

## Musicians march to a different drum

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On any given weekend, in countless bars throughout Springfield, you can hear people playing rock 'n' roll or country music.

If you want a change of pace, you might have to look a little harder. But it's out there.

Three local musicians are among those straying off the beaten path in pursuit of sounds not commonly heard in these parts.

### **“Playing nature”**

Paul Van Heuklom of Chatham doesn't play in public venues that much — but he'd like to.

He thinks there would be an audience for his Native American flute.

“It seems that whenever you play, you can get a crowd around you pretty quickly,” Van Heuklom said.

Most people have heard the haunting and spiritual sound of the Native American flute, even if they don't realize it. The instrument is featured in the scores of movies such as “Dances with Wolves” and “Last of the Mohicans.” Its atmospheric quality can be quite evocative.

“Some people will say that it's really relaxing. Others will say that it triggers memories. I've heard stories of people being brought to tears. I'd like to get good enough to have that kind of power,” he said.

The 51-year-old Lincoln Land Community College humanities professor first took up the Native American flute a couple of years ago. In his experience, that's the age a lot of men who play discover the instrument.

“I hate to say that it's a midlife-crisis sort of thing — flutes instead of red Corvettes,” he joked.

Van Heuklom began playing the Native American flute after trying to learn the type of breathing needed to play the didgeridoo, a wind instrument played by aborigines in Australia. After hearing a woman play the Native American flute, Van Heuklom learned he would not need to master the same type of breathing needed to play a didgeridoo and purchased a flute on the Internet.

Both the Native American flute's sound and the experience of playing can be relaxing and provide an escape from the stresses of daily life.

“It's incredibly healing and therapeutic,” Van Heuklom said. “It's almost a meditative experience, like in Zen.”

Van Heuklom plays some traditional songs, along with standards that have been transposed to the flute's scale. But he really enjoys improvising and "playing nature."

"You can imitate birds or wolves. Or you can play the tree line. As the tree line goes up, you go up the scales," he said.

In traditional Native American culture, men would use the flute to woo mates. Once that was accomplished, the man would no longer play. That the flute has been adopted for purposes of entertainment or enjoyment, and is also played by women, doesn't sit well with some tribal members.

"What we're keeping alive is not a strict tradition; it's an evolved form of the flute," Van Heuklom explained.

Traditionally, flutes were custom made to a person's body, with the length corresponding to the forearm and the space between holes to the width of the thumb. Because of this, the tuning varied greatly from flute to flute.

It wasn't until the instrument was standardized to a Western pentatonic (five-note) musical scale that it could be played in ensembles or adapted to popular songs.

Although the Native American flute has evolved over time, the spirit of the instrument remains. Van Heuklom related a saying that not only applies to his musical experience, but to that of everyone who is passionate about playing music.

"It's said that the flute maker removes the heart of a branch. It is up to the player, then, to replace it with his own."

### **Picking up sticks**

Nat Radwine, 53, always wanted to be a drummer. But his family persuaded him that his musical talent would be put to better use elsewhere.

He began playing bassoon in the fifth grade, and the self-described school "band geek" went on to play tenor sax in the University of Illinois marching band.

But the beat kept calling.

After graduating from college, the Springfield resident purchased a drum set. But it wasn't until 1995, when he was in his late 30s, that he first played as a professional percussionist.

Radwine started out playing with a blues-based rock band, but he was always looking to expand his musical horizons.

"I always jump at the chance to play different types of music, especially percussion-based," Radwine said.

He found an opportunity when a local acquaintance was putting together a Brazilian percussion ensemble. That group has since evolved into a Springfield bossa nova cover band called the Samba Llamas that at various times features vocals, flute, bass, guitar and up to four drummers.

"The rhythm in that band is all authentic Brazilian instruments," he said.

Radwine — who has studied music in Cuba, among other places — got to hear just how authentic the Samba Llamas are while traveling in Brazil.

