Once again the Princeton Traditional Music Festival was held over a weekend in the second half of August, commencing with a street dance on Friday evening. There were two stages with music happening continuously from 10am to 6pm on both Saturday and Sunday. As usual, there were no concerts on Saturday evening but time was provided instead for the now-traditional informal jam and party in the yard of Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat’s house in downtown Princeton. As before the performers at the Festival were a mixture of old hands and newcomers, with the former predominating. This is a list of the artists who had sung or played (or both) at previous festivals (including the trial run in 2007) and returned for the 2012 Festival. In the following survey their performances will be mentioned but not discussed in any detail:

Mary Armitage
Alex Atamanenko & Lawrence Halisheff
Jon Bartlett & Rika Ruebsaat
Claddach
Dark Willow (Ellen Van der Hoeven & David Donaldson)
Doc and Nac (Mike & Nakos Marker)
Fraser Union (Roger Holdstock, Henk Piket & Barry Truter)
John Gothard
Rosaleen Gregory
Stewart Hendrickson
Stuart James
Jasmine Fiona
King’s Shilling (Simon Trevelyan & Mary Armitage)
Lemon Gin (Jim Edmondson & Lyn Pinkerton)
Little Mountain Step and Clog
Local Ale (Lyn Van Lidth de Jeude & her daughter and son, Emily and Adrian)
Morgan & Graves (Bob Morgan & Lynn Graves)
Orkestar Šlivovica
Pasties ‘N’ Porridge (Doug Reid & Yvonne Harper)
Psycho Acoustic Ceili Band
Rattlebone Band
Tom Rawson
Chris Roe
Larry Saidman & Robin Cottle
Skweez (Judith Heather & Rich Williams)
Soft Focus (Marian Buechert & Steve Britten)
Solidarity Notes Labour Choir
Stab the Cat (Nathan Hayward, Veronica Maynard & Simon Trevelyan)
Vancouver Morris Men
Vazzy
Randy Vic & Becky Deryckx
Without A Net (David & Mary Lowther)

These were the individual artists or groups who made their debut at the Fifth Annual Festival in 2012:

Choir Slovenia
Diggers
er-Ratica
Tim Hall
Betty Hendrickson
The Hokum Steamers (Mike Ballantyne & Rick Van Krugel)
The Holdstocks (Dick & Carol Holdstock)
In The Family Way (Rob Corbett, his son Chris and daughter Emily)
Ben Meti
Sarah Jane Scouten
Penny Sidor
Slovenian Folklore Dancers
Something About Reptiles
Phillip Tidd
Trichoir
Zeellia

The workshops, always a very important part of the Festival and perhaps its very heart, were in 2012 the following:

Blues
Five Banjos
Free Reeds
Homegrown Traditions
Irish Jam
The 99 Per Cent: Songs of Social Struggle
Songs and Tunes of La Francophonie
Traditional Ballads from the Child Collection
Traditional Music of Eastern Europe

Friday evening’s street dance involved Morris men and Eastern European music by Orkestar Slivovica. The latter set the theme of the Fifth Annual Festival: Eastern European Musical Traditions in Western Canada. In their program introduction, titled “Princestonograd!”, Jon and Rika provided the following explanation of how they had tried to make the fifth festival unique:

We try every year to bring new music to Princeton reflecting the founding cultures of our town and area. This year the Festival celebrates the cultures of Eastern Europe, in recognition of the cultural traditions brought into the Similkameen valley in the early years of the last century. Miners from many parts of Eastern Europe, including Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Galicia, came to the valley, particularly Hedley and Princeton, to make a new life for themselves in a new country. They worked in the Hedley Mascot gold mine, the numerous coalmines in and around Princeton, Coalmont, Tulameen and Blakeburn, and the Copper Mountain Mine. Many came from mines to the east of Phoenix and Greenwood, and some came direct from their homeland. They all brought with them elements of their cultural background, including music, dance and song. We are very pleased this year to welcome Slovenian dancers, singers and accordion players, a Roma band, an Albanian accordion player, a Turkish band, a Doukhobor choir and other Russian singers, and music and song from the Balkans and the Ukraine. We thank them all for sharing their culture with us.
Many of the acts on both stages were by individual artists or groups who were veterans of the previous Princeton festivals or who had debuted at last year’s festival. Information on them will usually be found in the survey of the first festival at which they appeared and will be repeated only cursorily here. Stab the Cat, for example, the first group to perform on the Museum Stage on Saturday, were returning from a successful debut in 2011, and one of their members, Simon Trevelyan, had appeared at every festival since the first official one in 2008. These three musicians (Nathan Hayward on bagpipes, Scottish smallpipes and whistle, Veronica Maynard on musical saw, bodhran, spoons and feet, and Simon Trevelyan on guitar, concertina and banjo) performed a mix of pipe tunes, shanties, traditional and broadside ballads, and love songs.

