

Good Time Music



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One hundred years ago, musicians in downtown Louisville traveled from corner to corner playing songs on nontraditional instruments like [whisky jugs](#) (“the poor man’s tuba”) and washboards, accompanied by banjos, fiddles and guitars. The sound became known as jug music. On Saturday, September 18, the 6th Annual National Jug Band Jubilee is bringing the music back to its birthplace.

“Jug band music is called River Music and now we’re on the river,” says Heather Leoncini, president of the [National Jug Band Jubilee](#). “We love it. This will be our third year in Waterfront Park at the Brown-Foreman Amphitheater. Every year we are attracting more people. There is a huge contingent that comes from out of town for this – as far as California, New Jersey and New York.”

The National Jug Band Jubilee is a free, all-day festival that celebrates a pre-jazz style made popular in the early 1900s by Louisville musicians like Clifford Hayes, Earl McDonald and [Sarah Martin](#). By the time jug music reached its peak in the 1930s, it had infiltrated towns up and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Jug music also inspired the skiffle craze in England, which gave rise to bands like [The Beatles](#) and [The Lovin’ Spoonful](#).

In the 1960s, the Folk Revival led to the rediscovery of much pre-World War II American folk music. [Jim Kweskin](#) and Geoff Maulder, the headliners for this year’s National Jug Band Jubilee, were leading lights in that movement. Their group, Kweskin’s Jug Band, made several recordings for [Vanguard Records](#) that influenced artists like Bob Dylan, the Grateful Dead and the Rolling Stones.

Another person inspired by Kweskin’s Jug Band was Leoncini’s father, Steve Drury, who died this past November. Drury, who was known as [Dr. Gil Fish](#), and some friends at Waggener High School started a jug band for a talent show. The group morphed into the [Juggernaut Jug Band](#) and ended up playing jug music for the next 40 years.

“He was always a funny, outgoing crazy kind of dad,” Leoncini says. “I came home from college (at Clark University in Massachusetts) one day to find his antique, upright bass tucked into my bed. It was like he’d given my room away to his bass. It didn’t faze me. I grew up with band practice in the basement. I was used to having a bunch of crazy musicians around all the time.”

It was good preparation for her job as president of the National Jug Band Jubilee. Leoncini, 38, lives in Crescent Hill and works for NewPanda.com, an online marketing firm located on Patterson Street in the Highlands. For a long time, her father dreamed about creating a jug band festival, but the opportunity did not come until he met Rod Wenz, a former public relations executive.

“It was late at night and we were leaving this ragtime festival in Birmingham, Alabama,” remembers Gloria Wenz, Rod’s widow. “We heard this strange music and we went to listen. It was the Juggernaut Jug Band. We didn’t know what jug music was. After the show we started talking to them and Rod asked where they were from. Fish said, ‘It’s a place you probably never heard of, Louisville, Kentucky.’ We lived half a mile away from him and ended up meeting in Alabama.”

Rod Wenz began researching the history of jug music. He and Fish also started planning an event. Fish was too busy playing music to do a lot of organizing, but by then Leoncini had graduated from college. He just volunteered her. “I think my dad asked me,” Leoncini says with a laugh. “I think it was a question. I had sort of been working with the band a little bit, helping them maintain their website and sending out press releases, when he called and said this guy was



Heather Leoncini, president of the National Jug Band Jubilee, leads the festival that her father, Steve Drury, co-founded. Drury, known as Dr. Gil Fish from the Juggernaut Jug Band, passed away last year. Here, Leoncini visits her dad’s office where concert posters remain intact on the walls and ceiling. (Photo: Brianbohannon.com)

interested in doing something. It seemed like a good fit.”



Heather Leoncini takes in the array of posters in her father's old office. “Honestly, when my dad passed away, it was not even an option not to keep going,” Leoncini says of the annual jug band festival that her dad helped start, now in its sixth year. (Photo: Brianbohannon.com)

The first National Jug Band Jubilee was in 2005. It was a concert on the Belle of Louisville with performances by the Juggernauts and the Cincinnati Dancing Pigs. They had expected 200 people, but 400 people paid \$50 a ticket and they loved it. The second jubilee was an outdoor festival on Frankfort Avenue on the property of the St. Joseph Children's Home. In 2007, they held the festival in the Iroquois Amphitheater. Since 2008, the National Jug Band Jubilee has had an agreement with the Waterfront Development Agency to use the Brown-Foreman Amphitheater on the third Saturday in September.

“After Rod passed (in 2008), Gloria, his widow, said straight up, ‘We have to keep this going,’” Leoncini remembers. “Of course, my dad and I agreed. He got more involved and helped me keep last year's stuff going. Honestly, when my dad passed away, it was not even an option not to keep going. When Rod passed away, I thought that was a hard year. Needless to say, this year has been a million times harder.”

The 2010 National Jug Band Jubilee will include a tribute to both of the festival founders. It will also include the first inductions to the Jug Band Hall of Fame. The gates open at noon and festivities are expected to go on until around midnight.

“One of my favorite things is when we do the workshops at the jubilee and little kids come up and learn how to play,” Leoncini says. “I always smile when I see little kids playing [washboards and jugs](#). That signifies to me that the music is going to keep going on.”

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