



TOMORROW'S SONGS
TODAY

THE HISTORY OF FILM MUSIC

GARY MCGATH

Tomorrow's Songs Today

The History of Filk Music

by Gary McGath

Second Edition

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Supporters

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Several websites have been hugely valuable. The [Internet Archive](#) let me find old versions of websites that otherwise would have been long gone. [Kay Shapero's Filk FAQ](#) and [Debbie Ohi's Filk FAQ](#) provided pointers to lots of information. The [Filk Hall of Fame](#) maintains biographical information on key filkers which I've gladly used. [SF-Fantasy.de](#) features valuable and informative recorded interviews with filkers. [Fancylopedia 3](#) contains lots of information on fannish history, including filk.

The NESFA library has been a great place to find books relating to fannish history. The Filkindex, created by Sourdough Jackson and published by Roberta Rogow, was a valuable resource.

Terri Wells did a great job as the editor of this book, finding inconsistencies, typos, stylistic gaffes, and boring paragraphs, and pushing me to fix them. Without her help, this book would have been painful reading in many places.

Gwen Exner provided valuable copy editing for the 2023 edition. I've improved some phrasing in the old part of the book, based on her input.

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The odds are high that I've forgotten to thank someone who helped out. My apologies.

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When I decided to do a 2023 update, again many people provided useful information. I’d like to thank Luke Bretscher, Gary Ehrlich, Eli Goldberg, Merav Hoffmann, Karl-Johan Norén, Bill Roper, and anyone else I’ve missed. The “History of Filk” panel which I participated in at the 2023 NASFiC in Winnipeg, along with Roberta Rogow, Dave Hayman, Margaret Middleton, Erwin Strauss, and Catherine Macdonald, provided a lot of valuable information, confirming what I previously had or adding new details.

Introduction

Don't believe everything you read here.

Researching cultural history is hard, as I've discovered, even when it's a culture that you live and breathe. To put together the information here, I've conducted lots of interviews, in person and by phone, and exchanged lots of email. People have been very forthcoming with great stories.

Unfortunately, memory is an unreliable thing. People don't always remember things quite as they happened, and it's especially hard to remember dates. Different descriptions of an event haven't always agreed, and sometimes people have even contradicted their own public statements. Where possible, I've checked old books, articles, and websites, but those can contain mistakes too.

If I were writing a scholarly work, I'd give all the different accounts and let you choose among them. But I'm not aspiring to scholarly history here. I'm aiming to tell the story of a community that has been very important to me, a story to help the community understand its own past better and to help others learn about it. I want to tell that story in a way that's both interesting and accurate. Too much precision and detail get boring; what I've aimed to present is the likeliest version of events. Undoubtedly I'm wrong on some points some of the time. As I learn of significant errors, I'll make errata available on the Web (<http://www.mcgath.com/tst>).

Doing this puts a responsibility on me. People will almost certainly cite this book as a reference, and they may propagate mistakes as a result. With that in mind, I've checked the facts as many ways as I can, short of stalking people and spending a fortune on research. With any source, including this one, you must keep your critical faculties active.

I approached the history of Off Centaur Publications with the most trepidation. There are serious disagreements on who did what, and a lot of people look back painfully on the events. Still, Off Centaur brought filk to a level it had never reached before, and it can't be ignored. I intentionally focused on the good things and tried to be especially dry and factual in dealing with the bad ones.

Inevitably, people will ask, "Why wasn't X included?" Sometimes it's because no one gave me the information. Sometimes it's because I had to make a choice. Sometimes there might not be a good excuse. There are more stories worth telling about filk than any book can include, and I don't know all of them.

I'm distributing this book in both electronic and print editions. To allow the same master file to serve both versions, I created some necessary redundancy in the hyperlinks. The electronic document includes clickable links. In addition, these links are accumulated in the references at the end of the chapter, where they're both clickable and readable. This approach means you can find all the links in the print edition without having them clutter the text. It offers the additional advantage that the reference tells you what the link was about, should it go away in the future.

Introduction to the Second Edition

It's been eight years since the first edition of this book. Filk continues, and it changes. The COVID pandemic and the advances in Internet technology have been the biggest factors. The average age of filkers has climbed, but new people are still coming into filk. We've lost many valued community members but gained new ones.

The main changes to this edition are the addition of a new chapter, "Living in the Future," and the updating of the appendices. A few fixes have been made to the existing text. In some places I've updated information, but whenever you see a reference to the "present" in the first fourteen chapters, you should read it as "roughly 2015." The "future" is "after 2015."

Many hyperlinks have broken since 2015. I've tried to replace them all with updated equivalents or with Internet Archive links wherever possible. I've probably missed one or two.

There could be a third edition, if I live long enough and there's interest.

1. “Filker up!”

As you pass by a room at a science fiction convention, you hear that cry. Curious, you step in. You see people sitting in a rough circle. Several have guitars. Some have other instruments, or none. The room is full of songbooks and digital devices, from laptops to tablets to recorders.

Conversations fade into silence; someone starts strumming a guitar and sings. The voice isn't the greatest, but everyone listens attentively. A few sing along, and more of them join in for the chorus. You're sure you've heard the tune before, but not with these words. The song ends, people applaud, and then another song starts — this time a more serious one by someone with a really good voice. If you hang around long enough, you might hear songs about spaceships, pirates, computers, zombies, or cats — maybe even about pirate zombie cats stealing a spaceship's computer.

This is filk music, with an “i.” It can happen at a home, a science fiction convention, or a convention specifically for filk. People get together, regardless of their level of musical skill, and sing. It's something out of the past — a gathering where people make their own music — with songs out of the future. As the title of an early filk album put it, it's “folk songs for folk who ain't even been yet.”

But let's go back to our convention room. The atmosphere you see is very participatory, and the group isn't a huge one. You sense that the performers are members of a community; there's no star who shows up, sings, signs, and leaves. You hear lots of singing along and might see impromptu dancing in the aisles.

If you come back later on in the convention for the filk concert, you're in for more surprises. Backed by a full sound system, the performers work from a whole collection of instruments. The audience isn't gigantic, almost certainly less than two hundred people. But they're actively listening, not just letting the music flow over them. They're reacting to the words and joining in on the chorus, in harmony.

What is filk?

What exactly is this “filk” you've just discovered? If you asked the people in this hypothetical room, you'd probably get several different answers, but there are some definitions they'd all agree are wrong.

Parody lyrics to old tunes? No! Badly-sung music performed late at night at SF cons? No! Weren't you listening to that song Kathy just did? It was her own tune and lyrics, and she sang it beautifully. Sure, they'll admit, a lot of the singing is bad, but that's because the culture welcomes performers regardless of their level of ability. Some filkers are professional musicians!

Is it a musical style? Not really. Most of what you've heard sounds like folk music, but some people sang songs to popular tunes, and one performer came up with some really impressive jazz guitar riffs. And that guy in the lab coat with the keyboard — wasn't that a quote from Wagner in his song?

If you hang around for a few “filksings,” as these informal gatherings are called, you'll notice the subject matter spans a broad base. Science fiction and technology are popular topics, but songs can cover a lot of different areas and still be filk. Traditional love songs have a hard time passing muster, but

if it's about a mad scientist's love for his lab assistant, one fan's love for another, or even a "mixed marriage" between a fan and a non-fan, most would say it counts.

What you're seeing is a musical culture. The people who participate in it, including non-singers, are called "filkers." It's been called "the folk music of the future" or defined as "what people do at filksings." [Interfilk](#), an organization which funds convention guests, says, "Filk music is more than performance, songs, filk conventions, concerts, and open filks. It is all of these things and more. Filk is the community which builds and is built by them."

It's definitely folk music, not necessarily in the stylistic sense, but as the shared music of a culture. Edith Fowke wrote in *Canadian Folklore Canadien*: "Sung by an enormous body of fans, filksongs are much closer to folk songs than the compositions of professional folksingers like Gordon Lightfoot and Joni Mitchell which are commonly referred to as 'folk.' SF fans are a definite folk group with their own special language, and filksinging is a folk activity that has developed definite patterns."

In *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, we're told that filk is "a type of music, originally in the folk style but now of any style, with content relating to science fiction, fantasy, science fiction fandom, or other topics of interest to SF fans." It also recognizes the words "filker," "filking," and "filksing" ("a gathering of filkers to perform and listen to filk songs").

In this hypothetical introduction, you discovered filk at a science fiction convention. It's closely tied to science fiction fandom and shares many of its features: fascination with science and technology, love of good stories, and willingness to engage with anyone who has something interesting to say. A lot of the songs are based on TV shows, movies, and novels, saying something about them or making up new stories about their characters. Some songs turn familiar stories inside out, giving new insight, defending the supposed villain, or turning helpless maidens into "wicked girls saving themselves." Some are fan fiction that rhymes and scans. Nothing is sacred, not even Holy Writ; you might hear songs giving Bible stories a rather irreverent treatment.

Sometimes the flow goes the other way. Science fiction writers, such as Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, have included filk songs in their novels. Some people are both pro writers and filkers and work their own songs into their stories.

The songs you hear can be silly, serious, hopeful, or tragic. The best ones combine skillful music writing with powerful words. You might hear a song celebrating the progress of the space program and saying "there's a future to be won;" that's Jordin Kare's "Fire in the Sky." If you hear one presenting a moving view of the fan whose dreams are remote from daily life, it could be Zander Nyron's "Sam's Song" or Rob Balder's "Rich Fantasy Lives." You might hear a lot of silly songs about computers, but then encounter Steve Savitzky's "World Inside the Crystal," which compares computer programming to magic in a meaningful way. We'll delve more deeply into the varieties of filk in the next chapter.

In filk, unlike many musical venues, the words are generally the most important part. You can't just half-listen; you need to pay attention to what the song is saying. Phil Mills' "Powders and Signs" might seem to be a typical song about a girl who makes strange, supernatural things happen — but if you listen carefully, you'll notice that the evidence against her is really thin. ("On the very same day, or at least the same year...")

Filkers are almost aggressively proud of accepting weak performance and versification, as long as the song says something interesting, moving, or funny. When she was honored at the FilKONtario convention in 2003, [Sally Childs-Helton](#), an ethnomusicologist who's also a singer, summed it up this way:

We have taken our right to be creative and to literally “play” in the best sense of that word. We invite each other out to play. And we do it. We do it with great joy, and we do it with great hearts. We do it with a lot of loving forgiveness for people who are still developing as musicians and may be a little painful at first to listen to. We see the growth, we see the value, we see the community, and I can tell you that as a musical subculture — if you want to get really academic about it we are a musical subculture — I don't know of one like it anywhere.

Kathleen Sloan, in the spirit of filk, turned these remarks into a song, “Take It Back,” which filkers often consider one of their anthems:

But we can take it back. Take it back.
Take back the right to sing and play.
It will fill your heart, it will feed your soul,
When you take back the right to sing and play.

This is a “right” people once regularly exercised. A hundred years ago, people learned songs from sheet music and sang them with piano accompaniment. Phonograph records existed, but they were still so primitive that printed music was the main source of song publishers' income. The subject matter of filk may be the future, but the singing comes from the traditions of the past.

Filk's openness gives it a bad reputation with some people. The wrong notes stick in their minds, and they think that's what all of it is like. If you can't stand bad singing or a few weak songs, you should avoid the open singing, but you may still find some wonderful songs in the concerts.

New Hampshire's Jack Carroll, who has been involved in filk since the early seventies, says:

The quality of the music has gradually risen over the years. In the early to mid seventies there weren't any professional musicians involved in filk. I don't think there were serious amateurs, and now there are both. It's become more of an effort to produce good music and good words, and I think one of the best things about it is that it's still kept a place to be dreadful, so that you can gain experience and become good. A lot of other opportunities for music, even folk music, don't offer that to beginners. We've got a place for them.

When you meet filkers, you'll find people from a wide variety of backgrounds. They tend to have college educations. People who work in computers or engineering are especially well-represented. Some are professional musicians. Others come from all kinds of work backgrounds — lawyers, scientists, professors, radio and TV people, grocery clerks, handwriting specialists.

Filk includes songbooks, CDs, downloadable music, and Internet videos, but its heart is real-life gatherings of people. Filk conventions or “cons” take place in the United States, Canada, England, and Germany. Most run through a weekend. Usually they're in hotels, though some of the German ones have been in a medieval castle. Attendees usually stay at the hotel, even if they're local, because singing runs late into the night, sometimes till dawn. The daytime events include concerts, workshops, and usually an auction to help future conventions.

Filk still happens at general science fiction conventions, which gave it its first home. During the day there are concerts, panels, and themed circles. Many cons have official filk guests. When all the other programming has finished for the day, singing will begin and continue late into the night.

If you want to get together with filkers more often, you might go to “house filks,” gatherings in people’s homes to sing, eat, talk, and otherwise have a good time. These can be one-time events or regular gatherings.

Filk has even happened on Mars. On February 14, 2004, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory transmitted “The Pioneers of Mars” by Canadian songwriters Lloyd Landa and Karen Linsley to the Opportunity rover on the planet’s surface, as part of its “wake-up music” tradition.

In an [interview in 2012](#), Kathy Mar said:

Out in the regular part of the world, what musicians are is just live Muzak. We are the background soundtracks to other people’s lives. Trying to get people to sing along, trying to get people to really listen, it’s almost impossible. There was a folksinger named Carla Ulbrich, who someone talked into coming to a convention, and she was blown away because people got it. When she had a chorus, by the second time they were singing along. By the third time they were singing along in harmony.

Organization out of chaos

Let’s go back to the filk room once again. How do all these people in the room figure out who’s going to sing next? The two most popular ways to organize a filksing are called “bardic” and “chaos.” In the bardic or “pick, pass, or play” style, the seats are arranged in a rough circle, and each person gets a turn. Each participant in turn chooses to perform something, to make a request, or to pass. As someone new, you wouldn’t know any of the songs, but you could ask for a song on a general subject. There’s a good chance someone will oblige. If you were one of the regulars, you might ask for a particular song or a performance by a particular person. There’s no obligation to grant a request, but they’ll do their best.

In some parts of the US you might run into the “token bardic” or “poker chip bardic,” in which the moderator issues each person an object such as a poker chip, and anyone can throw one in between songs to get a turn. To make a request, hand someone else your token. When all the tokens are used up, the moderator hands them out again. Sometimes three sets of tokens with different colors are handed out at the start, so it isn’t necessary to stop and distribute the next set. Token bardic can have a smoother flow than traditional bardic, and participants can use their tokens when they have a song that follows the last one nicely.

In a chaos circle, anyone can jump in after a song is finished. If several people jump in at once, they queue up. Chaos can be more spontaneous than bardic, but if you’re shy and don’t have an instrument, you might find it hard to get a turn. A participant may help to manage the chaos, queuing up singers and encouraging those who haven’t sung. Someone might be the official moderator, or well-regarded members of the community may just gently lead. Unmoderated chaos is especially problematic when the group includes a “filkhog,” someone who grabs too many turns.

Sometimes chaos degenerates into what Lee Gold calls “piranha chaos,” where each turn is a struggle

for dominance. I've rarely run into this myself, but an article in *APA-Filk*, reporting on the 1984 Bayfilk convention, gives an idea of how intense it can get:

Part of the program guide were some pages with "ME-ME-ME!" or "Pass," designed to help regulate the sing. While it did help skip those who did not wish to participate, it didn't help much in regulating those who did. They tended to just leave the "ME-ME-ME!" signs out all the time. This meant that it was impossible to let people know when you have a perfect follow to the song being sung, because your "ME-ME-ME!" sign has to compete with 20 others.

Other chaos circles are more relaxed, and long conversations may follow a song. As a newcomer, you might find it hard to break into the conversation to start another song. If they lend you an instrument, you can start playing an introduction, or else you can call out "I have a song." If you need help derailing the conversation, someone else may call out "Filk up!" Each group develops its own style and customs.

In "fortune cookie" circles, most common on the West Coast, the host hands out pieces of paper with topics written on them, and the people who get them are expected to sing a song related to the topic when their turn comes around. This can be problematic if you don't have a big repertoire, but it can encourage people to bring out songs they don't perform much. In a "domino" or "song sequitur" circle, when it's your turn you have to follow the previous one in some way, such as using the same tune, being on the same topic, etc.

In performance circles, a Midwestern tradition, an inner group does most of the singing and a larger outer circle mostly listens. These can be bardic or chaos, and people in the outer circle can perform, though it may take a bit of persistence to get a turn. Sometimes it's a "performance line," with the core singers at the front of the room. This style has faded in the past couple of decades.

All circles become less enjoyable when they're too big. No matter how you organize it, the average waiting time to get a turn to sing is the number of people who want to sing times the average length of a song, plus the time between songs. With more than twenty people, this can be an hour or more. With a hundred, you might get to sing only once during the entire night.

At the end of a convention, you might stay for the "dead dog" filk. This isn't a particular kind of filk circle, but simply the last round of filking after the convention has officially ended. It sometimes lasts until the hotel insists that everyone leave.

Filk conventions

Each filk convention is different, but there's a general common style wherever you go. You can register in advance or (at a higher cost) at the door; either way, you're a "member" of the convention, not just an attendee. The typical con starts on Friday evening and runs through Sunday. There may be an event on Friday to meet other members. If you're a regular filker, this will include a lot of old friends; if not, just introduce yourself to someone and tell them it's your first convention. Like everyone at the con, you received a badge at registration; this helps to smooth out introductions and lets you remember the large number of people you'll get to know. Make sure to wear your badge whenever you're in the convention area; it proves that you paid to be there. During the course of Friday evening there will usually be a couple of concerts, followed by open singing through the night.

You can drop in on the con suite, a room supplied with snacks and drinks. These are included in your membership cost. It's a good place to meet people and converse. If you're planning a performance or can help back up someone else's, you can get together to make plans there, though you'll have to rehearse somewhere else.

If you want to buy recordings or songbooks, visit the dealers' room. You'll find tables at which people run their own businesses; in addition to music, you'll often find books, garb, and crafts for sale. If you're new to filk, ask the dealers what they recommend. You can also look at the auction table, where you can write down your bid on things you'd like to buy. It will have everything from kitsch to collectors' items.

Don't expect things to start very early on Saturday. Most people stayed up very late the night before, and the earliest program items will be small ones at 10 or 11 AM. This can be a good chance to attend a workshop and learn about how to perform better, work with sound gear, or just have more fun at a con. The afternoon will usually feature the biggest block of concerts. In addition to full concert sets, there may be a chance to sign up to sing one or two songs in the "one shots" or "two by tens." These can be popular, so you may have to sign up early or hope to be picked by a drawing.

There might be a dinner in the hotel in the afternoon or late in the evening. Hotel food is expensive, so you'll have to buy a separate ticket for this event. At some conventions, it comes with a special ceremony or entertainment. In the US, there usually will be an Interfilk auction, in other countries, an auction for the local fan fund. Some of the items which you saw on the auction table may go to voice auction here, because the bidding passed a threshold; some especially exciting offers may have gone "direct to voice," without having first appeared on the table. Even if you aren't interested in buying, it's great entertainment.

On Sunday things wind down. There may be some more workshops and a few more concerts, and the silent auction will close. If you've bid on anything at the table, be sure to check if you won and pay at the designated time. There may be an expedition to an outside restaurant in the afternoon, and people will come back for a final singing session called the "dead dog." Then come the farewells and hugs and the inevitable trip home.

Relatives of filk

There's music related to science fiction and other "geeky" subjects that isn't usually considered filk, and whose creators don't call themselves filkers. Tom Lehrer, Weird Al Yankovic, and Jonathan Coulton are well known. Some people have even put on Klingon opera, performing it in the Klingon language. Specialty bands like Harry and the Potters and District 13 do "wizard rock" and "rockingjay" and cover subjects that filkers love. Nerdcore performers do rap or hip-hop with geeky subjects. The difference is just that they aren't part of the culture. They may touch on it and like it, but they perform for a wider audience. Some are closer to the filk world than others. Barry "Dr. Demento" Hansen runs a popular radio show that has given airplay to a lot of filk songs, and he's been a guest at science fiction conventions.

Some people consider forms such as nerdcore, wizard rock, and rockingjay filk, but the people who perform them don't really pay much attention to filk or go to its conventions. They're equally valid forms of fan music, but they inhabit their own space. Melissa Tatum discusses the relationship between

filk and wizard rock in [“Identity and Authenticity in the Filk Community.”](#) She makes the point that “a group’s identity can be defined either by those within the group or by those outside the group. The definitions chosen by insiders and outsiders are likely to differ.” She concludes that “wizard rock is not filk because the members of the wrock community do not define themselves as filkers.” Indeed, there’s rather little communication between the groups. An article on [“The Wellspring of Wrock”](#) on Wizrocklopedia acknowledges the relationship between wizard rock and filk but treats them as two distinct communities.

I was once slated to be on a panel at Arisia on fannish music, with two of the panelists being from wizard rock and two from filk. I wrote to the other panelists that this would be a good opportunity to discuss the relationship between the communities, but the wizard rockers wanted me only if I wouldn’t talk about filk. I withdrew from the panel rather than have unnecessary unpleasantness in an already heavy schedule, but it’s sad that we couldn’t have had such a discussion.

“Geek music” often has closer connections to filk, with performers like Copy Red Leader and Debs & Errol living in both worlds. The filk community sometimes adopts songs by people outside it, calling them “found filk.”

The filk family

Filk is folk music, not because of its musical style, but because it comes from people getting together to make music for themselves. Like all folk music, it includes songs about the work people do (including computer programming, product design, and technical support), family and love (and the stresses which being a fan puts on them), and memorable experiences (including strange events at conventions).

If you visit a number of filksings, you’ll find roughly equal male and female participation. Jews, pagans, and freethinkers are easily found. There’s a strong tendency to light skins, probably reflecting the demographic makeup in the professions that filkers usually come from. It’s certainly not from a desire to exclude anyone for their appearance, but subtle cultural factors can play a role without anyone’s realizing it. Regardless, you won’t be turned away because of your appearance.

There’s something more, though, which you’ll find if you stay with filk for any length of time. It’s not just the songs, gatherings, recordings, and publications. It’s a community of amazing strength. Once you’re known as part of it, you’re welcome everywhere. Jane Garthson, a Toronto filk organizer who doesn’t perform or write songs very much, has experienced this with people she hadn’t met before.

You don’t know the music community that I’m part of, where they don’t have to know me to not only invite me to the parties but organize a party *for* me. I have no talent, no standing in the community as a creative person or performer, they don’t care! As soon as I say “I’m coming,” there’s a party.

It’s not that filkers have especially high social skills; often it’s the opposite. Maybe it’s that we find that not fitting in with the rest of the world, we fit in remarkably well with each other. I’ve experienced it myself on numerous occasions; anywhere that there’s a filk convention, even when I visited one in Germany for the first time, the moment I arrived I was at home. But it’s especially when filkers encounter rough spots in their lives that the support is there. Sometimes it’s been financial as well as emotional, particularly when people are facing large medical bills.

Filkers delight in seeming weird to the outside world, but at the same time they're a welcoming group, encouraging newcomers and helping them to fit into the circle. For some people it's baffling, but for others it's the world they were always looking for.

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2. Varieties of filk

Filk can deal with all kinds of topics. Look through a songbook such as *The Westerfilk Collection* and you'll find songs on space travel, bureaucracy, TV shows, English history, physics, California earthquakes, personal vengeance, the afterlife of tyrants, lime Jello, and filking itself. There's no limit on the kinds of songs that can turn up, but some are especially "filkish."

Songs about literature have always been popular. They can include songs based on science fiction novels or ancient mythology. Fantasy literature has become an increasingly popular inspiration lately. A song can summarize the plot, sometimes straightforwardly, more often injecting some commentary on it or changing its perspective. Often it will show a character's thoughts on the events. Dave Weingart's "Just a Boy Named Harry" shows Harry Potter's own perspective during his early years at Hogwarts. "A Thousand Ships" by Ju Honisch and Katy Dröge presents what Helen might have been thinking during the Trojan War.

Sometimes the song will change the story or look outside its boundaries, or even mix it together with another story. Kari Maaren's "Kids These Days" features a Dracula-like vampire grouching about the angst-ridden vampires in the *Twilight* series. Other songs tell very little of the story but give insight into characters. Chris Malme's "A Boy in a Room" looks at the dilemma forced on the protagonist of Orson Scott Card's "Ender's Game." Some of these songs effectively serve as fan fiction set to music.

Songs set to existing tunes often rely on the interplay between the story they're commenting on and the original song. Bob Kanefsky's "Liar!" sets an Isaac Asimov robot story to Stan Rogers' "Lies" and, like the original song, presents a conflict between needing to know the truth and wishing for a flattering falsehood. Lee Gold's "Aral's Nightmare" is based on Lois McMaster Bujold's novels about Miles Vorkosigan, who discovers in one of the books that he has a clone. If one clone, why not many? The tune for Lee's song is "Five Hundred Miles."

Movies and TV have inspired many filk songs. "The Last of Grand Moff Tarkin's Crew" lets a low-ranking soldier on the Death Star tell the story of *Star Wars* in a comical way. For a more serious example, Kathy Mar's "Demon in the Dark" tells the story of a *Star Trek* episode from the perspective of a misunderstood alien creature. Leslie Fish's "Eternal Loser" transforms Captain Kirk's many one-episode romances, which have often been a subject of jokes, into a story of his lonely fate. Seanan McGuire's "Evil Laugh" makes a short scene in *Firefly* where a crew member is playing with toy dinosaurs into a story-song from a tyrannosaur's point of view.

Other filk songs use original story lines. Leslie Fish's "The Horse-Tamer's Daughter" is a lengthy ballad inspired by Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* stories, but with its own characters and plot. Virginia Taylor's "Thornberry Wine" is a first-person account of becoming a vampire, while Steve Savitzky's "Vampire Mega-Byte" is the tale of a vampire computer. Don Simpson's "Ship of Stone" presents a future in which a civilization based in a fleet of spaceships has only distorted memories of Earth. Cat Faber's "Annie's Luck" tells an original story in the *Babylon 5* universe, without any of the regular characters.

Real life and realistic prospects for the near future can inspire filk songs. Space travel is a popular topic.

Jordin Kare's "Fire in the Sky" covers the history of space flight starting with Gagarin and ending with a verse saying "We're going to the stars." Steve Macdonald's "Journey's Done" does the same, but starts from the Montgolfier balloons. A lot of these songs simply applaud the idea of going into space; others remember tragedies such as the *Challenger* space shuttle disaster or averted disasters like the Apollo 13 mission. Julia Ecklar's "The Phoenix" turns the deaths on the ground of the Apollo 1 astronauts into a message of hope. Kathy Mar's "Dreaming" imagines passenger space travel in the future.

Any area of science can become filk material. James (formerly Jane) Robinson has written a number of songs about paleontology, such as "Fossil Fever" and "Digga Bigga Bone." Jack Carroll's "The Chemist's Drinking Song" is about chemistry, or at least about making long chemical names scan to "The Irish Washerwoman."

Computers appear frequently as filk subjects. The song may focus on computers familiar to the author or artificial intelligences from science fiction. Duane Elms' "Threes 1.1" offers a software developer's jaded view of a conference with a manager and a customer. Frank Hayes' "S-100 Bus" gives an idea of the days when hobbyists built their own computers.

