

Goebel Twyman: The Fiddle Player
and His Continuing Music

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December 8, 1983

FOLKLIFE ARCHIVES
KENTUCKY BUILDING
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
BOWLING GREEN, KY 42101

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William Goebel Twyman is well known around Monroe in Hart County, Kentucky for his fiddle playing. He started playing the fiddle at the age of twelve and played for almost seventy years. Mr. Twyman did not take fiddle lessons, but he just "picked up" fiddle playing on his own. He grew up around musicians. Both his parents played the banjo and they taught him and his brothers and sisters how to play. Mr. Twyman also plays cornet; he took lessons from Archie Brooks, a band director, and was in two brass bands.

Mr. Twyman started performing publicly at ice cream and pie suppers for people around the Monroe community. Mrs. Ruby Twyman, Goebel's second wife, said that he was a popular fiddle player and was called on a lot for these social events. Mr. Twyman and various bands he was in would also play for square dances that were held in people's homes. The musicians would sometimes stand in the hallway between two rooms full of people and play while everyone danced.

In the 1940's, many Hart Countians can attest to the fact that one of the best places to go on Saturday night was the Twyman's Country Store in Monroe. If Mr. Twyman and his band did not have prior engagements, they would play on the second floor of the store. It has been told that there were as many as one thousand people in and out of the Twyman's store on one Saturday night.

Mr. Twyman has played with many different bands in his lifetime - so many so that names of some of the members are forgotten. These bands played at contests, mostly held at schools, as far away as Louisville. In the late fifties, one of his bands had a great performance at the Metcalfe County Fair in Edmonton, Kentucky. The band competed and then the individual players of the band each competed with their own instruments. Each of the members won first and the band as a whole won the Grand Prize.

Mr. Twyman instilled the love of music in his children. All of his children are musically inclined and some of them have performed publicly with their father. He had four children by his first wife Mary Hancock who died in 1927. They had two sons, Herbert and Neulon, and two daughters, Orthelia and Norma Dean. Mr. Twyman had four children from his second marriage to Ruby Walton. They also had two sons and two daughters, Miley, Reggie, Eva, and Patsy Wren. Both of his sons by his first wife play instruments. Herbert, his oldest, plays guitar and drums and Neulon plays the mandolin. Eva, a daughter from his second marriage is a singer. She occasionally sang with her father's band and between 1956 and 1958 she sang with a group known as the Rhythmettes. Patsy Twyman, the youngest daughter from Mr. Twyman's second marriage, married fiddle player Bud Meredith. They became acquainted with each other at fiddle contests where Mr. Twyman and Mr. Meredith would compete with each other. One of them would win a competition one time and the other would win the next competition.

The last band Mr. Twyman was in was the Twyman Band which was made up of Twyman family members only. Mr. Twyman played fiddle,

his son Herbert played drums, Herbert's sons William and Tony played rhythm guitar and sang, respectively, and Mr. Twyman's son Neulon occasionally played and Eva, Mr. Twyman's daughter occasionally sang. The Twyman Band played rock and roll music mostly. At the age of sixty, Mr. Twyman even hand made an electric fiddle in order to be heard over the electric guitars in the band. When the Twyman band performed, Mr. Twyman would usually play three or four of his fiddle tunes. The band performed at many different places. They performed mostly at the Lincoln Jamboree in Hodgenville, Kentucky, the Dixie Jamboree at Cave City, Kentucky, and at the local radio station, WLOC in Munfordville.

Even though the Twyman Band played rock and roll music, Mr. Twyman has been quoted as saying, "Now I don't care much about rock 'n roll. It's just rhythm with noise. It's more racket than music." He mostly likes "breakdowns." Some of his old favorites that he used in contests were "Sally Goodun," "Chicken Reel," and "Black Mountain Rag." Mr. Twyman also composed tunes for the fiddle. One of his favorites is "Pickin' the Devils Eyes Out."

