

An Introduction to Alan Gibbs - the 3RFS Sysop

By Alan Gibbs with Editing and Ad Libs by Harry (doc) Babad

Doc's Introduction

We at the 3-Rivers Folklife Society are blessed with many unsung heroes. Our artists sing, speak or dance for themselves. They're on stage and in the limelight at the festival, concerts, coffee houses and dances. And of course you all know about John and Micki Perry, our founders, and may know (off Stage) Mary Hartman this year's TMF coordinator, and a full time hydrologist to boot.

What you may not be aware of the person behind our incredible useful and up to date website. Yeah, www.3RFS.org is an Alan Gibbs creation.

As we evolve, from just announcing events and sharing our history, to adding an electronic acoustic music article (*Music eTalk*), and now selling our CD set *Front Row Seat* via the internet, Alan's well trained bits and bytes keep you only a few clicks away from what we're up to - all the more current than could be possible via the monthly newsletter Folk Talk.

This article is about Alan with whom, as a computer junkie and Macintosh columnist, it has been my professional pleasure to work. [He still used a Wintel platform, but is loved anyway.] Whether he is dealing with our transition to more electronic circulation of *Folk Talk*, getting lucid feedback on my *Music eTalks* or just making the website a friendlier place for those of your who are less technically addicted - it's all ALAN GIBBS

The following is a lightly edited version of an electronic interview I've had with Alan. I was absolutely delighted and surprised by how broad he and his lady Judi's interests are. And now for the interview feedback.

Tell us how you got involved with folk music and with the 3RFS web site:

Folk Music and More - Actually, my musical interests are broader than just folk. They reflect diverse life experiences. Let me

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begin at the beginning. Back in 1939, I was born in Weaverville, California, the town whose naming was recounted later in a folk song by Mary McCaslin and Jim Ringer. Weaverville is located in the mountains about 100 miles south of Oregon and 100 miles inland from Eureka. Signs at either end of town listed the elevation as 2,045 ft and the population then as 896. Live music was uncommon during the 40s and early 50s - except for a bit of country music, known then as "cowboy music," that I heard at the annual county fair in nearby Hayfork.

There was, of course, AM radio (but no TV yet). The radio was a major piece of furniture, sporting a dozen vacuum tubes in an attractive cabinet. It also received shortwave, and the cabinet housed a player for 78 RPM records.

I recall hearing on the radio songs by Burl Ives, and The Weavers, and those were my first exposure to folk music. Compared to little or only occasional music, radio was a real ear and mind opener. I also recall listening to some bluegrass, plus a lot of early rock and roll (Bill Haley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Elvis, Fats Domino, et al.)

As a teenager, I discovered the program *Pledger at the Opera*, broadcast from San Francisco on KKHI, in which the DJ, Doug Pledger, played recordings of operatic arias. I didn't know then that he mispronounced many of the names. But I knew that I enjoyed the sound, and wondered if I might be Doug's only Weaverville listener. None of my contemporaries shared that interest.



An Early Philco Radio
Phonograph

Comparably, I listened to New York's WQXR — The Chicago theatre of the air, early broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera, lots of baroque, and Tchaikovsky — Folk, other than Yiddish, was unappreciated in my home, as was jazz — We only could afford one radio in those days. Harry

Stanford: Music and a Professional Engineering Education — In 1956, I finished high school and, with a scholarship in hand, left Weaverville for Stanford (Palo Alto, California), planning on an undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering (ME) followed by graduate work in aeronautical engineering. The former happened, the latter did not — but only because I was distracted and attracted when a new nuclear engineering (NE) program was started in the ME department. The program quickly acquired its own faculty and evolved its own courses, heavy in math and physics, and in 1965 I emerged from the NE program with a PhD, plus a graduate minor in math.

During my years at Stanford, I heard a wealth of live music in every imaginable idiom: pop, ethnic, classical, chamber music, opera, even a bit of folk. In 1960, and again in 1963, Ravi Shankar performed on campus, and I was introduced to the classical music of India, an idiom I still enjoy. I also appreciate the Bollywood sound.

After Stanford, I accepted a position in Richland with Battelle, in the "Reactor Physics" department. During the time I was at Battelle, management structure changed frequently, and over the years I was associated with a number of physics and applied math groups.

