

The Timberbound Project: Reviving Old Songs *continued from front page*

songs like "Reotruck Drivingman," "The Boys of Columbia County," and "Cedar Beetle Song." He also captured his love for nature, the region, and Kim, in his ballads, "Vine Maple Waltz," "Little Birdy," "The Winter Was Long," and "Same Old Wind."

John Cunnick was a local version of Woody Guthrie, telling tales and spinning yarns about work, love and friends, and preserving the essence of a time and place. He even wrote what could be called a protest song, "Down There On Baseline," which belittles the plight of laborers working in a vegetable cannery in Hillsboro and their relationship to the corporation that controls them. Unlike Guthrie, Cunnick didn't have any kind words for the local union in his song.

Originally from Ohio, John dropped out of school in 1962 and ran away from home when he was just thirteen. He was self-educated, bounced around working odd jobs to support himself, even working as a writer and editor in Seattle, before drifting down to Oregon in his twenties. He loved words, he loved to entertain and he loved to laugh. Reading his words you can tell he had a knack for picking out the absurdities in life and seemed to relished the opportunity to make fun of them, as well as himself.

John was thirty years old when he lived in Vernonia; he was only there for one short year but he made a lasting impression on almost everyone who knew him. He was killed in a tragic car accident in January of 1977 while traveling over Mist Mountain, sliding off the road in a snowstorm and into a ravine. His car and body were not found for several days. After a soulful wake John was buried at the end of Keasey Road on private property; an apple tree, which still stands, was planted to mark the spot of his grave.

Kim Cunnick continued to play the songs she and John had written together, forming a band called Timberbound, along with their friends Hobe Kytr, Dave Berge, and Mark Loring. In 1977 Kim published the "Timberbound Songbook" a collection of John's lyrics, the tunes she wrote and beautiful and haunting photographs of John, Kim, their friends and of John's funeral service. The cover art work was drawn by current Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde, a good friend of John's. The book's final song was written by Hobe Kytr, "Enterprise In Disguise (Ballad of John Cunnick)" a tribute to his lost friend. The songbook also includes notes, written by John, on many of the songs, as well as essays he had written about how to play various stringed instruments, giving a reader a real glimpse into John's style, his personality, and his sense of humor.

Kim moved away, remarried, and started a new life. Hobe Kytr and Dave Berge continued to play music together and recorded one album of songs they wrote, "Dog Salmon and Rutabagas," folksongs which also capture the spirit of that time in Vernonia, Asto-

ria, and along the Columbia River. The Timberbound Songbook is now out of print; those that own one of the limited copies cherish it. People around the region played the songs, but few were ever recorded or released. John and Kim Cunnick's songs were in danger of, if not disappearing, of being forgotten.



The original members of Timberbound: Dave Berge, Kim Cunnick, Hobe Kytr and Mark Loring. Photo by Jenelle Wiggins.

*There seems to be a gap or so
I won't go into here
And I know there was a sunrise,
WW II was in the air,
But I carry still the name I bore,
Some few that I was called,
And I've prayed at night a child of mine
might bear no name at all.*

Joe Seamons grew up not far from where this story started, in the hills between Vernonia and Rainier. His parents Paul Seamons and Dee Vanda's were part

of the "Keasey crowd," the group of folks, many who still live in the area, who were living, playing, working, dancing and partying in and around Vernonia at that time, especially out along Keasey Road. Joe was raised in the 1980's and 90's listening to the music and songs of John and Kim Cunnick and Hobe Kytr and Dave Berge. There would be annual gatherings-cider pressing parties or grange dances-where young Joe would listen to Hobe and other musicians play the songs live; the Dog Salmon tape was constantly in the family car tape deck. The songs were embedded in Joe's early life.

Seamons started playing music himself when he was sixteen and began performing when he was twenty-one. He played the guitar and other stringed instruments. At Lewis and Clark College Seamons met Gavin Duffy and they have been playing music together ever since. They formed a band, now called the Renegade Stringband, which plays acoustic, fast paced, bluegrass styled music. They occasionally cover a few Timberbound songs. While at Lewis and Clark, Seamons also united with a friend from childhood, Kate Sandgren, a vocalist, and began playing music with her.

Seamons is now twenty-eight, about the same age as John Cunnick when he lived at Keasey. In June of 2010 Kim Cunnick Fergus visited from Costa Rica where she now lives, and returned to Keasey for a two-day Timberbound reunion, an opportunity for the band members to play together, visit with old friends and record some of their music. All four members of the band were on hand when they sat down in a cabin on the same property where John and Kim lived and made video recordings of a handful of the songs. Joe Seamons was also there that weekend. These somewhat unpolished versions of the music are available on YouTube if you search "John Cunnick."

The reunion was a fun and beautiful weekend for everyone involved. Some of the Timberbound songs were recorded and preserved, performed by the original band members. But maybe more importantly, it stirred in Seamons an interest in reviving more of the songs and performing them live.

"At the bottom of it, these are really good songs," said Seamons during a break at a recent concert in May 2103 at the McMennamins Grand Lodge in Forest Grove. "Even if I grew up a long ways from where they were written, if I had stumbled across them and no one else was performing them, I'd like to think that I would be inclined to play them because of the quality and strength of the material. These are really good songs."

Seamons began playing around with the music, developing arrangements and delving more into the history and the stories that surrounded the songs. "There are also the whole layers of nostalgia that attract me to it, of course,"

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The Timberbound Project: Joe Seamons, Kate Sandgren and Gavin Duffy.

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