

Palos Heights Library presents 'Illinois Artists and Songs'

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Jessi Virtusio

As Illinois approaches its bicentennial on Dec. 3 residents may be looking to learn more about the state established in 1818.

"Illinois @ 200: The Musical Influence of Illinois Artists and Songs" on Oct. 11 at Palos Heights Public Library can help in that regard.

"There was an absence of this type of musical program in conjunction with the bicentennial of Illinois," said performer Steve Justman via phone from his Wilmette home.

"In Illinois we've got some things to be proud of. There is a musical legacy and contribution by Illinois over the years to American music, which is what I centered things on. We can look at songs that have specific Illinois landmarks mentioned in them.

"We have songs and we have artists. Sometimes we have overlap like the song 'Route 66' that was done by Nat King Cole in 1946. Nat King Cole grew up in Chicago. Route 66 started in Chicago. There's Steve Goodman. There's Burl Ives. There's Sam Cooke."

"Illinois @ 200: The Musical Influence of Illinois Artists and Songs" also features contributions by musicians such as [John Prine](#) and Warren Zevon.

"I touch upon poetry by the most well-known lyricist who ever came from Illinois. That's Carl Sandburg. It's all the same whether it's music or spoken. Lyrics are lyrics so I have a nice little mix of examples," Justman said.

"I just hope there are ones that people can relate to whether it's the artists or the songs themselves."

Justman (www.stevejustman.com) who performs at many libraries has done previous programs at Palos Park and Palos Heights public libraries.

"I try to bring programs of enjoyment musically. It just works so well in a library. It's a listen and learn experience. A library is a very viable venue for being heard and connecting musically with people," he said.

"I want to present things in context and within my scope of being a musician and teach a little bit as we go along. People who come to a library program, especially a musical one, are really probably pretty interested in the type of music.

"How can you ask for a quieter audience and a more attentive audience? For the performer, it's just ideal. They're trying to get people into the library for many different reasons and I try to give people a good reason to come."

Justman, who said he “started singing when I was old enough to talk,” began playing guitar when he was 12 years old and soon after learned to play banjo.

“I started out with folk music but then I realized somewhere along the line that it’s all interconnected – folk music, country music, the blues, bluegrass, rockabilly, all this stuff. They’re all different branches of what’s become known as Americana music,” he said.

“I’ve always been fascinated how certain lyrics in, for example, a bluegrass song can also be the same identical lyrics or phrases being used in a blues song that’s also from many years ago. There’s an interconnecting there.”

Justman, who is a requested performer at senior residences, also is the bassist for Johnny Cash and June Carter tribute band June’s Got the Cash, which performs from noon-3 p.m. Oct. 27 at Konow’s Corn Maze in Homer Glen.

In addition to performing solo in the Chicago area and Midwest, Justman offers several programs including “Musical Memories! The Magic of Song” and “The Roots of Americana.”

‘Illinois @ 200: The Musical Influence of Illinois Artists and Songs’

When: 6:30 p.m. Oct. 11

Where: Palos Heights Public Library, 12501 S. 71st Ave., Palos Heights

Admission: free; registration requested

Information: 708-448-1473; www.palosheightslibrary.org

Jessi Virtusio is a freelancer for the Daily Southtown.