In Richland, I was a supporter of the *Community Concert Series*. For the most part, those events were not in the folk idiom, although I recall an interesting program by Los Indios Tabajaras, => and a dance performance of Carmina Burana by the Ruth Page Ballet. (I know, C.B. really isn't folk music... But the lyrics are taken from Goliardic verse, a Medieval folk idiom!)



Ah the 60's – In colorful 1968-69, I was a visiting professor of NE at the University of Washington (UW), and while there heard Pete Seeger live for the first time in a Seattle concert. Later, in the mid 70s, I collaborated with a professor at New York University on some applied mathematics problems.

New York-New York and Washington Square Park and the Village –As part of that effort, my wife Judi and I were able to spend two months for each of three winters in the Big Apple (Jan-Feb 1974-76). Most days, I walked across Washington Square Park, but during those winter months, few folk singers ventured outdoors. Indoors was another matter. I recall a memorable concert by the Clancy Brothers, plus performances by Pete Seeger, Brownie and Sonny, and Arlo Guthrie. At a benefit folk concert for *Sing Out* magazine in 1974, the featured performers all were well-known to me except one. The unfamiliar name? Utah Phillips! He was a kick, of course, and I was astonished to learn that he lived (then) in Spokane, just up the road from Richland.

Doc Reminiscing – Alan, did you know that in the mid 50's Eleanor Roosevelt tried to have the Sunday Hoots at the Fountain in the park shut down. She lived in an apartment House/Hotel just beyond the Arch.

Washington Square Park after our times.
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I was in the park most Summer Sundays between 1952 and 1956. My father played chess and he indulged my love of music other than classical. It was in the park that I learned the facts of my folk music talent. I didn't have any, so I became a collector and writer in between earning a living as a Chemist. Yeah, listening to the great folk music at the "Labor Temple" and in the Park was a folk turn on that has lasted all of my life. – Harry



New York offered additional musical idioms; we heard, among many others, Indian maestros Ali Akbar Khan and Zakir Hussein, and classical guitarist Andres Segovia. And we attended a reading at St. Mark's in the Bowery featuring Beat poets Allen Ginsberg and Michael McClure. Midway through the reading, Gregory Corso, a fellow Beat who was in the audience, stripped off his clothes, loudly proclaimed "The Poetry Streak," then streaked naked up the aisle to the stage to give Michael a warm hug. Michael and Allen seemed unperturbed by this overt display.

In 1980, I left Battelle for a temporary position as a Visiting Professor of Mathematics at Oregon State University (Corvallis). During the two years I was there, I recall attending performances by Utah Phillips, Priscilla Herdman, and Faith Petric, and I'm sure there were others I don't recall. During that time, I also returned to Richland for summer jobs at what then was called Exxon Nuclear, the nuclear fuel plant north of town.

Time off to see the World – In the fall of 1982, Judi and I took a temporary leave from the working world and set out with our backpacks for a round-the-world odyssey. The trip took us to 17 countries, beginning with Fiji and Australia, then around south Asia, and ending with Kenya, Egypt, Morocco and the UK. We were on the road on our own for nine months as budget travelers.

We enjoyed exploring the different cuisines and, whenever possible, we dined where the locals ate, sometimes at fairly rustic places. The rich tastes of native foods will always



remain with us. We had no significant illnesses or other problems. A blur of folk performances comes to mind: Balinese gamelan music, plus ketchak and barong dances, more dances in Jogjakarta, and shadow puppet plays, lion dances at New Year's in Singapore, folk dances in Nepal, temple drummers in Sri Lanka, ...

Back Again to the Tri-Cities — Much later, back in Richland, I was hired for a contract job at WPPSS (now Energy Northwest) doing reactor analysis computations. The job was advertised to last just a few weeks, but I remained there nearly seven years.

It was during my WPPSS time that I discovered Dan Maher's weekly radio program, Inland Folk, and I recall attending his live concert in the park in Richland, when John and Micki Perry opened for him. Later, we learned that Utah Phillips would be performing in Kennewick and attended this "first 3RFS concert," perhaps before the organization was even officially formed. A second concert, featuring John Gorka, followed, as did a flood of others that continue to this day. At some point, 3RFS offered membership cards, and we became charter members.

