
CRAIG WASNER & JOHN GRIMM
CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO ATTEND...

HILLTOP Happenings

PIZZA, PERFORMERS, & PLENTY OF PIZZAZZ!

An ongoing program that brings entertainment, enjoyment, and inspiration to the folks of South Central MN

On eight Sundays during the year, there's a little bit of magic in Montgomery, Minnesota.

Early in the afternoon, a two-story brick building with "1892" inscribed near the peak of its roof opens its doors, and the aroma of fresh buttered popcorn beckons from the second story. Music and laughter echo throughout the vintage concert hall as musicians rehearse and patrons begin to stroll in and claim seats.

Promptly at 4 p.m., the fun begins. Led by proprietor John Grimm, a troupe of performers gathers on stage to join in a lively theme song during which members are introduced. For the next two hours, guests enjoy a diverse mix of music and entertainment ranging from popular standards to concert hall classics; from goofy comedy and colorful costumes to inspirational gospel and harmonic collaborations.



At intermission, fresh piping-hot pizza from Pizzeria 201 is available for two bucks a slice, served with friendly smiles at "Shannon's Snack Bar" (the kitchenette at the back of the hall).



The twelve regular troupe members hail from Green Isle, Montgomery, Le Sueur, New Prague, Northfield, Rosemount, and Royal, Iowa; guest performers occasionally appear as well. The audience, which numbers between 75 and 150, consists mainly of self-proclaimed "groupies" that have made this event a regular ritual. Buses often arrive from distant locations, and since the series began in March of 2012, faithful guests have become acquainted and enjoy mingling at intermission.

First-time visitors are generally mesmerized by the warm splendor of the hall, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Host John Grimm purchased the building in the early 1990's "to save a significantly historic building" and "to create a place where local folks could perform." (Occasionally he'll treat the crowd to an *a cappella* vocal solo, *sans* microphone, to demonstrate the hall's superior acoustics.)



During restoration, Grimm made every effort to repair or replicate the original architectural details, from the wood floor and lush carpeting to the ceiling mural and antique chandelier. But certain bohemian accents (such as the unique wall paintings behind the stage and various tchotchkes placed around the perimeter) suggest that the theater, much like the host, balances excellence with a charming touch of eccentricity!



The ambiance is perfect for this diverse, family-friendly, and time-honored form of entertainment. In any given show, audience responses may range from awed admiration to chuckles, hoots, and the occasional dab of an eye. Some are even inspired to “trip the light fantastic” at the rear of the theater, where local crafters are sometimes invited to sell their wares.

As breathtaking talent mixes with lighthearted entertainment against a backdrop of down-to-earth elegance, fans of this event have a sense that they are witnessing something that is both very special and truly “Minnesotan.”



THE HILLTOP HAPPENINGS TROUPE

Members include Howard Braith, Maren Brogger, Mary Lou and Wade Fradenburgh, John Grimm, Chuck Mallory, Louise Meyer, Hank Nieland, Craig Wasner, Lynn and Mark Wilms, and Wendy Zaske.



HOWARD BRAITH, drummer and guitarist, was born in Wadena, MN, and later moved to St. Patrick. Having been interested in music since he was a youngster, he also plays bass and guitar. He graduated from New Prague High School and currently lives with his wife, Doreen, near New Prague. He has three grown children and is a grandfather to six. He has been involved in music at church and other places since he was very young, and continues to do so to this day. He has over 30 years of experience as an auto technician, and his hobbies are fishing, X-boxing with his kids, and playing pool.

MAREN (WASNER) BROGGER, vocalist, pianist, drummer, and guitarist, is Craig Wasner's daughter. After graduating from college she moved to Nashville, TN to pursue a career in the music industry where she worked for MTV Networks. After almost 10 years she moved back to be closer to family and is working for a super-load transportation company in Northfield, MN. She got married in the summer of 2013 to a custom cabinetmaker named Karl on her parents' farm. Besides music, she enjoys spreadsheets, morning coffee, and watching her husband race sailboats.



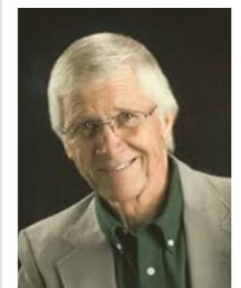
MARY LOU (BIROS) FRADENBURGH, vocalist, was born and raised in Minneapolis, graduating from Holy Angels Academy when it was an all girls' school. Her singing ability was evident early in life, spending hours listening to the radio and playing her 45 rpm records (of which she still has hundreds). Her recall of lyrics is simply phenomenal. She has sung all her life in different bands, churches, weddings, funerals, senior homes, and now Hilltop Hall. She and her husband Wade met because of music, when a mutual friend of theirs asked Wade to accompany Mary Lou at a company Christmas dinner in 1984. They were married two years later.



WADE FRADENBURGH plays bass and piano, sings, and occasionally performs in skits. He grew up in Scott County near Lydia and graduated from Jordan High School. His family is very musical. As a family they sang at different functions in churches. He learned to play guitar and clarinet at the age of 10 and later picked up the piano and bass guitar. He currently

is a bass player at his church. Wade and Mary Lou had a band when they got married called The Turning Point. In fact, they played at a 50th wedding anniversary the day after their wedding!

