

GATHER 'ROUND THE RADIO  
E-NEWSLETTER FOR THE METROPOLITAN  
WASHINGTON OLD-TIME RADIO CLUB



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THE UNEXPECTED PLACES ISSUE

THE SET-UP

Hello fine listeners, and welcome once again to the mythical confines of the GRTR Studio where we broadcast information and inspiration about radio, music, nostalgia, personality, books, and beyond. Terry Gross continues to be our inspiration. Listen to her “Fresh Air” radio show, live or podcast; check your NPR listings for a station where you can tune in.

Chuck and Joanie and I are here in the Mud Room with carrot cake and good coffee. Chuck has fired up the creaky old sound board, he’s piping in an

energetic Scottish folk tune, played by violinist Nicola Benedetti, which sets the tone for today's broadcast. Joanie is looking at the clock as it sweeps towards network feed.

### ON THE AIR

Hello everyone! And welcome to the broadcast. We've had a busy few weeks; the dusty old courier pouch is brimming with new music, notes about good listening; and we're keeping up with old friends as well. The thread we're following is young musicians, and how they are finding creative spaces and musical energy in unexpected places. We'll hear more from Nicola Benedetti and her ensemble of musicians; we'll look at a BBC Radio 4 documentary about Cecil Sharp, who collect folk songs in the Appalachians, circa 1916; and we'll recount the instances that performances can happen in a basement or an auditorium; on a rickety platform in a park, on a factory floor at lunchtime; or on a front porch down a dusty road. Folklore and performance are in such abundance these days, it's good to see how people are more than ever looking to the origins of the richness. And everyone is undaunted by the idea that research is a must, and rather fun, as part of the process.

First, though, our friend Kaleigh Acord from northern Virginia is back in touch with us! She's an accomplished violinist and ardent proponent of learning across artistic boundaries. She has brought us up-to-date with her current goings-on; and she's sent us a couple of her blog-posts and a YouTube clip. Kaleigh's parents, Tim and Roni, are long-time Club members, and ever since Kaleigh's 2006 recital at the Lyceum in Alexandria Virginia, Tim has always sent me informative notes about Kaleigh's progress in music school, including a well-earned spot in a young artist's program on WQXR-FM in New York.

Now, Kaleigh has completed her course of study at the Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. She studied with the renown violinist Midori, and was co-concertmaster in an orchestra conducted by Marin Alsop. She played in the Peabody orchestra for a student performance of

“Hansel and Gretel.” She was quoted in the Conservatory magazine, which defines opera rather succinctly:

Incidental music intertwines with lighting and movement on stage to create the setting, a soundscape as much as a landscape. When the characters sing their lines, the orchestra moves in synchrony and together they become one storyteller. “We are part of an extra-musical experience, in a way – it’s a whole art production,” says second-year graduate-performance-degree student and principal second violin Kaleigh Acord. “It’s like being in a movie while it’s happening, except you only get one take to capture each moment... that’s the thrill of it!”

Now for Kaleigh it’s out from the pit and into more collaborative ventures in the heady atmosphere of advanced study at the University of Wisconsin. There, she writes to us, it will be a wider look at the arts, not just the vertical “studio silo” approach to playing. And, what about the unexpected place where love-of-music was found? It was inside prison walls, Kaleigh tells us. She was part of an enthusiastic group of people called the Peabody String Sinfonia, a brand new, conductor-less chamber orchestra devoted primarily to performing at highly sensitive venues including homeless shelters and addiction recovery centers. This time they journeyed to the Maryland Correctional Institute for Women in Jessup Maryland. Quite the process, getting everything arranged. She wrote about the “disheartened eyes of several women,” but once the performance began the appreciation was palpable. Further:

The hit of the afternoon was *Redtail*, a one-movement work written by Peabody student violinist-composer Ledah Finck. She shared with the listeners that, for her, the piece is almost a musical portrait of a place from her childhood that was a beautiful, peaceful oasis in her life. She

added that because everyone hears music differently, they should feel free to interpret the work however they like. At the eager request of the audience, we played *Redtail* again at the end of the performance.

The power of music and the strength of any human heart! Fantastic!

#### MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

Joanie is signaling, we're past commercial! Ah well, Chuck pipes in a bridge; it's Nicola Benedetti and a Scottish dance which she loves to play because of calls for "tricky ricochet bowing."

#### DAYTON DRAGONS BASEBALL IS ON THE AIR!



Catch every game! They're doing great! Tied for first place in the Division! Winning two out of every three! The key? Pitching is strong, but maybe...

Could it be that the team was inspired by the National Anthem as performed on Heritage Day by the Lawrence Kandrach Singers? We think so. Like wow!

And, as September approaches, mark your calendars for this year's

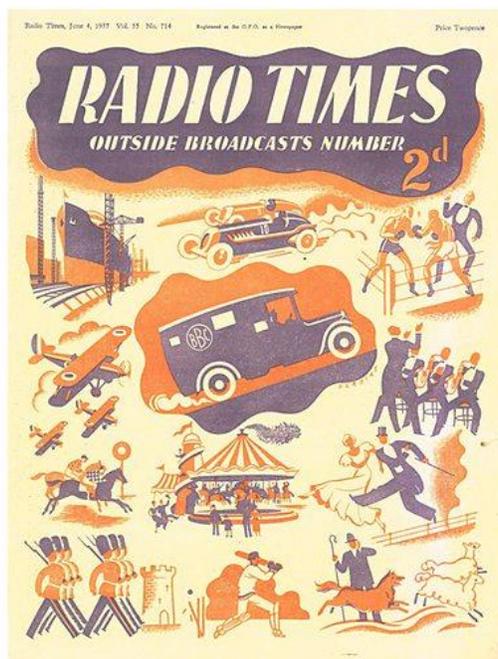
**Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention**, at the Hunt Valley Marriott Hotel, Thursday – Saturday, September 14-16. (Same hotel as last year; changed its affiliation.) There's a good line-up of presentations; and several celebrities from

film, stage, and television. Vendors, and most likely some folks dressed in costumes of their choice.