In 1973 Goebel Twyman made an album entitled "Goebel Twyman: The Old Time Fiddler." The performers on the album, with the exception of one, were all Twymans. Mr. Twyman's two sons, Herbert and Neulon, played the rhythm guitar and mandolin, respectively. Mr. Twyman's grandson William played lead guitar and another grandson Tony played drums. The only non-Twyman was Dennis Trent and he played bass guitar. The album included, among other songs, Mr. Twyman's three favorite tunes mentioned earlier and fiddling music he had been playing for sixty years. This album was the highlight of Mr. Twyman's career.

When the Twyman Band broke up, Mr. Twyman stopped playing his fiddle regularly in public. It has been about five years since Mr. Twyman has been able to play the fiddle at all due to his health. However, the musical tradition of fiddle playing is being continued through his granddaughter. Thirteen year old Lark Reynolds is the daughter of Eva Twyman Reynolds, Mr. Twyman's oldest daughter by his second wife Mrs. Ruby Twyman. Lark would listen to her grandfather and as her grandmother said, "He affected her." Lark, because of the influence of her grandfather, decided to play the fiddle. Mr. Twyman gave her her first fiddle - a three quarter size fiddle. Lark started taking lessons at the age of ten from an instructor at her school. She first learned to play classical music, but she "likes to play his type of music," referring to her grandfather. Breakdowns and jigs are her favorite types of music to play. Lark plays her grandfather's album and another album, "Twenty-Five Top Fiddlers," that Mr. and Mrs. Twyman gave her as one way of learning new songs. She listens to a song from either of the albums two or three times and then she just "picks it up." Lark does not need written music to learn the songs, she is able to learn the songs just through listening.

Lark outgrew her three quarter fiddle and now she plays a full size fiddle which her grandfather also got for her. Lark has started taking lessons from a man in Leitchfield, Kentucky. She goes to Leitchfield every Saturday morning from her home in Louisville for her lessons. As Lark's grandmother pointed out, this shows a lot of dedication to fiddle playing for a thirteen year old girl to devote her Saturdays to her music.

Lark enjoys playing her fiddle - her grandmother says that her fiddle goes everywhere she does - and the results are being evidenced. Lark was picked as one of the top fifty fiddlers in Jefferson County two years ago and due to this honor she performed at the Louisville Gardens. She and three others have played for square dances in their school and she has also been offered several other jobs to play for square dances in schools in the area around where she lives. This demonstrates how her music is community based - even though it is a larger community than that in which her grandfather played.

Lark is continuing with her fiddling much in the same way as her grandfather did. She started performing in her community - for a square dance. Now Lark is entering competitions, just as her grandfather did. She is going to compete in the 1984 Fiddling Nationals at Rough River State Park in the Juniors division this next year.

Mr. Twyman may not be able to play the fiddle any longer, but his music is continuing through his granddaughter Lark. Even though Lark's first fiddle lessons consisted mainly of classical music, she prefers to play the type of music that was introduced to her by Goebel Twyman and the type of music that he played for so long.

Mr. Twyman is unable to speak due to his health, so his wife Mrs. Ruby Twyman supplied most of the information for this paper. It is most appropriate that her thoughts about her husband and his musical abilities are presented through her poem, "The Bow and the Bereaved."

"The Bow and the Bereaved"

Often each night
When things were all quiet
He'd get out his fiddle and bow
Without having to look
At the notes in the book
He would play love refrains soft and low
You could judge from the tune
That it would be soon
He'd drift back to the old days of yore
When his children were young
And the songs that were sung
Couldn't fall on his ear any more
Too early in life
He gave up his wife
And was left with four children to keep
Then he knew that he had
To be both Mother and Dad
Such a sight would make anyone weep
Every stocking was darned
Each ruffle was ironed
And all things were kept in their place
Very strict with his rule
They must all go to school
And must never lag back in the race
With patience and thought
Their music he taught
And were never allowed to skip time
If he said play in C, he didn't mean D
So they'd keep up their rhythm and rhyme
Yes, the old spinning wheel
In the parlor was real
And "Roll along, roll along Silvery Moon"
There's a gleam in his eye
On his lips there's a sigh
For the love songs had ended too soon

May his musical touch
That to me means so much
Dwell forever in my memory
And love's old refrain
Will echo again
When he plays his last waltz for me.