

RING THE BANJO

The Newsletter of the National Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame Museum
Summer/Fall 2006



NEW MUSEUM WEBSITE IS ONLINE

After months of anticipation, the new Museum website is officially online. From the moment visitors click on www.banjomuseum.org they are aware that they have discovered a resource exclusively devoted to the four-string banjo and the mission of the Museum. This desired effect is accomplished via an attention grabbing animated introduction (inspired by the artwork of the *Banjo Crackerjax* LP by Harry Reser) which features lively banjo music as well as video clips of prominent four-string banjoists both past and present. The body of the website includes a substantive amount of information about the Museum including its mission, collections,

educational programs and events. As a research tool for students, a comprehensive history of the banjo is available and, for the first time, Museum membership payments and donations may be made thru the site via PayPal. Designed by Amy Finkel and Johnny Baier, the new effort was created to be easily navigated, edited, updated and expanded as necessary. Admittedly in its early stages, planned enhancements for the new website include several "members only" areas which will allow special access to Museum archives as well as expanded collection images and audio and video recordings.

2007 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES ANNOUNCED

As part of its ongoing effort to preserve and promote the music and heritage of America's only native musical instrument, the banjo, the National Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame Museum, located in Guthrie, Oklahoma, is pleased to announce its selections for 2007 induction into the Hall of Fame.



For PERFORMANCE/CONTEMPORARY - **GEORGETTE TWAIN** - The product of a show business family, Georgette Twain has worked in the entertainment industry her entire life. Trained as an operatic singer, her hopes for a career as a serious vocalist were crushed by a bout with polio in the 1940s. For both physical therapy - and fulfilling hopes to remain on the stage, she took an interest in the banjo - and the course for her greatest professional achievements was set. Hearing of her determination and skill, Eddie Peabody became a mentor to Georgette, opening many professional doors which ultimately led to her being proclaimed *Queen of the Banjo*. A banjo phenomenon in the 1960s and 70s, Twain appeared nationally on CBS television, produced an acclaimed LP recording and, in her most natural setting, made hundreds of stage appearances with legendary performers such as Phyllis Diller, Red Skelton, Lawrence Welk, Danny Thomas, Carol Channing, and Frankie Lane. Continuing to "*Let her banjo sing*," Georgette currently performs and

teaches in Nevada stressing the importance playing and performing properly and ALWAYS appreciating your peers.

(2007 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES continued on following page)



For PERFORMANCE/HISTORICAL - **JOHN CALI** - As one of the true pioneers who brought the banjo to prominence during the Jazz Age of the 1920s, John Cali remains one of the most respected and popular banjo players of all time. Born in 1898, Cali was a self taught child prodigy who played the violin, mandolin, guitar and banjo and, by 1912, found himself making cylinder recordings for Thomas Edison. More the consummate musician than stage entertainer, Cali never achieved the stardom realized by Eddie Peabody, Roy Smeck and others. Yet a review of popular stage shows, broadcasts and recordings of the 1920s through the 1960s which featured the banjo will likely find his name mentioned more than any other banjoist or musician. Cali grew up with broadcasting, performing with the likes of Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor and George Jessel and later lent his banjoistic skills to Broadway shows such as *Wildcat*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Porgy and Bess*, and

Hello Dolly. John Cali is arguably the most recorded banjoist in history making literally hundreds of cylinder, 78 and LP recordings throughout his career. Coming full circle, Cali was an unquestionable force behind the revival of the banjo's popularity via the 1950s recordings of *It's A Sin To Tell A Lie* by "Something Smith and the Redheads" and *The Man With The Banjo* by "The Aimes Brothers." Cali died in Seattle, Washington in 1984.



For DESIGN & MANUFACTURE - **WILLIAM LANGE/THE PARAMOUNT COMPANY** - When American popular music of the early 1920's was calling for "snap" and danceable rhythms of the banjo, manufacturer William Lange was prepared. Having been a partner in the Rettberg and Lange company (which produced Orpheum banjos), Lange, an avid banjo enthusiast, had been manufacturing banjos and refining banjo design since 1897. In 1922, William Lange (now on his own) began marketing these refined banjo designs under the name *Paramount*. Lange's timing could not have been better. His innovative and modern banjo designs stunned the banjo world and left most other banjo manufacturers playing a frantic game of catch-up. With seven models available in a wide price range, Lange and his *Paramount* company had a virtual monopoly on the quality banjo market for several years. Holding their own as the other banjo

manufactures came up to speed, in their 17 years of operation, William Lange and the *Paramount* company produced over 40,000 instruments - more high quality banjos than any other manufacturer of the 1920's and 30's.



For PROMOTION - **THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY** - Himself a fan of Dixieland Jazz, it was Walt Disney's personal desire to incorporate this distinctive American musical form into his films, recordings and theme parks. The banjo, as a natural standout in any Dixieland setting, quickly evolved as a Disney favorite sight and sound - particularly in the ever growing family of Disney resort theme parks. Beginning in 1954 at California's *Disneyland* and later continuing in Florida's *Walt Disney World Resort*, *Euro Disney*, and *Tokyo Disneyland*, live banjo shows such as *The Class of '27*, *The Banjo Kings*, *The Rhythm Rascals*, *The Hoop Dee Doo Revue* and *Disneyland After Dark* (which featured Louis Armstrong and Hall of Fame banjoist Johnny St. Cyr) have presented the four-string banjo to a massive audience in both a musical and entertaining manner. Both legendary

banjoists and entertainers such as St. Cyr, Gene Sheldon and Freddy Morgan as well as more contemporary banjo notables like Doug Mattocks, Pat Terry, Jr., Cathy Reilly Finn, Lee Floyd, Don Van Palta (and many, many more) are all proud alumni of one or more of Disney's banjo offerings. It is safe to say that hundreds of banjo players have found a satisfying venue to present their music to the literally millions of people who have enjoyed the four-string banjo as the result Walt Disney's love of Dixieland Jazz and the ongoing promotion of the banjo done by the company which bears his name.



For EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION - **DON VAN PALTA** - In addition to his reputation as a marvelous banjo player and entertainer, educator and true gentleman, Don Van Palta has the distinction of being the first individual to be elected to the Hall of Fame in two separate categories. In recognition of his enviable career as the first banjo player at Shakey's Pizza Parlor, the memorable *Flying Dutchman* of the 1960s Mickey Finn Show, and countless performances on luxury cruise ships around the world throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, Van Palta was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2000 in the category of *Performance*. However it must be noted that through his innovative instructional methods and materials literally hundreds of today's banjo players have found their way to produc-

-tive banjo playing. Making use of the technology of the day - which over the years segued from cassettes to VHS tapes to CDs to DVDs, Don Van Palta continues to take his 'one on one' approach to teaching to a worldwide classroom which currently consists of over 500 students. The positive impact which Don Van Palta has had on the banjo community as both a performer and educator cannot be overstated - a proud achievement today and the promise of a wonderful legacy in the future.

Twain, Cali, Lange, Disney, and Van Palta will be inducted into the National Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame during ceremonies scheduled for May 24, 2007 in Guthrie, OK.

BANJO BLAST YOUTH BANJO BAND BEGINS 2nd YEAR



With many returning youngsters - along with some new faces, the sixteen girls and boys who make up the Museum's youth banjo band (known as the *BANJO BLAST*) recently began their second year. The program, coordinated and funded by the Museum, is aimed at children age 8 - 12 and meets once per week. Instruments and instructional materials are provided to beginners at no cost with returning students requested to pay a minimal banjo rental fee to allow the program to perpetuate itself. Instruction is offered at two levels (beginning and intermediate) by Margie Boatright, Jack Murphy and Bill Mitchell under the leadership of Barbara Duer. In addition to scheduled performances at the *Guthrie*

Territorial Christmas Walk in December and the *Guthrie Jazz Banjo Festival* next May, this years *BANJO BLAST* program will include numerous performances at area nursing homes and civic events as well.



WORLD AWARD RECEIVES INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

In May 2006 the Museum's Board of Directors bestowed special recognition on the song *The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise* by declaring it to be the official anthem of the four-string banjo. Written in 1916 by Canadian songwriters Ernest Seitz and Eugene Lockhart, the song continues to maintain a particular affection among Canadians - they even named a Toronto park after it! Upon learning of our Museum's recognition of the tune, *THE NATIONAL POST*, one of

Canada's largest national newspapers with a weekly circulation of over one and a half million copies recounted the story of the song and recent award, dubbing our Museum "The 'Pickiest' Institute of America."

OFFICIAL ANTHEM OF THE 4-STRING BANJO

Is the grass bluer north of the border?

What could surely be the "pickiest" Institute of American music has chosen a time-honoured Canadian song for a singular honour.

The National Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame, in Guthrie, Okla., recently proclaimed that, henceforth, *The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise* will be known as the official anthem of four-string banjo players.

Long considered "the most successful popular song in Canadian history" the song was created by Toronto-born Ernest J. Seitz, who had in 1906, composed the melody at the age of 12, and his friend, London, Ont.-born Eugene Lockhart, who wrote the lyrics in 1916.

By 1923, more than one-million copies of sheet music had been sold and the song was well on its way to becoming a North American standard. Over the years, it has been performed by everyone from jazz greats like Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and Oscar Peterson to Canadian opera stars Ben Harper and Minka Branner. The City of Toronto created *The Sunrise Parkette*, at Avenue Road and St. Clair Avenue, to honour Seitz and Lockhart and, in 2005, they were inducted (posthumously) to the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Born in Hamilton, Ont., in 1905, Seitz was a child prodigy at the piano (Lockhart, his father, had young Ernest's hands insured for \$5 million). During the 1920s and '30s, Seitz performed regularly as a soloist in concert with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, as well as with the New York Philharmonic and the Boston and Philadelphia symphony orchestras. For much of this period, Seitz also taught at the Toronto Conservatory of Music (over the Royal Conservatory). In 1946, Seitz left his music career behind to take over the family business - Christie Chevrolet and the Precision Car and Ribbon Co. in Toronto.

As for Eugene Lockhart, he went on to a highly successful career as an actor in Hollywood - he specialized in dastardly villains and received an Oscar nomination for his role in *Algebra* (1939). His daughter, Anne Lockhart, would become a television star in the '50s and '60s for her roles in *Love and Lost in Space*.

In 1960, the composer's children, Burke Seitz and Anne Lockhart, both, gave to Oklahoma a presentation guide at the Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame.

Shelagh Matheson
National Post

UPCOMING EVENTS

BANJO MASTERS WORKSHOP

November 18 & 19, 2006 - Hosted by Johnny Baier - \$150 (\$125 for Museum members)

GUTHRIE JAZZ BANJO FESTIVAL VOLUNTEER PARTY

December 7, 2006 - 7PM-9PM - Hours Douvres - Refreshments - Entertainment
- All GJBF Volunteers and Museum members are invited - please RSVP to 405-260-1323 by December 5th

"SING ALONG AT SHAKEY'S" NIGHT

January 20, 2007 - 7:30PM-9:30PM - Relive the "Good Old Days" in our new Shakey's exhibit!
\$10 Donation - Banjo sing along entertainment - Pizza slices and soft drinks available - Seating Limited
- Call 405-260-1323 for reservations



GUTHRIE JAZZ BANJO FESTIVAL

May 25 - 27, 2007

Our 16th Year! Many new and exciting events!