Cats are popular among filkers, and so are songs about them. They don't need to have any content related to science fiction, though it helps if they aren't just sentimental. Filkers are fully aware that cats can do annoying, even destructive things, and we love them anyway, so we take out our frustrations through songs. Jane Robinson's "Overflowing Cat Box Blues" is a popular example. Dogs also come up in songs, though more rarely; one example is "Ghost Puppies in the Sky" by Duane Elms.

The animals in filk songs aren't necessarily alive; there's even a sub-genre about dead cats. If one is sung while I'm in the room, you may see me fleeing at high speed.

The largest category of filk songs may be songs about filk and fandom. These include songs about experiences at conventions, like Poul Anderson's "Bouncing Potatoes" and Anne Passovoy's "Marcon Ballroom." They might be about what it's like to be a fan or filker. Brenda Sutton's "Strangers No More" is about being part of the community. Kathy Mar's "HeavenCon" imagines the ideal convention. Debbie Ohi celebrates her favorite convention in "Home to FilKONtario." Roberta Rogow's "At the Worldcon" is about a not so satisfying visit to a convention.

There are songs that comment on other songs, often using the tune of the original. T.J. Burnside Clapp's "Lullaby for a Weary World," with the recurring line "Sleep, my weary world," inspired Lee Gold's "Reveille" to the same tune, which says that what the world needs isn't to sleep but to wake up. Bob Kanefsky's "Doppel-Entendre," to the tune of Julia Ecklar's "Doppelganger," in effect comments on itself, being about filk songs that use the tunes of other filk songs. Mike Stein's "Signed, J. P." is a sequel to "Puff, the Magic Dragon," with an original tune.

Ask at a filksing for a song on any topic, and there's a good chance someone will have one. If not, someone may write one on the spot. Such songs are called "instafilks." Sometimes people create them just for the occasion and forget them, but sometimes they polish them and make them part of their repertoire. Betsy Tinney was asked, "Do you know any songs about salads?" Twenty minutes later, she emailed back, "We do now," attaching an MP3 of the freshly written "Salad of Doom," which is now one of her most popular songs.

Tom Smith is an acknowledged master of instafilk. At one OVFF, the song contest called on participants to write “the best song Tom Smith never wrote,” i.e., parodies on his songs or style. Tom obviously wasn’t eligible to participate, but at the completion of the contest, he performed a medley of freshly-written songs commenting on each entry in sequence.

“Salad of Doom” describes a cheerful subject, yummy food, in threatening terms. In the recorded version, the backup musicians sing “DOOM nom nom, DOOM nom nom...” in a waltz beat. Other filk songs treat grim subjects cheerfully. Brooke Abbey’s “Wreck of the Crash of the Easthill Mining Disaster” piles catastrophe on catastrophe till it’s so implausible that it’s funny. As the song says, it’s “as sad as it’s true.” The term “ose” is used for songs that are unremittingly grim — it comes from treating the word “morose” as if it were “more ose” — but “cheery-ose” songs that juxtapose cheerful and grim elements are very popular. Irony plays a big part in many filk songs.

Some songs are really short, just two or three lines with an abrupt ending, like this one:

Off we go into the wild blue yonder,
Flying high into the sun ... (*sizzle*)

These are called “showstoppers.”

Musical styles

Styles are almost as varied as subject matter. What you’ll hear most often at filksings is ballads with regular verses and simple accompaniment or none, because they’re easy to do and they let the words come to the fore. Many filkers like choral singing, working from an arrangement or improvising the harmony. Group singing from books was once so popular that several filk books bore the word “hymnal” in their titles.

Some performers go in heavily for popular styles with multi-instrument arrangements. You’ll often hear the Celtic rock style. Quite a few songs combine country elements with science fiction in their lyrics, using a country-style tune. A few groups like hard-rock styles, strong on electric guitars and drums. It’s hard to make the lyrics audible with this approach, though, so it’s less common in filk than in popular music. Filkers are more likely to go to the other end of the spectrum and sing a capella, sometimes because unaccompanied singing is the only available choice, but sometimes performing small group arrangements with excellent effect.

Any kind of instrument might show up in a filk performance, if someone can play it well. A performer might specialize in one instrument and play it spectacularly, or have a whole collection of instruments to bring out as the song calls for them. A few filk recordings have featured whole small orchestras.

When filkers write songs to existing tunes, the range of styles gets even wider. Some filks use centuries-old folk songs; it’s been said that you can make anything scan to “Greensleeves.” Hymns from the Reformation and tunes from the Baroque and Classical periods can be grist for the filker’s mill. Show tunes are popular but often difficult, with chords that few guitarists can manage and vocal ranges that challenge most singers. Filk lyrics often use tunes from popular groups of past decades, such as the Beatles, as well as current hits. Occasionally filkers have ventured into rap or hip-hop. A few people do

filk karaoke, even though the idea of using canned accompaniment feels wrong to others.

Some filkers tell stories or write poems without tunes in addition to creating songs, and it's legitimate to take a turn in most circles for either of those, as long as the story isn't too long. Some stories have audience participation elements, where people are encouraged to shout back responses or repeat chorus-like elements. Ian Hanley, Mike Rubin, and Harold Feld have contributed to the storytelling tradition in East Coast filk, and in the West Tom Digby has written many poems that are known to filkers.

Be careful what you ask filkers for. You may get it.

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3. The beginnings of filk (1940-1965)

Where and when did filk begin? It's hard to pin down an exact point. People have been gathering to sing for centuries. Some of their songs recounted fantastic stories. New technologies have always inspired songs. From the growth of the railroads came ballads like "Casey Jones." The steam drill gave us "John Henry." Songs like "In My Merry Oldsmobile" celebrated the appearance of the automobile.

Student songs, at least as old as the sources of *Carmina Burana*, are precursors to filk. College students have always gotten together after (or instead of) studying and made up their own songs, often with daring lyrics. Some of them were about mythology, the fantasy literature of an earlier day. The songs at engineering colleges, such as MIT and Caltech, often mention technology and look a lot like early filk songs. This is no coincidence, since they were often written by the same people and adopted as filk songs.

But if filk is the folk music of science fiction fandom, the early history of filk is strongly tied to science fiction conventions. No one called it filk at first. Singing has been part of cons since 1940 or earlier. Sourdough Jackson mentions a song called "The Marching Song of Foo-Foo" and dates it to 1939. There is an unconfirmed report that at the 1936 gathering of nine fans, rather grandiosely called the Philadelphia Science Fiction Convention, participants sang SF-related songs as they returned to the train station. Fred Pohl mentioned in *The Way the Future Was* that at the 1947 Worldcon, also in Philadelphia, Theodore Sturgeon accompanied a singer named Mary Mair on his song "Thunder and Roses."

Fans produced song sheets on acid-laden paper, using messy stencil reproduction machines, and distributed them at cons. John A. Bristol published a "Science Fiction Song Sheet" (see Fig. 1) at Chicon 1, the 1940 world science fiction convention. Harry Warner, Jr., writing about the same convention, tells us, "'Filksong' was a term that had not yet been invented, but songs were sung that consisted of new lyrics with a science fiction theme set to familiar tunes." He also mentions an interesting bit of recording history:

Fandom's big chance to get its music before the mundane public took the form of Vanguard Records, a project that the present Vanguard recording firm probably never heard about. Just after World War II, [James] Blish and Robert W. Lowndes got outside funds for their attempt to found a firm producing 78-rpm discs. One fan composition, Chandler Davis' "Song of Worlds Unseen," performed by Bertha Melnik, was among the works on Vanguard that actually got distributed. There were ambitious plans for a fat album of music by various fan composers. The company was in search of recording rights to works by non-fans like Stravinsky and Bartók when it collapsed after it lost an angel.

Amateur press associations, commonly called "APAs," were a mainstay of fannish communications in the forties, and continued to be until the Internet largely displaced them. A few still exist. In the usual model, members would type up and make the requisite number of copies of their own pages, and one person would collate them and distribute the assembled publication to members. Sometimes the collator did the reproduction. APAs such as APA-F in New York and APA-L in Los Angeles included some songs.

SCIENCE-FICTION SONG SHEET I ^{Jackson}

Published by John A Bristol, 5174 Conduit Rd, Wn/DC, for the Chicago 1940 World Science-Fiction Convention and the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, and perhaps other persons that mite request a copy and hence, we respectfully call to your attention, falling under the purview of the common-law copyright (with the exception of the Road Song of the Transport Cadets), which means that my high and mighty permission must be obtained for any hypothetical reprint of any of the contents.

CONVENTION OF 2140

(Tune: "There are smiles that make us happy,...")

Here are fans from Enceladus,
Here are fans from Luna's face;
Here are fans from Mercury to Pluto,
And from Vulcan, if there's such a place.

And we who gather in this conclave
Do assert that we will never be
Content, until the flag of fandom
Floats over Proxima Centauris!

D Ta FRAGMENT

(Tune: obvious)
We'll build a tempo-ship,
And we'll take a little trip,
And watch a million years go by.

MARCHING SONG OF FOOFOO

(The words are given here from memory; true text has been stenciled for the long-overdue Escape. It would be sacrilege to name the tune for this, but it should be apparent.)

Forward, FooFoo's legions,
Fight against the ghù;
Down with Wollheim, Wylie,
Lowdeq and Kornbluth too.
We shall be victorious,
FooFoo on our side;
Strike the ghùs with mighty poos and
Take them for a ride.

Forward forge our legions,
Fighting foul ghughu;
Up with FooFoo, down with ghughu;
Hail to Great FooFoo!

ODE TO OMNISCIENCE

(Tune is a catchy one, but I'll have to give it to you verbally)

Far above the Hudson's water,
There's a discord sour,
Where a dozen dirty Bolos
Have the Ivory Tower.

PINK AND PURPLE ROCKET

(Tune: The popular song it's mercilessly plagiarized after)

A clock it, a sprocket,
A pink and purple rocket;
I rode on a spaceship out to Luna,
On the way I jumped it:
I jumped it, I jumped it--
Yes, on the way I jumped it.
An ISP boat came along,
And on the moon they
dumped it.

They were sliding on down the
curve of space,
Without any definite time or
place;
Were a-put-put-putting all about,
When they spied it with a shout.
They took it, they took it,
My little purple rocket,
And if I do not get it back
I think that I shall die.

(From here on you throw away the script and begin to improvise.)

THE ROAD SONG OF THE TRANSPORT CADETS

(Tune: "The Roll of the Caissons", Copyrighted by Street & Smith, 1940---used by special permission.)

Hear them hum!
Watch them run!
Oh, our job is never done,
For our roadways keep rolling
along!

While you ride;
While you glide;
We are watching down inside,
So your roadways keep rolling
along!

Oh, it's Hie! Hie! Hee!
The rotor men are we--
Check off the sectors loud and
strong!

ONE! TWO! THREE!
Anywhere you go
You are bound to know
That your roadways are rolling
along!

KEEP THEM ROLLING!
That your roadways are rolling
along!

TWILIGHT PRELUDE

(General tune of Taps, with an extra, unaccented, syllable at the beginning of each line)

The day is done,
Time's sands near run;
The seas are dry, the sky is dark,
the sun is gone.
We've done our best--
These times may pass:
New days may dawn.

For the fact that all of the selections in this sheet are more or less parodies, we can only apologize. Hilt Rothmann was going to write some original music to a piece, but we never could compose one he liked.

All we have to say in conclusion is: YNGVI IS A LOUSE!



Fig. 1: Early evidence of filk.

But when did filk become *filk*? And where does the word come from, exactly? The origin of the word is disputed, though everyone agrees it started out as a typo for "folk." The letters I and O are adjacent on a typewriter keyboard, so it's an easy mistake. There are two main theories about the typo. Both agree that the term appeared around the mid-1950s.

One theory says that it originated in a convention's program book, where an item about "folk singing" was printed as "filk singing." Henry Jenkins endorses this theory in his book *Textual Poachers*, but doesn't give any specifics. The problem with this theory is that no one is able to name the convention or book where this happened. The other theory has specific names and events associated with it, confirmed by well-known fans; it's now the dominant view. Lee Gold recounts this explanation in her essay, "[An Egocentric and Convoluted History of Early 'Filk' and Filking](#)":

Eventually I got around to asking older fans about just what fan had originally typed "folk song" into "filk song" in just what "amateur publication." The culprit turned out to be Lee Jacobs, a LArea fan who had died shortly before I entered fandom. Back in the 50s, he'd submitted an essay to SAPS (Spectator Amateur Press Society) entitled "The Influence of Science Fiction on Modern American Filk Music" about supposed science fiction incidents in folk songs, which was a straight-faced analysis of a number of thoroughly filthy "dirty songs," taking various metaphors in them as if they were meant literally.

Wrai Ballard, the Official Editor of SAPS, rejected the essay on the grounds that the songs would get the APA in trouble with the Post Office, by violating the laws against mailing pornography. But he did notice that

LeeJ's title had an interesting typo: FILK SONG. He told his friends about it. And he had a lot of friends.

Lee Jacobs eventually published his essay elsewhere (this time getting the title spelled accurately), but by that time most of the people in organized SF fandom had heard about "filk songs." They decided, as Karen Anderson wrote, to apply the term filk to the already long-standing tradition of SF/fannish songs and music.

I've heard some skepticism about this account on the grounds that an unpublished typo couldn't have gotten such widespread attention. But does it make any more sense that a published one would get such notice, and then everyone would forget where they saw it? Lots of fans obsessively collect old materials from conventions, and someone should have the publication responsible.

As for how Lee Jacobs' typo could have turned into a popular expression, I think the answer lies in two people: Poul and Karen Anderson. Poul Anderson was a well-known science fiction writer who kept close ties to fandom. His wife Karen, who is still alive and is mentioned in the quote from Lee Gold, also has professional writing credits but has lived more on the fannish side. She wrote in "An Introduction to Filk Singing," originally published in *West by One and by One, An Anthology of Irregular Writings by the Scowlers and Molly Maguires of San Francisco and the Trained Cormorants of Los Angeles County*, privately printed, San Francisco, 1965, and reprinted in the songbook for the convention Consonance 2002:

Since the essay appeared in an amateur publication circulated among science fiction fans, though, there was only one thing to do. Rather than waste a phrase like "filk song," something must be created to which the name could be applied. Now, some eight years later, it means "a topical song borrowing the melody and structure of a well-known folk or popular song." And there are hundreds of them.

My husband and I decided one evening, around the middle of the second tumbler of red wine, that there ought to be some Irregular filk songs.

Karen Anderson published a "zine," an amateur periodical, with the whimsically German title of *Die Zeitschrift für Vollständigen Unsinn* (the magazine for complete nonsense, aka "the Zed"). In 1953 it included a poem by Poul, titled "Barbarous Allen: A Filk Song." Its scansion matches the ballad "Barbara Allen," which has several tunes. This was, as far as anyone can tell, the first intentional use of "filk."

A later issue of the Zed, in 1955, included an article by the pseudonymous P. A. Kingsley (perhaps a pseudonym for Poul and Karen Anderson), titled "How to Write a Filk Song." It says a filk song is "a distorted folk song," and that the term "was a typographical error in, or in correspondence about (this is not clear), Lee Jacobs' 'The Influence of Science Fiction on Modern American Folk Music.' The term was tossed around in SAPS for a while, then dropped but gleefully caught by Karen Anderson."

Fancylopedia 2 (1959), compiled by Dick Eney, defined filk as "A type of music which, if it weren't fannish, would be called a folk song; fan parodies or pastiches of this or other types of mundane chansons."

Names produce cohesiveness, and soon "filk songs" became popular among science fiction fans. Gatherings were small in the fifties, typically three or four singers, sometimes with other fans present to listen. In 1957 Laurence Sandfield distributed a six-song booklet called *Songs from Space* at the Worldcon (World Science Fiction Convention) in London. This may have been the world's first filk book. A

[scanned copy](#) is available online, thanks to Rob Hansen.

Pittcon, 1960's Worldcon in Pittsburgh, was an important point in filk development. A songbook called *A STF and FSY Songbook*, with more than fifty song texts, appeared at the convention. The editor was Hal Shapiro. It was dated 2060, in line with the kind of whimsy fans love. Some of the songs were by professional authors such as Isaac Asimov, L. Sprague de Camp, Damon Knight, and Robert Heinlein. It's unclear whether they gave permission; fandom had a very casual attitude toward copyright then, and nobody seemed to mind unless money was involved. The title page pontificates:

Prepared for presentation at the one-hundred-eighteenth annual World Science Fiction Convention, the Pittcon, being held at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, NA, Earth, this Labor Day weekend in the year 2060 AD. Proceeds from the sale of this work are to be evenly divided, after costs have been refunded, between the TAFF fund (monies used to bring visitors to these gatherings from other galaxies), and the Misfit Party Fund (monies used by the "Michigan Instigators of Science-Fantasy for Intellectual Thinkers Society" for BLOG at conventions).

TAFF is the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, which does bring visitors to conventions, though so far not from other galaxies, so it's likely that money collected really went there. MISFITS was a popular mangling of MSFS, the Michigan Science-Fiction Society. The word "blog" wasn't a prophecy of the Internet, but a fannish term for a kind of drink. The book includes a Gilbert and Sullivan takeoff, "Impatience or Hubbard's Bride," written by Charles B. Tanner under the pseudonym Goldberg & Solomon. Fannish operettas, often playing off the Savoy operas, have been a tradition ever since.

The last page expresses a hope which came true, with the help of other publishers: "And with this we end the first in what is hoped will be a series of Science-Fiction and Fantasy Song Books."

[Juanita Coulson](#), who has been active in fannish music since the 1950s, had the song "Travelin' Girl" in the book; her name then was Juanita Wellens. She recalls that Pittcon opened a room for singing after the regular programming was over, and people from different regions got together and sang through the night, some leaving only when it was time for breakfast. It was several years before this kind of activity was repeated at a convention, but connections had been made that would later bear fruit.

In 1960 Poul Anderson and Ron Ellick wrote "The Childish Edda," a humorous treatment in song of the Norse legends in the *Elder Edda* and *Younger Edda*. It was set to the tune of "The Ballad of Jesse James" and led to a small fad of writing songs to that tune. "The Orcs' Marching Song," a silly summary of *Lord of the Rings*, soon followed, with several people contributing verses. Other songs to the tune were about Jesus Christ (with an "optional verse for Trotskyites") and Captain Marvel.

"The Orcs' Marching Song" began a tradition of songs by multiple authors, where verses could be added without limit. Two of the longest are "Real Old Time Religion," a parody of "Give Me that Old Time Religion" with verses mostly about pagan deities, and "Young Man Mulligan," covering characters from all over science fiction and fantasy literature. For a while George Scithers and the "Young Man Mulligan" Society tried to maintain some order in the song, but the rules gradually broke down under the weight of many contributions. Songs like these later came to be known as "pizza songs," because singing them through would supposedly take enough time to order pizza and have it delivered. In 1988, *Rise Up Singing*, one of the most popular books for group folk singing, included eight verses of "Real Old Time Religion." They're credited to "anon. filk singers and Pete Seeger."

There really were no filkers yet, in the sense of a specialized fandom. Conventions were small, everyone knew everyone, and most people participated in all kinds of events. It was all part of “fanac,” organized fannish activity. When there was singing, they sang, then they might go on to a long discussion of space vehicles, Heinlein’s writing, or politics, or just order drinks. Songs could cross over with other fanac; Randall Garrett contributed to filk with singable SF reviews in a style similar to Newman Levy’s *Opera Guyed*. The large majority of the participants were male and light-skinned, but female influence, with Karen Anderson and Juanita Coulson among the notables, was important from the beginning.

In Juanita’s case, “important” is an understatement. Filk culture as we know it would probably never have happened without her. As Barry Childs-Helton put it, “It’s all her fault. She was always instigating people to come on into the fold and join the tradition.” She has continued to instigate through the decades. In 1962, she performed with Theodore Sturgeon and Ted Cogswell as a warm-up to the masquerade. The acoustic conditions were less than ideal. As she put it, “The room they had selected for the masquerade had about a 40 foot ceiling, which I think was lined with sponge rubber, and there were no mikes, or there were mikes and they weren’t turned on. The people who were sitting at the tables right in front of us could hear.” (Juanita, whose vocal capacity is legendary, doubtless could have filled the room, but the other two would have been drowned out.) Still, it was official singing at a Worldcon.

Unofficial singing happened sporadically. At Tricon, the 1966 Cleveland Worldcon, Barry Gold found a piano and started doing some songs, and a small group joined him. This was the way singing happened at many conventions.

A couple of songs arose out of Westercon XIX (1966) in San Diego, which endured serious problems from both the hotel and its own committee, starting a tradition of songs about convention mishaps. People started contributing verses for “What Shall We Do with the Hotel Manager?” to the tune of “What Shall We Do with a Drunken Sailor?” The convention banquet has been preserved in infamy by a song. Poul Anderson’s daughter Astrid dropped a potato by accident and said in surprise, “Mommy, this potato bounces!” Poul examined it and said, “I’ve often written about them, but this is the first time I’ve ever actually heard a dull, sickening thud.” The result was “Bouncing Potatoes,” to the tune of “Waltzing Matilda,” which is still well known.

Trends in popular music have influenced and strengthened filk. Humorous or “novelty” songs were very popular in the fifties and early sixties. Songs related to horror movies, such as “Purple People Eater” and “Monster Mash,” appealed to science fiction fans. Tom Lehrer’s songs struck a chord, even if it was a dissonant one. *Mad* magazine published many parody lyrics to popular tunes, including a 1961 songbook insert called *Sing Along with Mad*.

Mad’s contribution wasn’t just the parodies it published, but its successful legal defense of them. Though neither the tunes nor the original words were published, some songwriters and publishers claimed *Mad* was violating their copyright. The case *Irving Berlin et al. v. E.C. Publications, Inc.* 329 F. 2d 541 (2d Cir. 1964) was a win for *Mad*, sustained by the Supreme Court on appeal. Judge Charles Messenger wrote in an often-quoted decision:

We believe in any event that the parody lyrics involved in this appeal would be permissible under the most rigorous application of the ‘substantiality’ requirement. The disparities in theme, content and style between the original lyrics and the alleged infringements could hardly be greater. In the vast majority of cases, the

rhyme scheme of the parodies bears no relationship whatsoever to that of the originals. While brief phrases of the original lyrics were occasionally injected into the parodies, this practice would seem necessary if the defendants' efforts were to 'recall or conjure up' the originals; the humorous effect achieved when a familiar line is interposed in a totally incongruous setting, traditionally a tool of parodists, scarcely amounts to a 'substantial' taking, if that standard is not to be woodenly applied. Similarly, the fact that defendants' parodies were written in the same meter as plaintiffs' compositions would seem inevitable if the original was to be recognized, but such a justification is not even necessary; we doubt that even so eminent a composer as plaintiff Irving Berlin should be permitted to claim a property interest in iambic pentameter.

This decision made filk publication in print safe. Nearly all filk songs, like *Mad's*, consisted of new words set to existing tunes. Most fans couldn't read music, and distributing recordings was cumbersome in the days before cassette players, so it wasn't easy for people to learn songs with original tunes. People wrote original songs, but lyrics to well-known tunes predominated.

The gatherings of this time were tiny, and rarely did anyone get up on a stage or use a microphone. It was just one of the ways to have fun at a fannish gathering.

So things continued for a quarter of a century, and then the universe began to expand.

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4. The period of growth (1965-1978)

Satellites orbited the Earth, and the US and Russia raced to the moon. *Star Trek* came on the air, with a passionate fan base. Since the launch of Sputnik, people had been waking up to the fact that the future would not be like the present.

Science fiction fandom started growing at a rapid rate. In 1967, the Worldcon hosted 1,500 members; no previous one had broken 1,000 in attendance. Since then, the only Worldcons not topping a thousand members have been ones held outside North America.

Up to this time, filk had been developing in mostly isolated communities. Fans kept in constant touch with each other across the US and beyond, publishing fanzines and APAs (Amateur Press Associations, which collated and mailed ongoing discussions before there were Internet discussion boards). These sometimes included song lyrics. Singers need to perform for an audience, though, and mailing lyrics doesn't have the same impact, so islands of filk existed almost entirely unaware of each other. In her 2003 *Strange Horizons* interview, Juanita Coulson said:

Other fans across the US (though damned few of us) were creating various versions of filk songs at the same time, in most cases initially unaware that anyone else might have come up with the same notion. Eventually, through different avenues, we learned that other fans — including fans in other geographical regions — shared our enthusiasm for musical SF and Fantasy. In the Midwest in the '50s, we'd sit in a circle of three or four and run through our entire repertoires — which at most was three or four songs, including our adaptations of Heinlein's lyrics — until we'd done them all; then we'd repeat them, or stray into folk music or Tom Lehrer. By the 60s, we'd acquired a few more original songs, but still relied heavily on folkie stuff to pad the program. ...

To be a proto-filker was a lonely thing. We all were inventing the wheel separately, unaware of the existence of others in other geographical areas of the US. Blundering along, as it were. What we had in common was a love of SF/Fantasy and music and a burning desire to combine the two, if only for our own satisfaction.

As fandom grew, so did people's desire to make their own music. Folk singing exploded. Today we remember mostly the big names, like Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Simon and Garfunkel; but while they grabbed the headlines, many lesser-known singers performed in coffeehouses and on street corners, often in small gatherings where people were encouraged to sing along. Some of the people who developed their musical background this way later became filkers.

In the sixties, the islands of filk began to come together to form — well, not exactly a continent, but at least a bigger island. Filkers in different areas became more aware of one another. Perhaps it helped that filkers, like women, were still looking for their space in fandom. At the 1969 Westercon in Santa Monica, Bruce Pelz and Ted Johnstone (David McDaniel's fannish pseudonym) held a gathering of about forty people, singing songs from *The Filksong Manual*. Other filking took place where people could find space, and the hotel management kept asking them to move, finally giving them a room to sing in.

There was even another early venture into recording. Chuck Rein released a filk-like 45 RPM record at Midwestcon in 1969. One side was titled "Oh, the Planets I've Seen," in a spirit similar to Heinlein's "Green Hills of Earth." He was aiming for a professional music career, though, and didn't join up with filkers at conventions. He is, however, reported to have produced a single-issue zine, *EA/Ntastic* (not to be

confused with Eric Gerds' later *FAN-tastic*), with filk lyrics.

In 1966 came an event that would drastically change the face of fandom. *Star Trek* premiered on TV. It was a huge step forward in TV science fiction — in fact, in TV in general. It featured a black woman as a bridge officer. It showed alien creatures as beings to communicate with and understand, not just zap with a ray gun. It advocated, by example, reason overcoming reflexive hostility.

Gene Roddenberry, the creator of the show, said: “I think that man should stop seeking uniformity. Unfortunately, today people feel threatened if someone believes differently than they do. ... *Star Trek* was trying to say some other things. That to be different is not to be ugly. To be different is not necessarily to be wrong.”