The Web and 3RFS — In the fall of 1995, Judi overheard a remark by John Perry that he hoped 3RFS could eventually have a page on the World Wide Web. Judi is a skilled technical writer who had worked for United Nuclear and Hanford Environmental Health Foundation, among others, but she had never written for the web. Nonetheless, she immediately offered to create a page for 3RFS. (Er..., now what?)

She and I both gleaned what we could from various online articles about hypertext markup language (HTML) and web page authoring. Judi then hand-coded the first tentative pages for the 3RFS web site, using nothing more than the Windows Notepad text editor. We also talked with the folks at One World Telecommunications (OWT) about web site hosting. They were extremely helpful and encouraging, and in December 1995, the 3RFS web site became a reality.

(Here's an early version from March 1996:)

Welcome to Three Rivers Folklife Society



A non-profit organization dedicated to folk music.

LATE-BREAKING NEWS!!

March 30 Benefit Concert for Bruce (Utah) Phillips in Seattle. Performers include Linda Allen and Jim Page. For information, go to [table of contents-current events](#).

NEW!! Sound clips of upcoming performers. Currently:

Dan Maher and Annie Gallup (March 23)
Steve Gillette and Cindy Mangsen (March 25)
Judy Small (April 3)
Lou and Peter Berryman (April 11)
Phantoms of Soul (April 20)
Chaskinakuy and Telynor (May)

Please note:

Sound quality depends on available RAM. If you receive poor-quality sound, you may need to close other applications or install more RAM.

Netscape users may need to turn on a media player (options-general preferences). [E-mail](#) us if you have questions.

For sound clips, go to [table of contents-upcoming events-concerts/coffee houses](#).

[Click Here](#) for sound clips, listings of concert and coffee house performers, and other wonderful folkie things.

This was still early in the history of the web, and few organizations (or folk musicians) had web pages up and running. Our web site was noticed a few weeks later by a person affiliated with the Tri-Cities Corporate Council for the Arts (TCCCA), who also had attended one of the 3RFS concerts the previous Saturday. She called us, complimented us on the web site, and pointed out that TCCCA offered grants to local arts organizations. Subsequently, 3RFS applied for and received a grant from TCCCA to help fund the first Tumbleweed Music Festival. As the 3RFS concerts continued, we became interested in the possibility of offering performers' sound clips on the 3RFS web site to help publicize upcoming concerts and coffeehouses.

Music Sound Clips - Yesterday and Today - When Windows 3.1 arrived, we found it included software that allowed us to play a performer's CD on our PC and record an excerpt as a sound clip. The resulting sound files were in the uncompressed "wav" format,

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so the files were relatively large. We did choose settings to compromise between sound quality and file size but, at best, our one-minute, monophonic sound clips often occupied 3/4 MB of disk space or more, and could take 3-5 minutes to download via a slow dial-up connection. Still, a number of visitors to the 3RFS web site found them worth the wait.

