

OPINIONS

Questions? Call Associate Editor James E. Casto at 526-2796

Folk musicians reinventing themselves

We used to be known as "those folk music people." But here's a hint: If you are at the Huntington Museum of Art's Hilltop Festival today from 1 to 3 p.m. and ask The 1937 Flood to "Play Misty for Me," you'll not be met with silence.



Dave PEYTON

We're just cashing in on the name.

While The Flood has been around for two decades, we've never sounded as good as we do right now because of Doug Chaffin, a bass player from near Summit, Ky., who seems to enjoy what we do.

Charlie plays guitar. Joe plays fiddle and I play the Autoharp, a strange and little-known instrument that I've been playing since my days as a student at Marshall University.

All of us in The Flood developed an interest in music through the folk genre. But I have a confession to make. Playing folk music all the time is — well, a bit boring. The secret to learning traditional music is to learn three chords. If you can learn three chords, you can play 95 percent of all the traditional music of the mountains. Learn a fourth chord — a minor — and you can play all of it.

Folkies today are changing as they move toward the status of senior citizens. "Three chords and a cloud of dust," just doesn't do it for us the way it used to. We did what we could to preserve the old music. We've played "Flop Eared Mule" and "Sally Good-

in" so many times, we hear them in our sleep. Now we're movin' on down the line.

That's why folkies, The Flood included, have been reinventing themselves.

We're not alone. J.P. Fraley, the best fiddler in Eastern Kentucky, recently cut a CD on which he plays "Begin the Beguine." Fraley probably knows more than a thousand old-time fiddle tunes and his role in preserving these old folk tunes is inestimable. He deserves to play "Begin the Beguine" on a CD if he wants to.

And we deserve to play "Ain't Misbehavin'," "Stormy Weather," "Chattanooga Choo Choo," "Sweet Georgia Brown" and, yes, even "Misty."

I play some of them on the Autoharp, but not all. The instrument has its limitations, but not nearly as many as the guy who plays it.

So, if you see us under the craft tent today at the Hilltop Festival, stop by and say howdy.

And if you think to yourself "What are those folkies doing playing THAT kind of music?" cut us some slack. We're old and eccentric, and getting more so every day.

And we're movin' on.

Dave Peyton is a columnist for The Herald-Dispatch. His telephone number is 526-2790 and his e-mail address is dpeyton@herald-dispatch.com.

WE HAVE TO CHOOSE