To be different is not necessarily to be wrong. This idea strongly resonated with science fiction fans, and with filkers, who were different even among fans. It was an idea that begged to be expressed in song. At the same time, *Star Trek* brought in many “femmefans” (but don't use that word today!), including some first-rate songwriters. Bjo Trimble, who led the successful letter-writing campaign to get the show renewed for a third season, was interested in filk. She had contributed an illustration to the cover of *The STF and FSY Song Book* and later chaired FilkCon 3. The first Trek convention, in 1972, was organized largely by women.

Enter Leslie Fish, who came to be one of the best known of all filkers. She and the DeHorn Crew performed at the Star Trek Convention of 1975 or 1976. In 1976 they issued the first commercial filk album, a vinyl LP titled *Folk Songs for Folk Who Ain't Even Been Yet*. *Star Trek* inspired most of the songs on it, though the allusions are veiled, possibly to avoid copyright and trademark complaints from Paramount. Two of the songs pay tribute to the US space program. “A Toast for Unknown Heroes” celebrates the many people behind the scenes who made the flights possible. “Hope Eyrie,” one of the most beloved of all filk songs, celebrates the Apollo moon landing.

The DeHorn Crew produced a second LP a year later, called *Solar Sailors*. Trek songs also dominated this release, with more obvious allusions than those in the first one. One of these songs, “Wobblies from Space,” takes the show in a strange direction, as syndicalists unionize the *Enterprise*. This reflects her association with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), in which songs had been important since Joe Hill. The Texas A&M Library lists a companion songbook, published in the same year by Bandersnatchi Press, in its fanzine collection.

Leslie explained the album in an email to me:

I'd written a bunch of Star Trek songs that had gotten me free entry into a couple of Trek conventions, and at the same time I was running around Chicago with my folkmusic band The DeHorn Crew (that's a union joke), not making much \$\$, and we decided to make an album of the songs if only to have something to sell at our open-mike gigs. Since this was before the advent of cassette-tape albums, we planned to make it as an LP. I knew a Trekkie who had a home recording studio who liked the idea, so we went to his place for a couple weekends and cut the master tape. When timing the tape, we found that we were eleven minutes short — and the only solution was for me to write another song. Well, damn, I'd already written at least one song for every major character on the show, so what did that leave? Why, nothing but a jolly tale of the entire crew on shore-leave. The result, written in a single day, was “Banned From Argo,” which turned out to be the second-favorite song I've ever written, much to my chagrin. Anyway, we added it to the tape, Sean Rigby edited it, I

drew the cartoon on the back of the album-cover, showing the whole band and the engineer and a couple pick-up musicians, and a friend from the local Science Fiction club did the cover photo. I forget who wrote the content for the back cover or the internal booklet, but it was typeset and printed at our local union print-shop. We all had to go around begging and scaring up the money to actually print the album — all we could afford was 500 copies — but we made it. We never guessed, from its modest beginnings, that “Folksongs for Folk Who Ain’t Even Been Yet” would become a classic!

To be fully accurate, “Banned from Argo” was on Leslie’s second album, “Solar Sailors,” not on “Folk Songs for Folk Who Ain’t Even Been Yet.”

On “Hope Eyrie,” she told me:

The tune, the first verse and the chorus came easy, but after that I was stumped. The whole subject and its implications were just so vast, it was difficult to boil down into a few verses. It took me six years to complete the poem, but the result was “Hope Eyrie.” If I could be remembered only for one thing, let it be that song.

As for “Banned from Argo,” she wrote,

For the next few years, thank you, at every con I went to, I got asked to sing “Banned from Argo” — sometimes two or three times a night.

Overkill, anyone?

Soon enough, I got sick to death of singing that bleeping song. I made a general announcement asking the fen to please not ask me to sing it more than once per con. Even that got to be too much, and I asked the fen not to ask me for it *at all*. That didn’t stop other filkers from singing it — often several times per con — while I was in earshot, so next I asked that please, nobody sing it while I’m around. Well, the fans complied — but then, if you please, they started filking it. Yea, verily, they kept their promise and didn’t sing that bleeping song in my presence; they’d sing filks on it instead.

That quote, by the way, is from *The Bastard Children of Argo*, a 93-page book consisting entirely of parodies of and songs about “Banned from Argo.”

Both albums were later reissued as cassettes, which were more economical to produce in small runs. As of this writing, they are still available as a combined CD, *Folk Songs for Solar Sailors*, published by Random Factors.

Forget the technical milestone for the moment. Forget “Banned from Argo” (if you somehow can). The biggest contribution of this album may have been to show that there could be serious filk songs, dealing with serious ideas and feelings rather than just being silly or satiric. “Hope Eyrie” was unlike anything in filk before:

We know well what life can tell:
If you would not perish, then grow.
And today our fragile flesh and steel
Have laid their hands on a vaster wheel
With all of the stars to know
That the Eagle has landed: tell your children when.
Time won’t drive us down to dust again.

Filk now offered more than just silly parodies in the corridors; it included music that earned the right to be taken seriously.

The Dorsai and the SCA

The growth of fandom made another contribution to filk, from an unexpected direction. Conventions were growing, and for all the benefits that offered, it meant that not everyone there was a close friend. A few people caused problems, and a piece by artist Kelly Freas went missing at an art show. As a result, in the early seventies Robert Asprin organized a group of fans to provide security. They called themselves the “[Dorsai Irregulars](#)” or DI, after Gordon Dickson’s Dorsai, the best fighters in the inhabited worlds. At Star Trek conventions, the same people worked as the Klingon Diplomatic Corps. The Dorsai name had Dickson’s full approval, and both he and Asprin were filkers. So were quite a few of the DIs, and when they weren’t protecting the lives, fortunes, and sacred honor of fans, they’d often find a place to get together and sing. Asprin celebrated the formation of the DI by holding an all-night filksing at Discon in 1974, and according to DI lore it was “the first big open public filksing.” Several people attended and participated in costumes or period garb. Asprin’s Filk Hall of Fame citation mentions it:

At Discon II, the Worldcon in Washington DC in 1974, Robert started a filksing in a public room that lasted all night. This was a milestone in the history of filk, in that it marked a transition of filk from something a few people did in private to a major part of convention programming.

He helped and encouraged new filkers. Clif Flynt, at the time a complete newcomer, showed him a song he’d written, and Asprin said, “This is the sort of thing I hate. This is almost a really good song.” He then explained how to write a funny song, set up punch lines without telegraphing them, and make the twist work. Since then, Clif has definitely written some really good songs. He in turn “dragged” Mary Ellen Wessels to the first Ohio Valley Filk Festival, “all but kicking and screaming,” and she became a last-minute addition to his concert. Since then she’s been pulling people as last-minute additions into all her concerts. That’s how filk grows.

The DI even spread filk into Canada, with singing at Toronto Trek 1976. The organization continues today, though professional security guards have become common. It has passed many traditions into general filkdom, including a love for Tullamore Dew Irish whiskey.

Anne Passovoy, who wrote the popular filk song “Harbors,” was one of the early DI members. Asprin moved away from filk in the eighties as he became a successful writer, but what he’d started didn’t lose its momentum. Today the Dorsai roster is full of filkers, including Anne, Bill and Gretchen Roper, Bill and Brenda Sutton, and more.

In *The Making of the Trek Conventions*, Joan Winston writes:

Not only do the Dorsai do security, but they also hold the grandest filksings your heart ever heard.

Filksings? Well, them’s folksongs set to well-known tunes with fan-written lyrics, usually on SF, fantasy, or “Star Trek” topics, some of which can be printed in a “G”-rated volume. Some are very funny. Some are very sad, and some, especially the way Ann Passovoy and Juanita Coulson sing them, are very beautiful.

Asprin had another identity, Yang the Nauseating. This was his name in the Society for Creative

Anachronism, an organization that loosely recreates the Middle Ages, with an emphasis on fun more than accuracy. Its connection to filk goes back to its beginning; Poul Anderson helped to found it in 1966. Asprin and his friends created the Great Dark Horde, modeled on the Mongols and emphasizing martial virtues similar to the Dorsai's, within the SCA in 1971.

Michael Longcor (Moonwulf in the SCA) in West Lafayette, Indiana (the center of the Barony of Rivenstar in the SCA), played a big role in making filk part of the organization's activity. Some of his songs were published in *Dragon*, the official Dungeons and Dragons magazine. He, like several other SCA filkers, also participated in the Dorsai Irregulars. I first heard of filk from Michael when I was a graduate student at Purdue, about 1974, and attended a couple of SCA meetings. Asprin was also in the SCA and wrote a number of "Scadian" songs. The "bardic" form of the filksing, with each person getting a turn, may have first been introduced from the SCA to Los Angeles filkers.

The SCA's most enduring (though not always endurable) gift to filk may be "The Mongol Birthday Song." Devised in the Barony of Calafia in 1977, it uses a modified version of "The Volga Boatman" and can have two-line verses added without limit:

Happy birthday (grunt)!
Happy birthday (grunt)!
Death, destruction, and despair,
People dying everywhere.

Happy birthday (grunt)!
Happy birthday (grunt)!
Here's a lesson you should learn,
First you pillage, **then** you burn.

[Chambanacoon](#), in the Champaign-Urbana, Illinois area, served as an early center for filk. Anne Passovoy was singing there as early as 1973, and she and her husband Bob were among the DI founders. Many more filkers soon flocked there. Its only official program item was the guest of honor's reading, but in the evening filk took over the main room. Dickson regularly attended, along with other SCA filkers such as Eliot Shorter and Robert Asprin, and Leslie Fish sometimes came. On Saturday afternoons it had, and still has, "the neverending filk panel," which recesses until the next year when its scheduled time is up. It discusses what had and hadn't worked at the Friday night filk, and suggestions from it are tried out on Saturday night. The things that worked have affected the way filk is generally run at Midwest filk cons.

Filk had a presence in the South as well. The New Orleans Science Fiction Association (NOSFA), like other regional science fiction clubs, covered a broad range of fannish interests, particularly APAs and fanzines, and filk figured in. Deep South Con was held in New Orleans in 1968 and 1971, and filk happened around the edges, as was common for conventions in this period.

With its new strength from all these sources, filk became more noticeable at science fiction conventions. MidAmeriCon, the 1976 Worldcon in Kansas City, Missouri, enjoyed a significant filk presence. In a [2000 interview](#), Bob Passovoy said, "Filking didn't really become respectable until MidAmeriCon." Anne said that before that, "singing wasn't thought much of at conventions because cons were for talking and singing interfered with the talking." Clif Flynt said it was the first time he'd seen anyone

actually *tune* a guitar at a filksing. (Or, under cross-examination, the second. He admits to having observed a rendition of Tu Ning at MidWestCon a year earlier.) According to one account, the convention had no *Star Trek* or SCA programming and no all-night movies, because the committee wanted to avoid too big a convention. I wasn't there, but I can imagine people saying, "No Trek programming? No SCA stuff? Let's find a movie! ... No movies this late? Hey, I hear some people singing down the hall. Let's check that out."

Filk was slower in getting started on the East Coast, but it was gradually making inroads at conventions such as Balticon, Lunacon, Disclave, and particularly Boskone in Boston.

Erwin ("Filthy Pierre") Strauss heavily influenced East Coast filk and gave it a distinctive style. He organized Boskone 3 in 1966, with the MIT Science Fiction Society (MITSFS) helping to make MIT facilities available. He called it a "Pirate Boskone," the second Boskone in the same year, though fan historians now accept it in the canon. He produced two books called *Songs of MIT* and *Songs of Significance*, working from a MITSFS collection of song lyrics stored on punch cards and printing them on mimeo stencils. Campus authorities confiscated some of the copies. He says that the official reason was that it was published on MIT equipment without proper authorization, but he thinks the real reason was the sexual content.

He issued several editions of a songbook called *Microfilk*, starting in 1974. The first version had a mere three sheets, but over time it grew to a huge number of songs. All the editions were printed in very small type, intended to be read with a magnifier. It was distributed by multiple generations of photocopying, so even the strongest magnifier didn't always help. Still, it provided material at many group filksings. In the seventies, Boskone had group filksinging in the evening, with Erwin at the piano or electric piano, and *Microfilks* and the more readable NESFA songbooks available. The convention supplied a room they could keep all night, along with soft drinks and ice. Filk was fairly well attended until about 1 AM, after which a few diehards would continue all night.

"Filthy" led group singing at conventions from Boston to DC, though none gave it quite as much recognition as Boskone. Group singing came to be recognized as the "East Coast style" of filk.

Joe Ross and Lisa Raskind ran filk at Boskone until the late seventies, when Joe moved on to other interests within the convention and Lisa had to withdraw because of health issues. J. Spencer Love took over for them. Robert Asprin sometimes attended these gatherings, leading a Dorsai invasion with solo performances and song circles as an alternative to group singing. In 1976, he led a hallway filk, with Clif Flynt and Jack Carroll among those participating.

Meanwhile, on the West Coast, Westercon started making some room for filk in the late seventies. Jordin Kare and Gary Anderson wrote in *Kantele* in 1979 that there were several filksings during the course of the convention, though it was necessary to scrounge for space and move repeatedly because of noise complaints. According to Gary, "The one event that sticks in my all-time fun bank is the march down the staircase, after we had to leave the room because of noise, of 30 or so of us, singing 'Lord of the Dance,' everyone singing in tune and time, resonating in the open stairwell, then down the main hallway and into the ballroom."

In the South, Rick Norwood introduced filk to the New Orleans Science Fiction Association (NOSFA) in the late sixties. While it didn't often find its way onto convention schedules, filking could be found in

the con suite and other common areas.

Every convention that gave some recognition to filk was an advance. It's hard to realize in today's world of gaming conventions, anime conventions, and comics conventions, how unified fandom once was. Singing had been around for a long time, but as a separate category of activity, with its own followers, it was something new and suspicious. Conventions seldom assigned function space to filk, so people had to sing in halls or stairwells, which could only have further annoyed the fans who don't like weak voices. There was already a tradition of singing late at night; filk's marginal status gave more reasons to do this, since the function rooms might be grabbable, or at least filkers could find a quiet area.

Getting acceptance for filk took work, but filk contributed to convention attendance without much cost. As Steve Simmons put it, "any event that keeps 1/3 to 1/2 of the attendees occupied is a major programming event and must be dealt with seriously. ... Filking doesn't cost as much as movie rentals, and pleases more attendees."

This new world of filk had more songs; unlike the early filksinging where everyone knew all the songs, new songs were constantly appearing. This created a need for more songbooks, so people could learn them.

In 1963 Arnold Katz produced a zine called *Filk #1* with nine song parodies; I don't know who he was or whether there was ever a #2. In 1965 Bruce Pelz published an influential collection called *The Filksong Manual*, the first of four volumes with that title. They included not just lyrics, but notated music for some song lyrics that well-known authors had published without providing a tune. The authors apparently didn't object to having their words reprinted, and some well-known professional writers, including Gordon Dickson and Poul Anderson, contributed to the Manuals.

Single songs sometimes weren't enough for the fannish musical imagination. There were two whole operettas in the Manuals: *My Fair Femmefan* and *Captain Future Meets Gilbert and Sullivan*. It's easy to dismiss *My Fair Femmefan* as an expression of attitudes that are best forgotten, but reading it carefully shows something quite different. At the start, Iggens declares:

Listen to her, mark the way she stutters,
Appalled by every horrid phrase she utters.
By rights she should be drummed clear out of fandom
For mispronouncing fannish words at random.

He drags Martha through a fannish "education," but in the end she sees through him:

Science Fiction Times will thrive without you,
Somehow Forry will survive without you.
And there still will be blog where they snog in the fog.
LassFass will meet in the smog without you—
We can do without you!

Fred Patten's "[A Brief History of the LASFS](#)" (Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society) notes the "growing female presence in SF fandom" during the sixties, and *My Fair Femmefan*, reworking the plot and songs from *My Fair Lady*, gives an idea of the ambivalent reactions to the trend.

In 1967 someone at MIT produced *Ye Olde M*T Songe Booke*, with 33 pages of songs relating to MIT and technology, including a few by Tom Lehrer, who was a professor at MIT at the time. The editor's name is given as Kimball Gosseyn; this is a pseudonym, likely a combination of Kimball Kinnison from E. E. Smith's *Lensman* series and Gilbert Gosseyn from Van Vogt's *The World of Null-A*. The introduction says, "In the interest of avoiding pornography prosecutions, we do not include "The Coed Masturbation Song." Further on, the introduction invites readers to "write the Institute [MIT], asking for information on the confiscation of all copies of the Erwin 'Filthy Pierre' Strauss edition of a similar song book." The songs appear in monospaced capital letters, wandering up and down from the baseline, suggesting the same punch-card origin as Erwin's books.

In 1969, a thin but historically important songbook appeared, the *Minneapolis in '73 Filk Song Book*. Edited by James M. Young, the chairman of the bid committee for holding the 1973 Worldcon in Minneapolis, it was apparently the first filk book sponsored by a convention or bid committee. The city was a strong center of early filk, with people like Poul Anderson, Ted Cogswell, and Gordon Dickson. The book had only six songs, but one of them was "Young Man Mulligan," reprinted from *The Filksong Manual*, which had 49 verses at this point in its life. At the end Bruce Pelz included a request for more verses.

NESFA (the New England Science Fiction Association), which runs Boskone, may have been the first convention to produce songbooks for the filkers attending. In 1972, it published [*The Boskone 9 Filk-Song Song Book*](#), edited by Karen Blank (yes, with two "song"s in its title). This was mimeographed and stapled and was "free to Boskone filksing participants." An expanded [*Boskone 10 Filksongbook*](#), edited by Kris Benders and Joe Ross, was distributed at Boskone 10 the next year. In 1974 it was renamed [*The NESFA Hymnal*](#), though this wasn't the same book as the one still published by NESFA. Lisa Kaufman (later Raskind) was the editor, and 500 copies were run.

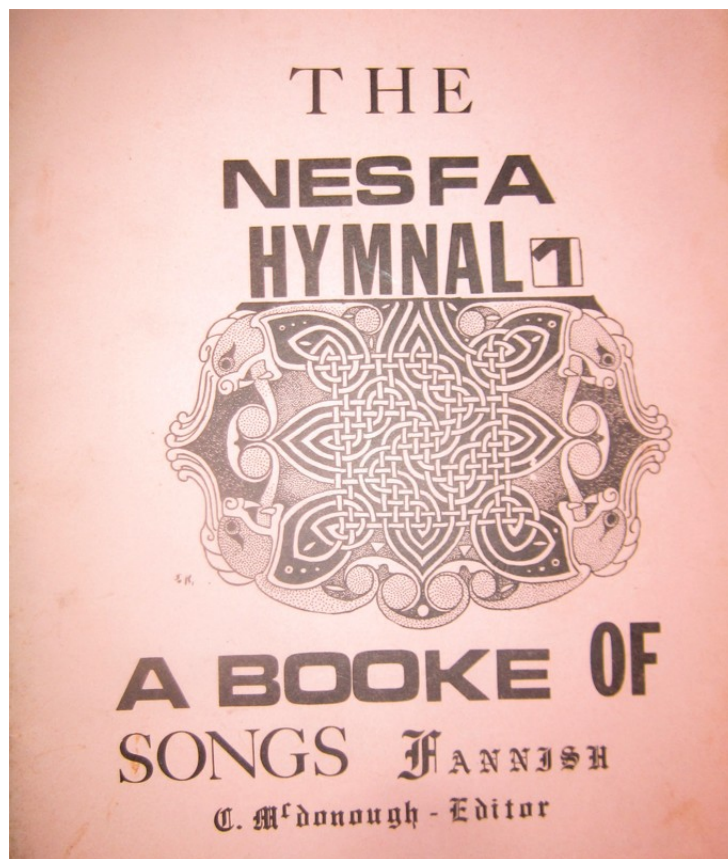


Figure 2: *The NESFA Hymnal 1: A Booke of Songs Fannish*

In 1976, *The NESFA Hymnal, Volume 1: A Booke of Songs Fannish* became the first filk book that NESFA put a selling price on; it was available for \$3.00. The introduction by editor Craig McDonough said:

Part of the activities at past BOSKONEs have included the singing (and otherwise bandying about) of a most peculiar type of composition known as the *Fannish Folk-Song*, or ‘Filksong.’ As there is always a shortage of readable copy of some of these songs (to ensure, amongst other considerations, that everyone is at least *trying* to sing the same song) it was deemed by NESFA that There Would Be A NESFA SongBook For User At The BOSKONE. The Volume You are now holding is the result.

The 1967 “booke” was the direct ancestor of the *NESFA Hymnal, Second Edition*, which went out of print only recently. NESFA ran 400 copies of the 1967 Hymnal, which boasted 56 songs. Subsequent books in 1977 and 1979 held additional songs that went into the Second Edition.

NESFA didn’t just publish songbooks. Boskone hosted a series of operettas, starting with *Captain Future Meets Gilbert and Sullivan* in 1972. This was reprinted in *The NESFA Hymnal*. Later in the decade came three musicals by Mark M. Keller and Sue Anderson, presented by the RISFA Players. The first of these, *Mik Ado About Nothing* or *Back to Rivets*, was based on Gilbert and Sullivan. The other two, *Rivets Redux* and *The Decomposers*, used a variety of sources. NESFA has reprinted these in the book *Rivets!!!* The plays reflected then-current issues in fandom. Chip Hitchcock wrote in his introduction to the book: “The old fannish archetypes of *Mik Ado About Nothing* mutated into the fringe fandoms of *The Decomposers*; they were as strange as Mark and Sue could make them and still be recognizable.”

NESFA’s wasn’t the only “hymnal,” or collection of songs for group singing, that was significant in the seventies. The Johns Hopkins Science Fiction Association produced four editions of *The HOPSEA Hymnal*. The third edition, issued in 1976, is the best known; the fourth was a limited signed and numbered edition. Credits were erratic; they were often just by first name or last name or pseudonym, or missing completely. There were claims of copyright violation, and HOPSFA resolved these by gluing opaque white paper over the offending songs.

Filk was gradually gaining acceptance, though few recordings had been issued and few conventions had filk programming. Then came 1979 and the first filk convention.

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5. Cons and recordings (1979-1988)

Today there's no lack of ways to satisfy your hunger for filk when there's no filksing or convention within reach. You can find recordings, both free and for sale, on the Internet. You can buy CDs. You can make good-quality recordings to bring home with a device that fits in your pocket. In the late seventies, it wasn't like that. You could count the filk albums for sale on your fingers. Cassette recorders were available, but bringing one and a decent microphone to a filksing was a chore. You could join the filking at some conventions, but there were no cons specifically dedicated to filk.

Leslie Fish's two LPs were still available. Gary Anderson and others informally distributed cassettes. The first published filk tape may have been *Children of the Future*, by Karen Willson, which Hourglass Productions released in 1978 or 1979. It featured multiple vocal and instrumental performers, and the insert credited sound engineers. It's still available as a CD. Diana Gallagher's *Cosmic Concepts* is another contender; it isn't clear which tape came out first. *Cosmic Concepts* was later reissued in expanded editions called *Cosmic Concepts Complete* and *Cosmic Concepts More Complete*. A lot of early tapes were done on home equipment.

In the seventies, some of the old science fiction fans had been wary of the "Trekkies" invading their realm, but gradually those who didn't go exclusively to separate conventions gained acceptance. Roberta Rogow published *Sing a Song of Trekkin'*, a collection of twenty of her *Star Trek* songs, in 1979. She had commercial hopes for the book:

I wanted to break into the Trek commercial market with something that could be sold at Trekkie cons, but I knew I couldn't afford to publish it myself. I talked someone else into doing it. I don't think he ever broke even on it. We thought it would be picked up by Pocket Books or one of the major publishers, but it wasn't.

This informal and piecemeal approach started to change in 1979. Some people got together and decided to do something new: a filk con! In fact, that's what they called it: FilkCon. It's strange, but filkers today have almost forgotten it. Just finding out exactly when it happened took a lot of digging.

Robert Asprin had proposed a Filk Foundation, and Margaret Middleton did a lot of the work to make it real. Curt Clemmer and Robert Passovoy led the convention committee and got the Arlington Park Hilton, in Arlington Heights, Illinois, for the weekend of July 28-29. Margaret agreed to be treasurer. The objectives of the Filk Foundation were the "furtherance, encouragement, and preservation of filksinging as an art form and a form of oral history peculiar to the science fiction field." Preservation meant recording, and there was lots of it at FilkCon. Furtherance and encouragement meant getting cons to designate and publicize locations for filk. Getting it on the program would come later.

An often-mentioned motivation for the con was the desire to record Juanita Coulson before her voice started to fade. Time has shown there was no need to hurry, but the result was some very good recording work. The main room was full of microphones, and all the concerts were taped. Bill Roper mentions this bit:

They were trying to set levels on Juanita: "OK, Juanita, can you give us a level?" Juanita says, "How's this?" in a sweet little light voice. The guy turns the gain up on the microphone. Bob Passovoy sees this; he's standing at the back of the room and takes his headphones off, 'cause he's listening to the monitor feed, and he knows

something bad is about to happen. Juanita launched into “Herbs and Simples,” which has, shall we say, enough dynamic range to kill somebody. I know the fellow who was on the recorder at that time with the headphones still on, and his hair is still curly.

If you’d been there, you would have been one of about 75 people, and you could have attended a few program items as well as a banquet and a small art auction. As a member, you would have received a tape made from the performances, not available to the general public, in your choice of cassette or reel-to-reel format. The progress report, published with *Kantele* #3, sounds not very different from a modern filk con, except for the lack of concerts and the inclusion of a smoking room:

The consuite will open Friday afternoon and run continuously until checkout time Sunday. There will be one function room downstairs Friday night for singing if the concentration of conversation in the consuite is too high. Saturday there will be three meeting rooms going: the main singroom with recording equipment; the secondary singroom unwired and the audience can smoke, and a talkroom for panels, guitar or belly-dancing lessons, artist/artisan show in the early afternoon, etc. Banquet Saturday night, with at least the main singroom reopening afterwards.

You’d have seen a guy towing a wagon of instruments, who wasn’t previously known on the filk scene, and a bit later you’d have discovered he played them all very well. His name was Bill Maraschiello, soon to be known as “Bill of Many Instruments.” The Filk Hall of Fame lists six-and twelve-string guitars, banjo, mandolin, penny whistle, hammered dulcimer, autoharp, Irish bagpipes, concertina, ocarina, and frame drum among the ones he could play expertly. It was a great loss to the filk community when he died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1986.

The first FilkCon was the only filk con ever held in the Chicago area. Filk had been a very large part of Chambanacon in Illinois since the mid-seventies, and it soaked up most of the demand there might have been for a filk-specific convention.

In the same year, filk made a significant appearance outside the US. The 1979 Worldcon in Brighton, England, drew a large handful of American filkers, including Juanita and Buck Coulson, C. J. Cherryh, and Erwin Strauss.

In August 1980, you could have gone to Toledo, Ohio, for FilkCon II. Most of its organizers were in Ann Arbor, Michigan; they just hadn’t been able to find a suitable hotel closer to home. Dan Story chaired it. The convention brought in Marty Burke, a prominent Dorsai songwriter and performer, as the guest of honor, the first official guest at a filk convention. Frank Hayes introduced his song “Don’t Ask,” playing off the title of Dickson’s “Soldier, Ask Not” and presenting a distinctly uncomplimentary view of the fictional Dorsai. Bill Roper recalls:

Frank is not a large man, and he was sitting on one edge of the stage where we were filking. As he proceeded to play this, more and more Dorsai showed up around him, on the stage behind him. The shtick was too good to pass up.