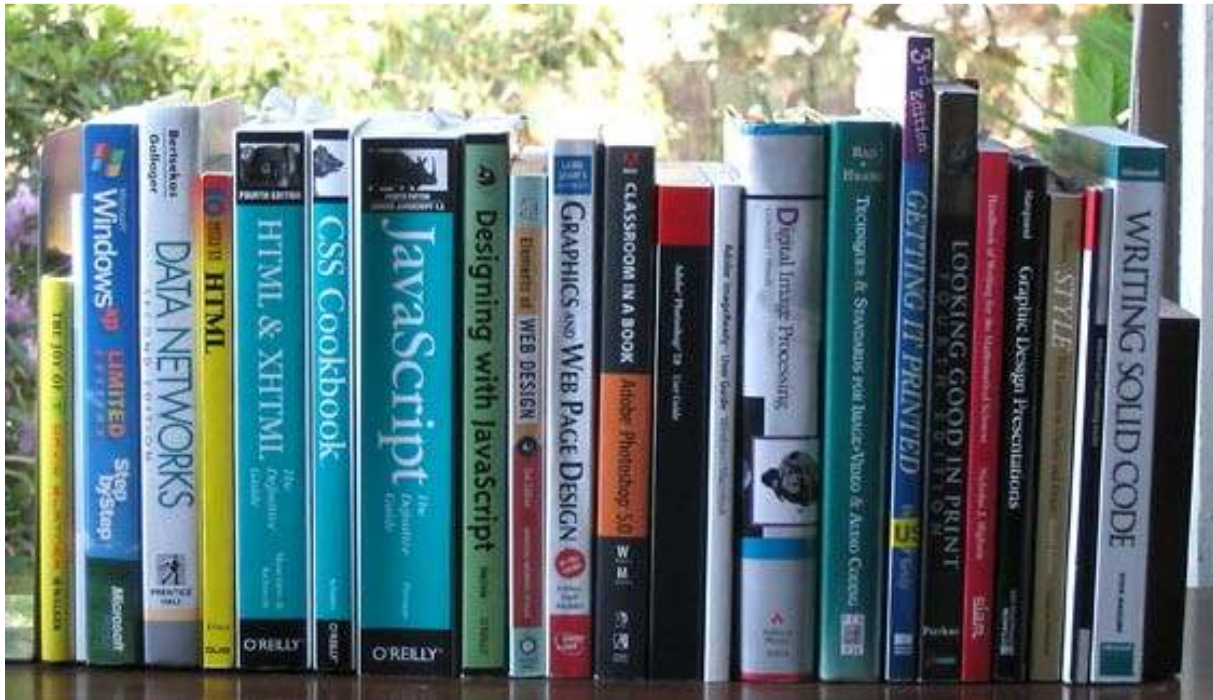
Today we rarely do sound clips, except for Tumbleweed Festival, since most performers now have websites or personal pages of their own and usually offer sound clips there. When we have occasion to create sound clips today, the software tools are very much improved, and the clips can be saved in a compressed format, usually "mp3." These clips have much better fidelity, are in stereo, and have smaller file sizes than was possible with the old wav format.

Bye, Bye Nuclear Engineering — In my professional life, my long-term project at WPPSS eventually finished, and management announced a layoff of 1/3 of the engineering staff, including me. I had realized for some time that nuclear energy was no longer a growth area, and this layoff convinced me that it was time for a change. With the aid of some federal retraining funds, I spent two years at UW in Seattle as a graduate student in the electrical engineering (EE) department.

I appreciated the irony that, in 1968, I had been at UW as one of the youngest visiting professors while, in 1996, I was back as one of the older graduate students. I was in a different field, of course, and I emerged with an MS in EE, specializing in signal processing. This led to a job at a small Seattle software company, originally called *Statistical Sciences*, later *MathSoft* and then, oddly, *Insightful*. I worked there for three years while the company's fortune's rose and fell: their best two years ever were followed by their worst year ever. Major layoffs ensued, including my own, and I decided I was ready for yet another professional change.

A New Career, the WWW — During the time I had been at UW and at *Insightful*, my interest in web site design had continued to grow. I had become much more accomplished in HTML, had learned to use cascading style sheets (CSS), and was becoming proficient in JavaScript. My student work in signal processing had included work with digital images, and I found that it fit nicely with the preparation of images for the web. Accordingly, I developed

some ability with Adobe PhotoShop, the professional image processing program, and I began to explore digital photography.



Web designer's bookshelf

Judi had continued to update the 3RFS event pages for a while, but gradually the work had shifted over to me. In 1997, the year of the first Tumbleweed Festival, while I was still at UW, I had offered to create a Tumbleweed page as part of the 3RFS web site. That one page quickly expanded to more pages and, for several weeks during that summer, I was in almost daily e-mail contact with Perry Campbell as we worked through the details for the pages, then coped with the inevitable performer additions, cancellations, and schedule changes.

An artist friend, Nicholas Kirsten-Honshin, was aware of my budding web design skills, and he asked if I could create a web site for him, which I did (www.honshin.com). This was followed by an invitation to design a web site for the related Kirsten Gallery in Seattle. That led to doing digital photography of art works to be displayed on the gallery web site. My most recent project for the gallery is a slide show of photos of their Zen Garden (www.kirstengallery.com/Zen/zengarden.htm).