Alex Atamanenko, NDP Member of Parliament for the Southern Border constituency (Okanagan and Kootenays), again appeared with his accompanist Lawrence Halisheff, but on this occasion, in line with the Eastern European music theme of the Festival, he sang songs exclusively in the Russian language.

The traditional ballad workshop, hosted by Phillip Tidd, was so crowded with performers—Phillip himself, Rosaleen Gregory, Lyn Pinkerton, Sarah Scouten, Penny Sidor, Emily & Lyn Van Lidth de Jeude and a visitor from Scotland added at the last moment—that each participant had only time to sing one Child ballad. There was some fine a cappella singing from several of the balladeers, and it was clearly a case of one hour being insufficient for a workshop in which the narrative songs tend to be lengthy.

Kitty Lie Over proved to be a concert of mainly Irish instrumental music, while the next two performers, John Gothard and Claddach, were well-known to Princeton festival goers. John again entertained with his mix of unusual British traditional songs and ballads and instrumentals on guitar or concertina.

Claddach, one of the pioneers from 2007, provided their customary quota of infectious, toe-tapping Celtic tunes and songs from British and Irish traditions along with a little B.C. content. Newcomer Penny Sidor has been a singer of traditional songs for many years and recently, at age 55, began making her own songs. She describes her songs as “funny, sad, soothing and rousing” and included some jokes and stories in her lively set.
Like the Traditional Ballads workshop, the Home-grown Traditions workshop was overflowing with participants, around a dozen in total. Hosted by Larry Saidman, it demonstrated once again the profusion of local talent in the Princeton area. Returning performers included, in alphabetical order, Allen the Troubadour, who normally plays and sings country music but on this occasion performed a sixties protest song, “Eve of Destruction”; singer Barbara Bushewsky; blues guitarist Rick Freeman; banjoist Stuart James; bassist Rick Law; logger and harmonica player Hugh Money; trumpeter Corry Oerlemans; and drummer Henry Ruel. New additions for 2012 included bluesman Jason Gasparetto on slide guitar; Pattyann, who specializes in old hymns and other inspirational songs; and, last but not least, singer Sophia Milner, who performs classic country songs and fifties blues. An impressive array of talent, but Jon and Rika have yet to convince these local musicians to focus their efforts jointly on recreating the traditional music characteristic of old Princeton before the impact of radio and recordings from the USA. The musicians may be “homegrown” but, by and large, the songs they sang and the tunes they played were not.

A stalwart of all the Princeton festivals since 2007, the dependable Chris Roe added guitar to her usual mix of a cappella songs and melodeon instrumentals. Then came a new face: Karel Crepnjak. Karel began playing accordion in Slovenia at the age of nine. He says his favourite music is “Umpapa” (“Oom pa pa”), that is, polkas, waltzes and some slow tunes.

King’s Shilling—the duo of Simon Trevelyan and Mary Armitage—are familiar performers to Princeton audiences but their material on this occasion was decidedly out-of-the-ordinary, focusing on traditional songs about slavery, press gangs and convicts.

Lemon Gin turned out not to be a group new to Princeton but the new name adopted by the familiar duo of Jim Edmondson and Lyn Pinkerton, who have been singing together for twelve years. Jim and Lyn were followed by two more familiar faces, Judith Heather and Rich Williams of Skweez, also veterans from the 2007 trial run and every festival thereafter.
Saturday on this stage was closed out by Choir Slovenia, who, like Karel Crepnjak, exemplified this year’s Eastern European theme. The group is a mixed adult a cappella choir that began in 1955 when the first post-war Slovenian immigrants started to organize themselves. They sing an exclusively Slovenian folksong repertoire from different regions of their homeland, together with sacred songs. The choir participates regularly in Slovenian Society functions and church services. They are one of the few Slovenian choirs in western Canada keeping up the singing tradition of their homeland.

Meanwhile, on the Vermilion Stage the events of Saturday August 18th had begun with a concert by the Hokum Steamers. The Steamers, a duo comprising Mike Ballantyne and Rick Van Krugel, played a mixture of ragtime, old blues, hokum, jug band songs and gospel music. Their songs are mostly from the 1920s and 1930s and they strive to perform their material in an authentic manner, including keeping the lyrics exactly as they were originally sung.

Sarah’s set was followed by a concert by the four-piece band er-Ratica, comprising Don Davidson, Bernard Gobin, Jane Slemon and Cameron Stewart. They have many years of kitchen party experience between them and perform an eclectic mix of songs and tunes from a variety of folk traditions. Er-Ratica was followed by a lively performance of Irish dance tunes and songs by Randy Vic and Becky Deryckx, returnees from last year’s festival.