The quality of what you could hear was climbing. Around 1980 Julia Ecklar, still just a teenager, started bringing the art of songwriting to a level that hadn’t previously been heard in filk, and she had the vocal skills to do justice to the songs. Many of her early songs, such as “Born-Again Trek,” were about *Star Trek*. Like a lot of people in filk, she was shy about singing at first, not going on stage till Capricon in 1981, but when she sang, people took notice. Her songs grab the listener as songs, even if you don’t

know their source material. You don't have to have seen the movie *Ladyhawke* to appreciate the new vistas opening for a "mouse among men" in her song of the same name, or to have access to her own unpublished story to be at once thrilled and frightened by the course a soldier chooses in "Temper of Revenge."

Her 1986 tape *Divine Intervention*, recorded with a small orchestra, was unprecedented in filk. With powerful songs and a voice to match, it explores such themes as religious tyranny, a torturer's conflicts, and the aftermath of global war. It uses classical techniques, opening with an overture, underscoring James Kirk's lament with an elaborate horn solo, and even venturing into Dixieland jazz. Its approach startled some people; was this even filk? Regardless, it was popular, and Prometheus Music has since reissued it on CD.

Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, both trained musicians, entered filk in 1982 and added a couple of unusual perspectives. Sally is an ethnomusicologist and a versatile percussionist. Barry is a rock guitarist with an undergraduate degree in English, a master's in creative writing, and a doctorate in folklore. At six feet nine inches, he's easily visible in a crowd. Together, they introduced a sound to filk that took many people by surprise. Some people needed a while to get used to it, but once they did, Barry started leading jam sessions at filks.

Meg Davis (not to be confused with another filker known as Margaret Davis) was named the "Best Young North American Songwriter" by Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul, and Mary in 1978, and in the eighties became well known in the filk world. Her albums include *Swing the Cat* and *Captain Jack and the Mermaid*.

Heather Alexander showed up at a Bayfilk convention, and the first performer she heard was Meg Davis. She was so intimidated by the quality of Meg's performance that she almost turned around and left, but she soon proved she could hold her own with her fiddling and singing.

Kathy Mar, a folk singer in Denver, came to the Denver Worldcon in 1981 and briefly looked in on the filk but felt too shy to participate. Her family bought her a membership for Chicon IV, the next year's convention, for Christmas. She sang several songs, two of which were put on the souvenir tape, and quickly became very popular. She became a leading advocate of making room for filk at science fiction conventions.

At least that's Kathy's account. Moss Bliss offers a different story of her filk debut:

I, too, was a local folksinger, and I lived right around the corner from Kathy — my girlfriend at the time was the mother of a girl who had once been a member of Kathy's "family", but she didn't usually hold that against me.

I was at Kathy's when she came home from Day One of Denvention 2, bubbling over with excitement about how she sang some of her "regular folk songs" for them AND THEY LOVED HER! (Face it, have you ever known Kathy Mar to be shy?) She then collected her friends, as many as would go and including me, to "crash the late-night movies", which was my first contact with Fandom (and the first time I had seen *Forbidden Planet*).

I have related this to Kathy as my recollection, and she continued to stick to her story as you published it. But it's not true, and it's not like Kathy.

I take no position on which is more accurate.

California and Ohio

If you lived outside the Midwest, it would have been a long trip to the early FilkCons, but something was happening that would move the center of the filk universe to California.

The area around Los Angeles already supported significant activity. Gary Anderson had been hosting housefilks which grew into Los Angeles Filkers Anonymous (LAFAs), the oldest filk club still in existence. Gary, Paul Willett, Ron Bounds, Ev Turner, and some others founded it in 1980 and held monthly meetings for singing. A household called Kushyon's Flyte House had been hosting earlier filksings in the Los Angeles area and continued occasionally for some time. It was a "household" in the SCA sense of "a loosely knit-together group who do things together." Members included Tera Mitchel, Eric Gerds, Chris Weber, Karen Willson, Paul Willett, and Cynthia McQuillin. Filksings usually took place at people's homes; sometimes LASFS would make its space available.

Some of the gatherings were huge. Rick Weiss reports that typical gatherings attracted forty to sixty people, not necessarily all present at once. People would come from as far as San Diego. The filksings would start up at 2 PM, and many would stay overnight afterward. One of these gatherings, in Pasadena, had an estimated 200 people over the course of the day. That's bigger than most modern filk conventions. The bardic circle, in which everyone gets a turn, was the usual way of organizing the singing, and at a large gathering it could take a long time to get a chance to sing.

When Los Angeles fans do something, the ones around San Francisco won't let themselves be outclassed without a fight. In 1980, Jordin Kare, Teri Lee, and Catherine Cook started the first filk publishing business ever, calling it Off Centaur Publications. Jeff Rogers was also heavily involved, though not an official partner. It aimed for higher recording quality at a time when the few filk tapes that existed were produced on home equipment. Jordin provided most of the financial backing, while Teri and Catherine, soon joined by Andrea Mitchell, ran the operations.

The people who started Off Centaur had already published *The Westerfilk Collection*, a book of filk songs edited by Jordin, Teri, and David Bratman. Jordin had been planning for some time "to out-do Filthy Pierre and put out a comprehensive filk hymnal." Margaret Middleton urged him to do something more complementary than competitive, and the resulting book emphasized quality rather than the quantity that characterized *Microfilk*, with good production values and notated music. This was before home computers and WYSIWYG printers made book layout easy. Teri entered the music notation by hand, Dave typed the lyrics in on an IBM Selectric, and corrections required literal cutting and pasting. Providing notation was important before there were any tapes for sale; even if you couldn't read music, you might still be able to find someone who could play it for you. Wail Songs reissued the book in 1996.

Off Centaur Publications was based in a large home in El Cerrito where some of the staff lived at times, and the company sold its wares at many conventions. A number of well-known filkers, including Leslie Fish and Mary Ellen Wessels, migrated to the Bay Area to be part of it.

Frank Hayes, who later married Teri Lee, had been singing at conventions since 1980 or earlier. His songs include such memorable ones as "Never Set the Cat on Fire" and "When I Was a Boy," and he

earned an unusual kind of fame. His ability to forget lyrics — even when they are sitting right in front of him — has been legendary since the early eighties, giving rise to a hypothetical ailment called “Frank Hayes Disease.” The condition has even been mentioned in *Wired* (link no longer available). It may be contagious. In a Duckon program book, he wrote:

By 1983 or so, my ability to forget had reached legendary status. Some filkers claimed they got temporary amnesia just from sitting in the same room as me. On one amazing (but true) occasion, Heather Alexander borrowed a guitar, not knowing it was mine--and promptly forgot a song she had known for years.

Lee Gold wrote a song about the condition — to a tune by Frank, of course:

And keep your lyrics, so you can read them when you please
And give to fight Frank Hayes Disease!

In June of 1981 California got its own convention, FilkCon III, also called FilkCon West. The guests were Buck and Juanita Coulson. Bjo Trimble (often known as “the woman who saved *Star Trek*”) organized it; because of low pre-registration, she cancelled the hotel contract and moved the con to the meeting rooms of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS). Off Centaur released the tapes *Best of FilkCon West* and *Juanita Coulson Live at FilkCon West* in February of 1982.

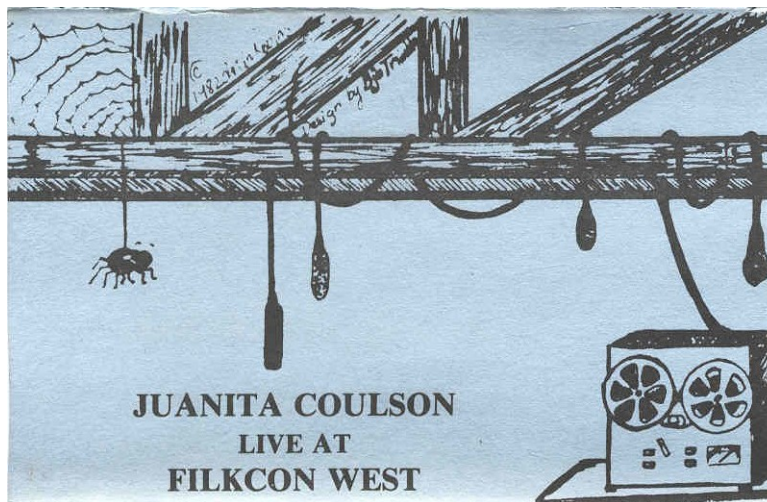


Figure 3. Illustration from the tape “Juanita Coulson Live at FilkCon West”

In 1982, your choices for attending a filk convention would have doubled, with a FilkCon West (or FilkCon 4.1) and FilkCon East (4.2). The western one, sponsored by Off Centaur and known as Bayfilk, took place in Oakland in March, with Margaret Middleton as its guest. FilkCon East was held in Kansas City, Missouri on the last weekend of May. Well, that’s east relative to California. It would be a while before filk conventions showed up near the Atlantic.

Even if you didn’t live near those conventions, you enjoyed more and more options for getting filk on tape. Off Centaur published four tapes from Bayfilk 1: *Margaret Middleton at Bayfilk*, *Bayfilk 1 Concert*, *Best of Bayfilk 1*, and *Bayfilk Crazyies*.

Two FilkCons occurred in 1983 as well. Bob and Anne Passovoy served as the guests at FilkCon 5.1,

FilkCon West, or [ConChord](#), in Fullerton, near Los Angeles. ConChord is still running, making it the oldest filk convention in existence today. FilkCon East (5.2) became even less eastern, moving to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where it was held in conjunction with the regional convention OKon. The FilkCon name mostly fell into disuse after these cons.

It started to seem that if you wanted to be where the filk was, you had to pick up and move to the Bay Area. However, the Midwest community hadn't died; far from it. Conclave in Michigan had earned a filk-friendly reputation by the early eighties. So had Marcon in Ohio; its guests in that period included Juanita Coulson and Bill Maraschiello. Marcon had welcomed filk since the seventies, as Anne Passovoy's "Marcon Ballroom," a song about some problems with its hotel, recounts. In Illinois, Chambanacon continued its filk tradition, featuring the Coulsons, the Passovoy's, Margaret Middleton, and Michael Longcor as fan guests of honor in four successive years from 1981 to 1985.

Filkers helped to improve the situation at conventions by volunteering to be on the organizing committee. Mary Ellen Wessels recalls she was on the committee for Confusion, a Michigan convention, and worked to convince the "old school" people that filkers could be valuable program participants: "This one has a Ph.D. in astrophysics, and this one is a professional jazz guitarist. You can use them in other things, too!" She was able to get some good performers to entertain at the convention banquet, letting more people realize they really were quality musicians.

Van Siegling and some of his friends in Columbus talked about starting an ongoing filk convention east of the Mississippi. The best available facility was in Cincinnati, so the first Ohio Valley Filk Festival ([OVFF](#)) was held there in 1984. The group that had run FilkCon II talked with the Columbus group about hosting a convention in Michigan the next year that would alternate with Ohio (the name "Huron Valley Filk Festival" was tossed around), but plans fell through, and it was too late for Ohio to get a con going. After skipping 1985, OVFF has come back every year to the Columbus area. About eighty people attended the first con, but 112 showed up in 1986, and soon it came to be the biggest of all filk conventions.

OHIO VALLEY FILK FEST II OCTOBER 31-NOVEMBER 2, 1986

Greetings filk-lovers all! OVFF II is having a second awards ceremony to recognize the excellence of some of our finest filksongs and filksingers. In order to do this we need your input--thus we are issuing this nomination form. OVFF I winners are ineligible for OVFF II. Please fill nomination form out and mail to Ohio Valley Filk Fest II, P. O. Box 14078, Columbus, Ohio, 43214. (Please PRINT or TYPE!)

Category No. 1: Best Original Filksong - This must be original (Hope Eyrie, OVFF I) words & music.

<u>Name of Filksong</u>	<u>Writer/Composer</u>
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

Categories Nos. 2 and 3: Best Filksinger - We will be giving two awards in this category: Best Male and Best Female Filksinger.

<u>Male</u> (Bill Maraschiello, I)	<u>Female</u> (Julia Ecklar, I)
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

MAIL TO OVFF II ON OR BEFORE MIDNIGHT, APRIL 15, 1986.

Fig. 4: The OVFF II Pegasus nominating ballot (page 1)

The first OVFF introduced the Pegasus Awards, which quickly became a central feature of the filk world. The winners were “Hope Eyrie” by Leslie Fish (Best Original Filk Song), “Twelve Years at Worldcon” by Frank Hayes (Best Parody), “Unreality Warp” by Clif Flynt (Best Original Humorous Filk Song), Bill Maraschiello (Best Male Filker), and Julia Ecklar (Best Female Filker).

OVFF III saw the first wedding ever held at a filk convention. Bill Sutton and Brenda Craven had first gotten to know each other on Compuserve’s Science Fiction and Fantasy Forum and met in person at Bayfilk in 1986. They got engaged and decided to get married at OVFF, and Howard Scrimgeour helped them to broadcast the wedding from the hotel over Compuserve. This was 1987, so it was text over a phone line, not video over high-speed Ethernet, and Howard had to scramble just to find a phone jack. Brenda wrote to me:

Halloween weekend, October 31, 1987. Well, I recall sitting at the back of the ballroom sewing frantically on the remaining Renaissance outfits for the members of the wedding while Bill and many of those members rehearsed the first performance of Tom Smith’s “Rocky Horror Muppet Show”.

I remember my Maid of Honor, Jane Mailander in a shiny lavender princess dress. THAT will never happen again, tee hee! And I remember being introduced to Mary Ellen Wessels by Bill Roper saying, “Can she join

the wedding party? We want to sing a song for you.” Sure! Absolutely! What an honor.

I remember Howard Scrimgeour, dressed in formal Star Trek attire, sitting at the front with a computer terminal, typing like a madman, so that our CompuServe friends who couldn't attend in person could still share the day with us. (Bill and I met on the CompuServe SF and Fantasy Forum back in the days long before it was common to meet a spouse online.)

I remember how my fondness for Buck Coulson rose beyond measure when he agreed to wear a monk's costume in his capacity as minister. Buck was a plain and simple man, and the whole costume thing made him very uncomfortable. He also agreed to amend the words of the ceremony because my now ex-husband decided to drag his heels and not sign our divorce papers. We'd already brought in friends and family, created the aforementioned elaborate Renaissance outfits for the party... so much preparation, and it almost went out the window, but for the grace of Buck. He changed the penultimate sentence in the ceremony to say, “And now, *inasmuch* as it is possible, I declare these two people to be husband and wife.”

I remember that each member of the wedding party sang a song as part of the service. And I remember the look of horror on our Jewish friends' faces when, after “You may kiss the bride,” my maid of honor set a guitar on the ground before us to leap over.

I remember not knowing 95% of the people who attended the wedding (I was relatively new to the filk community), but they welcomed me in warmly. Colleen Savitzky crafted a handsewn corsage with tiny dragons in it, which I still wear on our anniversary. Emily Vasquez-Coulson baked us a stunning three-tiered wedding cake (and on our 20th anniversary presented us with ANOTHER cake with before and after pictures scanned into the icing, and an album of photos of the day...we thought there were no pictures of our wedding! That type of kindness still makes me cry.)

It was a wonderful introduction to my adopted family of the heart.

Bayfilk, ConChord, and OVFF continued, with occasional skipped years, as the only three filk conventions till close to the end of the eighties, when an international interloper appeared. But more on that later.

Off Centaur's high point was the cassette and accompanying songbook *Minus Ten and Counting: Songs of the Space Age*, released in 1983. They issued 2500 cassettes, and all were sold. This was one of the first filk albums that paid attention to all the legalities when reusing existing tunes, getting permission where it was needed. The climate of the music publishing world in the eighties made it easier than it would have been today. Most of the songs on this album are still well known. The company also produced a second *Westerfilk Collection*.

In addition to publishing recordings and songbooks, Off Centaur sold filk and non-filk products produced elsewhere, with artists such as Stan Rogers, Malvina Reynolds, and Tom Lehrer. Real life affects filkers, and on January 28, 1986, the tragic destruction of the space shuttle *Challenger* hit filkers, who love space exploration, very hard. Off Centaur released a tape, *Challenger Memorial*, with songs by multiple composers and performers.

An idea of the variety of products you could have bought can be found in its [1984 catalogue](#), preserved by Harold Stein. It includes five of the company's own songbooks: *Minus Ten and Counting*, *The Horse-Tamer's Daughter*, *The Westerfilk Collection* (Volumes 1 and 2), and *Crystal Memories*. The Off Centaur tapes listed are *Minus Ten and Counting*, *Rifles and Rhymes*, *A Wolfrider's Reflections*, *Songs of the Dorsai*, *Genesis*, *The Horse-Tamer's Daughter*, *Storyteller*, *Songbird*, *Songs of the Rainbow King*, *Cold Iron*, *Skybound*, *Space Heroes* and

Other Fools, *Singer in the Shadow* (in two different versions), and more than a dozen convention tapes. These are in addition to recordings and songbooks from other publishers sold by Off Centaur.

A Baltimore science fiction bookstore, Tales from the White Hart, placed a significant order with Off Centaur in the early eighties, two to five copies of almost every item. Teri Lee was surprised enough that she called White Hart's Kathy Sands to confirm it, assuring her that all items were refundable. This was the beginning of the store's important role as an East Coast filk dealer, making regular appearances at conventions.

While Off Centaur focused on studio recordings, it used some sophisticated methods for convention recording. At Chicon IV in 1982, a shotgun mike captured whoever in the circle was singing with very little background noise. The room with this microphone was packed to the danger point until Juanita Coulson agreed to move to another room and got about twenty people to follow her.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in America...

If you weren't close to California or Ohio, there were still opportunities. The lack of filk conventions on the East Coast wasn't simply a matter of lack of interest. An older tradition still held sway there, one that didn't emphasize performance but fit in with general conventions. Erwin Strauss continued to go to conventions from Boston to Washington, organizing singalong gatherings and accompanying them on a piano if one was available. At some point he acquired a melodica (a breath-powered keyboard instrument), which he could bring with him.

The NESFA Hymnal, Second Edition, served as one of the standard volumes for sing-along gatherings for many years. It included one of the longest editions of "Young Man Mulligan," sixty-eight verses followed by six pages of annotations. However, the song had lost its original moorings by then. It alternates two tunes ("I was born about ten thousand years from now" and "The great fantastical bum"); the original design by George Scithers and Bruce Pelz specified that one tune should be used for science-fiction verses and the other for fantasy verses. By the time it reached the NESFA version, this pattern was largely lost.

In 1987 [*The NESFA Hymnal, Volume 2*](#) came out and is still available. Spencer Love ran song contests at Boskone during the eighties. NESFA required all entrants to grant permission to reprint their songs, providing the largest source of material for Volume 2. In group singing sessions using these books, the first volume is called "the Old Testament" and the second one "the New Testament." I edited a revision of Volume 2, which is sometimes called "the Revised Standard Version."

The 1980 Boston Worldcon, Noreascon 2, was run largely by the same people who ran Boskone. Spencer, who had been running Boskone filk for several years, was joined by Jordin Kare. Jordin introduced the song circle, breaking with the singalong tradition. The program book designated the singalong room, led by Erwin, as "East Coast" and the circle singing room as "Midwest." Gordon Dickson and Robert Asprin made an appearance in the "Midwest" room at one point. Spencer found it a new experience to hear so many unfamiliar songs from people playing guitars and singing solo. The convention designated rooms where people could lead the singing however they liked. This marked the beginning of a change in the East Coast style.

Philcon, the Philadelphia science fiction convention, held song contests in 1988 and 1989 and may have held earlier ones. Most filk song contests use live performances, but these contests requested submissions on tape. Entries with original music required a “written score.” Clippercon, a Baltimore-area convention, included filk from its beginning in 1984. Shore Leave, a *Star Trek* convention also based near Baltimore, featured regular filking.

The East Coast has generally produced fewer big names than the Midwest and West, but it’s had its prominent writers and singers. The Boogie Knights began performing in the Baltimore area, doing parody songs with medieval topics and outrageous puns. Duane Elms from Connecticut became well known as a songwriter, with songs such as “Dawson’s Christian” and “Threes 1.1.” He performed at cons, but asked Larry Warner to perform the songs on his album, *St. Elmo’s Fire*.

The South generated some filk activity at least as early as Deep South Con 16 in 1978, at the Riviera Hyatt in Atlanta. As often occurred in those days, the singing happened in a hotel room, and someone in a nearby room complained when it continued into the night. What was unusual was that when the hotel manager came, he offered space in the lobby to continue singing. At least twenty people participated at some point during the evening. The event was commemorated with a couple of new verses to go with Anne Passovoy’s “Marcon Ballroom.”

The 1979 NASFIC (North American Science Fiction Convention) in Louisville featured filking on a riverboat. It’s been reliably reported that Juanita Coulson outsang the steamboat whistle, inevitably resulting in a parody of “John Henry.” Diana Gallagher from Florida first encountered filk there, though she’d already been writing filk-like songs on her own. A community developed in southern Florida during the eighties, and a group called Orion’s Belt performed together for a while and released a tape.

Room parties dominated the evenings at most Southern conventions, so there weren’t as many opportunities for filksings as in some other areas. Singing at conventions tended to be in guest rooms.

Denver has never hosted its own filk convention, but it’s had a filk community since the eighties. One of its leading voices back then was Barbara Kongsjord, who died in March 1989 of cancer. *The Filking Times* ran an obituary stating that she attended Bayfilk 5, “fulfilling her last wishes to attend a Filk Con and see the ocean.” Gail Barton and the Denver Area Science Fiction Association (DASFA) published the songbooks *Dasfolk Filk Rock* (about 1970) and *Son of Dasfolk Filk Rock*.

MileHiCon was an important center of filk for several years. Anne Prather started Denver Filkers Anonymous about this time, holding regularly scheduled singing events, and Sourdough Jackson, Gail Barton’s husband, created *Filkindex*, two volumes of comprehensive listings of published filk in 1987 and 1988, published by librarian Roberta Rogow and with assistance from Carol Kabakjian. They include an article called “A Short History of Filk Publishing,” which I’ve mined heavily for this book.

Denver’s strongest period for filk was the early eighties; when OVFF started running on the same weekend as MileHiCon and Kathy Mar moved to California, the level of activity died down but never completely went away.

The crash of '87

Off Centaur had brought about a time of unprecedented growth for filk. It was a time of newfound energy, of high-quality recordings and publications. The world was a filk song, and the song was exciting. There was a time ... It all went wrong.

The company seemed to be going strong into 1987, publishing Bill Roper's solo tape that year. Bill, who had discovered filk at MidAmeriCon in 1976, initially developed a reputation for singing songs of gloom and destruction, to the point that his 1987 tape was called *The Grim Roper*. They were the kind of song called "ose" in the jargon, as in "ose and morose." One of them, "Wind from Rainbow's End," was a thoughtful piece about how science fiction fans often build emotional walls around themselves as children, then find themselves trapped in them. His songs have become less grim since then, but they and his pleasant bass voice are still popular. In retrospect, we might consider the album's grimness a foreshadowing.

Putting together a fannish business isn't easy. Operating on friendship and high ideals can lead to overlooking serious problems until it's too late, and it can make the problems twice as painful when they're discovered. Throw in the fact that many fans, like the protagonist of "Wind from Rainbow's End," have limited social skills, and it can all go very wrong.

Without digging up all the old skeletons, let's just say that conflicts arose among the partnership and their associates, and accusations were made. In 1987, some of the principals tried to re-create the business as Off Centaur, Inc., but failed to reach new agreements with many of the artists. Off Centaur Publications broke up acrimoniously in 1988, and Andrea Mitchell filed a lawsuit in late 1989 against Jordin Kare and Cathy Cook-MacDonald. The conflicts took on a wider personal dimension that threatened to tear the West Coast filk community apart.

The mention here of some lawsuits in connection with Off Centaur isn't intended as a complete enumeration. There were multiple legal actions, and it wouldn't serve this book's purpose to go into them all.

It wasn't until 1992 that the legal disputes were settled and the partnership formally dissolved. Teri Lee, Andrea Mitchell, and others picked up some of the pieces as [Firebird Arts and Music, Inc.](#), which still exists. Firebird moved to Oregon in 1990. Many of Off Centaur's releases remain out of print, their copyright situation hopelessly entangled.

The Bayfilk convention, run by Off Centaur before 1989, was a collateral casualty. Firebird sponsored the last one in 1989, and its attendance was down by about 40% from the previous year. Aside from the surrounding controversy, a number of regulars went to a filker's wedding on the same weekend. Steve and Colleen Savitzky rented a suite for parties, known as the "Neutral Zone," for people who wanted to get away from the conflicts. In *The Filking Times*, Issue 5, Kathy Mar reported about her experience with Bayfilk 5:

I am regretfully informing you that I was personally touched by the Bayfilk (non-existent) "Blacklist." ... Dean offered to pick up my membership for me to save time. Unfortunately, when he told the registration desk who the membership was for, he was asked to wait while a phone call was made to verify that I would be allowed to purchase one. The answer was yes, but I was sorely disappointed to learn the call even had to be made.

Steve says that Jordin, at least, was banned but spent time in the Neutral Zone.

Bob Laurent, who had started the publishing business Wail Songs about 1985, launched a new convention with Teri Lee's encouragement. Many of the people who had helped with Bayfilk joined the effort, including Mary Kay Kare and Heather Rose Jones. [Consonance](#), the new San Francisco area filk convention, started up in 1990 and is still going.

Bob started Wail Songs largely to publish convention recordings, complementing Off Centaur's emphasis on studio recording and focusing on the convention experience more than the best performances. His first album, though, was a home-studio recording, *Fragile Wall*, made by Clif Flynt and Mary Ellen Wessels as house guests. In 1991 Wail Songs became a corporation. It published about fifty cassette albums, more than half of them from convention recordings, through the early 1990s. One of the last was my own *Shrink Wrap Blues*, which Spencer Love recorded.

1987 was a troublesome year for filk in the East as well as the West, in spite of a promising start. For Boskone 24 in 1987, Spencer organized a fan fund to bring Leslie Fish and Bill Roper to the convention. Only enough money was raised to bring Leslie, but Bill came at his own expense, as a regular convention participant. Both received concert slots on the program. The stresses of a convention that had grown into thousands reached the boiling point that year, in what has gone down in fan history as "the Boskone from Hell." Many local teenagers sneaked in without paying and did other unpleasant things after that. Badly overloaded elevators in the Sheraton Boston resulted in crowds milling through the halls; these combined with extremely cold weekend weather to produce thermal chaos that triggered many false fire alarms. (At one point, the filkers used the fire alarm, sounding a G, as an accompanying drone.)

Leslie began her concert in a partitioned ballroom as scheduled. In the adjacent partition, John Kiley, the famous organist of Fenway Park, would be providing live musical accompaniment for a silent movie in the next hour. Acoustic separation between the partitions was minimal, and he decided he needed to warm up before the movie. A filk performer didn't carry much weight against a celebrity known to every Red Sox fan, and Leslie's concert came to a premature end as the organ overwhelmed it. Still, the program did include concerts.

