

Press Release

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The Time Travelers - Joe & Paula McHugh

Bringing America's rich history to life through storytelling, music, and art.

Joe McHugh is a fiddler and storyteller whose powers of imagination and infectious sense of humor hearken back to the likes of Mark Twain and Will Rogers. Paula McHugh is a gifted visual artist and musician. Together as *The Time Travelers* the McHughes transport audiences back through time weaving together legends, tall tales, and little-known historical facts with authentic fiddle, banjo, and “courting” dulcimer duets, as well as projected images of original paintings. A bountiful feast for ear and eye that is sure to delight the intellect and nourish the soul.

“One of the finest storytellers in North America”

~U. Utah Phillips

Place:

Time:

Tickets:

The Time Travelers: Keeping Alive the Long Memory

An evening of traditional old-time music, storytelling, and original art.

Joe and Paula McHugh are practitioners of enchantment, conjurers of the imagination, and traveling minstrels of delight. The tools of their trade are the artfully told story, lively musical duets, and paintings that bewitch the eye and touch the soul.

“There are two kinds of history as I see it,” Joe says, “the formal history that gets written down long after something important has happened, a big battle, for instance, or the assassination of a president. That kind of history needs time, generations often, to get all the details right. But there is another kind of history that is recorded during or right after something meaningful happens. Someone is inspired to compose a ballad or a fiddle tune, create a legend or tall tale. It is this living kind of history telling that Paula and I love to share with others.”

Joe and Paula McHugh call themselves *The Time Travelers* and they transport audiences back in time to the folkways of the Trans-Appalachian pioneers, the rough and ready days of the California gold rush, the injustices of slavery and building of the underground railroad, the divided loyalties of the Civil War, the myth and reality of the western cowboy, the perils of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression—even the crazy challenges faced by the back-to-the-landers of the 1970s.

“I was a back-to-the-lander myself,” Joe says. “I grew up in the city but moved to the hills of West Virginia when I was just twenty. I bought a farm and learned to plow and cut hay using horses. That’s also when I fell in love with the fiddle and the old songs and stories.”

Paula McHugh grew up in the Midwest and has played the banjo and dulcimer for thirty years. She is also an accomplished artist whose paintings are inspired by the titles of fiddle tunes and folk songs.

“The titles of many of the old tunes evoke in me powerful images and feelings,” Paula says. “*Soapsuds Over the Fence*, *Forked Deer*, *Sally in the Green Corn*, *Steamboat Around the Bend*, each represents a unique slice of American history, our history.”

Paula works primarily in oils and egg tempera.

“I love looking at old photographs and I spend a lot of time perusing archives of historical photographs in search of just the right face or a particular landscape. I then use that one element to create my painting. It is not about nostalgia. It’s about tapping into our collective mythic memory. I don’t know why but I find it a deeply satisfying experience.”

“The way it works in our show,” Joe says, “is that I begin by telling a story about a legendary character such as Daniel Boone or Annie Oakley or how a wound received in a duel in 1837 caused the death of a Confederate general twenty-five years later at the battle of Shiloh. I might recite a poem about a gun-wielding railroad bull named East Texas Red or sing the praises of a medicine show pitchman and his cure-all liver elixir. Then we play a fiddle and banjo tune related to the story while projecting an image of Paula’s painting inspired by the title of the tune.

“I also play fiddle while Paula dances a limberjack doll on a bouncing board, a gold miner with his pick and shovel, perhaps, or a three-legged chicken. We also demonstrate how a “courting” dulcimer was used to bring young sweethearts together. The shows provides a banquet for the ears, eyes, and the imagination and it’ll get you laughing, too.”

Joe sees himself as inheritor of a venerable tradition of oral storytelling going back to Davy Crocket, Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, and Will Rogers in which humor played a vital part.

“Times were often difficult and some people were cruelly treated but many used humor and music as a way to survive and encourage those who would follow after them,” says Joe. “I don’t try to sugarcoat history, but I do want the people of today to appreciate the courage, determination, ingenuity, kindness, and ability to laugh at oneself that helped forge this great nation.”

The McHughs have traveled far and wide sharing their stories, music, and paintings. They have performed at colleges, festivals, museums, and theaters throughout the United States and in Europe. When they are not touring, Joe writes books and produces programs for public radio while Paula paints and cares for her garden. Joe’s current radio project and

oral history for the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History is titled *Rosin the Bow, a Fascinating Journey Through the World of the Violin Family*. The project web site is: www.rosinthebow.org