

About Phil

Few musicians play the hammered dulcimer. Fewer still sing while accompanying themselves on this fascinating instrument, whose name means “beautiful song.” Phil Passen does both.

Phil plays and sings primarily old-time American and traditional Irish music. Can such upbeat dance music be called soothing? With rhythmic playing on fast tunes and sensitive playing on slow numbers, Phil’s music often elicits that word – “soothing.” And though it may seem contradictory, listeners also dub the music “happy” and “bouncy” as they tap their feet to the beat. The songs he sings include familiar American folk songs such as *You Are My Sunshine* and *The Sloop John B*; old-time songs such as *Sail Away Ladies* and *Coo Coo Bird*; and contemporary folk songs such as *Kilkelly, Ireland* and *Hot Buttered Rum*.

Phil played for 500 people at Borders State Street store in Chicago for Maeve Binchy’s only U.S. autographing. He frequently performs for the Chicago Department of Aviation’s tourist programs at O’Hare Airport, where travelers often thank him for providing pleasure on a stressful day, and at the Green City Market. He also played in the World Symphony Orchestra’s performance of *The Lord of the Rings Symphony* at Chicago’s Auditorium Theater.

Phil regularly performs at area libraries, and is included in the *Best of the Best* by the Library Administrators and Coordinators of Northern Illinois. Library patrons and staff alike react with delight and enthusiasm to the mix of music and information in Phil’s programs. Audiences are fascinated by the uncommon, trapezoidal- shaped hammered dulcimer. After Phil’s performances, members of the audience, young and old, musicians and non-musicians, come up to take a closer look at the dulcimer and try their hand at it.

Phil's newest CD, *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp: Music of the Civil War on Hammered Dulcimer* is a fascinating solo recording of music commemorating the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. The hammered dulcimer was popular in the United States during the Civil War, and music of that era seems right at home played on this unique instrument. Many tunes and songs in this program are still familiar today, such as *The Girl I Left Behind Me*; *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*; *Home, Sweet, Home*; *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys are Marching*. Others, such as *Lorena*; *Lincoln and Liberty*; *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, *The Marching Song of the First Arkansas Regiment*; *Shiloh Hill*; and *John Brown's Dream* are less familiar but just as beautiful, rousing, and inspiring.

Phil's second CD, with guitarist Tom Conway, is *Cold Frosty Morning: Christmas and Winter Holiday Music*. Beautiful melodies such as *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* and *What Child Is This*; old favorites such as *My Dreidl*, *Jingle Bell Rock* and *Here Comes Santa Claus*; and contemporary songs such as *Winter Solstice* and *Hot Buttered Rum* are featured on this diverse and exciting recording.

Swinging on a Gate: Traditional American and Celtic Music, Phil's first CD, was a "most popular" choice on Amazon.com. The all-instrumental CD, with Phil on hammered dulcimer and Tom Conway on guitar, features old-time American dance and fiddle tunes and Celtic music. Tunes include *Twin Sisters*, *Bonaparte's Retreat*, *Miss MacLeod's Reel*, and *John Ryan's Polka*.

Phil was born in Toledo, Ohio; grew up in Monroe, Michigan and Toledo; and graduated from high school in Ashtabula, Ohio. He attended Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, before participating as a full-time activist in the antiwar and civil rights movement of the 1960's and 70's.

After Phil and his wife, writer Barbara Gregorich, settled in the Chicago area in the early seventies, they joined the Old Town School of Folk

Music, and Phil began to itch to play an instrument. He really wanted to play the drums, but the set he had in mind didn't fit into a nine hundred square foot apartment.

Although Phil heard the hammered dulcimer for the first time on John McCutcheon recordings in the late seventies, he didn't immediately make the connection between hammering strings and hammering drum heads. Finally, at a John McCutcheon concert at the Old Town School in 1994, the light dawned. Inspired anew as John played the dulcimer, Phil thought: "I can do that." And now he does.

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