In the conflicts and recriminations which followed the convention, Spencer stopped running filk for Boskone, and Lois Mangan picked it up. The next year, the convention fled to western Massachusetts, and membership plummeted from 4200 to 1327. Still, there was filking, and Duane Elms made his first appearance at Boskone.

In spite of activity at Boskone and other general conventions, no one had yet held a filk convention further east than Ohio. MuseCon, described by Kathy Sands as "a convention with music, costuming, & dance as the focal points," took place on the first weekend of May in 1987 and had a heavy filk presence. The people who ran the Darkover Grand Council convention started it up, inviting Julia Ecklar, Meg Davis, and Clam Chowder as guests. It was a financial failure and there wasn't a second one.

Though 1987 wasn't a good year, filk publishing didn't die with Off Centaur. Wail Songs went on for many years afterward. Chrys Thorsen started Thor Records in the late eighties, and it released a number of tapes by Kathy Mar, Cynthia McQuillin, and others. Eric Gerds' DAG Productions, started

in 1982 to publish songbooks, produced several tapes and has lasted for a long time, though it's no longer very active. Some filkers started personal labels.

Filk in print

If you wanted filk in books, your opportunities grew rapidly during the eighties. Laser and inkjet printers started coming into the consumer market, and home computers gained capabilities to go with them, so individuals and low-budget organizations could turn out songbooks with nice typography and graphics, replacing the old stencil printing and its monospaced text and line drawings.

In addition to the books already cited, a few more are worth mentioning. In 1980, a group called the L. A. Filkharmonics published the songbook *Massteria*; two sequels followed. Old Collinwood Publishing House put out a series of songbooks inspired by the TV series *Dark Shadows*. Off Centaur issued songbooks to go with its tapes; one of the first was *Crystal Visions* in 1980, by Cynthia McQuillin. Heather Rose Jones published *Songbook Pusher*, with an eponymous song about selling songbooks. Roberta Rogow began a series of self-published songbooks titled *Rec Room Rhymes*, which is still going. The number of published songbooks kept growing through the eighties.

As a member of a widespread community, you'd have wanted not just to hear songs, but to keep tabs on what people were doing. To help with this, several fanzines popped up in the years around 1980. In 1978 Margaret Middleton and Clif Flynt started *Kantele*, the first filk zine. Named for a Finnish instrument of the dulcimer family, it ran for fourteen issues, the last being dated Winter 1984-85. It was the first to publish some enduring songs on paper, including Joe Haldeman's "The Ballad of Orbital Hubris" and Anne Passovoy's "Harbors."

Margaret had also published a songbook, *On and On into the Night*, for the filkers at Texas A&M. Paul Willett edited *Philk Fee-Nom-Ee-Non* (often abbreviated to PFNEN and pronounced "piffnen"), which started in August 1981 and ran until 1991. Fans nominated it for a Hugo Award in 1984. Its focus included songs, convention reports, and general commentary.

If you're trying to collect a complete set of PFNEN, there is something you should know, especially if you're going crazy trying to track down issues 48 through 51. *These issues don't exist*. After missing several months of publication due to life issues, Paul issued #52 to keep up with a hypothetical monthly schedule, and promised that issues 47 through 51, which existed in draft form, would come out later. Issue 47 did in fact appear, but 48 through 51 never did.

Lee Gold wanted there to be a zine that specialized in songs, so in 1988 she started a bimonthly zine, [*Xenofilkia*](#), which hasn't missed an issue to this day. It was priced per page of songs, so that readers would get a fair deal even if some issues were thin (which they rarely were).

In 1981 Eric Gerds started the filkzine *FAN-tastic: Filk Songs and Other Fannish Delights*; though he intended it as a quarterly, it ran only two issues. The first consisted mostly of Chris Weber's song lyrics, the second of Karen Willson's. Both had much higher production values than the typical zine of the time. He had planned two more issues, likewise with single-author themes, but they never materialized. When Lee Gold and Eric agreed that the issue with her work was never going to happen, she refunded his expenses and published them instead in her own zine, *Filker Up*, in 1986. So far *Filker Up* has had six

issues; it's distinguished from *Xenofilkia* in consisting mostly of her own songs and not having a regular publication schedule.

APA-Filk started about 1979. Robert Lipton coordinated it at first, and at some point John Boardman took over. It had a distinct flavor, pushing the bounds of taste and controversy more than other filk zines. An article in the May 1984 issue, part VII in a series called "Yesterfilk," says:

Too many previous installments of this series have been politically oriented. It's time to get back to the fundamentals of filk-singing — that is, to something raucous, bawdy, scatological, and outrageous.

This serves as a lead-in for songs called "The Great Farting Contest" and "Star Whores." Pete Seeger subscribed to *APA-Filk* and performed some of the verses from "Real Old-Time Religion" which Boardman had collected.

Bob Kanefsky made a special niche for himself as a parodist. He avoids being recorded and even asked me not to record his interview for this book, but he's written a great many clever parodies of other filkers' songs, which were first compiled in three *Songworm* songbooks and now are available on the [Songworm website](#). Other filkers really liked having their songs twisted and mutilated by "Kanef," and they often recorded his parodies of their songs. He turned one of Leslie Fish's songs into an anti-smoking song; she's an avid smoker, but she recorded it anyway.

Lee Gold tells the story of a songbook which her husband Barry, working in the computer industry, had come upon: it was called the *LOTS Songbook*, after the Low-Overhead Time Sharing project at Stanford. It included a song called "I Wonder What the System Is Doing Tonight," to a tune from *Camelot*. She liked it but thought some of the lines could be improved. After changing about half the lines, she ran it in *Filker Up* as "I Wonder What the VAX Is Doing Tonight," identifying it as a rewrite and crediting the original song and author. Rick Weiss sang it at a convention in the San Francisco area, and, according to Lee,

There was a guy who was looking strangely at him, who was there for his very first filksing. The guy came over to him and said, "I recognized parts of that." The reason he recognized parts of that was he'd written the original. His name was Bob Kanefsky. So you see, I'm partly responsible for having given Bob Kanefsky the idea that you can take someone else's filksong and rewrite it and change it and do horrifying things to it without warning them. And Bob has forgiven me.

Ten years after the first FilkCon, there were three annual filk cons in the US and one was starting in England, and filk maintained a growing presence at general conventions. The handful of recordings available in 1979 had grown to a large selection of tapes, sometimes of very impressive quality. After a lot of hard work, filk was finally starting to get respect. As the eighties closed, filk was entering its golden age.

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6. The start of a golden age (1989-2000)

The Soviet Union collapsed peacefully. Borders opened. The Internet started to become a part of ordinary people's lives. It looked like the beginning of an era of world peace and freedom. As the nineties began, the Bosnian War and Al Qaeda were still in the future. It may have been just the illusion of a golden age for the world, but it certainly marked one for filk.

In the eighties, filk could be viewed as the time of the two great superpowers, California and the area from Michigan to Ohio. The walls, if we can call them that, came down in the nineties as activity grew in many areas, not just in the US but in Canada and Europe. No longer could any one group shatter the filk world if it blundered.

1989 marks the point at which I entered filk fandom, so there will be a lot more personal observations from this point onward. My entry was at Noreascon 3, the Boston 1989 Worldcon, where Spencer Love was running the filk, or as he put it, "did my best to run a three-ring circus." I first encountered Filthy Pierre's group singalong and didn't find it to my taste, but then I discovered concerts and circles and enjoyed them much more.

If there was one thing that made me stick around, it was Brenda Sutton's singing her song, "Strangers No More." It told of something which I really liked:

She drives a truck, he computes
That one teaches school.
The only rule among us is, "There really are no rules."
Some like ose, some fantasy,
Some science fiction strong.
The one thing that unites us is
Our love of harmony and song (with)

One voice singing, one hand strumming,
Slowly building note by note there starts a quiet humming,
Lyrics brush the memory, somebody starts a drone,
The basses fill the bottom in, there sounds a baritone.
Layer upon layer swells with alto and contralto,
The melody enhanced by soaring tenor and soprano.
Strangers no more we sing, and sing, and sing, and sing!
Strangers no more we sing, and sing, and sing, and sing!

Spencer said that Brenda was also one of the most valuable people to bounce ideas off at the convention.

Filk cons no longer happened just in the US. 1989 saw the first filk convention outside the United States: Contabile, in Newbury, England. It was mainly the work of Gytha North and Mike Whitaker. Both of them were guests at US conventions around this time, helping to spread the word about British filk.

Even within the US, filk wasn't confined to North America. Hawaii had a community, at least briefly. The Hawaiian Filking Society published a newsletter, *Na Mele O Na Hoku: Songs of the Stars*. Debbie Sanders wrote an article in *The Filking Times* explaining that the filksings were held outdoors and without instruments, though the singers hoped someone who played an instrument would join them. *Na Mele O Na Hoku* ran through 1992.

It took a few failed starts, but filk cons finally reached the East Coast. In the eighties a confederation called the East Coast Filkers' Exchange came together and produced a zine called *The Muze*, which ran four issues. (The third was a double issue, numbered 3 & 4, so the last issue was number 5.) Contributors included Paul Willet, Bob Asprin, Leslie Fish, Frank Hayes, and Roberta Rogow.

PFNEN #43 reports that Vinnie Bartilucci tried to launch an East Coast con in 1986, but nothing came of it. MuseCon in 1987 had left a heavy financial burden on its organizers, and they didn't try again. In 1990, Richard and Carol Kabakjian filled the gap with ConCerto in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. They invited Julia Ecklar as the guest of honor, but she had to cancel, and Kathy Mar and Linda Melnick served as the guests at the convention, with Spencer Love as the toastmaster.

ConCerto was intended as an annual convention, but difficulties in hotel negotiation forced the Kabakjians to cancel in 1991. The contracted hotel for the 1992 convention went out of business, and they couldn't find a suitable replacement hotel on such short notice. In February 1992, learning of the cancellation, Spencer Love brought a group of New England filkers together to throw together a convention on very short notice. I offered the name "ConCertino" (a small concerto) for it, which is what we went with, and the convention was held in June in Westboro, Massachusetts. Memberships and dealer table reservations from the cancelled ConCerto were transferred to ConCertino.

It was indeed a small convention but a successful one, with six guests and fifty or so members. M.A.S.S. F.I.L.C. was organized as a 501(c)(3) corporation to run it, with expert help from Ellen Kranzer in negotiating the legal maze. Originally it unofficially stood for "Massachusetts Association of Silly Singers Fannishly Inflicting Lyrical Chaos." Later the periods were dropped and the name changed to [MASSFILC](#) so that state employees would have a chance of getting the name right.

We decided afterwards that we'd like to do it again, but not every year. To manage this, we persuaded a group in the Baltimore-Washington area to run a convention in 1993. This got the name Conterpoint. It received a lot of help from MASSFILC that year, since the local filk community was just getting started. After a Fred Small concert in 1994, a local group started talking about holding regular filksings in the area. Once a few of these had happened in various homes, the next year's discussion turned to running another Conterpoint. They incorporated under the name Conglomeration and started serious planning for a 1996 convention, becoming a regular part of the rotation.

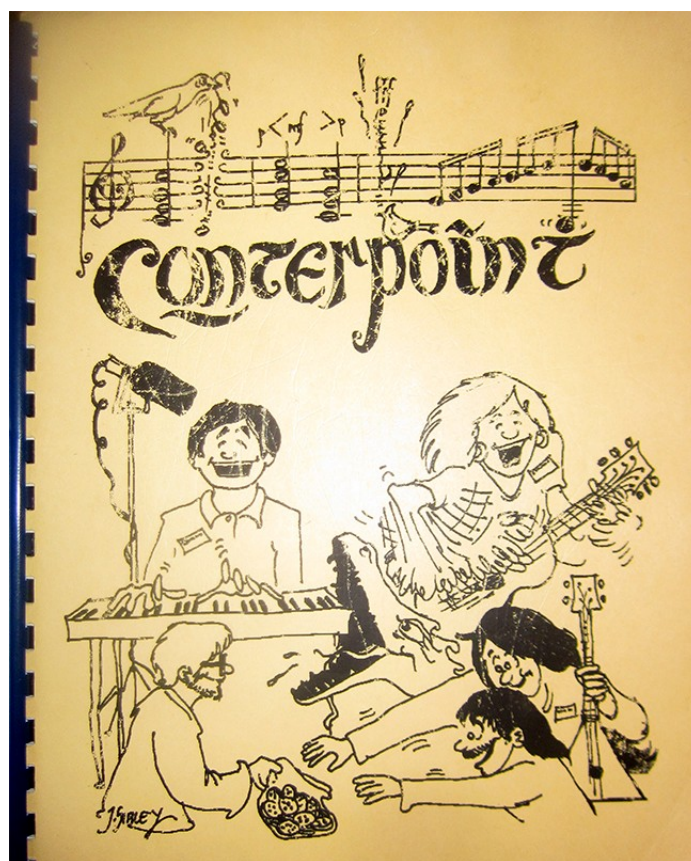


Figure 5: Conterpoint program book, 1993

Adding a third convention to the rotation, the New York Metropolitan Filk Organization (figure out the acronym for yourself) organized and started Contata in 1994, with a strongly Jewish flavor, including a kosher con suite. It was nominally a New York convention, but hotel space is expensive and parking is horrendous in the city, so all the Contatas have been held in northern New Jersey.

In 1995, as the rotation came back to ConCertino, the organizers of the three conventions realized that a common identity for the Northeast conventions was necessary, so that people would recognize that something more was happening than a series of one-shot cons. The conventions adopted the unifying name of [NEFilk](#), with a logo designed by Matt Leger and its own website. The conventions in the different areas kept their own names alongside the NEFilk name.

In 1997 Bill and Terri Wells organized The Second ConCerto in Cherry Hill. In 1999, I chaired my first filk convention, ConCertino '99. The 1998 Contata was lightly attended, so I pledged that ConCertino would reach 100 members. We did — with some finagling involving paid memberships for inanimate objects.

Plans to make the new ConCerto part of the rotation failed because of the organizers' personal situation. When they had to cancel The Third ConCerto for 2001, Conglomeration stepped in, even though they'd just run a Conterpoint in 2000, and ran another one.

Filk grew northward and southward. In 1991, Canada became the third country to have a filk convention, with the first FilKONtario held near Toronto. Many visitors from the eastern US came, giving it a larger foreign presence than its organizers expected, but a very welcome one. Canadian filk deserves its own chapter, though, so let's leave that for the moment.

Filk hadn't attained as high a profile in the South as in some other areas, but by 1986 there was serious talk at the Atlanta Worldcon of a filk convention. Michael Liebmann moved to Atlanta from Los Angeles and got regular housefilks going. In 1992, Lee Billings started Musicon in Nashville, and it continued through 1996. It was held on the first weekend in January, and though Nashville is a "southern" city, it endures real winters. People remember the last Musicon because a snowstorm closed all the roads on Sunday, effectively adding an extra day to the con. The closing party of a convention is normally called the "dead dog," but this one became famous as the "sled dog."

After it became clear that Musicon wouldn't continue, the Atlanta group picked up the slack and started [GAFilk](#) in 1999, scheduling it for the weekend before Martin Luther King Day. The group consciously decided to have a light programming schedule, because after the holidays people would be more interested in relaxing than preparing for concerts. A big part of the program is the "2 by 10" concerts, where each performer gets a slot not exceeding two songs or ten minutes. Open singing starts no later than 10 PM. As Bill Sutton puts it, GAFilk sticks to the view that "Filk is about the circles, filk is about the community, filk is about people playing together, not about the concerts."

The vast middle of the country, between Ohio and California, hadn't seen a filk convention since FilkCon "East" in Missouri and Oklahoma. In 1993 Harmonicon came to Independence, Missouri. The convention moved to Oklahoma City the next year, then to Wichita, Kansas before reaching the end of its run. There's still a large expanse between Ohio and the Pacific states with no current filk cons.

Even the English-speaking world wasn't the limit. In 1997 a German group held a convention in a medieval castle. FilkContinental stayed for two years in Castle Blankenheim, then moved to a rather ordinary youth hostel in 1999 before finding another castle, Freusburg, in 2000. Germany has its own chapter in this book.

The growth of filk conventions reflected a larger trend toward more specialty conventions. Costume-Con had started in the eighties. Conventions for "furry" or "anthropomorphic" fandom, centered on animated or illustrated stories with part-human, part-animal characters, started up in the nineties. Anime conventions were well-established in Japan but now started appearing in the West. The increasing range of choices meant that people could participate more intensively in their special interest, but at the same time it diminished the cohesiveness of fandom. More people would go just to their preferred specialty conventions, rarely making contact with other parts of organized fandom.

Still, the character of filk didn't change much through the nineties. The idea that everyone can participate remained solid in spite of the growth in numbers and talent. If anything, participation improved. The traditional Midwest idea of the performers' circle, with an outer circle of secondary participants, started giving way to bardic and chaos circles in which everyone could participate equally.

While no region dominated the filk world anymore, the Midwest-based community with the Dorsai Irregulars at its core remained very strong. To the extent that there was a center of filk, it was OVFF,

sometimes called the “Worldcon of filk.” The biggest single source of new midwestern filkers was now Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Steve Macdonald and Tom Smith are among Ann Arbor’s notables. Steve went (“hogtied and carried,” according to one account) to Capricorn in February of 1992 and to OVFF later that year. He had been writing songs since 1977, but hadn’t had an opportunity to perform many of them till he discovered filk. Filkers provided a ready audience for songs such as “Journey’s Done,” “Cold Butcher,” and “To Touch a Star.” At Renaissance festivals he’s known as Gallamor the Bard.

Tom Smith had been going to filksings in the Ann Arbor area since the mid-eighties, but it took him a while to develop into a really good songwriter and performer. He first got real notice with his 1991 tape, *Who Let Him in Here?*, and his concert at Chicon 5. The Chicon program book’s listing for him misspelled his name as “Tom Sith”; he ran with it and turned it into a song. He’s best known for his bizarre humor in songs such as “Operation Desert Storm” and “Domino Death,” but he’s also done moving pieces such as “A Boy and His Frog” and “Starlight and Saxophone.” A master of instafilk, he’s called “the world’s fastest filker.” At an OVFF song contest, he wrote and sang an instafilk response to every one of the entries.

Sometimes filkers perform during masquerade intermissions. This gets them a large audience but a tough one to hold; they want to hear the judges’ decisions, not somebody’s songs. Tom ran into extra problems when he filled this role at the 1992 Philcon. The guitar feed just didn’t seem to be working, no matter what the sound crew did. Finally he hauled his guitar as high up his chest as he could, so the vocal mike would pick it up. Afterwards, he learned that the soundboard had been miswired, and the guitar was being heard just fine — at the débutantes’ ball in the next hall.

The 1994 Philcon made up for it, though. Tom’s first song to an original tune was “Superman’s Sex Life Boogie,” which is based in part on Larry Niven’s article, “Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex.” That article makes the case that if Superman ever had sex with Lois Lane, it would kill her. In 1994, Tom [sang his song with Niven on stage](#), which he says “counts as a life highlight.”

The Dandelion Conspiracy

Getting filk accepted at SF conventions was still a problem. Filk was winning, but sometimes at the cost of significant friction. Some cons carried a reputation, not always deserved, for being filk-unfriendly. Kathy Mar decided a new, friendly but firm approach was needed and devised the “Dandelion Conspiracy,” unveiled at Chicon 5 (the Chicago Worldcon) in 1991. Its [flyer](#) is worth quoting in full:

There seems to be little understanding in fandom at large of the changes that have occurred in filk music since its inception so many years ago. This is not helped by the way most filkers react when we interact with other fans. We are very intense, we tend to be blind to or enamored of those aspects that non-filkers find most annoying, and we are inclined to be very vocal (no pun intended) and obnoxious in our protests when we feel we are being mistreated.

In an attempt to find a way to communicate our views to others more effectively, I have decided to form what I call the Dandelion Conspiracy. This is meant to serve many goals at once. In taking the dandelion as the filker’s symbol, I hope to convey, as gently as the flower-power movement did, that filk is almost impossible to root out. If disturbed, it tends to proliferate. It can be beneficial at times, and it can even be beautiful in spite

of its weedy reputation.

Most ConComs fail to realize the real advantages of treating filkers well. Most filkers take hotel rooms so that they can crawl off to bed at whatever impossible hour the filk ends and to provide a secure environment for their recording equipment and instruments. They are perfectly content with any large quiet room that is done with programming for the day, and are almost always finished before programming starts again. They give their money, then put very little strain on the daytime programming because they are usually asleep through most of it. The more professional performers are happy to entertain at the masquerade during the judging intermissions. They don't mind if people talk or stretch while they play. If treated well, they will tell other filkers and all their friends good things about the convention; so their numbers increase as the years go by.

Because there is no organization of filkers to lobby for better treatment and to approach Con committees in our behalf, we are at the mercy of people who understand us very little if at all. In order to make them aware of our increasing numbers and to make sure they recognize not only the better known singers, but all those who just love to listen, I will have available dandelion stickers and dandelion buttons at this convention and any others I attend. The stickers are free and the buttons will be at cost. Anyone is welcome to copy the dandelion and distribute it on their own. With time and luck, ConComs may come to know in a gentle yet insistent fashion just how many people are in favor of this special science fiction art form in all its diversity and joy.

I hope to see a lot of dandelions at this convention and at other conventions in the future. Like the weeds we are, we will grow in numbers and colorful profusion until we are taken seriously by ConComs. From the smallest root, we will grow back. If disturbed, we proliferate. We may be weeds, but we're beautiful just the same.

The dandelion became a symbol of filk. People wrote songs about the Dandelion Conspiracy. Debbie Ohi ran a website for several years called the Dandelion Report; it's no longer up, but its pages on the Internet Archive have provided a treasure trove of information for this book. Leonard Zubkoff started a publishing business called Dandelion Digital. It's hard to tell how much this effort persuaded convention committees, but the position of filk continued to improve. Many people, both familiar and new, played a role. Let's look at some of the new ones, roughly from west to east.

“Dr. Jane” Robinson (later James Robinson) released the album *Wackademia* in 1989. She often worked with Cynthia McQuillin, with whom she became life partners. Her favorite topics have included dinosaurs and academic pettiness. Most of the dinosaurs in her songs are long dead, but one of her most popular songs is “Nessie, Come Up.” (Pronouns are a tricky matter in these cases. I'm using “her” here but will use “him” further on.) Cynthia launched Unlikely Publications to publish her own songbooks and tapes and also published Jane's songbooks.

Cat Faber was living in Oregon when she first got involved in filk. In 1997, she was the Interfilk guest at OVFF. She performed with Callie Hills as the duo Echo's Children, and people scooped up their CD as soon as the concert was over. She has shown how much can be done with the simplicity of a capella duets, such as “The Word of God.” While her songs tend toward the calm and contemplative, one of her most popular ones urges the audience to shout “**NO QUARTER!**” as loudly as possible in the chorus.

Californians Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff didn't get involved in filk until 1995, according to their [Conflikt bio](#), even though Maya had been writing science fiction professionally since 1989. At Baycon 1995, Jeff brought his guitar just to have something to do in his spare time, and Kathy Mar spotted him and

pulled him into a concert. Since then they've been very popular at filk cons in North America and Europe. They specialize in performances of hit songs which are spot on, except that the words have been replaced. Jeff also helps out other filkers in producing their recordings.

Technology was making changes in performance. I brought an electronic keyboard to MASSFILC meetings and cons but used it as a simple accompaniment instrument. Joe Ellis made a much bigger splash with his keyboard gear in the Midwest, using more elaborate equipment to explore new musical possibilities. His albums included *The Synthetic Filker* and *The Dream Is Alive*. The dedication of his songbook, *Sysex Dump!*, includes "one nameless filxfan in particular, whose overheard comment that 'Keyboards don't belong in a filk!' drove me to an even higher standard of writing and performance." One of his compositions, "Robofilker," is filk rap.

Erica Neely is also from the Midwest but entered filk while studying at Oxford. She became known for songs of gloom and destruction that contrasted with her upbeat personality. Her best-known song insists that "it must be cheerful 'cause not everybody dies."

Publishing and sales remained important. Before Bill and Gretchen Roper were married, Gretchen was selling merchandise at cons as half of a business called the Secret Empire. In 1986, Bill suggested that she add tapes from Off Centaur to their stock and Bill replaced Gretchen's previous partner. In 1990, they started [Dodeka Records](#) to publish filk in the Midwest (including Midwestern Canada). Their first two albums were on cassette, *Music After Midnight* by Dave Clement and *Who Let Him In Here?* by Tom Smith. Later albums included their own work. Dodeka Records is still active today.

In Georgia, three well-established filkers, Brenda Sutton, Gwen Knighton, and Teresa Powell, combined their powers to form the Three Weird Sisters. When Gwen moved to England to marry, Mary Crowell joined the group. They've produced four CDs and have appeared as guests at numerous conventions.

As previously mentioned, the eastern US has never been quite as big a source of performers as other areas, though it's had some good writers and certainly hasn't lacked for organizers. It has had its singers, though. Ookla the Mok, from Buffalo, began doing filk in the early nineties. According to [their own website](#), "They're a big noisy rock band, which makes a lot of filkers want to throw things at them." At one Worldcon, where they'd been put into an open space in a multifunction area, a vendor got annoyed enough to grab a microphone from them. The name comes from an alien character from the 1980 cartoon *Thundarr the Barbarian* (named from "UCLA" pronounced like a word, according to Wikipedia). The core members are Rand Bellavia and Adam English; there have been others in the group from time to time. Much of their repertoire focuses on comics and superheroes.

Another East Coast filker showed that age is no barrier. Acacia ("Cacie") Sears started joining filksings at the age of five, sang at Chicon 5 when she was seven, and began recording songs not long after. She still sings, though her interests have moved to other kinds of music.

Some East Coast songwriters, such as Dave Weingart, Harold Feld, and Gary Ehrlich, haven't been as widely recognized as they might be, since they aren't big-name performers who issue CDs, but they've created some interesting and effective songs.

Boskone regained a leading position in filk-friendliness in spite of a falling-out after the 1987 disaster. In 1992, the convention brought in Kathy Mar as the Featured Filker, and has continued to have one every year. The only exceptions were 2002, when Tom Holt was invited from England but couldn't come, and 2013, when Heather Dale was designated Featured Musician instead.

The filk community also endured some sad losses. Leonard Zubkoff, the founder of Dandelion Digital, died in a helicopter crash in 2002. Meg Davis withdrew from performing because of multiple sclerosis. Michael Rubin, a well-liked songwriter from the New York area, died of cancer in 1995, as did Gary Anderson in 1999. Mike's story "The Programmer and the Elves," with a chant-along refrain, is still often heard.

