

A Short History of Tumbleweed Music Festival, by Micki Perry (August 2016)

It's hard to believe, but this will be the 20th year for Tumbleweed Music Festival! The first was held in Howard Amon Park on Saturday and Sunday of Labor Day weekend in 1997. There were about 60 acts and most sets were 30 minutes long with many acts performing more than once during the weekend. Dance groups and workshops were held in the old Community Center Building up the hill, and there was an indoor venue at Killarney's Pub which is now The Gaslight. The song contest theme was "Tumbleweeds" and the winners were a local band, 6 Legged Frog. Our hospitality area was in the gazebo which had a major yellow jacket problem, but somehow we were able to feed our volunteers and performers while battling the pesky insects. We had our first Sunday night after-party for performers and volunteers at Abby's Pizza after being turned away from Killarney's which closed the following weekend. It was essentially a shanty sing and the tradition has continued all these years.

3 Rivers Folklife Society was actually founded in 1987 and gained non-profit status in 1991, the same year we began our coffeehouse series. Our concerts, coffeehouses, and contra dances were well attended in the 90's and we had become acquainted with lots of regional and national performers who loved our audience. So why did it take us 10 years to finally decide it was time to do a festival to accommodate all our favorite performers? The answer is that we needed dedicated volunteers with a vision for a festival and a Steering Committee to plan and organize the festival and do all the nitty-gritty work to make it happen. Janet Humphrey was our first festival chair. The first steering committee included John and Micki Perry, Perry and Liz Campbell, Dave Oestreich, Theresa Grate, Gary White, Harry Babad, Jim Mock, Robin Hill, Mickie Chamness, Frank Cuta, and Robert Phillips. Many of these folks are still active volunteers involved in the production of Tumbleweed. There have been many other Tumbleweed chairpersons over the 20 years who have provided leadership: Kendal Smith, Micki Perry, Mary Hartman, Dwayne Horton, Alan Page, Jim Coleman and Gene Carbaugh. Tumbleweed has always been a volunteer effort since its conception and wouldn't be possible without the dedication of hundreds of volunteers every year.

As the years progressed Tumbleweed grew. We never had a problem getting enough performers and eventually lengthened the set times to 45 minutes and had more than 100 acts. We even added new stages. This year we will have a new indoor stage in the basement of the CREHST building which will feature Victory Music musicians. A great enhancement to the festival was the addition of the Richland Community Center which provided air-conditioned venues for dance performances and workshops and a wonderful hospitality area and kitchen. The festival has also expanded to include a Friday night concert featuring young local talent and a Sunday evening concert celebrating our yearly theme. This year's theme is "Come Together" which is what we do at Tumbleweed every year.

Those who have been attending Tumbleweed for many years have accumulated lots of memories and most have acquired a lot of new friendships with folks they encountered at Tumbleweed. We remember the weather disasters, the wind storms and the rain, especially the rainstorms in 2009 when we had to cancel the evening concert after the first set when Robyn Landis and Larry Murante were literally "singing in the rain". That was our 13th year and our theme was "Superstition." Murphy's Law was definitely in effect that year!

Some of our memories are sad because we have lost a lot of members of our Tumbleweed family over the years. This year we will have a panel workshop on Sunday honoring those who are now gone from us: Dave Oestreich, Steve Guthe, Merrit Herring, Rob Burrows, Bruce and Kay Mesford, John Perry, David Rea, Arwen and Teresa Morgan, Linda Huddle, TR Richie, JaneTitland, Chuck Pyle, Darlene Melvin, Lew Wallen, Rob Folsom, Di Meyer, and Jesse Robison.

During the past 20 years, Tumbleweed Music Festival has gained a reputation as one of the best acoustic music festivals in the Northwest. It is certainly one of the friendliest and is noted for the sense of community that brings together folks from all walks of life, all ages, all levels of musical experience, and many communities during a magical weekend musical experience. Help us celebrate 20 years of coming together at Tumbleweed. Please share your memories and your history in the gazebo area. If you have pictures or memorabilia from past years please contact Micki Perry at 509-783-9937 or 509-947-6735.