

From Prairie to Farm to City: Music to Commemorate the 200th Anniversary of Illinois' Statehood — In recognition of Illinois achieving statehood on December 3, 1818, organizations and institutions throughout the state will be celebrating the bicentennial all year. The music in the program reflects the story of Illinois, which is shaped not only by the land (prairie, Great Lakes, Mississippi River), but also by the many cultures which have thrived in it, beginning with Native Americans, and including French, German, African-American, Mexican, and other immigrant groups. The program includes songs about farmers, workers, disasters, and tragedies. Blues, and maybe even a little Rock and Roll. A really informative and entertaining look at Illinois, its history, and its people.

Phil Passen Bio

Few musicians play the hammered dulcimer. Fewer still sing while accompanying themselves on this fascinating instrument, whose name means “beautiful song.” Phil Passen does both.

Phil was born in Toledo, Ohio; grew up in Monroe, Michigan and Toledo; and graduated from high school in Ashtabula, Ohio. He attended Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, before participating as a full-time activist in the antiwar and civil rights movement of the 1960's and 70's.

After Phil and his wife, writer Barbara Gregorich, settled in the Chicago area in the early seventies, they joined the Old Town School of Folk Music, and Phil began to itch to play an instrument. He really wanted to play the drums, but the set he had in mind didn't fit into a nine hundred square foot apartment.

Although Phil heard the hammered dulcimer for the first time on John McCutcheon recordings in the late seventies, he didn't immediately make the connection between hammering strings and hammering drum heads. Finally, at a John McCutcheon concert at the Old Town School in 1994, the light dawned. Inspired anew as John played the dulcimer, Phil thought: “I can do that.” And now he does.

Phil performed for many years for the Chicago Department of Aviation's tourist programs at O'Hare Airport, where travelers often thanked him for providing pleasure on a stressful day, and at the Green City Market. Phil regularly performs at area libraries, and is included in the *Best of the Best* by the Library Administrators and Coordinators of Northern Illinois. He also played in the World Symphony Orchestra's performance of The Lord of the Rings Symphony at Chicago's Auditorium Theater.

Audiences are fascinated by the uncommon, trapezoidal- shaped hammered dulcimer. After Phil's performances, members of the audience, young and old, musicians and non-musicians, come up to take a closer look at the dulcimer and try their hand at it.