Interfilk

As the size of filk fandom grew, so did the interest in getting in touch with filkers from distant places. Some people traveled long distances to conventions, and the best known ones had their expenses paid as guests, but a lot of interesting people couldn't afford to go at their own expense. Bob Laurent, of Wail Songs and Consonance, wanted to improve this situation. He looked at the UK's Flying Filk Fund, which brought in people from North America. According to Spencer Love, his immediate goal was to bring Mike Whitaker from England to the United States, after he'd met Gytha North at Consonance 1991. At Chicon 5 he brought together Spencer Love, Gary Anderson, and Bill Sutton to start a new organization for the purpose. This group adopted the name Interfilk, and the four founders became officers, as well as each being the director of a geographic region. Bob was initially president, Bill vice president, Spencer treasurer, and Gary secretary.

This all-male board resulted in some complaints, so the next three directors added, in 1993, were Kathleen Sloan, Mary Ellen Wessels, and Judith Hayman. Two more directors were added later, and there have been some changes in the makeup of the board since then as people have moved from their region, been unable to continue, or — in the case of Gary Anderson — died. There is no other membership in Interfilk, and the directors remain unpaid. It is now a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. The board holds its annual meeting at OVFF and sometimes a spring meeting at FilKONtario.

The two most visible functions of Interfilk are bringing guests to conventions and raising money through auctions. Guests are sent only to North American conventions, but they may come from anywhere. As Bob had planned, the very first Interfilk guest was Mike Whitaker, who appeared at Consonance in 1992. The other guest in that year was Randy Farran, whom Interfilk sent from Oklahoma to ConCertino.

1993 saw two more Interfilk guests, Steve Macdonald at ConChord and Zander Nyronnd at OVFF. The number increased to three in 1994 and continued growing until by 1998, it was rare for a filk convention not to have an Interfilk guest. The guests aren't the most famous filkers, but rather ones who the directors think would make an interesting contribution outside of areas they normally travel to.

The main source of funds is auctions held at the conventions which host Interfilk guests. It was originally standard for the guests to perform a concert just before the auction, though this has become less of a requirement. The items auctioned are donated by convention members or other supporters. Small-ticket items are auctioned on the table, with a slip of paper for people to fill in their bids. More

exciting items, or table auction items which get more than a specified number of bids, go to voice auction. Convention members serve as auctioneers; some of the Dorsai Irregulars, like Mark Bernstein and Bill Roper, do a particularly good job.

At one time the professional auctioneers' lobby got Ohio to pass a law prohibiting charity auctions from using auctioneers outside the state-licensed cartel. This was a problem for OVFF, but fortunately they were able to get someone who understood the difference between a fan auction and an estate auction. The law was later repealed, or perhaps modified so that it no longer affected OVFF.

From an early date, the auctions featured "Interfilk wenches." Mary Ellen Wessels explains:

One of the things that the Dorsai Irregulars did was helping with auctions. The guys would auctioneer, but the women would wear these elegant dresses and be the very classy auction runners. Some warped part of my brain said, 'Hey, we could do that, except we could make it campy and a little on the seedy side and have fun with it.' I didn't think we could pull off elegant. People loved the idea, so they just ran with it.

The wenches' shtick is to hover over people thinking about bidding (both men and women) and flirt outrageously with them. Occasionally there have been male "wenches." A few people have felt uncomfortable with this, and I wrote a song about it ("Interfilk Wench Rant," to the tune of "Alice's Restaurant"), so provisions were later added to opt out. Initially a segregated area for people who didn't want to be "wenched" was introduced; this proved as popular as a 7 AM concert, so the preferred way to opt out became a standardized gesture, arms crossed over the chest with fists clenched.

How well Interfilk guests work out varies. Interfilk likes to select people who aren't as well known as they should be. Some are just locally known because they're really good at what they do but are uncomfortable with an unfamiliar crowd. They can still work out well, but it can take special care from the convention committee to use them to best advantage.

More and more songbooks appeared, and the inclusion of songs in convention program books became common. Firebird continued Off Centaur's practice of issuing songbooks to go with tapes.

Reaching out

Communication channels became more important than ever as filk spread wider. Rick Weiss's *The Filking Times* started in 1988 and ran for 35 information-filled issues totaling 349 pages, ending in March 1993. The first issue was called *Loose Notes*, but he changed the name to avoid confusion with Susan Landerman's series of songbooks by the same name. It didn't run any songs, since *Xenofilkia* already had that covered, but was dedicated to news, reviews, and announcements.

Carol Kabakjian started publishing *Philly Philk Phlash* in 1987. It included songs and convention news with an East Coast focus.

Margaret Middleton and the Filk Foundation published *Harpings*, a newsletter, for about five years following the end of *Kantele*. It ended partly because of the rise of electronic communications, partly because of lack of easy access to a copying facility.

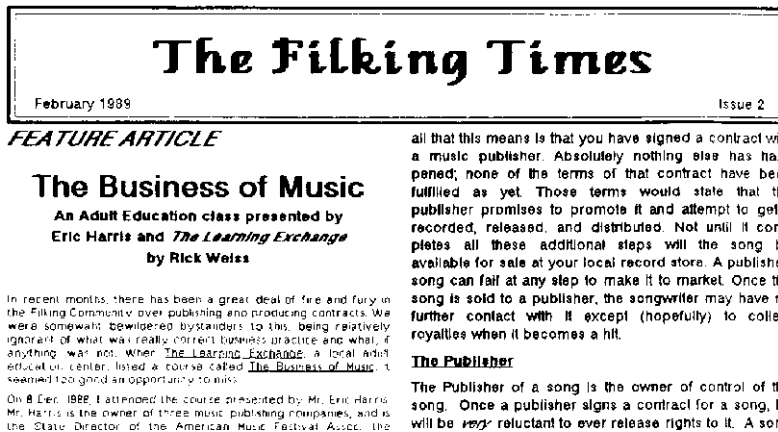


Fig. 6: Top front page of *The Filking Times* Issue 2

Meanwhile, the biggest change to communication since the introduction of television was happening. The Internet was starting to become available to everybody. In the eighties proprietary networks, such as GEnie, Compuserve, and America Online (AOL), became popular, along with private bulletin board systems (BBSs). GEnie was especially popular with filkers for a while, as was Compuserve's science fiction forum. The Internet had existed for some time but wasn't available to many people outside of research projects. When AOL and Compuserve opened Internet gateways, the result was a huge cultural collision between the limited, anarchic community of veterans and the confused users stepping out of their gated communities.

For a short while, Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) held an important role in personal computer communications. They consisted just of a modem that would accept calls, a computer, and some software. Most of them didn't belong to any network or business beyond the person who set them up. Eric Gerds started the DAG Electronic Bulletin Board System in 1989 with a 1200 baud modem (that's 1200 bits a second — you wouldn't want to send MP3 files over it even if they'd existed then). It included information on ConChord as well as an online catalogue for DAG Productions, Eric's filk publishing operation.

In 1990, another filk-related BBS, the StormGate Aerie, came on line while DAG was suffering from server issues. Nikolai and Kay Shapero ran it. StormGate Aerie was a link on FidoNet and participated in its Filk Echo, which meant it could exchange messages with other participating BBSs.

FidoNet gradually gave way to Usenet, a decentralized system of message boards called "newsgroups." Today most people who know of Usenet's existence think of it as a backwater of the Internet, but in its original 1979 form it was a set of protocols for linking computers on an ad hoc basis, much like FidoNet. In 1987 the newsgroup system was organized under a new naming hierarchy, with seven major top-level categories and a catchall category called "alt." An informal but widely accepted process, involving a vote of users, let new groups get approval in the big seven categories. Starting an "alt" newsgroup only required convincing a Usenet host somewhere to create it; the drawback was that it might not get wide distribution.

The FidoNet Filk Echo migrated to the newsgroup alt.music.filk; for the remainder of the echo's life, its posts appeared automatically in the newsgroup. In the early nineties Usenet became widely available

through the Internet, allowing a much wider audience for discussions. Well into the 21st century, most Internet service providers had Usenet gateways. If a host didn't carry alt.music.folk, a request to add it would usually be granted. Later in the nineties a vote was held to create the newsgroup rec.music.folk in the "rec" (recreation) top-level category. This was a complicated process, involving a lot of discussion on just how to define "folk" in the proposal, and it was accepted. By convention, alt.music.folk was retained for "bawdy" songs, and all other discussion went to rec.music.folk. Both newsgroups still exist, and rec.music.folk still carries a small but steady flow of traffic.

The oldest folk website may be the Cyberspace Starport, created by Steve Savitzky. The Internet Archive's oldest snapshot of its flier page is dated December 6, 1996, but it shows a "last modified" date of November 23, 1994, and there is an announcement of the site in Xenofilkia #39, February 1995. The archive snapshot says: "Eventually it is hoped that the Cyberspace Starport will be a home on the Internet for many science-fiction fans and fannish businesses. I would also like it to become an ftp site for folksongs posted to alt.music.folk." Xenofilkia #42, August 1995, announced its own page on the Starport, including an index maintained by Barry Gold. The site still exists as "[The Starport in Cyberspace](#)," now at thestarport.com instead of starport.com, and the Xenofilkia section is still actively maintained.

The oldest folk recording on the Web may be one by Leslie Fish, posted by Scott Dorsey. The [page](#) is on the Internet Archive, but unfortunately the recording, in the old Sun Au file format, isn't. The Internet Archive snapshot is from April 18, 1997, but Scott says it had been on there at least a year earlier. The page explains, "For a relatively poor quality demo, we have available a short performance from Leslie Fish, at a science fiction festival in 1993. Due to the vagueries [sic] of the compression and transfer process, this is about as high quality sound as is possible over the net, although it does not do justice to the original recording." Think of it as a lost Edison wax cylinder.

By 1997 websites were proliferating rapidly. The oldest [snapshot of Lynn Gold's website](#), dated May 6, 1997, includes links to pages for seven folk conventions and forty other folk pages. The Filkers' Bardic Ring, which existed by 1997, was a part of the site webring.org, one of the earliest attempts to let similarly themed websites connect up with each other. Several websites joined the ring; unfortunately, the Internet Archive didn't capture the list.

Live chat was another option, as Rob Wynne and Mike Whitaker created the [FolkNet IRC](#) channel. It still exists, though it gets little use today.

Lots of folk books appeared in this period. Wail Songs published *Stave the Wails* in 1991 as a "folk sampler," and it became a favorite book at folksings. Now that publishing with inexpensive home equipment was possible, personally authored songbooks, convention songbooks, and companion songbooks to albums became abundant.

During the nineties small-run production of CDs became economical, and folk albums rapidly moved from cassettes to the CD format, with Dandelion Digital among the first publishers. The more popular albums (except those mired in the Off Centaur disputes) were reissued as CDs.

In 1988 there had been three folk conventions in the USA and none anywhere else. In 1998 there were eight folk cons spread over four countries. Filkers had connected over the Internet. Fans everywhere were discovering folk and becoming part of it. From its obscure beginnings in hallways and hotel rooms,

it had become a major force in fandom.

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7. A new century (2001-2015)

2001 was the “dot-bomb” year, when many businesses found out that having a domain name and website didn’t guarantee riches. It was also the year when murderous attacks in the US created a climate of fear that still hasn’t gone away. Nonetheless, filk has continued to grow, and new technologies have helped it along. Two new conventions have appeared, and use of the Internet has matured.

September 11 hit the community hard emotionally, but fortunately not in a direct way. After the attacks, filkers began a wave of checking by phone and over the Internet to make sure everyone near New York and Washington was safe and accounted for. Debbie Ohi was stuck in Japan till flights resumed but not seriously inconvenienced. FilkContinental in Germany was less than three weeks away. There was talk on the German mailing list about canceling it, but everyone soon agreed that would be a form of surrender, and it took place on schedule.

Filkers responded in the way that they knew, just as they’d responded to the Challenger disaster in 1986: they wrote songs. Leslie Fish sang about the courage of the Flight 93 passengers who fought back knowing their own lives were already lost. Harold Feld warned of the twin dangers of passivity and blind revenge. MASSFILC collected many of these songs into *September 11, 2001: A Memorial Songbook*. Proceeds from its sale went, and still go, to the Families of Freedom Scholarship Fund.

The new millennium had started out full of optimism. Steve Macdonald decided to celebrate by traveling to every filk con in the world in 2001 and recording a chorus of members of each convention, plus the 2001 Worldcon in Philadelphia, singing his song “Many Hearts, One Voice.” His plan was to combine all of these into one recording. He ran into travel problems because of the dot-bomb economy and then 9/11, but made it to all the cons and got the recordings. Unfortunately, the technical challenges of mixing the recordings into a single performance proved greater than expected, even though everyone was working off the same metronomic beat. He gave out a few rough cuts on CD but was never able to release a combined recording. Still, it was an event worth remembering, as he wrote in retrospect:

It’s been quite a year. 10 conventions. Over 400 people. Over 600 voices. All coming together, binding our world and community.

The WorldDream isn’t a song. It isn’t a recording (though we’ll have that to remind us of the fulfillment of the Dream). It’s a feeling. It’s the knowing- that wherever you are, whatever you do; you belong to a global community.

This started as my dream. For many of you, this became your dream as well.

It has been a year of great tragedy and loss. We’ve had the horror and anger left by the attacks on 11 September. In addition to the losses from Ground Zero, we have lost a couple of our own as well. Alasdair Prett in the UK and Merce Crain in the US will not have the opportunity to hear their voices on the CD when it is released. My heart cries, and my soul mourns with their families and loved ones.

It has been a year of growth and deepened personal connections; not only for myself; but for many others. A year of healing, as well.

From the deepest parts of my heart and soul, I thank you for helping to bring this dream to reality. May the

connections, bonds, and family that you have found through the year support and enrich you for the rest of your days.

So- it really isn't over. It's only the beginning.

A smaller and quieter filk event in 2001 showed another way filk was overcoming geographic distance. Two Jewish women from New York and a blonde from California got together to form a group called Lady Mondegreen. Over time it grew in a complicated way, as they aimed to include people who they felt didn't sing enough, and it now has members from England and Germany. They've never all been in the same performance, but somehow they make it work (allegedly with the assistance of carrier pigeons). The two founding New Yorkers are Merav Hoffman and Batya Wittenberg, and the blonde is Seanan McGuire, now a prolific author who's been nominated for Hugo awards, participated in the Hugo-winning *SF Squeecast* podcast team, and won five Pegasus awards (one a tie). She's also done some impressive fundraising for Interfilk; but more on that in a moment.

The community continues to overcome traditional expectations. It accepted gays and transsexuals long before it was mainstream. "Dr. Jane" Robinson had become involved in filk in the Off Centaur days and had a long relationship with Cynthia McQuillin. However, Dr. Robinson told me for this book,

I was never 'Jane,' and my 4-year-old self knew it; but there was nothing to be done about it in 1952. It took a disastrous short-term relationship and several years of therapy to get me to the place where I could make the obvious conclusion that I was *not* a woman. (Cindy's first comment on learning this was, 'Finally I get to meet the man I fell in love with!')

She had the surgical changes made in 2004, and he continued happily as James Robinson.

The filk community was more than accepting. There never was an issue, and I didn't expect that there would be.

Advancing technology helped to bring the filk world together. High-speed Internet became more widely available for homes, and anyone can now use digital audio files. Less than a decade after the first primitive audio appeared on the Web, the MP3 format became available. Players appeared around 1999 and became increasingly common. In 2001 Apple released the first iPod. Now people could record a song without expensive studio facilities and send it digitally to other people. The music industry panicked and filkers rejoiced. In 2002 Eric Gerds launched the "Filk Radio" website, streaming recordings to the Web.

LiveJournal, one of the earliest social networking websites, was launched in 1999. Unlike the sites which dominate the social networking scene today, its format encouraged long, thoughtful posts rather than just links, pictures, and short comments. Filkers soon gravitated to it, and it became the major center for online filk in the first decade of the new century. Unfortunately, it made a number of missteps as it changed hands several times, losing its reputation for user-friendliness. Brooke Lunderville (now Abbey) wrote "The LiveJournal Shanty," where she (now he) lamented that

I'd like to be told
When the parent company's parent company's
parent company's parent company's
parent company's parent company's

company's been sold.

Under its present ownership, SUP, it provides a voice for independent Russian bloggers, and this has occasionally made it the target of denial-of-service attacks, discouraging some people when they couldn't log in. Users have gradually drifted away; LJ still has a significant filk presence, including a [filk forum](#), but it's a far smaller one than it once had.

In 2005, YouTube was launched, letting people make not just recordings but music videos, which anyone with a Web browser could watch. Many filk songs have appeared in videos on YouTube. Often the creators of songs maintain their own channels, but some are there without the composers' and performers' knowledge and consent, and some artists have had trouble getting paid for songs of theirs on YouTube.

With the growing number of options, the online filk community has become fragmented, with no central place to hear all the exciting news. Some people still hang around on rec.music.filk. Filk mailing lists and privately run forums keep their members informed. Google+ and Facebook support filk communities. Filkhaven on IRC still exists, though activity is rare. Some filkers use Twitter, and I've been running @FilkNews there to distribute information which comes my way, sometimes including live coverage of conventions.

Another Internet effort which I've made is the [Filk Book Index](#) on the MASSFILC website. This is an online list of more than 200 songbooks, many with the contents listed. Playing off my experience as a software developer for an academic library, I designed it to hold all the data in the MODS XML format, potentially allowing many uses for it.

Filk recordings can be found on sites that sell downloadable music, such as Bandcamp, CD Baby, and the Apple Store. Old items often turn up on eBay. Many filkers find this a more viable option than selling CDs at conventions, since buyers don't have to wait a year for the next convention in their area. Others produce their own CDs at home and sell them directly, or put their songs up on websites to play or download for free. This has been bad news for traditional dealers, though. Tales from the White Hart closed its retail store in 1998, though it still continues to sell filk and other merchandise at conventions.

Getting together to sing online still isn't practical, though. Propagation delays of even a few milliseconds are enough to mess up singing along, and the Internet just isn't designed to be that real-time. Besides, seeing people on a screen isn't the same as being there with them. There's no satisfaction in hugging an LED display. The heart of filk is still real-world gatherings at housefilks and conventions, as Steve Macdonald showed with his WorldDream tour.

From 2001 to 2008 Juliana and Douglas McCorison hosted a tiny convention or big weekend party called PondFilk on Vancouver Island. It drew people from the northwestern US and inspired some people to think about a bigger convention. As PondFilk approached the end of its run in 2008, this became a reality with [Conflikt](#). Its creation was largely the work of Bethany "Runnerwolf" Allen, who explains:

I realized we had Steve Dixon, we had Vixy when she was just getting started in filk, we had Cecilia Eng, we had huge amounts of talent that would occasionally get out. Then we had this other pool of talent in the

northwest that never left the northwest, who had never been to a filk con, who had never been exposed to filk outside of what they saw at Orycon and Norwescon. The closest filk con was Consonance. I loved Consonance, I want to go back to Consonance, but it's in the bay area. I spent several years figuring how we could get a con together.

Then I found out that Juliana McCorison was hosting something between a housefilk and a filk con [PondFilk] at her house every summer, and I started going to that. One year, we were sitting there, and I was making my really impassioned case that we should have a filk con that can pull people from outside of the northwest so that they can hear the people we've got here who've got such talent, and the people who are talented shouldn't have to fly to go to a filk con. Somebody looked up and went, "Can you do this?"

Seed money was available within the local filk community and was paid back ahead of schedule. The first con chair was Rick Weiss, who had previous experience chairing ConChord. Organizational backing came from SWOC, a regional fannish nonprofit organization. The convention has continued every year, with 140 to 180 people attending.

GAFilk, which started just before the turn of the century, added some exciting traditions in the 2000s. When the convention added a banquet, Mary Crowell provided lounge musician-style entertainment. In subsequent years, this grew to a house jazz band of impressive quality, known today as "Play It with Moxie." The banquet draws eighty people or more, and the dance floor is packed.

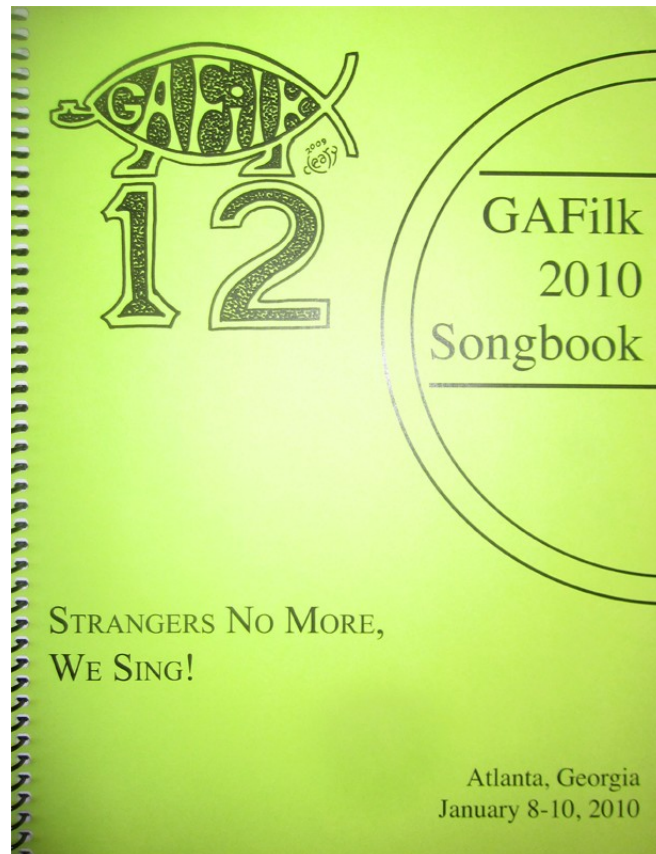


Figure 7: GAFilk 2010 songbook

In 2002, the convention wanted to bring in Lois McMaster Bujold, a leading science fiction author who loves filk. Their concern was that announcing her as a guest would result in a lot of people coming only to see her, and their solution was not to announce her until shortly before the con. She had no program obligations and just attended as one of the participants. This worked out really well, and the committee decided this would be a good thing to do with other guests, letting them attend a filk con without “being a pro.” The guest lineup now regularly includes a “Super Secret Guest” who isn’t announced until December.

Interfilk auctions continue to be popular at conventions, sometimes raising amazing amounts of money. The largest bid on record wasn’t even for a tangible item. The winner paid \$3,000 at OVFF in 2011 to be included by name (“tuckerized,” as they say in fandom) in a novel by Seanan McGuire. That’s why her *InCryptid* series includes a family named Gucciard.

Interfilk has lately been delivering about seven guests a year to filk conventions. It brings them from Europe to North America, but not vice versa; the German and UK filk funds exist to send filkers eastward over the Atlantic. Often a “guest” is a performing group rather than an individual. In 2007, Interfilk combined with the FilKONtario committee and some other fundraising sources to bring all sixteen members of the N’Early Music Consort from England to Canada for FilKONtario. This was an all-out effort on everyone’s part, and the convention had no other guests.

If you want more singing than you can get at filk conventions, or if there isn’t one near you, many general SF cons feature a significant filk program. Boskone has continued to host a Featured Filker or Musician every year, as well as filk concerts. Down the East Coast, Arisia, Lunacon, Philcon, and Balticon run solid filk programs and sometimes bring in filk guests. In the Midwest, Chambanacon continues to be filk-heavy. In fact, Bill and Brenda Sutton have chaired it for the past few years. On the West Coast there’s Orycon, ConDor, LosCon, and Westercon. All recent Worldcons have featured filk concerts, panels, and open singing.

New voices in filk often enjoy a significant presence in the wider world, and some of the older ones have expanded their reach. Filk is just one part of their musical lives, one they sometimes play down on their websites. The wider world has changed since the days when it was “a proud and lonely thing to be a fan.” Fantastic literature often gets onto best-seller lists. Lots of TV shows and movies include aliens, space travel, monsters, and even fans. Megastars perform songs such as “Space Oddity” and “Rocket Man.” Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield doesn’t just sing songs about space; he sings them *in* space, in zero gravity on the International Space Station! His “I.S.S. (Is Someone Singing)” has become very popular among filkers, especially in Canada.

Formerly filkers who were also professional musicians used one repertoire for filksings and another for working performances. Now the same songs often work for both, helping their status in both worlds.

S. J. (“Sooj”) Tucker is a case in point, a frequent guest at filk conventions as well as a touring musician. Her repertoire covers pirates, ninjas, and traditional and modern fantasy. She has teamed up with Alexander James Adams and Betsy Tinney as the very popular trio [Tricky Pixie](#). Alec does very energetic fiddling and Betsy plays a five-string cello, giving an unusual sound to the group. Betsy came from a classical background and learned to improvise on the job with a folk-rock band.

In 2006, Heather Alexander became Alexander James Adams. That transition is a difficult time for

anyone, but especially for a singer with public visibility. She didn't know if she'd have a usable voice when he was done, but knew that regardless, he'd be able to play fiddle. In 2005, while she was still Heather, she (the pronouns get confusing no matter how I approach it) went to a concert by S. J. and introduced herself, saying, "If you ever need a fiddler, let me know."

In the winter of that 2006, Alec got a call from S. J., and his wife answered the phone. By then, Heather had "disappeared," and Alec was still feeling reluctant to talk to people outside his immediate circle. Sooj had been offered a main-stage performance at a festival, but on condition that she team up with Heather. His wife said, "Heather's not here, but I do have a fiddler who's pretty damn good, if you'd like to talk to him." They got together, and Alec described it as follows in an interview with me:

Sooj and Betsy are almost the epitome of the mindset of the whole filk community. They were very kind to me. In a transition, everything gets changed. Not only is your body physically changed, your mind is physically and mentally changed. The problem is, I would play music and think, "I know where this note is in my voice," and it was not there any more. Both Betsy and Sooj, like I said, were the epitome of what the filk community's all about, which is embracing you for whatever you have, and appreciating you, supporting you, and loving you no matter what. They pretty much carried me musically that first year.

Once filk found out what had happened between Heather and Alexander, everybody was cool with it. Considering that Heather was so well loved, it was one of my bigger fears: "Oh my God, what am I doing to this person that people adore and love and support? Will they be there for *me* when I come out and appear before them?" And yes, they were there in droves.

[Sassafrass](#), a group with members scattered around the US, performs Ada Palmer's complex arrangements, which often include multiple lyrics going at once. Their most ambitious project has been *Sundown*, a song cycle based on Norse mythology from the murder of Baldur to the fall of the gods at Ragnarok. They have performed it at conventions with costumes and staging, and the music hints at Wagner in its use of leitmotifs.

Judi Miller, from Ohio, found a distinctive niche interpreting other people's performances in a combination of pantomime and American Sign Language. She's able to handle songs without hearing them beforehand, and has always managed not to collapse laughing until after the song is over. This doesn't give her a lot of opportunities to sing, but at Contata in 2011, where she was the guest of honor, she surprised many people by being quite an impressive singer.

As filkers grow older and the community larger, the losses have inevitably continued. Some of the founding figures are no longer with us: Poul Anderson and Gordon Dickson died in 2001, Bruce Pelz in 2002, and Robert Asprin in 2008. Cynthia McQuillin succumbed to long-term health problems in 2006. Lois Mangan, one of the pillars of MASSFILC, was beaten by Parkinson's in 2008. Chris "Keris" Croughton, often seen at the sound boards at British and German filk conventions, died in a traffic accident in 2011. In 2014, Bari Greenberg died suddenly after rapidly gaining attention in the filk community, and Joe Bethancourt, a filk and folk singer of many years who often worked with Leslie Fish passed away in the same year after a series of illnesses.

