



Lifestyle

'Hawkeye' Herman

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For the Daily Tidings
July 26, 2010 2:00 AM

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For the past 32 years, Michael "Hawkeye" Herman has been explaining that "blues is the roots and everything else is the fruits" to more than half a million children in more than 500 schools spanning 25 states and eight foreign countries through his Blues in the Schools program.

Herman moved to Ashland in 1999 to work at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival for a play for which he had written the music.

A performance in Ashland by Hawkeye Herman can be a rare event as Herman prefers not to work where he lives. "I don't have to worry about playing in clubs here in the Rogue Valley until late at night and carrying equipment and setting up equipment," said Herman, "and the reason why I say that is because I spent between 25 and 30 years doing that all over the country to get to the level to play festivals and concerts."

Herman was accompanied in his performance at the Tidings Café by Southern Oregon University professor and harmonica player Irving Lubliner who has been playing for about 42 years. The two seasoned blues men traveled light to the Tidings newsroom on a sweltering afternoon. Lubliner and Herman fell into synch, performing an original song written by Herman. Striking is the level of professionalism demonstrated by these musicians.

Other than being a professional musician, Herman also is a blues educator, visiting schools and universities all over the United States and Europe. "That's a really important part of what I do, along with two other musicians, Billy Branch and Fruteland Jackson," said Herman. "We're the three main blues educators who tour the country and also do Europe in terms of going into schools and universities explaining to people that blues is the roots and everything else is the fruits."

The work of teaching younger generations about the blues and leading workshops have fit well

into Herman's touring schedule of blues festivals and concerts during the weekends. As Herman explains, he found that while touring in the early 1970s he needed work during the week when he was on the road.

"I have an older sister and she lived in the Midwest and she asked if I would be interested in going to my niece's second-grade class and playing the guitar for the kids and talking to them about blues," said Herman. "I went and it was great. I had a great time, and that's what started the blues in the schools program."

One might ask, just where does a blues educator go to learn about the blues? For Herman, it was Berkeley in the late '60s. "From about 1967 to 1974 there was a Berkeley Blues festival that went on at the UC Berkeley campus and they brought all these really great unbelievably famous blues men to the UC Berkley campus to not only perform but to give workshops and to have one-on-ones with musicians and fans," said Herman.

Herman, who lived about six blocks from the campus, would go busking (performing in public places for tips) nearby playing for college students. He also frequented coffee houses where blues musicians were known to play.

"I sat close and watched and learned from people like Lightnin' Hopkins and Son House and Bukka White and Furry Lewis and Brownie McGhee was a friend of mine and John Jackson and Sam Chatmon and all these old blues guys that are now just sort of dusty, old photos and anybody who is under 50-years-old wonders what they were like," said Herman. "I not only got to see those guys play, but got to learn from them and have personal interaction with them."

The lessons that Herman received from legendary blues musicians allowed him to make a living in music since 1975. With the tutoring of his early blues mentors and the years of experience that come with being a blues musician, Herman's message for school kids began to take shape.

"Blues that sprang from African-American culture influenced and helped create the rest of American popular music," said Herman. "Kids don't learn that generally in the course of being in school, and I think it's very important that they do."

The main point Herman hopes to drive home is the affect blues has had on our popular culture. And one way he conveys this message is through his song based on a Willie Dixon quote, that the "blues is the roots and the rest is the fruits."

"I can tell you that I frequently will be at a blues festival and will bump into people who will say 'You're Hawkeye. You were at my school 25 years ago.' And that person will have three little kids with them. So I can see the impact and they will say to me, 'the blues had a baby and called it rock 'n' roll, that's the song you sang for us,' " Herman said.

"That is exactly my lesson, in one little song, the blues had a baby and they called it rock 'n' roll, and that's an easy way to remember the influence of blues music and where it came from on our modern culture."

The popularity of hip hop and rap along with other forms of pop music is why Herman feels the responsibility to educate kids about the history of music.

"Most of what people know about music is from pop music and my point is, that blues music actually influenced and laid the groundwork for what we know today as pop music," said Herman.

As Herman finished his Tidings Café performance and headed out the door, to continue his blues crusade one can't help but wonder what lies ahead for the future of blues. Perhaps someday future generations will talk about getting to interact with the legendary blues man Hawkeye Herman.



Michael "Hawkeye" Herman, right, and Southern Oregon University professor Irving Lubliner perform at the Tidings Café in the Ashland Daily Tidings newsroom