Additional opportunities followed, and soon I was doing web design and digital photography for a diverse range of clients, which I continue to do today. New clients continue to emerge from unexpected contacts and, while the work is not yet full time, it is a welcome professional activity at an age when many folks are fully retired. One of my more interesting projects was to photograph dancers at a Native American Pow Wow presented at a state school for people with developmental disabilities.



The 39 photos then were displayed online as a slide show.

Image #9

<http://www.fircrestfriends.org/FSPowWowSlides.htm>

Are you a musician yourself?

I'm a sensitive listener to many different idioms, including folk. But I'm not a performer. As a teenager I did play harmonica, but have not been inspired in a long time. As a kid, I also studied violin for two years, but it did not hold my interest. I tried guitar on my own, with minimal success, and perhaps I'll pick it up again sometime. As for singing, well, Harry, I've heard you say you sing in the key of "flat," and I wonder if that might apply to me as well.

Tell us about some of your other interests:

There are a lot. Here's a compressed summary of just a few.

* *Poetry*: I've enjoyed the poetry of the Beats: Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, et al. I heard Allen read in New York, and both Gary and Lawrence at different times in Seattle. (*doc sez Me too*) Apart from the Beats, I've appreciated the work of Pattiann Rogers, who I met at a reading in Seattle, and of Stanley Kunitz, now in his 90s, who I have read, but not

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met. I discovered the Sufi poetry (in translation) of Rumi and Hafez. They lived in the 13th and 14th centuries, so I could not meet them, but I did meet Coleman Barks, a translator and popularizer of Rumi.

* *Photography*: It's now almost exclusively digital and, apart from my professional work, mostly of outdoor scenes and wildlife. The camera goes along on all my hiking trips. And that brings me to the next item:



Barred owl, Discovery Park, Seattle, April 2007)

* *Hiking and Backpacking*: I began as a kid, in my Weaverville days, in the nearby Trinity Alps; then, after I moved to Richland, I hiked and climbed with the Intermountain Alpine Club for several years. More recently, I've hiked mostly in the Cascades with friends Rick and Marin. My most ambitious trip in 2006 was a four-day backpack to the

Enchantment Lakes via Aasgard Pass. Did I say climbing? Well, most of that was a few years ago, but I've been to the summits of Mt. Adams and Mt. Hood, also Mt. St. Helens while it still had one and, in Australia, Mt. Kosciusko and Ayers Rock. Plus a number of others. I still have ambitions of trying Mt. Rainier.



Alan (L) and Rick check their mail



Alan's photo of Glacier Peak from Mt. Forgotten Meadows

* *Contemporary Art*: I'm pleased to count as close friends the meditational artists Richard Kirsten Daiensai and Nicholas Kirsten Honshin. I appreciate also other streams of contemporary art and Native American art. I enjoy checking out the Seattle gallery and museum shows, and shows I encounter elsewhere in my travels.

* *Spices, Ethnic Cuisine and Cooking*: I appreciate ethnic foods, particularly Thai, Indian, Mexican and Middle Eastern. Fortunately, Seattle offers many inexpensive restaurants that serve these idioms. I also enjoy cooking some of them at home to serve to family and friends.

[Alan, I guess you win doc Babad's compulsive recipe collecting prize, growing DVD collection contain perhaps 16,000 recipes including some we created. Its my time off for errr, good behavior vice. By TMF time might be more and yes you can read the recipes on a PC; I'm not selfish only Mac-addicted.]

Has the computer always been part of your life?

It seems like it now, but before that there were pencils and paper, math tables, a slide rule, and mechanical desk calculators. My introduction to computing came in the 1950s, while I was still an undergraduate at Stanford. My first

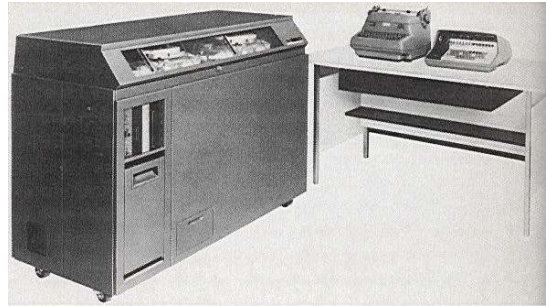
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experience was with an IBM 610. The machine was about the size of a desk,

had 100 storage registers, and was programmed in machine language.