Reaching for the stars

Filk has been getting more notice from the mainstream media. The Paramount documentary *Trekkiies 2*

(2004) includes a segment from the ConChord convention, where Kathleen Sloan, Lee Gold, and Karen Anderson explain what it's about. Inevitably, it includes a verse of "Banned from Argo," but it also features several thoughtful songs, including Matt Leger's "A Simple Country Doctor." In 2008 Atlanta's public broadcasting station PBA covered GAFilk; the [segment is available on YouTube](#). That same year, a reporter from the *Boston Phoenix* visited a MASSFILC meeting, and the *Phoenix* published "[What Is Filk?](#)"

With so much happening, the question was bound to arise: was filk ready for the Big Time? A number of filkers have had well-paying careers, so it was possible to put real money into finding out. Eli Goldberg decided to take up the challenge with his label, Prometheus Music. The biggest project was a CD aimed at the mass market, *To Touch the Stars*, which he [discusses at length on LiveJournal](#).

In 1997, I formed Prometheus Music. My goal was to take filk to a professional level, at a time in which filk albums were rarely as professionally produced as today. I spent about \$175,000 to explore what professional filk could look like (mostly covered by sales).

To Touch the Stars was one of our first projects, and our most ambitious effort to deliberately produce filk for a mainstream audience. Producer Kristoph Klover and I had both loved the classic *Minus Ten and Counting* space filk album, which was out-of-print, in an era in which 'out-of-print' didn't mean you could still play it on YouTube.

In hindsight, we were incredibly naive. I thought it would cost \$4,000 and be done in a year. In the end, I spent about \$45,000, and easily a thousand hours of my time over seven years. And Kristoph easily spent as much time. We all made a lot of missteps on the production, in trying to deliver a project that was far beyond our experience level at the time. But ultimately, the CD brought together the best space exploration filk songs, produced in partnership with the National Space Society and Mars Society, who had both recently completed space songwriting contests. The full-color lyric booklet easily rivaled any coffee table space book.

The album sounded strange to many filkers. Songs that they'd always heard in a folk style were now full of percussion, electric guitars, reverberation, and electronic sound effect. Was this even filk? (Or was that an echo of the reaction to *Divine Intervention* in the eighties?) It sounded like something you'd hear on the radio.

Robert Zubrin, a well-known writer on space, wrote a lengthy introduction to the 32-page booklet, which had color illustrations on almost every page. Christine Lavin sang her own song, "If We Had No Moon," on the album. The level of publicity was unprecedented. Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin endorsed it. The Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and the Museum of Flight carried in their gift shops.

It earned Prometheus about \$30,000 in sales, a spectacular success when you consider that a "successful" filk album is one that sells more than a hundred copies. When you consider that this was the return on a \$45,000 outlay, though, then we have a problem, Houston.

Commercially speaking, the album was an unmitigated failure. It taught us that filk music brings intrinsic limits in audience and mass appeal — no matter how it's performed or packaged.

In reality, the prominent space museums who stocked the CD rapidly abandoned it, despite our efforts: their customers simply had no interest in music of an unknown genre by unknown artists, even with Buzz Aldrin on the cover. And Apogee Press, a major space enthusiast publisher that tried to sell it at a major space

conference, did not even move even a *single* CD.

And without the large non-filk buying audience we'd designed it for, it sold only about \$30,000 in ten years — staggering by filk standards, but not enough to cover costs. Kristoph affectionately dubbed it “To Touch the Black Hole”.

He concluded that “the juxtaposition of lyrical earnestness and structural simplicity that is often part and parcel of filk songs just doesn't make a satisfying mainstream album when put together back-to-back.”

The album may not have touched the stars, but it did touch Mars. Its recording of “The Pioneers of Mars” was transmitted as “wake-up music” to the Opportunity Rover in 2004.

That brings filk up to the present (2015), but the story isn't done yet. The filk of the 21st century has spread well beyond the US. Let's look now at its story in other countries.

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8. Filk in the UK

The *Guardian* published an online [article about Loncon](#), the 2014 Worldcon, which began:

In a corporate-looking suite of the ExCeL centre, a softly spoken American tunes his guitar, clears his throat and breaks into song. The tune is a re-imagining of America's 1971 hit *Horse With No Name*, instead dealing with the dilemmas of exploring the universe: "I flew though the cosmos on a ship with no name..."

This is filk, a genre of science-fiction-inspired music named after a misspelling of folk, and one of the quirkier items on the agenda of the 72nd World Science Fiction Convention, which this year is being held in London.

If you want to find filk activity in the United Kingdom, go to the annual convention in February, or look up the many gatherings in between. From a small beginning, filk has grown to a strong community.

The UK can make a strong claim to having created the first published filk book with [Songs from Space](#), put together by Laurence Sandfield and Eric Bentcliffe, which was distributed at the 1957 Loncon. There was a lot of filk at Seacon, the 1979 Brighton Worldcon, but it was all from visiting Americans. Juanita Coulson mentions a Scottish folksinger who enthusiastically joined them, but organized British filk came later. A four-member group called Eridani, consisting of Ann Neilsen, Lesley McCartney, S. Cowden, and Gordon M. Cowden, produced a couple of tapes in the eighties, but their long-term influence was felt more in Germany than in the UK.

The Filk Hall of Fame credits [Gytha North](#)

with almost single-handedly leading and inspiring filk in Britain when it began in the early 1980s. She would start singing in some obscure corner of a con, and gather a few people together to listen, some of whom would also try their hand at singing something. She was essentially the matriarch of filk at British conventions well into the late 80s.

She organized and edited the first three UK filk books, and had songs in the first couple of UK hymnals.

I met Gytha and many other British filkers at ConFiction, the 1990 Worldcon in the Hague, where she was running the filk program. She gave me my first spot ever on a filk stage. I sang a song about the TV show *Beauty and the Beast*; no one tried to kill me.

The Filk Hall of Fame says that "British filk first got properly organized" at Follycon, the 1988 Eastercon convention in Liverpool; Gytha was on the committee and got filk onto the program. She was the first British guest at a North American filk convention, Consonance 2 in 1991. Unfortunately, she died in 2006, but by then her legacy was strong enough to continue without her.

Gytha played a big role in launching the first [British filk convention](#) in 1989, called Contabile (playing on the Italian "cantabile," singing). Mike Whitaker, another major figure since the early days of UK filk, chaired it. Contabile was followed by Con2bile (pronounced con-too-bi-lay) the next year, which led to a series of conventions with ever-changing titles and organizing groups, each one punning on its ordinal number. The strain has increased with the numbers, as names have included Dixseption (17), Van der Filk (22 or "vingt deux"), and Duple Time (2/4 time, i.e., 24). The series is known simply as "the British filk con." There's been one every February since the beginning. The full set of names,

years, and guests is in the Appendix.

If you're an American visiting a British filksing or convention, you'll find it has its own style, which won't be entirely foreign to you but has its unique features. In North America, most concert performances are half-hour sets or longer, planned in advance so people can rehearse. There are events such as one-shots where people can sign up at the con to do one or two songs, but these get treated as secondary, and they draw smaller audiences. In the UK, the "main concert" consists of people who sign up for short performances, it lasts for an hour or two, and it's very well-attended. This style presents a lower barrier to entry for new performers. (GAFilk, in the United States, has adopted a variant on this tradition, alternating blocks of "two by tens" with full-length concerts.)

Instead of visiting the con suite to socialize, you'll head for the pub or bar. In most US hotels, if there's a bar at all it's a small one within the restaurant for getting quick meals or drinks. The bar in a British hotel is much more of a social center. North American filk conventions usually have a con suite, a room rented and stocked by the convention as a center for socializing and free snacks. The bar is space shared with other hotel guests, and you have to pay for the drinks and food, but in a British bar you can get actual meals at a reasonable price. American hotel restaurants are geared for business and are typically slow and expensive. British hotels generally include breakfast in the cost of the room, which gets people off to an earlier start and encourages attendance at morning programming.

UK filk conventions offer a lower "unwaged" registration cost. US conventions are more likely to give price breaks to students (who may or may not have paying jobs). UK conventions end later on Sunday, with programming extending into early evening hours, than American ones do. People going to American cons often need to be home on Sunday, so very little happens after 3 PM.

Finally, American hotels charge the same room rate regardless of the number of occupants; there may be a small surcharge for more than two people, but mostly they don't care as long as the room isn't wrecked. In the UK and continental Europe, the room rate is per person, and hotel management can get quite upset if you're sneaking extra people in. This means UK filkers don't follow the American fannish custom of packing a ridiculous number of people into a room to save money.

Contabile invited Leslie Fish as its guest of honor. Bringing in an overseas guest is expensive, especially for a brand-new convention, so the organizers decided to raise money through a fan fund. They originally called it the "Trans-Atlantic Fish Fund," playing on the well-known Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, but quickly changed it to the Flying Fish Fund to avoid confusion. Raising money for a first convention can be tricky, but they accomplished it with some creativity. Lawrence Dean wrote a song promoting the fund, money was collected at filk gatherings, and a book and music dealer (*At the Sign of the Dragon*) donated a portion of sales. The fund reached its target months before the convention.

After Contabile the fund continued, its name changed to the Flying Filk Fund, designated for bringing one guest to each UK filk convention. Gytha North served as the first administrator. It still exists, with changes over the years; auctions at conventions provide its main source of income.

In 1995 the fund brought a filk guest to Intersection, Glasgow's 1995 Worldcon. At that point it was renamed the Filk Fund, and Robert Maughan took over as administrator. This occasion included the raffle of a "Filt" or Filkers' Quilt, with members of UK fandom creating its individual squares. In 1996 Lissa Allcock took over fund administration.

For a while another fund existed, the Filk Convention Management Fund, used to roll over money from one convention to the next. UK filk conventions, unlike most others, aren't run by a continuing organization, but by a separate entity organized each year. In 2009 the rules of the Filk Fund were changed to include this purpose, and the two funds were merged.

A feature of British filk conventions is the "Sams" or UK Filk Awards. Their first presentation took place in 1999 at XIlophone, following the urging of Phil and Lissa Allcock. Earlier conventions had held award ceremonies, but each year's committee presented its own set of awards or not, without any continuing theme or tradition. The name came from "Sam's Song," an internationally beloved song by Zander and Soren Nyron. The design of the awards very loosely follows the Oscar, varying from year to year.

Anyone attending can make a nomination at the convention. After nominations are closed, the members vote. There are awards for songs (which go to the author) and for performances. Eligibility isn't limited to the UK.

Between conventions, gatherings originally happened not in people's homes, as in the US, but in pubs. The original gatherings, for reasons that no longer make much sense if they ever did, were called "WiGGLeS," which stood for "We're Gonna Get Lynched!" This has mutated into the SWiGGLe, or Singing WiGGLe.

Singing in a pub presents obvious limitations if you don't have your own space in it, so the WiGGLeS were basically social rather than musical gatherings. An even bigger problem loomed in the form of Britain's draconian entertainment licensing laws. For a long time, almost any musical "performance," even if it was just three or more people singing for themselves, required an entertainment license, with attendant costs and red tape. This was known, without affection, as the "three to a bar" rule, and must have been very convenient for agencies who didn't like free competition. The [Live Music Act of 2012](#) loosened the requirements considerably; what long-term effect this has on British filksings remains to be seen.

It was possible to hire a room in a pub for singing, if the pub had the appropriate license. Some of the early SWiGGLeS took place at the Aquarius Archery Club in Finchley, North London, before it burned down in 2012. Since then people's homes have been the usual location for SWiGGLeS.

[Becon Publications](#), a small publishing outfit run by Roger Robinson, has produced many songbooks, starting with *The Old Grey Wassail Test*, edited by Gytha North in 1987. Her two subsequent collections were *On Filkley Moor* (1988) and *The Drunken Rabble Project* (1990); the three are still available in a combined volume titled *And Then 3 Come Along Together*. Other books from Becon since then have been personal collections, such as *Zander's Little Book of Filks* by Zander Nyron, or books issued at conventions, such as *Under Filk Wood* for the 2005 Worldcon in Glasgow. There have been numerous other British publishers of filk books and recordings.

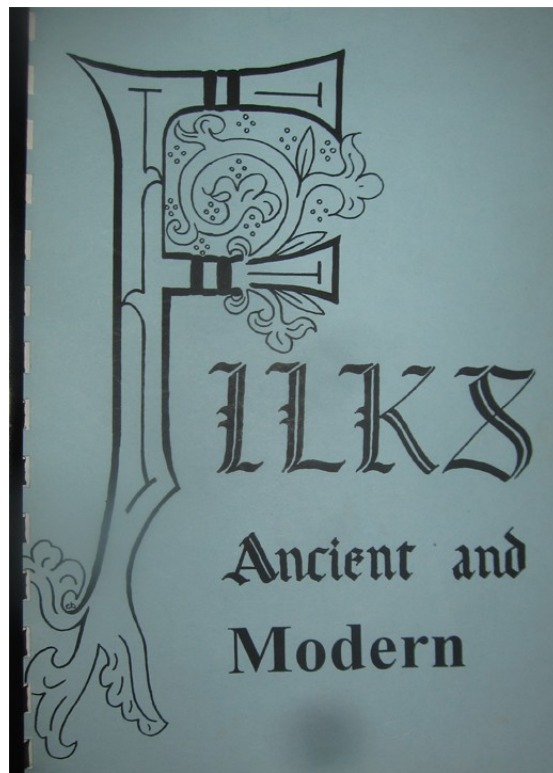


Fig. 8: *Filks Ancient and Modern*, a British songbook

British filkers have made special contributions on the Internet. Martin Gordon-Kerr's Filk Archive has many recordings of filk songs contributed by registered users, who can download other users' MP3 files for free. Its success depends on its relative obscurity from people who grab and repost recordings wholesale, so I'll refrain from providing a link here. Rafe Culpin's [UK Filk Music Database](#) provides extensive information on filk published in the UK.

British filk includes some very good choral singing, largely because of the work of Valerie Housden. At Obliter-8, the 1996 convention, she led some multi-part harmony arrangements, leading to the formation of a choral group called the N'Early Music Consort (punning on the famous Early Music Consort). It's much better than its name suggests and has produced a CD, *Voices Going West*. It's become a tradition for the NMC to present a concert at each year's convention.

One of Valerie's choral pieces is "A Short Treatise upon the History of Filk," making use of Johann Sebastian Bach's arrangement of a well-known hymn tune by the less famous composer Hans Leo Hassler. The melody goes under several names, including "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded." Valerie's words take it in a different direction:

The history of filking
Is full of famous names
Who knew good melodies and
Who filched them without shame.
Charles Wesley stole fine folk songs
And Booth remarked upon

Why Satan had all the best tunes.
They're not the only ones.

J. S. Bach is a filker.
He did not write this tune.
The composer was Hassler
Who's turning in his tomb
Because some folks think Johann
Wrote this sweet melody.
J. S. Bach is a filker,
The lesson is clear to see.

Mike Whitaker and Pat Brown (Silver) added a third verse, not quoted here.

Phoenix, a group with a very different style, got its start at Contabile. It began with Mike and Anne Whitaker and Phil Allcock; later, Tim and Annie Walker and Lissa Allcock joined in. They were a filk-rock group with an impressive variety of instruments, whose motto was “When in doubt, play **loud.**” The group has been inactive due to logistics issues since 2012.

[Talis Kimberley](#) appeared in filk in the early nineties and wrote songs both thoughtful and emotional, performed with great energy. In 2001 she joined up with the group Lady Mondegreen as one of its core members.

[Playing Rapunzel](#) (Mich Sampson and Marilisa Valtazanou) is a highly regarded duo on the folk and filk scenes. Mich adds a Jewish touch to the music and Marilisa a Greek one, and between them other cultures and languages often show up.

In addition to the organizers, the songwriters, and the performers, the people who work the sound equipment are important, and they play an especially big part at British conventions. One of the steadiest workers at the sound table was Chris Croughton, who also regularly worked at German filk cons, bringing sound equipment there at his own expense. He seldom sang solo but had a fine bass voice in the N'Early Music Consort. When not at work, he had a fine appreciation for bilingual puns. His death in 2011 was a sad loss.

One song from the UK earned a distinctive place in filk. Lots of filk songs have been parodied, and a few have been parodied lots of times. Mike Whitaker's “Before the Dawn” is different, though; it has inspired a large body of songs that expand on the original one, generally using different tunes. It's what science fiction writers call a “shared universe,” where no one's reviewing all the songs for consistency, but they still fit together in a big story arc. It even has [its own website](#).

“Before the Dawn” is a simple, effective song about a tower sentry who is killed in an invading force's nocturnal attack. Mike wrote two companion songs, and then Zander Nyron wrote one to follow them. Mike added one more, and the five appeared on his tape, *The Oak, the Rowan, and the Wild Rose*. Other British filkers kept the momentum going, adding plot and characters to the story “in a disturbingly self-consistent way, almost as if the story already existed and was just waiting to be told.”

This culminated at Loncon 2014, where a cast of filkers put the cycle together as a musical. This involved the usual scrambling for people to fill parts, and a call for a substitute in a critical role just a week before the convention. The performance took place after the formal close of the convention, but still Lissa Allcock reported afterward that the performance “filled the room as well as taking up the room next door where the fabulous convention tech crew speedily set up a large screen and video feed by cable from the filk room.”

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9. Filk in Canada

Neither fandom nor filk stops at the US border, and Canadian and US filkers function much more as a single community than as separate national ones. Toronto, the home of FilKONtario, is within a day's drive of Ann Arbor and Columbus, and filkers keep close ties across the border in those areas.

Looking back, we can find the first signs of organized filk at the World Science Fiction Convention in Toronto around 1973. The people singing at Torcon II (1973) included Lee and Barry Gold and Tamar Lindsay. Clif Flint came to Fan Fair III in 1975 and discovered filk on a restaurant expedition. In 1976 the Dorsai invaded Canada, bringing filk to Toronto Star Trek (not connected with the later Toronto Trek), and Howard Scrimgeour, a Canadian who'd be very important in subsequent events, encountered filk for the first time there.

Another Toronto fan, Marg Baskin, started hosting parties around 1979. Known as BasKon, they drew people from as far as Rochester, New York. Some people would go into a back room to sing or listen to open-reel tapes she'd recorded at distant conventions. The Conclave and Confusion conventions in nearby Michigan featured filk in the evening, with Robert Asprin and Gordon Dickson (who was Canadian by birth) often attending, and Canadian fans were exposed to filk there.

Howard started making trips to the US for the early Ohio filk conventions, FilkCon II in 1980 and OVFF starting in 1984.

In 1990, Judith and David Hayman came on the scene. They'd been listening to filk for some time before Ad Astra in Toronto, where they met Howard, Duane Elms, Allison Durno, Robin Nakkula, Catherine MacDonald, and Joey Shoji. Judith calls Allison her "filk mother." Judith and Allison got filk onto the program at Toronto Trek the same year.

The critical mass in the Toronto area kept building, and going to OVFF meant an eight-hour drive. Around 1990, Joan McDougall came up with the idea that there should be a Toronto filk convention. She shared her idea with several people, including Heather Borean, who started pulling together a committee. Heather talked to Howard, who'd been treasurer for some of the local Ad Astra conventions, asking if he wanted to be treasurer for a filk con. He said he'd do it if she convinced him it could break even; she managed to convince him.

The committee set the date for the first [FilKONtario](#) in April 1991, as far as possible in the calendar from OVFF. It fell late enough in the season to minimize the chance of a bad snowstorm, but early enough to avoid competing for hotel space with June weddings. They invited Bill and Brenda Sutton to be the guests of honor. The committee picked up some ideas from OVFF, including a Friday night reception and a Saturday night banquet. Publicist Lidia Tremblay produced flyers with a mock-formal tone patterned after classical concerts and their associated receptions, with Michael Skeet's cartoon penguins in their tuxedos. From an early date, the Friday night party was "tie and tails," varying the "mad hatter" theme of OVFF's opening reception. OVFF asked people attending its party to have some kind of headgear; at FilKONtario, tie and tails were *de rigueur* — but could be as whimsical as you liked. A Mai Tai cocktail, a book of Thai tales, and a convention ribbon stuck to the back of a belt were just a few of the interpretations that showed up.

While it was successful in many ways, FilKONtario encountered money problems, like many first-year conventions. Attendance was lower than expected. People came to the rescue, though. Bill Sutton held a mock revival meeting to raise donations. Printed songs were sold at 50 cents a page, with the hotel providing free copying. These efforts, plus a significant donation from an anonymous benefactor, saved the con from losing money. In the end, Heather kept her promise to Howard that the convention would break even.

The number of travelers from distant areas, including a van full of filkers from New England, surprised the organizers. ConCerto had just been held in New Jersey the year before but had been cancelled for 1991, so a number of people in the eastern US satisfied their hunger for a filk con by heading out to Canada.

That first year, FilKONtario held a contest to write a theme song for the con. Just two people offered entries, and neither one stuck. It was only years later that the con adopted Urban Tapestry's "Home to FilKONtario" as its official theme song.

The aforementioned penguins on the flyer escaped from their two-dimensional confinement, and from the beginning the birds have perched everywhere at FilKONtario. Penguins adorn the stage, and a penguin-shaped water pitcher keeps the performers refreshed. In the hall, a picture of Opus gives you directions. A song contest requires you to use a list of words, one of which is always "penguin," and penguin representations serve as prizes. The con suite holds a big display of penguin toys and puppets lent by members. (Sadly, water damage ruined much of the collection in the early 2000s.) The closing singing event, usually called the "dead dog" at other conventions, is the "dead penguin."

FKO — a nickname it acquired along the way, probably from Steve Macdonald — came back the next year, with Tom Smith as its guest, but it struggled for a couple of years. The second convention conflicted with a filker's wedding in Michigan, and the third showed that a con doesn't do well on Mother's Day weekend. Heather Borean stepped down as con chair in 1993 and Judith Hayman took over. Since then, under a variety of con chairs, the convention has steadily grown and hasn't missed a year yet. According to its mission statement, it "promotes and supports filk in Ontario with global linkages and influence so any music lover can choose filk as a creative outlet, a source of joy and friendship, a place to develop skills and a social activity."

Like other successful filk cons, FKO benefits from a dedicated tech crew, with Ken Lalonde as one of its mainstays since 1997. His wife Peggi, who joined the con committee in 1996, is regularly seen selling merchandise in the dealers' room, and she published a zine called *Filking from C to C* for several years. USB Studios, Ken and Peggi's publishing label, has produced several CDs of convention recordings. Judith Hayman has edited several songbooks for FilKONtario as well as her own *Sea of Stars*.

In 1991 Mary Ellen Wessels met Judith and Dave Hayman. She invited them to be "Lounge Lizards" at ConFusion 1993 in Michigan, and they really wanted her to come to the third FKO. She said she'd love to but was seriously short on money. Not a problem, they said, offering to let her stay with them and pay her expenses. Feeling very grateful for this, she helped out wherever she could. She noticed that there was no toastmaster to do announcements and introductions, so she stepped into the role. The Haymans gave her a badge that said "Unofficial Filk Waif." The next year FKO invited her back as the official Filk Waif of the convention. The name stuck, and the con now features a Filk Waif every year, the equivalent of a toastmaster or MC at other conventions.

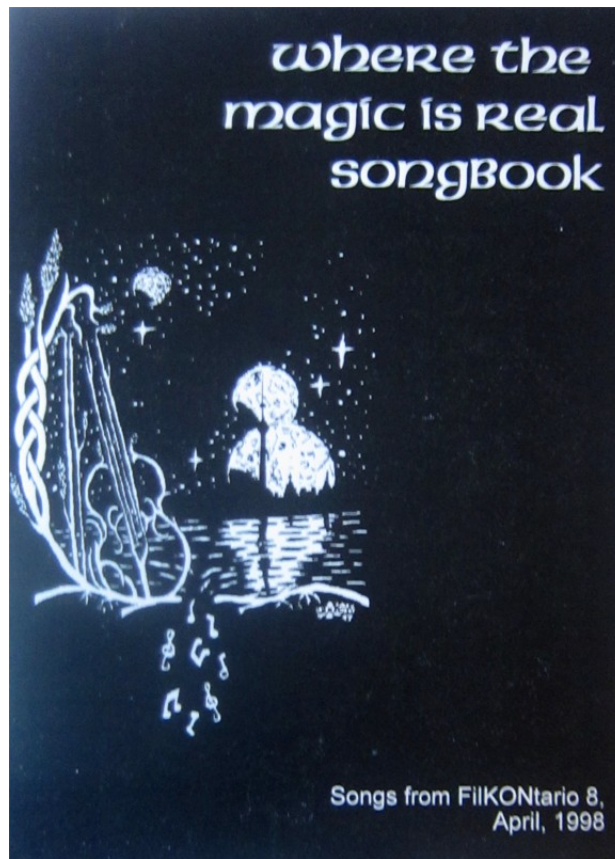


Figure 9: FilKONtario 1998 songbook

The Filk Hall of Fame

1993 wasn't a good year for Mary Ellen Wessels (aka Mew). Her Filk Waif role had led to OVFF 9's inviting her to be their toastmaster, but as the convention approached, her father was dying. She told me in an interview:

I almost didn't go. I was really on the fence of whether I should go or not. The hospice nurse said, "You know what? I think you should go. Your mom's got a lot of people around right now. I've seen people hang on until the right person is there; I've also seen people wait until somebody's gone, because it's too hard to let go. It'll be OK." People were really, really supportive. It's an amazing community, it really is. I've seen that in action so many times.

Her father died on Sunday morning during OVFF. Judith was standing by to take over her duties if necessary, but Mew's mother urged her to stay because she was "already with her other family." Others were also facing crises; Tom Smith's grandmother was hospitalized with a serious illness during the weekend. The people at the convention came forward with lots of support and sympathy. There was pain, but also a spirit transcending it. According to what Judith and Dave wrote on the Filk Hall of Fame website, "Dave said that we needed to do 'something' to recognize this part of filk: the closeness of the community." More recently, though, Judith has said that this was not any part of the motivation to create the honor and has disavowed that statement.

David developed the idea of an award for long-standing achievement in the filk community, including recognition of accomplishments other than writing and performing songs. At Consonance in March of 1994, he presented the idea to Bill Sutton, who liked it, and then to the Interfilk meeting. The directors, though favorable, didn't consider it within the bounds of Interfilk's charter. David then presented the idea to the FilKONtario con committee and discussed it with Kathy Mar, the convention's guest that year. Further discussion, at Contata in New Jersey and then at ConAdian, the Worldcon in Winnipeg, firmed up the idea, clarifying it as an honor for ongoing achievement rather than an "award."

The result was the [Filk Hall of Fame](#), which has become FilKONtario's most distinctive feature. Lots of details remained to set up, of course. The FKO committee decided that instead of selecting people by an open vote, like the Pegasus Awards, a jury made up of one member from each filk convention's committee would make the selections. Anyone could submit nominations. The plaques used the dandelion symbol, with Kathy Mar's permission.