JOHN GRIMM, proprietor and host, performs as a singer, actor, comedian, and impersonator - often with original skits and compositions (he's written over 100 songs and four musicals). An Air Force veteran and former airline pilot, he moved to Montgomery in 1992. He's been a parent to 12 children and a foster parent to over 100. He has served as Mayor of Montgomery, Le Sueur County Commissioner, Board President of Mobilize Montgomery, and Grand Marshal of Kolacky Days. In 2011, he was a candidate for the District 25 Senate seat. He continues to develop "The Harbor," a former resort redesigned as a residence for veterans.



CHUCK MALLORY, vocalist and harmonica player, hails from South Florida and moved to MN after it was determined that his wife, Jean, didn't care for the traffic and humidity. He has been involved in music since Primary Choir at Church. He has played parts in many stage productions including "Gorky the Bear," "John the Baptist," "Grandpa Dansville," "Scrooge," and various other parts in Christmas productions at his church in Shakopee. He resides near Green Isle, MN with his wife Jean and 3 cats. They have 3 grown daughters, 2 granddaughters, and 5 grandsons. He also enjoys dabbling with mandolin and violin, making guitars out of cigar boxes, camping, hunting and fishing.

LOUISE (KINKENNON) MEYER is what John calls “our own Minnie Pearl!” Originally from the central part of Iowa, she grew up on a farm and went to school in the small town of Scranton. She began working in cafés in Jefferson, where she met her husband, Milton. After getting married, they moved to Minnesota in 1958 and operated a bar in Montgomery for 5 years. Next, she traveled with him as he worked in seasonal road construction until his retirement. Milton passed away in 2010, and she continues to live in the home they’ve owned in Montgomery since 1968. She enjoys her two parakeets, doing yardwork, and going dancing.



HANK NIELAND is an accomplished musician playing guitar, dobro, banjo, mandolin, and bass. He started on guitar in 7th grade and continued to add instruments. Most of the time he taught himself, but sometimes would take a few lessons from other musicians. His passion is bluegrass, and he was in a bluegrass band for a number of years. He grew up on a farm and naturally took to mechanic work, which led him to work for Northwest Airlines for 20 years. After 9/11, Hank worked for Vic’s Crane Service, then later for Anderson Bus Company (which is now Koch Bus Service) and has been there 14 years. He keeps a fleet of 41 buses running in great shape, ensuring they are functioning to MNDOT standards. He and his wife Lois live in Rosemount and enjoy coming down here once a month to share music with others.

CRAIG WASNER plays keyboards and guitar, sings, composes, and operates a recording studio. He studied music at the University of Minnesota/Duluth and Berklee College of Music in Boston. He has performed with national recording artists (including two Grammy Award winners) on 5 different labels. Through his annual Craig Wasner & Friends Benefit for World Vision concerts, he has raised over \$500,000 through tickets and donations. He also serves as band leader for the Over & Back benefit shows (providing aid to 55 local charities) and as Music Coordinator for the Northfield High Schools Rock and Roll Revival concerts. He lives on a small farm near Northfield, Minnesota with his wife, Linda. He has three adult children and twin grandchildren.



LYNN (WESTLAND) WILMS hails from New Richland, Minnesota. A music graduate of the University of Northern Iowa, she has been a minister of music in several churches; directing choirs, leading contemporary worship groups; and playing piano, organ, and a number of other instruments. She has also given vocal and instrumental lessons her whole career to children and adults. Her work included teaching in an international school in Bogotá, South America while her husband, Mark, worked in mass media. They have five foreign exchange daughters who still call them “Mom and Dad.” Lynn has a love for music of all kinds, and a love for people.

MARK WILMS was a radio disc jockey and TV weatherman before becoming a Lutheran minister. He and his wife Lynn met in college and together served on the mission field in Bogotá, South America, where Mark was a media advisor for the Colombian Lutheran Church. After ordination into the ministry, Mark served parishes from rural Nebraska to the south side of Chicago. In 2015 he made a career change to interim ministry, serving his first assignment at St. John in Montgomery, Minnesota. Mark learned piano as a youth and sang in church choir, leading to a love for singing both sacred and secular music with Lynn. They are currently living in Royal, Iowa.



WENDY (WILLIAMS) ZASKE sings “20th-century songs” in originally-designed costumes. While at Robbinsdale High School, she received scholarship awards for classical piano from the Schubert Club, the Minnesota Music Teachers’ Association, and the Minneapolis Music Teachers Forum; she also studied violin and sang in church choir. With an honors degree in English from the U of M, she’s worked as a writer, graphic artist, DJ/KJ, recreation coordinator, Chamber of Commerce administrator, and radio host. She and husband Tony (who operates the sound booth) met in 1986 as nightclub DJs and married in 1989; they later established mobile entertainment services in MN and CA. They currently live near Le Sueur with 4 cats.



Hilltop Hall is located at
206 First Street North
in Montgomery, Minnesota.
Built in 1892, it is on the
National Register of Historic Places.

Hilltop Happenings variety shows take place on the last
Sunday of each month (except the winter months
of December, January, and February; and July,
due to local Kolacky Days Festival events).

Admission is free, although donations are accepted to help
defray production and overhead costs.
Soft drinks and popcorn are available throughout;
pizza is sold at intermission.

Excerpts from the programs may be seen on
YouTube - simply search
“Hilltop Happenings Montgomery, MN”
and click on the link.

For more information about Hilltop Hall and its events,
call John Grimm at (612) 756-1075.

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