(Retrieve the number in Register 16, retrieve the number in Register 27, multiply the two numbers, store the result in Register 31, ...) Data and program instructions were entered by typewriter, and the

program could be punched into machine-readable paper tape and saved for future calculations using different input data.



Later, Stanford acquired an IBM 650, and I learned an early version of the Algol programming language, with programs punched into IBM cards. When I arrived at Battelle in 1965, the site computer was an IBM 7090 and the programming language was Fortran. I worked at the 300 Area and punched my reactor physics programs into cards. Twice each day, a van arrived to pick up the cards and ferry them downtown to the Federal Building where the 7090 resided. My output was delivered by van the following day, printed on oversized computer paper. When changes were needed (often), I punched them into a new set of cards, then waited another day to see the results. The one-day turnaround sounds primitive now, but at the time anything done on the computer still seemed magical, and the one day wait was just fine.

Computing evolved greatly over the following years, with remote job entry, computer networking and, eventually, personal computers. Our first home computer was a Gateway machine with a 33 MHz Intel 486 processor, 4 MB of RAM, and a 120 MB hard drive, running DOS and Windows 3.0. Our current machines have far more system resources and a broadband connection to the Internet, but it was that first clunker, and a 14.4 KB dial-up modem, that introduced us to the possibilities of the web.

So what does the future hold?

For the 3RFS website? I'd love to re-code a lot of the pages, since some of them still use much of the original HTML 2 coding from 1995. I've updated the Tumbleweed pages a bit at a time each year and would like to get to the other pages. That's been on my mind for a while, but there have been other priorities.

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I don't expect to make another career change, but the technology of the web continues to evolve rapidly, and I hope to adapt to all the ongoing changes in my current fields of web design and digital photography.

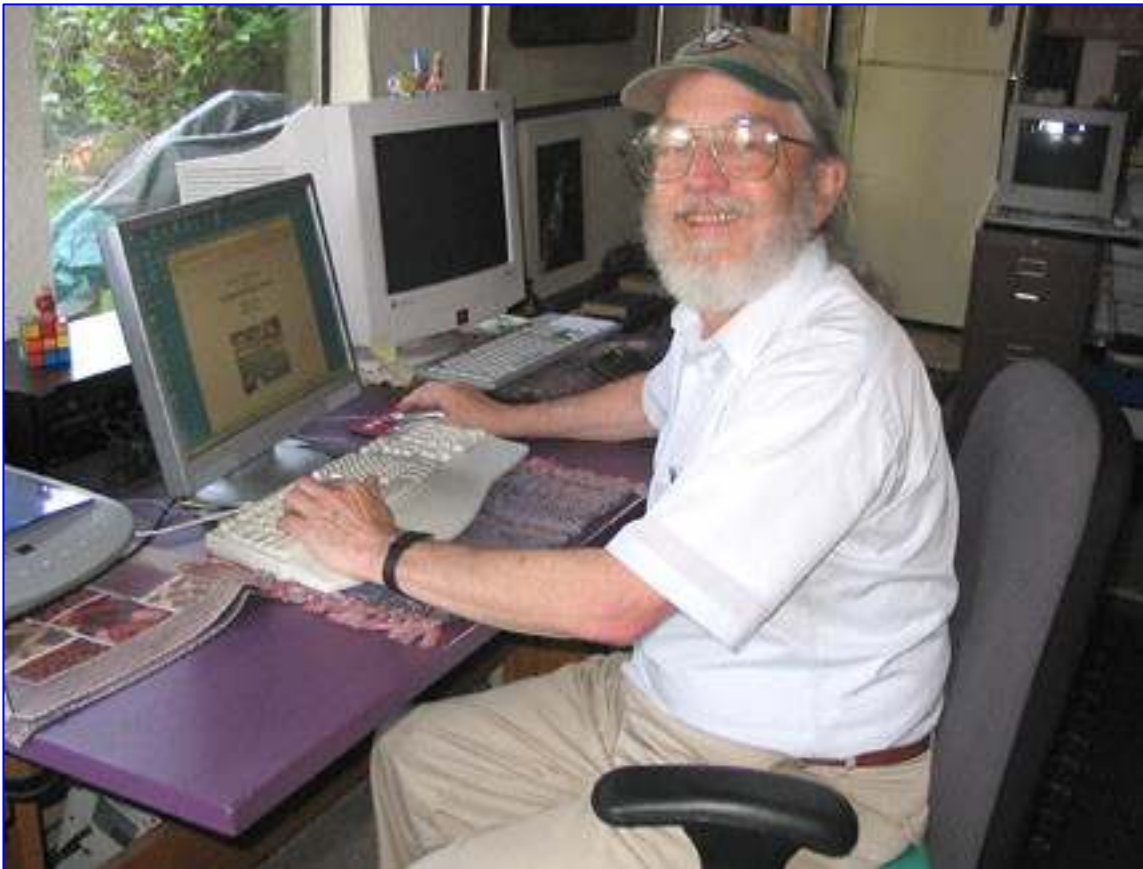
As far as other interests go? Well, I'll be out on the hiking trails for as long as I have the ability, and maybe next year I'll attempt Mt. Rainier. And, of course, I hope to attend a number of additional Tumbleweed Festivals.