The Hokum Steamers were followed by a newcomer to the Princeton Festival, Sarah Jane Scouten. A young singer-songwriter from a folk music family, Sarah says that she draws on traditional American music styles but pairs them with her own frank and evocative lyrics. Her sister accompanied her on banjo for much of her performance.
Echoing the slogan of the Occupy Movement and with the Arab Spring and the students’ struggle in Quebec in mind, the Ninety-Nine Percent Workshop focused on social and political issues. Participants included Mike Marker, Lemon Gin, the Diggers and members of the Solidarity Notes Labour Choir.

After these serious and rousing songs it was time for a little energetic fun with Little Mountain Step and Clog, who performed in their wooden clogs to traditional English dance music. The Rattlebone Band, one of the Festival’s pioneer and most committed performers, continued in the same spirit, bringing us up to 2pm and the traditional Shanty Workshop, led as usual by Jon Bartlett, Simon Trevelyan and Rich Williams (among others).

The formidable Orkestar Šlivovica, who had provided music on Friday evening and would do so again after the closing ceremony on Sunday, had their own concert, underlining the East European theme of this year’s festival. That theme was continued by Trichoir, which was formed in 1963 and consists of Doukhobor men who love to sing and preserve their culture. Of its 28 members, 15 were singing at the Festival. The choir performs at Doukhobor festivals, senior centres, churches and music festivals. The songs they sing were all passed down to them from generation to generation and were all learned by ear, as there is no music written for them.

After Trichoir came some more familiar faces, Morgan and Graves, and then it was time for the Blues Workshop, an ongoing tradition at the festival. Participants included (among others) the Hokum Steamers, Doc & Nak (Marker) and two members of Fraser Union, Henk Piket and Barry Truter.

Then it was back to the East European theme of the 2012 Festival with the Slovenian Folklore Dancers and Something about Reptiles. The Vancouver Slovenian Society was founded in 1958 and the Slovenian Folklore Dancers began in 1964. Their costumes are of the style worn in Gorenjska, in the Julian Alps. The group performs dances from various parts of Slovenia, some very traditional and some choreographed more recently. They are always accompanied by an accordionist playing traditional tunes. Active in the B.C. Slovenian community, they regularly dance at festivals, cultural events and cultural and seniors’ centres.

Something About Reptiles plays a kind of gypsy-fusion music, created with vocals, guitar, accordions, viola, bass and darbuka (hand drum). They describe it as “kitsch meets classic with traditional music, warped into something east of cabaret and west of gravity” and “music for people who aren’t afraid of anything”.

Slovenian Folklore Dancers

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Throughout much of Saturday audience members moving between the stages could stop and watch street performances by Morris dancers, sometimes waving their white handkerchiefs, sometimes fiercely beating their rapper sticks (swords) together at key points in the dance. Both the Mossybank Morris Men and the Vancouver Morris Men were up and about again on Sunday too.

Dark Willow began the proceedings on the Museum Stage. This duo, which debuted at last year’s festival, consists of a Princeton pioneer, Ellen Van der Hoeven and David Donaldson, with Ellen on vocals, guitar and mandolin and David playing pennywhistle, melodica, recorder and krummhorn.

Separated by an hour-long banjo workshop, there was some fine traditional ballad singing on the Museum Stage. A concert by Alberta balladeer Rosaleen Gregory, who has regularly participated in Princeton festivals since 2009, preceded a set by newcomer Phillip Tidd. Rosaleen mixed a cappella performances of tragic ballads such as “Sheath and Knife” and “Clerk...
Saunders” with a guitar-accompanied rendition of “Thomas the Rhymer” and a song about contemporary issues by her partner Dave titled “Steady State”.

Raised in England during the ‘50s and ‘60s, Phillip Tidd was greatly influenced by the Folk Revival and by the many field recordings of Kennedy and Lomax and those in the English Folk Dance and Song library at Cecil Sharp House. He has been singing traditional songs for almost 50 years, becoming a regular at the Vancouver Folk Song Society during the ‘70s. Recently he spent two years in England, singing in folk clubs and dancing Cotswold Morris.

Next up was Tim Hall, who played guitar, banjo and concertina and sang songs from a spectrum of folk genres—traditional American, English, Australian and maritime songs. Then it was back to Eastern European music with Ben Meti, who plays the accordion in the heavily-ornamented style of his native Albania. Ben performed tunes from his homeland as well as melodies from other Balkan cultures. After Ben came In the Family Way, a trio of father Rob Corbett and his son Chris and daughter Emily. The group has performed for many years in the southwest interior of B.C., with a trademark sound of tight vocal harmonies on a variety of traditional songs, accompanied by guitar, mandolin, ukulele and harmonica.

