



Submitted photos

Jean Mann, who will be returning this year, performs on stage at the Astor Street Opry Company during the 2014 gathering. Mann performs original songs on her four-stringed tenor guitar.

TENOR GUITARS TAKE THE STAGE

Story by CATE GABLE

Bring your four-strings to the sixth annual Tenor Guitar Gathering (TGG6) — May 28 to 31 in Astoria — including more than 10 workshops, over 20 musicians and four evenings of live performance. But who's counting?

Tuned and Ready

Certainly not Mark Josephs, the founder of this amazing event and now president of the Tenor Guitar Foundation, a nonprofit this gathering spawned. "I'm not sure exactly how many people we've had attending in the past or how many we can expect this year. I'm just glad that we've been able to keep bringing in the quality of talented musicians that we've had over the years. Now it's getting so people are calling us," he says, in his typically sunny fashion.

A mere six years ago, the idea of a tenor guitar gathering was a gleam in Josephs' eye. He and his wife had just scoured the coast looking for a fun place to retire and had landed on Astoria. When Josephs mentioned the idea of a tenor guitar gathering to Gordon Styler, then-owner of the Astoria Guitar Company, he discovered his co-founder. That first year Styler's shop became ground zero for the gathering.

The spectacle quickly outgrew the guitar shop venue, in the manner of Josephs' comment about Styler's tremendous support, "You play one note and you build a chord around it and maybe a song, but it all starts from the one note."

Josephs' one note became part of a chord on a tenor guitar that is tuned again and ready to go. This year the main events will be held at Pier 39; the big room is for concerts and the small room in the Rogue Ale Public House will house the workshops.

The ad hoc planning for that first year's gathering created traditions that have lasted — the Tenor Guitar Serenade on the Trolley, followed by

luncheon and live performance at the Bridgewater Bistro; the evening performances; and the workshops. The formula has been tweaked slightly over the years, but the biggest change has simply been the momentum the gathering has generated since its founding. Now there is also a tenor guitar newsletter, the nonprofit Tenor Guitar Foundation, and a Tenor Guitar Hall of Fame (all available online here: www.tenorguitarfoundation.org)

What's New

"I've decided to organize the event a little differently this year," said Josephs by phone. (He is a supportive care service representative at an outpatient cancer center in Los Angeles until he can retire full-time and join wife, Karen, in their Astoria home.) Because there are many ways to tune a tenor guitar — following the tunings of other four- or six-stringed instruments — this year's event will group similar tuning styles onto the same days. Thursday, May 28 is dedicated to the so-called Chicago tuning, including all workshops and the evening performances. Chicago tuning is identical

to the top four strings of a regular guitar or a baritone ukulele. (Nick Reynolds, one of the founding members of the Kingston Trio used this tuning because he favored the slightly louder sound it provides.)

Saturday, May 30, will feature the traditional CGDA / GDAE in-fifths tuning, following a traditional banjo tuning. This is also a violin tuning sometimes called Irish Tuning. And Sunday, May 31 — with an added evening concert at the Astor Street Opry Company this year — will be all about the Mandolin and related tunings.

What's great

But don't be intimidated by this array of tunings and tenor-guitar insider lingo. Yes, if you're a musician, you'll find the workshops are friendly, informative and rockin'. The range includes how to build your own cigar-box electric guitar, an introduction to music from the Balkans, classic rock, honky tonk, and triad tunings. But for the general public, what this gathering means is three days of superlative and incomparable finger-pickin' magic, delivered by some of the best contemporary folk musicians in the country.



Attendees of the 2014 Tenor Guitar Gathering pose for a photo after riding the Astoria Trolley.



From left, Gerry Carthy, John Lawlor, Tom Molyneux, Mark Josephs, Stephen Schauer and Tim May take a photo at the Rogue Ales Public House Banquet Room during last year's Tenor Guitar Gathering. All but Molyneux and Schauer will be returning this year.

Some of these musician have been hidden away quietly doing their own thing, like Philly guitarist John Lawlor. One of the TGG organizers got a call about Lawlor's phenomenal talent on the tenor, and now he'll be onstage in Astoria. Plans are even in the works for a Lawlor CD

Jean Mann will be returning this year. Stan Jones, writer of the song "Ghost Riders in the Sky," will be inducted into the Tenor Guitar Hall of Fame. Author Mike Ward will be on hand, as will a relative of Stan Jones, Keetet Stuart. Erich Sylvester, Carl Allen, Ben Serkin, Josh Reynolds (Nick's son) and John August will perform. And don't forget Mark Josephs himself — he plays a hot guitar. Gerry Carthy, Tim May, Pat Mac Swyney, Steve Ramsey, Ez Marc, and Douglas Fraser are also on stage. It's a massive talent explosion.