PS: The Website itself - A Bit of Tech and Tool Talk

So, what exactly do you do to maintain and keep current the 3RFS website?

Usually folks send me e-mail about upcoming events or schedule changes. I appreciate that, since it lets me get the info online sooner. Occasionally, I don't learn about events or schedule changes until I see them in Folk Talk. Either way, I then have to edit the HTML code for the corresponding page to display the new material. You probably know that you can look at the underlying HTML code for any web page you are viewing just by using menu commands on your web browser (View Source, View Page Source, or something similar, depending on whether your browser is Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, or other). The HTML code is what tells your browser how to display the page on your monitor, and that code is what I have to edit.

Of course, the pages you view on your PC are sent to you via phone line or cable from the server at OWT in Kennewick. (OWT has been the host for the 3RFS web site since the beginning, and they have always been incredibly supportive.) Since I have a copy of every 3RFS page on my PC at home in Seattle, I can edit my own copy of the HTML code with a simple text editor. For each upcoming performer, I also add a link to their web site, if they have one. I then log in to the 3RFS website at OWT and send my revised copies of the pages to the server via FTP. The revised versions replace the previous versions and are available to viewers immediately. If I have images or sound clips to install, I also FTP those to the website.



Alan in his home office with his computers

Occasionally, I need to create an entirely new page, such as the Front Row Seat CD info and PayPal ordering pages, or the new Guitar Raffle page. I do that at home, using just a text editor. I'm aware that some page writers like to use software packages (Microsoft's FrontPage, Adobe's Dreamweaver, et al) for this purpose, but I prefer to write my own HTML code directly.

The general procedure for the Tumbleweed Festival pages is the same. It's just that there is a lot more data to update each year, and it often seems to arrive all at once.

When I have images to process, I use Adobe PhotoShop and accompanying ImageReady software. As an example, for the image on the new Guitar Raffle page, I wanted to emphasize the guitar's sunburst finish. I used two photos provided by Alan Page, taken at slightly different angles. The sunburst pattern is visible in one, but not in the other. I sized the photos for the web page, then created a single dynamic image that

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alternates four times between the two views to emphasize the sunburst pattern.

When I have a series of images to display, such as photos from previous Tumbleweed festivals, I write a bit of JavaScript code to automate a slide show.

In addition to doing the site updates, about a year ago I joined the proof reading team for Folk Talk. Kendal e-mails me a draft version of each issue in Portable Document Format (pdf), I proof it for any problems and e-mail any corrections back to her. Kendal incorporates them, along with any corrections from other proofreaders, then e-mails me a final version that I install online via FTP. Of course, Harry, you send me your monthly Music e-Talk articles, generally as Microsoft Word documents. I do a quick proof reading and, if I see any minor typos or layout problems, I correct them. I then save a copy in pdf format and install it online.

Finally, whenever I install a new issue of Folk Talk or e-Talk online, I also announce it via our RSS link. That's the pair of orange buttons marked XML/HTML near the top of the home page. I don't know how many of our viewers are familiar with RSS, but those who are and who subscribe - it's free - will find a copy of the announcement in their RSS viewer soon after I post it.