Web-site: [www.MidAtlanticNostalgiaConvention.com](http://www.MidAtlanticNostalgiaConvention.com)

Our own Club, MWOTRC, has the Noon on Saturday slot for its annual gathering of Club members, new friends, and other conventioners.

### PLENTY OF SONGS TO WORK WITH



Chuck is piping in a lovely song by Pieta Brown, a young singer-songwriter who grew up in Iowa, and when she takes a bunch of songs to the studio, top-flight musicians are waiting at the door for the chance to sit in on the session. Here she sings with Mason Jennings, from her album “Postcards” (2017.)

“As the world rolls and tumbles / As the edges fray /

How soon can you get here? / How long can you stay?”

She takes the invisible and makes it spiritual. It is the human condition in a new light. This is the kind of song that the British folklorist Cecil Sharp was searching out in the Appalachian Mountains some hundred years ago. Between 1916 and 1918, Sharp documented some 1,600 songs in towns and farmhouses in North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. He would write the musical notations, and his assistant Maud Karpeles would write the lyrics; sometimes for hours on end, as one singer or another would become inspired and thus, tireless.

Last year BBC Radio 4 put together a 45-minute documentary, with on-location interviews and impromptu recording sessions with relatives of the singers that Sharp visited; and readings from his diary and the one that Maud Karpeles kept as well. He wrote that one day he played a “woefully out-of-tune” piano, but no matter, the singer was beyond compare and a new version of a ballad was saved from obscurity. Radio play helped keep the songs alive, and the inspiration found full voice in the folk revival of the 1960s, and at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the Mall beginning in 1976.

Gillian Welch, from Ohio, who always gives the acoustic tradition a fresh energy, tells the BBC interviewer that she knew of the Sharp collection, and how nice it was to know that a song she loved and sang was but one of a dozen versions. The BBC crew is crowded into her living room, and she asks them if they would like to hear a song that she wrote with her husband David Rawlings. Murmurs of muted approval are heard. By way of introduction she says, “We’ve never recorded this; we just sing it around the house.”

Chuck puts on a mournful song by long-time balladeer John Hiatt, who has thankfully just come out with a new album. The song is “Down Around My Place”: “The radio is busted, every tool is rusted / Down around my place / Creeks and rivers dried up / Exhausted fields lay fallow / Kingdoms come and crumble / My prayers are merely mumbles / Down around my place...”

## JOANIE READS AND TAKES US TO NETWORK FEED

The coda for our show takes us back to the big city – Chicago – and music in another unexpected place. Club member John Reiser sent this reminiscence to me, about his mother and her musical talents so many years ago. I put it in the GRTR of January 13, 2014: Joanie reads:

The item on Rosa Rio on page 11 brought back fond memories of my childhood and my mother who was also a pipe organist during the 1920's and early 30's at the major theaters in Chicago. She spoke fondly of Rosa and I am sure they shared cue sheets. And I believe they recorded for the same label. I am sure they crossed paths many times during their guest appearances.

All the major radio stations in Chicago -- WMAQ, WGN, WBBM and WLS -- had theater organs with an organist on duty 24 hours a day. Many of the city's theater organists played and were also on staff at these stations. My mother played, and was also on the staff of WLS, the Sears-Roebuck Station (the world's largest store), also known as the Prairie Farmer Station.

At that time, Caesar Petrillo was organizing the musicians in Chicago -- sometimes in a rather rough way. My mother had to personally play for him with both prepared and sight-reading scores, as well as improvising all kinds of cues that would accompany the silent film action. Sometimes "union organizers" would enter a theater during a film showing and physically remove any non-union player from the organ console and the union player would step in and continue playing right through. My mother told me that is how she got her first position as a theater organist. She also suspected that there were a few broken hands during the "organizing" process.

During the summer months, many of the theaters closed because of the summer polio epidemic season. The theater organists would then go on tour giving organ recitals at the resort areas where many of the wealthier city families resided during the summer. My mother had a large box of glass slides that were projected on the screen when she played, showing the music program and the words to the songs. On a personal note, my father was an avid theater pipe organ enthusiast and happened to offer to entertain one of those touring Chicago organists during her visit to his town. Frequent trips to Chicago followed, and the rest is history.

With the introduction of sound films during the early 1930s, the need for theater organists diminished. My mother continued to play, however, when the theaters had additional entertainment, or she would give occasional recitals in the area theaters that maintained their pipe organs. I recall going with her to the theater during the morning while she practiced or worked with the pipe organ technicians in making repairs or adjustments.

#### MUSIC BRIDGE AND OUT

Thanks Joanie, wonderful! That's our show from the little tin pot studio down by the creek. Thanks for tuning in. Chuck is piping in Bruch's Scottish Fantasy, from Nicola Benedetti's album "Homecoming" (Decca 2014, B0021290-02).

Here's the web-site for the English Folk Dance and Song Society, for more British folk information, including the Cecil Sharp House:

<https://www.efdss.org/>

Keep those cards and letters coming! Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room? But of course!

Thanks ever,

Mark Anderson

Carlisle PA