by BURTON LAINE

# Making Music, Making Friends

If you've seen the Grand Ole Opry or listened to it on WSM radio at some time, you know the drill. There is a back-up band, and each individual country artist comes on for a two-song set. It's high quality music with professional musicians that love to play together. When listening to the old-time country western music show organized by Bill Pelto, the Grand Ole Opry immediately comes to mind. The show takes place at the Lavell Town Hall 15 miles west of Cotton on the last Saturday of the month, and at the Solway Town Hall in Munger on the second Saturday of the month. The amazing thing about these shows is that both are held in town halls in small communities and draw as many as 150 people on any given night. Why? "Because I want to always put on a quality show," says Bill. Word of mouth around both areas fuels attendance.

Bill has been organizing this three hour show for three years, and has a list of about 50 of the best musicians in the region to draw from, most who are over 50 years old and many much older. For each show he talks to each musician to pick out two songs that person wants to feature. He then takes the songs from each person, finds the music in the proper key so everyone in the show is on the same page, and puts together the show into three one-hour sets. At last month's show at Solway, after Bill kicked off the second set, he said, "You know, it's hard to sing those two songs in a row without getting a tear in your eye." Then he introduced Gail Miles from Esko and she took over the lead mike. All of the artists in the band knew exactly what to do, and the songs moved along in perfect form. When she started "Green, Green Grass of Home" there

Dancers took to the floor as Gail Miles from Esko sang "Green, Green Grass of Home."

Debbie Slygh and Vince Pigman.

was a stream of dancers that moved onto the small dance floor in front of the stage. Bill always takes the mike to introduce each lead musician, and often tells stories between songs. After one song that he especially liked he said, "people say 'this is the best show we've seen,'" comparing it to shows from earlier months. You get the feeling he hears that almost every month, with the large number of regulars and new audience members who attend.

Bill's love of music doesn't come from a career in the music field. He was involved in the Mountain Iron Country Live show for about three years, and when he moved to Duluth decided to start a similar show in another location. He was in the marines for 20 years and retired as a captain, then taught elementary school for 21 years in Duluth. Currently Bill puts his day job enthusiasm into driving a bus for UDAC in Duluth.

Bill owns the sound system for the shows, paying particular attention to quality and a four-corner speaker system to make sure every-

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Bill Pelto takes off on "That's What Makes the Jukebox Play". Left to right are Jerry Dube on steel guitar, Mike Johnson on drums, George McLellan on lead guitar, Debbie Slygh on rhythm guitar, and Vince Pigman on bass guitar.

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Jerry Dube of Hinckley on steel guitar.

one can hear clearly in the mostly over 50 audience. At the November 10 show at Solway, the performers in the main band included:

- Jerry Dube, Hinckley, on steel guitar
- Duane Hawkinson, Aitkin, on rhythm guitar
- Debbie Slygh, Kelsey, on rhythm guitar
- Vince Pigman, Superior, on bass guitar
- George McLellan, Duluth, on lead guitar
- Mike Johnson, Duluth, on drums

In addition, other performers included:

- Gail Miles, Esko
- Marilyn Flatley, Duluth
- Cleone Phillips, Iron
- Deb Hawkinson, Aitkin

At one point in the show, by popular request, Cleone Phillips performed a fine yodeling rendition of "He Taught Me To Yodel." One thing that is impossible to miss in this show is the appreciation all of the performers have for Bill being the organizer and bringing them all together. During the last set they took time to individually thank him. It's quite a tribute, considering this is an all volunteer effort, and everyone gets together simply to make good music and put on an entertaining show.

The next two shows will be gospel music shows at Solway on Saturday, December 8, and the regular show at Lavell on Saturday, December 29. Both shows start at 6:00 p.m. and are free. There is even a potluck before the shows, and the only cost is a donation bucket at the end of the table.

# Formula for Staying Young

There are many groups of seniors who get together to make music in the area, and another one is the Lincoln Park Ramblers. This group plays a wide variety including old-time classics, country, jigs, hornpipe, bluegrass and gospel music. They practice on most Mondays at Lincoln Park Community Center, 2014 West 3rd Street in Duluth, and anyone is welcome to sit in and listen.

Fiddler Betty L. Peterson is the

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Violin virtuoso and group leader Betty L. Peterson.

The Lincoln Park Ramblers (left to right) Dorothy Williams, Ralph Anderson, Betty L. Peterson, Bob Stoinski, and Kenneth Weber.

main organizer of the group. She and Ralph Anderson go back to an original group called the Grandmas and Grandpas that played together for 16 years. Ralph feels it's "our formula for staying young." It must work because the group ranges from 76 to 85 years of age. For the last two years the Ramblers have become a group that enjoys each other and enjoys making music. Ralph Anderson plays lead guitar and sings. Kenneth Weber plays guitar, harmonica and piano. Bob Stoinski's specialties include guitar, mandolin, and banjo, and Dorothy Williams provides percussion, including drums and spoons. "Whoever takes the lead – we follow," says Betty.

Bob Stoinski picking and strumming.

Kenneth Weber

The group plays for senior events, retired groups, nonprofits, and recently they played Scandinavian music for a church event. "It's rewarding to see the people smile. It makes people happy," according to Betty. Watching them, you can see it keeps them pretty happy also.