Because the gathering is attracting such a colossal group of accomplished musicians, Josephs wanted to provide more stage time. So the Saturday concert starts at 3 p.m. with a dinner break from 5:30 to 7 p.m. and then continues and will run "probably until 9:30 p.m. or so. It was like a big puzzle," says Josephs. "On paper it looks good! Every year I plan it as best I can and then just step back and let the thing take over."

Another change is that the traditional Sunday morning jam is being replaced by a full-blown evening performance. This grand finale concert takes place from 6 to 8 p.m. Sunday at the Astor Street Opry Company Playhouse, a bargain at \$15. (You can also wander into the Astoria Sunday Market food court for free and hear some hot tenor guitar performances during the day from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.)

Community Participation

Community support has also development over the years. As Josephs says, "I cannot stress enough how much the community of Astoria really makes events like the FisherPoets, the Astoria Music Festival, or the Tenor Guitar Gatherings thrive. Astoria is a Camelot-like magical place that embraces the creative, the musical, the artistic."

KMUN was an early sponsor, and Carol Newman has continued to follow the TGG experience over the years. Her entire Friday show, from 3 to 4 p.m. May 29, will be devoted to the guitar gathering.

Many individuals, organizations and businesses



Former National Park Ranger Stan Jones, who wrote the song "Ghost Riders in the Sky," will be inducted into the Tenor Guitar Hall of Fame this year. The ceremony will take place at the May 28 concert at Rogue Ales Public House Banquet Room, which starts at 7 p.m. Keeter Stuart, Jones' relative, will accept the award and perform some of Jones' songs on tenor guitar.



Tim May, of Nashville, Tennessee, performs during last year's Tenor Guitar Gathering at the Astor Street Opry Company Playhouse on a \$3,500 Collings tenor guitar, sent by luthier Bill Collings for May to play at the event. May crafted the tenor guitar on the stand, right, himself.

have stepped up to donate to, participate or become involved in TGG some way. This year, an additional feature of the gathering will be a "Back Stage Pass" evening concert, Friday, May 29, sponsored by RiverSea Gallery. Doors open at 6:45 p.m.; music starts at 7 p.m. For a ticket price of \$40 you can schmooze with the musicians in an intimate setting, hear some great music, sample finger foods, sip wine and get your favorite CD autographed.

Every aspect of the gathering uses local talent and expertise from Dave McMacken's new poster design, to the delicious food at the Bridgewater Bistro and Rogue Ales Public House, to printing at Laserquick. And Astoria has responded in kind. On May 4, Mayor Arline LaMear proposed, and Astoria City Council members approved, a proclamation "inviting all citizens to join in the events celebrating the Tenor Guitar Weekend in Astoria."

Good advice!



Astoria Sunday Market vendor Alan Matta brought his cigar-box-guitar-making skills to last year's Tenor Guitar Gathering with a Build Your Own Electric Cigar Box Guitar Workshop. Due to popular demand, the workshop is back at this year's gathering, taking place from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday at the Pier 39 Banquet Room. Participants walk away with a three-string slide cigar box guitar.

Concerts

For a complete schedule and ticketing information for this year's Tenor Guitar Gathering, visit www.tenorguitarfoundation.org

Chicago Tuning / Ukulele Concert

7 p.m. Thursday, May 28
Pier 39 Banquet Room
\$40

Backstage Pass

7 p.m. Friday, May 29
RiverSea Gallery
1160 Commercial St., Astoria
\$40

Afternoon & Evening of Tenor Guitars

3 p.m. Saturday, May 30
Pier 39 Banquet Room
\$40

Ending concert

6 to 8 p.m. Sunday, May 31
ASOC Playhouse
129 W. Bond St., Astoria
\$15

Catch a glimpse of John Lawlor's slick licks here:

"Exactly Like You" — www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTjm60tm2WY

"Wives and Lovers" — www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ac18GU8ft0Q

If you'd like to join others who've donated to support this event, become a Tenor Guitar Angel by visiting www.tenorguitarfoundation.org/tenor-angels.htm