“I went to a club and I heard pagode-samba and it was really thrilling,” Radwine said. “It really authenticated what we were doing here.”

Although he calls Latin music his first love, Radwine, a real-estate appraiser, has since explored and found success in other genres.

While he was the owner of Crow’s Mill School, a Springfield bar that hosted live music, Radwine got to know a lot of local musicians, including many drummers whose work he is quick to praise. These connections led to an invitation to join Stone Ring Circle, a modern Celtic band that today is known as the Emerald Underground.

“We call our music Celtic-fusion because it’s not just rock-based. There’s influences of jazz, traditional, even some Latin influences in some of the rhythms,” he said.

Radwine occasionally plays a bodhran, the traditional Irish drum. But because of the Emerald Underground’s style of music, he usually requires a traditional drum set.

“It’s hard in this format to get the volume to drive a band that’s seven pieces with (a bodhran),” he said.

The Emerald Underground is making its way onto the Irish festival circuit, where it can play in front of thousands of Celtic-music-loving fans at a time. But Radwine also loves playing more intimate, bimonthly gigs at Celtic Mist in Springfield.

“We really feed off of crowd interaction, and when you’re that close to the people, sometimes it’s even better,” he said.

### **Musical walkabout**

On Tuesdays, the lunch-hour crowd can hear the strains of traditional folk music at the Trout Lily Cafe. A closer listen to the lyrics, however, reveals something slightly different.

“If they miss the introductions where I say that I’m playing Australian folk songs, they kind of look at me like, ‘What language are you speaking?’” said musician Kathryn Raistrick.

Raistrick, 60, of Springfield explained that although she sings in a familiar tongue — and many of the songs cover common topics of love, home, work and the sea — it’s still foreign enough lyrically, and occasionally thematically, to elicit strange responses.

“They’ve got a lot an awful lot more sheep-shearing songs,” she said of the artists from the island continent whose songs she performs.

“You would think because it’s English that it would be the same, but it’s not. There’s a whole vocabulary for sheep shearing and a whole vocabulary for the sea.”

As president of the Prairie Grapevine Folklore Society, Raistrick, a retired state worker, is instrumental in keeping American folk traditions alive in Springfield. With her voice and guitar, she’s also taking Australian folk traditions on a walkabout across continents.

Raistrick isn’t Australian by birth, but she has forged a kinship with the continent’s musical heritage.

“About 30 years ago I went to Australia, and while I was there I heard some of the music and I just fell in love with it. When I decided to (perform), I figured no one else is doing it and it’s fun and it’s different,” she said.

Raistrick said she’s always been drawn to odd or funny songs. She also likes to make people think while they’re listening.

“They can get the Top 40 on the radio and hear what’s popular on ‘American Idol.’ But there are more than a few people who like to hear different types of songs,” she said.

Not everyone who hears her lunchtime gigs finds the music strange. With an international tourist attraction just down the road at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, it’s not terribly uncommon for an Aussie to stop in — an experience Raistrick says she always enjoys.

“At one point I was singing a song that mentioned the town of Ballarat (about 70 miles northwest of Melbourne) and a woman said, “That’s where I had my first baby,”” she recalled, laughing.

### **Want to go?**

\* The Emerald Underground, with Nat Radwine on drums and percussion, can be heard live in downtown Springfield at the Old Capitol Art Fair on May 16 or at Celtic Mist on May 28. CDs and merchandise are available via the band’s Web site, [www.theemeraldunderground.net](http://www.theemeraldunderground.net).

\* Kathryn Raistrick performs from noon to 1 p.m. Tuesdays at the Trout Lily Cafe. Her CD, “Australian Songs,” is for sale via her Web site, [www.klraistrick.com](http://www.klraistrick.com).

\* Paul Van Heuklom is available for live performances. Contact him at [paul@nafluteplayer.com](mailto:paul@nafluteplayer.com)

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