light; I've Anchored In Jesus; Rescue The Perishing; Are You Washed In The Blood?; Let The Lower Lights Be Burning; Near To The Heart Of God; I'll Go Where You Want Me To Go; Wonderful Grace Of Jesus; Take The Name Of Jesus With You; Living On The Hallelujah Side.*

July 2008 Update:

Jim has recorded more than fifty albums. For additional information, you may contact him at: Jim Hendricks, 3016 Cages Bend Road, Gallatin, TN 37066. (615) 826-6877 Website address is: <www.jimhendricks.com>