These newcomers were followed by some well-known figures: banjoist Tom Rawson and Princeton resident Larry Saidman. Larry has previously performed with his partner Elaine Rutherford but on this occasion he was part of a duo with an old musical friend, Robin Cottle. They were both members of an old-timey, jug-band and blues group called Yowzuh in Edmonton in the 1970s, and they took the opportunity to again recreate some of the music of the interwar era. Mary Armitage, familiar to Princeton audiences as half of King’s Shilling, then made her debut as a solo performer with a set in which the songs were all, in one way or another, about women—how they endure, adapt, survive and succeed. Some were traditional English ballads or lyrics, while others were Mary’s own compositions.
The “Songs and Tunes of the Francophonie” workshop, an old Princeton tradition, was followed by Betty Hendrickson’s first solo appearance at the Festival. Thirteen years ago Betty’s husband bought her a hammered dulcimer, an instrument that she had always enjoyed listening to, and a few years ago she began performing solo and with other musicians. Her set was entirely instrumental.

Beverley Dobrinksy of Zeellia

The final concert on the Museum Stage took us back to the Eastern European theme with a performance by Zeellia. The group sings and plays Slavic folk songs and dances from the Ukraine, the Balkans and the Canadian prairies. They respect their Ukrainian roots but include Canadian content, calling their music “Slavic soul” and thereby connecting the past with the present and the old country with the new. On this occasion their performance was made all the more memorable by taking place against the backdrop of a spectacular thunderstorm.

Moving over to the concurrent set of concerts and workshop on the Vermilion Stage, Sunday morning started with a characteristic performance by the well-known Vancouver group Fraser Union, followed by Soft Focus, the duo of Marian Buechert and Steve Britten. Then it was the turn of Local Ale. This was the new name adopted by the family of Lyn Van Lidth de Jeude and her daughter and son, Emily and Adrian. Longtime members of the Vancouver Folk Song Society and familiar faces at the Princeton Festival, most of their repertoire on this occasion was from North American traditions, including a few songs sung a cappella.

Local Ale

Although she also sang a few traditional ballads, Jasmine Fiona’s concert on this occasion mainly consisted of children’s songs. She was followed by a group new to Princeton, the Diggers. They consist of
Earle Peach, a musician, social activist and the conductor of Solidarity Notes Choir, Regina Brennan, a full-time union rep for the Public Service Alliance of Canada, and Dan Keeton, a freelance journalist and host of Co-op Radio’s “Union Made”. The Diggers seek to portray in story and song the evolution of workers’ rights, won through hard-fought campaigns.

The core of this group, who made their debut at the previous year’s festival, is a duo consisting of Dr. Doug Reid and retired school teacher Yvonne Harper. They sometimes get help from ex-Princeton physician David Reid and/or Ken Freshwater from Scotland. The group performs mainly Scottish and Cornish traditional songs.

The Free Reeds workshop, another Princeton tradition, provided an opportunity for virtuoso performances on harmonicas, accordions, melodeons and concertinas. It was followed by a concert of songs about the Princeton region and British Columbia by Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat, with a couple of francophone songs from Acadie and Quebec thrown in for good measure.

Stewart Hendrickson’s set featured a number of Irish slow airs played unaccompanied on the fiddle, which provided a good lead in to the Irish Jam workshop that followed. Then came Pasties ‘n’ Porridge.

Doc & Nak (Mike and Nakos Marker) then entertained with a concert of traditional American material, including several blues showcasing Nakos’ dobro playing. Another American duo, The Holdstocks (Dick and Carol) also sang and played traditional music from the United States, this time with a focus on songs from California. Accompanying themselves on guitar, mandolin or autoharp, they sang traditional ballads, songs of the sea, old time tavern songs, songs of the California gold rush and songs of social significance.

Rika Ruebsaat and Jon Bartlett

Pasties and Porridge

The Holdstocks
Then it was time for some more francophone music. Suzanne Leclerc and Bryn Wilkin, otherwise known as Vazzy, underpinned their performance of traditional French-Canadian and Métis songs with fiddle, foot percussion, banjo, spoons, mandolin, bodhran, harmonica, and jaw harp.

The final performers of the day on the Vermilion Stage were the Solidarity Notes Labour Choir. Under the direction of Earle Peach, this seventy-piece choir has been performing on picket lines, demonstrations and at benefits since 2000. They believe that music is a powerful language to educate and inspire people, reminding us of our strength and history. Their heartfelt choral music provided a rousing and fitting end to the concert part of the Festival. The 2012 Festival concluded with a traditional singalong in the Gazebo, culminating with Jon and Rika’s daughter Morgan Bartlett leading the assembled throng in “Lowlands Away” (another Princeton festival tradition, commenced a couple of years previously). Then Orkestar Šlivovica appeared again, trumpets and saxophones wailing, to lead a final musical march around the streets of Princeton.