To be eligible for the Filk Hall of Fame, a person must have made a contribution dating back at least five years, or if ongoing, one that has continued for at least ten years. The guidelines tell the authors of nominations to give reasons that are as detailed as possible, and they instruct the jurors to go only by the nominations. Several people have received this honor posthumously, and each such occasion gives new urgency to honoring people while they're still around to receive it.

Living honorees get a call in the spring, about a month before the convention, from David. Most react with incredulity. They're sworn to secrecy until the Filk Hall of Fame Banquet at FKO, where the year's new inductees are announced. There's always an informal guessing game up until the banquet, when people look at who's attending who doesn't normally come to the convention and wonder if that's the reason. In 2013 I was talking with Roberta Rogow and said something like, "It's always interesting to look at who's here who doesn't usually come and wonder if they've been named for the ... Oh." Yes, she was one of the inductees. In a later email she told me that when she was called, "at first I thought someone was playing a nasty joke." In 2014 Michael Longcor showed up and insisted to everyone that he'd bought the trip for himself as a birthday present. There may have been a few subvocalized responses of, "Oh, yesss, precioussss."

The day after the announcement of the awards, the convention holds a concert of songs which the inductees perform or select. Since not every FHOF inductee is a performer, and since some people can't come, other people attending the convention are often asked to perform songs. The catch is that they're not supposed to know in whose honor they're performing the song! If it's obvious, they try not to let on. Dave Hayman selects the performers, who may recruit additional performers.

This gives me a chance to present two personal stories.

In 2011, Dave Hayman asked me to organize a performance of "Onward, Sauron's Soldiers," which is a parody of Sullivan's "Onward, Christian Soldiers." Some of the local people in MASSFILC, including me, had sung the song on stage at the New England Folk Festival, so I recruited some of them to perform the song as a chorus. One of these people was Ellen Kranzer. Here's the story as she tells it:

As a Hall of Fame inductee, one of the things you need to do is select songs to be performed during the Hall of Fame Concert. When you're not really a performer, this means that other people need to be found to perform them — without knowing who requested the song. So, after a certain amount of agonizing I came up

with 5 songs that were representative of my interest in filk. One of them was “Onward, Sauron’s Soldiers,” because it was piece of classic filk from the NESFA Hymnal and it was a good piece to do in multi-part harmony. In fact, I had been part a group of MASSFILCers who had sung it at the New England Folk Festival the previous year. When we discussed who could perform it, I suggested that Dave ask Gary McGath to lead it. In due course, Dave asked Gary. Gary said yes and then turned around and sent email to the MASSFILC list asking if anyone wanted to sing with him. I ignored the email.

Then, a week or two before FKO, there was a MASSFILC meeting. At one point, Gary announced that he’d been asked to perform “Onward, Sauron’s Soldiers” at the Filk Hall of Fame concert, but he didn’t know who had asked for it and he wanted to practice. Then, he turned to me and said, “Do you want to sing with us?” At this point, I had a problem. I’m usually one of the first people to jump at the opportunity when doing something in parts comes up at MASSFILC. I couldn’t very well claim that I wasn’t sure if I was going to FKO since Gary and I were car-pooling. Saying “No” was going to raise all sorts of questions as to why. I looked at Gary and said “sure.”

Gary sent Dave the list of people who would be performing with him.

I heard from Dave. He was quite irate because I wasn’t supposed to tell anyone. I was initially confused. Then it became clear that Dave thought that because I was on Gary’s list of performers, I had told Gary that I was the inductee. I reassured Dave that his assumption was completely wrong. I had to agree to join him or Gary would have figured it out.

Ellen did a nice job of keeping a straight face during rehearsals.

The next year, David asked me to sing my own “Shrink Wrap Blues” at the FHOF concert. At least I’m told he did and I believe him; I completely forgot about it and was caught flat-footed at the concert, without a keyboard nearby to accompany myself on. Fortunately, someone supplied a recording of me singing it, and I went on stage to sing a harmony part with myself. Self-karaoke, you might say. The request was from Persis Thorndike.

All the FHOF inductees are listed in the appendix. My unique contribution (in 2004) was the shortest and dullest acceptance speech in its history.

Canadian songwriters and performers

At Contradiction in Buffalo in 1986, Clif Flynt met a shy Toronto flutist named Debbie Ohi and talked her into going to OVFF. There he and Mary Ellen pulled her into their concert. In rehearsal they worked out flute parts for a couple of songs, and she found she enjoyed performing. She became friends with Allison Durno, and the two of them occasionally sang together at conventions. They met a fellow called Kevin Davies and started practicing with him; about six months later, he introduced them to Jody Krangle. The four performed together as Northern Retreat.

The group only lasted for a couple of months in 1993, doing one concert before Kevin dropped out. Allison, Debbie, and Jodi stayed together and renamed themselves [Urban Tapestry](#), making their first appearances at ConFusion in 1993 and FilKONtario in 1994 and quickly becoming very popular. Debbie’s “A Neurotic Love Song,” a tribute to *Star Trek*’s Captain Picard, was reprinted in *TV Guide*. In 1997 they became the first Canadian guests of honor at a US filk convention, The Second ConCerto. The group remains together, though their separate career paths have decreased the number of cons they can attend together. Debbie has become a very successful children’s book illustrator, doing

illustrations for Michael Ian Black's *I'm Bored* and *Naked!*, covers for re-issues of nine Judi Blume books, and interior illustrations for three of them. She's currently working on a children's book of her own, *Where Are My Books?*

[Heather Dale](#) started appearing at FilKONtario in the early 2000s, and she was a hit from the beginning. Her music often covers Arthurian and other medieval subjects, and her popularity has grown far beyond filk fandom. Today she's a touring musician doing concerts all over the US, Canada, and Europe, performing with the versatile instrumentalist Ben Deschamps. They often perform with the US group Tricky Pixie.

Toronto hosted Torcon, the 2003 Worldcon, giving the FilKONtario crowd a chance to bring filk to a bigger convention. Judith Hayman ran the filk track there, and did an encore at Anticipation, the 2009 Montreal Worldcon.

In 2004, the Filk Society of Upper Canada was created as a nonprofit corporation to give FilKONtario a formal backing organization. The name refers to the name of a province that had covered the southern part of present-day Ontario until 1841.

Filk doesn't happen just in Toronto. Winnipeg is home to a community with more of a folk orientation, with a performing group called [Dandelion Wine](#) at its center. The founding members were Dave Clement, Tom Jeffers, John Speelman, and Dave's daughter Cheryl Miki. It got its start in 1985, first calling itself Prairie Wind. In 1992 the name changed to Dandelion Wine, alluding to the Ray Bradbury book as well as filk's dandelion symbol. Their first album, *Circles in the Grain*, came out on tape that year; Bill Roper published it under the Dodeka Records insignia. In 1995 John and Cheryl left the group, and Dave and Tom decided to continue as a duo. Since Tom married his fiancée Sue and moved to Toronto, Dandelion Wine has been less active. Tom and Sue now perform as Stone Dragons.

Calgary is 500 parsecs from anything, but filk can be found there. Once upon a time a group of filkers engaged in campfire group singing, with everyone using the same book, rather like the old East Coast hymnal singing but outdoors. Jane Garthson reports that she and Blind Lemming Chiffon once dropped in on a filksing there and tried to introduce the idea of doing songs that not everyone had a copy of, but without a lot of success. Today [Vanessa Cardui](#) and her circle of friends keep a filk presence there; she recently released a CD called *Filk and Cookies*.

In British Columbia, Douglas and Juliana McCorison held an annual house convention called PondFilk from 2001 to 2008. Calling itself "the smallest FilkCon," it still managed to bring in guests such as Steve Macdonald, Joe Bethancourt, and the Bohnhoffs. Brooke Abbey (formerly Lunderville) describes herself as a "banjo-playing pharmacist" and is known for such songs as "The Wreck of the Crash of the Easthill Mining Disaster." John Caspell, aka "Dr. Filk," used to sing with her; sadly, he died following a traffic accident shortly before the two were to be guests at ConCertino 2009.

Canadian general conventions such as SFCOntario and Can-Con enjoy a good filk presence. The [Prix Aurora Awards](#), administered by the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association since 1980, have honored Kari Maaren, Phil Mills, Dandelion Wine, Dave Hayman, Urban Tapestry, and Karen Linsley. Though it has close ties to the US, Canadian filk is far more than just the area where we have to calculate exchange rates to buy CDs.

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10. Filk in Germany

In 1999, I decided to make a trip to Europe and visit the German filk con, [FilkContinental](#), once in my lifetime. I loved it so much that when I came home I decided to learn the language. Since then, I've lost count of the number of German filk cons I've been to.

Filk started in a very different Germany. It started in two of them, in fact, with few chances to travel between them. Huge changes came in 1989, with travel restrictions being lifted and the Berlin Wall coming down. It was a key year for filk. Scattered activity existed before then, including an article published in a zine called *Warp* in 1987, but nothing organized. In 1989 a fan named Mary van Duysen was showing homemade videos — this was long before YouTube! — built around Julia Ecklar's songs. Worn-out copies of tapes such as *Where No Man...* and *Solar Sailors* circulated among West German *Star Trek* fans. The tapes of the British duo Eridani were popular as well. People started singing these songs at Trek conventions. One of them, Kerstin “Katy” Dröge in Hamburg, began learning guitar so she could accompany her own singing. She wanted the lyrics and chords, so she wrote to Julia at Simon and Schuster, the publisher of her Trek novels, on the slim hope she might reply.

One day her father called up to her, “You have a letter from the US. Who is Julia Ecklar?” Katy ran down the stairs shouting “This can't be true!” Julia's reply included the lyrics and chords of her Trek songs, as well as the address of Wail Songs. Katy ordered lots of material from the US.

Meanwhile, another seed of filk began growing to the east. Until November 9, 1989, Berlin was a city split down the middle by a heavily guarded wall, yet science fiction fandom had somehow slipped through it. Indeed, *Star Trek's* message of different peoples working together must have had a special meaning to them there. While people were singing Beethoven's music to “An die Freude” as the Wall came down, Kirstin Scholz had gotten hold of some filk tapes, including *Solar Sailors* and *A Wolfrider's Reflections*.

The 1990 Worldcon took place in the Hague, not far from Germany. The German filkers must not have felt ready yet to mix with their counterparts from other countries; the singing consisted mostly of British voices, with a significant American minority, but not much else. However, the freelance German journalist Robert Vogel looked in on the filk and brought back a lot of tapes. These got into the hands of many fans from both the East and the West. Berlin was still legally divided, but with the Wall gone, people were taking full advantage of their new freedom.

In 1990 came *Einheit* (unity), as Germany became one country and Berlin one city. Fans from the East and the West could travel freely, and people interested in filk found each other. In May of 1991 Katy organized a filk circle at Con Course II in Hamburg. She sent out advance inquiries on whether anyone had written their own songs. Only one reply came back, but it was an impressive one. Juliane “Yoooh” Honisch sent Katy her lyrics and original music to some Trek songs she had written. They met at the convention and formed the first well-known performing duo in German filk. This convention welcomed East Germans who hadn't been able to attend any fan conventions before, including Kirstin.

After some enjoyable filking, everyone agreed they should meet occasionally. A crowd gathered in the apartment of a filker named Carola in Berlin, and occasional housefilks followed. Katy placed another big order with Wail Songs, expanding the Germans' horizons to more performers, including Steve

Macdonald, who'd later move to Germany to marry her. Filkers started writing their own songs, in both English and German; Katy says they tended to write about books in the language in which they'd read the book. They continued to follow the Trek cons, and early German filk was almost always related to *Star Trek*. The WARP III convention which occurred that fall in Nuremberg made room for filk, and so did Con Course III.

The next step was for filkers to hold gatherings on a scale bigger than a living room. In 1992 Carola and Kirstin organized the first "Absolutely Ultimate German Mini-Filk Con" at a youth hostel in Gütersloh, with something like twenty people attending. Another followed in 1993 in Berlin, and Yooch and Katy released their first cassette, *Filk from a Developing Country* (Volume 1, "Neofan"). That same year Kirstin started her zine, *Let's Filk About*. Published under Edition Pegasus (or Pegasus Publishing), it included songs in English and German, reviews, and articles on filk. Yooch and Katy made a brief foray into zine publishing with *Der Filkholiker*, but seeing that Kirstin maintained much better production values, they conceded the ground to her after two issues.

In 1994 there were two mini-filk cons, both "absolutely ultimate," in Berlin and Gütersloh, and a song contest at Star Date One in Mannheim. Yooch and Katy had started attending British filk cons; Katy met Spencer Love at one of them and learned more about what was happening in the USA. Her article in the fourth issue of *Let's Filk About*, "Filk im Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten" (filk in the land of unlimited opportunities) is a thorough overview of American filk at the time, listing all the active cons and many of the publishers, as well as covering the status of online filk.

A lot of Germans showed up at the 1995 Worldcon in Glasgow, including Juliane, Kirstin, and Katy. In the same year, Juliane, Katy, and Kirstin sang on the main stage at Con Course IV, and the Austrian Bernd Felsberger organized filk at FedCon in Munich. At Con Course Kirstin started talking about having a bigger con in Germany, slowly wearing down Katy's skepticism about the idea. The next year Germans got the chance to meet Julia Ecklar, who'd given them so much of their start, when she served as the guest of honor at Obliter-8, the British filk con. Lots of them took the opportunity, making more connections with the UK filk community at the same time. Yooch and Katy released Volume 2 of *Filk from a Developing Country* ("Beyond"), and Bernd Felsberger released a CD, *Stations to the Next Generation*.

As people from other backgrounds such as role-playing games came into filk, the subject matter started broadening. They started making connections on rec.music.filk and developing international friendships, especially with people in the UK.

Germany was recapitulating the progress of American filk, but much faster, progressing from singing after hours to concerts in just a few years. In the introduction to her 1995 songbook *Filk from a Developing Country*, following the tapes of the same name, Juliane wrote in English:

I called it that because this is what Germany is, where filk is concerned — a developing country. Until very recently, the German filkers' annual meeting could be held in a living room without great problems. Now, we have progressed to a youth centre situated in close proximity to the middle of nowhere. (You probably always knew it — the middle of nowhere is in Germany.) There are a number of filkers in Germany, though, and the interest is growing steadily.

1996 showed just how fast the country was developing. Kirstin released the first *Let's Filk About Songbook*, a bigger collection than the zines. It was devoted entirely to songs and included bilingual supporting

text. Filking continued at Fedcon and Star Date One, and several recordings were released. Plans developed for a filk-multimedia convention called Bordertone Filk, though it didn't happen. Instead Kai Bober hosted a smaller "garden filk" gathering, which was repeated annually through 1999. It featured outdoor singing whenever the weather cooperated.

Also in 1996, Kirstin finally convinced Katy that a bigger con was possible and that they could draw more people with some advertising. They made the necessary commitments — Kirstin mentions that 10 liters of Tequila Sunrise somehow figured into the deliberations — and started spreading the word, and in the fall of 1997 held the first FilkContinental at Castle Blankenheim.

Yes, a real medieval German castle. Many of the country's old castles have turned into youth hostels, making them affordable for events like fan conventions. The facilities aren't as luxurious as typical hotels, but they make up for it in style. [Blankenheim](#), in the westernmost part of Germany, was built in 1115 and has gone through many modifications since then. The French conquered it in 1794, and it lay abandoned for many years. In 1926 the Deutsche Turnerschaft (German Athletic Association) acquired it, and in 1936 major renovations turned it into a youth hostel.

Two or three people came to the first FilkContinental from Britain, at least partly at Rika Körte's instigation, including Chris Croughton, who helped to provide a very good tech setup. Franklin Gunkelmann more or less spontaneously took the role of Master of Ceremonies, a job he's done wonderfully ever since. The committee initially reserved a block of forty beds, which sold out quickly, and increased it to 50. Anke Teschke tried to register late and begged for a spot sleeping on the floor, which she quietly was given as the fifty-first attendee. She became active in running the con for several years. There were no guests the first year, but the con was judged a success. In order to finance guests for upcoming conventions, Kirstin launched the German Filk Fund, supported by auctions which Franklin ably ran.

In 1998 FilkContinental hosted an entire performing group as its guests of honor, the English group Phoenix, and the room block went up to 60 beds. The same year, Ju and Katy appeared as Interfilk guests at FilKONtario, the first German guests ever at a North American filk con. Volker Tanger and Kirstin (now married to Volker) launched an email list to help keep German filk fans in touch, as well as a filk database.

The 1999 con took place in the modern but dull youth hostel in Gütersloh, which had hosted some of the earlier Mini-Filk Cons. It included the first American attendees, Leslie Fish as the guest of honor and me as the weird tourist who loved the con enough to keep coming. The next year the con found another youth hostel castle, [Freusburg](#), in the south central part of the country. It stayed there for over a decade and enjoyed a good relationship with the place until the management changed in 2012. The castle sits at the top of a hill, with a narrow, winding road to challenge drivers' skills. One year part of it was closed for construction, and the drivers had to make a harrowing cross-country detour. Most of the attendees came by train to the little rail platform at the bottom of the hill, and a dedicated crew led by Katy brought them up to the castle. The visitor to the Freusburg can find many scenic roads and hiking trails nearby, as well as attractive houses and a small church.



Fig. 10: Castle Freusburg

Rooms weren't up to hotel standards by any stretch. Beds in most of the rooms were bunks, and up to five people might share a room. There were separate men's and women's toilets, but they shared a washroom. In 2005, Debbie Ohi's reaction when she thought she was in the wrong bathroom was priceless. The shower room was time-shared unisex; you had to knock on the door to find out if it was available to you. The water could be turned on only for a few seconds, so you had to keep turning it back on as you were showering. Toward the end of the convention's run in Freusburg, the facilities received an upgrade which brought bathrooms to individual rooms.

On the positive side, the boarding package included meals, which was fortunate since the nearest restaurant was a couple of kilometers away down in Freusburg Village. This meant lots of opportunities to get together and talk at leisure with other attendees.

A regular feature of the convention has been the "Harmony Workshop," in which about a quarter of the members spend a few hours practicing one or two choral pieces to perform at the closing ceremony. Many members of the N'Early Music Consort from England regularly participate, contributing to the performance's impressive quality.

People still felt a need for more than the one big gathering a year. After FilkContinental 2000, Ina Franken (now Schaefer) proposed a gathering in Haus Maurinus, a place for small gatherings in Leverkusen, near Cologne. This became a big party or mini-convention called "Filky Days," organized by Ina, later joined by Christine Hintermeyer. The place operated by self-service. If you went there, you could prepare your own meals in a kitchen and bathe in a coin-operated shower; you brought your own soap, towels, bedding, and even toilet paper. The thirty beds consisted of bare mattresses. Its nicer points included a big grill and a terrace equipped so the participants could sing around a campfire.

Franklin often served as the Master of Barbecue. People enjoyed it enough to keep coming back for years. For the last one, in 2008, they also rented a neighboring building with another eleven beds. There was no program, just getting together, singing, and having a good time.

After Filky Days came to the end of its run, Steve Macdonald and Sibylle Machat were talking in Hamburg. Sib's thirtieth birthday was coming up, and Steve suggested she should have a convention for a birthday party, so all her friends could be there. It somehow turned from a joke to an actual plan:

“Nah, the middle of August is too close to FilkContinental, sometimes there's a Harmuni on, folks are on holiday, wouldn't work, bad timing..”

“So what would be good timing?”

“Spring, maybe - far enough away from both the British and the German con...”

...

“You know, I know this hotel that we've been running Stargate Conventions in for years now, they'd be great for us, stage and all... and how difficult can a filkcon be?”

Thus was [DFDF](#), Das Frühlingsfest der Filksmusik (the spring festival of filk music), born. The name is a play on Das Frühlingsfest der Volksmusik, a large folk music festival. A smaller convention than FilkContinental but bigger than Filky Days, with a program and German guests, it's held at the Relaxa Hotel in Bad Salzdetfurth, a small and scenic suburb of Hildesheim in northern Germany. A standard feature of this convention is “Aquapella” singing in and around the swimming pool, with laminated song sheets.

Both conventions have an auction for the German Filk Fund. Franklin has been willing to do some crazy stunts to keep interest high. Should I tell you about Sailor Moon? No, maybe I'd better not. There's no way to unsee it.

When the the Freusburg changed hands, FilkContinental's committee couldn't get a satisfactory deal from the new management, so the last convention there was in 2012. It skipped a year and then moved to the Musik-Jugendherberge Wernigerode in the Harz Mountains. Even though it's not an old castle, it's quite an elegant place and is very music-friendly. The hostel manager is a musician, the staff is friendly, and the organizers hope to stay there for a while.

Volker Tanger has provided much of the technical expertise for DFDF and FilkContinental, both behind the sound desk and in his “Defense Against the Technical Arts” workshops for performers. At FilkContinental he's aided by an able crew from England. In 2001, Kirstin registered the domain [filk.info](#). Her [history page](#) there is a valuable source for the early history of German filk (in German). Volker does podcasts on [sf-fantasy.de](#), some in English and some in German, and his interviews have been a valuable source for this book.

Filkers from Germany have been getting noticed in other countries. In 1998 Juliane and Katy were Interfilk guests at FilKONtario, and the guests of honor at HarmUni 1 in 2001. In 2012 they were the first Germans to be guests of honor at an American convention, OVFF. HarmUni hosted another German guest, Alexa Klettner, in 2002, and Rika Körte served as the first German Interfilk guest in the

US, at ConCertino in 2003. Since then Germans have made fairly regular guest appearances at American cons.

Germans started appearing on the final ballot for the Pegasus Awards in 2002. Katy and Juliane were jointly nominated for “best performer” and for their song “A Thousand Ships,” and YooH was also nominated for “best writer/composer.” Eva Wiest, later Van Daele-Hunt, was nominated for her songs “Stimmen im Wind” and Die Puppen” and received a nomination for “best writer/composer.” “A Thousand Ships” appeared on the ballot almost every year until it finally won in 2010; Katy’s immediate reaction at OVFF was “Holy shit.” In 2014 the ballot included YooH’s “Pageant Legend,” a very unorthodox take on Morgan Le Fay.

The German filk scene includes a number of performing groups. The Kinder family forms the heart of a group called GeBORGt, a name that can be taken either as “borrowed” or “Borged.” The title of their first album was “We Assimilate Everything.” A quartet called Lord Landless performed for a while, and two of its members have continued as Pavlov’s Duck. Barbership, the world’s only filk barbershop quartet, consists of Katy Dröge, Steve Macdonald, Rafael Van Daele-Hunt, and Eva Van Daele-Hunt. Eva is also half of the duo Summer and Fall, along with Christine Blum. They’ve been guests at multiple conventions, including being guests of honor at ConCertino 2015.

German filk comes in both English and German, with occasional other languages thrown in. Even if you speak only English, you won’t have any trouble at FilkContinental or DFDF. Nearly everyone there speaks at least passable English, and many are fluent. But it’s much more fun if you know German and can understand everything that’s going on. Whether you know the language or not, you’ll hear the finest audience harmonies of any filk con in the world, as guest after guest can attest.

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11. Filk around the world

Filk is dominated by the Big Four countries: the United States, Canada, the UK, and Germany. This doesn't mean, though, that there isn't a lot of filk in other places. It just tends to be local, activity comes and goes, and people outside those countries don't notice it much. Getting information about it has been difficult, since these communities don't have big, highly visible activity such as CDs and conventions. But let's take a quick trip around the world to see what we can find.

Flying over to Europe, the filk activity all seems to be in the north. We already know about the UK and Germany; aside from that, there's some activity on the Scandinavian peninsula.

Some filking was going on in Sweden starting in the late seventies, if not earlier. The program book for Minicon 4, held in Stockholm in 1979, has photographs of filksinging. A booklet from the 1990s titled *The Filksöngs* is a collection of song lyrics, which appears intended to go with a cassette of the songs. The introduction by Ahrvid Engholm gives some background on Swedish filk:

Swedish filksinging has a short but interesting history. Most of it is recorded on "cassette fanzines" from the late 70s and the 80s. ...

David [Nessle] and Erik [Andersson], often with a little help from their friends from Sala and Alingsås, from then on known as "Salingåas," during a few years published a stream of cassette fanzines that gave birth to a Swedish filksinging tradition, a tradition hitherto unknown to Filthy Pierre, with cassette fanzines like "Hur man roar en biskop op med två Snören" (How to Amuse a Bishop with Two Strings), "Minnenas radio" (Radio of Memories) and "Det finns mycket" (There Is Much).

In Sweden filksongs are not usually sung at conventions, but published on cassette fanzines. Salingås fandom inspired others to do their own cassette fanzines — seldom up to the standards of the original Salingås filksong team.

In 1999, Wolf von Witting issued a 28-page book of songs titled *20th Century Wolf Songs*. Karl-Johan Norén is turning out songs today, some of them in Swedish.

Finland's science fiction and fantasy fan base is big and fragmented, and if you look in on its zines and conventions, you'll find filk in both English and Finnish. A zine called *Arczine: Scifistin Malja*, published in 2000, contains 60 pages of songs. Titles includes "My City Lies Under the Ocean," "Anakin Skywalker," and "The T. Rex Sleeps Tonight," as well as Finnish titles such as "Borgimarssi," "Vorloni," and "Tshernobyl-vals." *Star Wars*, *Buffy*, *Star Trek*, and the Cthulhu mythos are well represented. Unfortunately, its creators weren't very careful about asking for permissions. It contains some well-known songs that would take some work to get permission to reprint, and I've confirmed that it includes at least one filk song without permission.

Finncon maintains a regular tradition of filk songs written to greet its guests. [In 2013 the songs included](#) "Starfish" for Peter Watts, "Aliette de Bodard" for the guest of the same name, "Kielien Taituri" for J. Pekka Mäkelälle, and "Opposing Forces" for Stefan Ekman. That's two songs in English, one in Finnish, and one in French and English. Nicely international!

Heading southward, we'll spot scattered filkers in Switzerland and Austria, who are part of the German community, but not much else. You might spot something called "Filk" in Italy, but it turns out to be a company which sells jewelry. It doesn't have anything to do with songs, and the name doesn't even sound Italian. In spite of their wonderfully singable language, Italians don't seem to sing filk.

Let's head eastward along the Mediterranean. We'll find a filk community in Israel, which arose some time after 1987 and still exists today. For a while its activity was publicly visible on LiveJournal's [Israfilk](#) forum, with song texts and references that are mostly in Hebrew, as well as occasional announcements of filksings. A website called [Fuzzy Fish](#) presents filk in Hebrew; its most recent entries are dated 2011. Yehuda Porath reports that currently one or two housefilks a year take place, along with occasional filking at conventions. Kathy Mar said in 2012 that as many as a hundred filkers may live in Israel. Eli Goldberg reported in *Eagle Bytes*, 2006:

In June, I had the opportunity to travel to Israel for two weeks, just before Hamas and Hezbollah kidnapped three Israeli citizens, and you all know the results.

While in Israel, I enjoyed meeting several members of the nascent Israeli filk community. The parallels to American filk in the late 1970s were striking: the Israeli filkers were a young, enthusiastic, and growing group of college-aged-ish people who valued fun and fellowship over rote musical mechanics.

They don't have much access to American recorded filk — a single CD costs as much as \$30 after customs and shipping.

Flying east over Singapore, we can wave to Terence Chua, who's attended quite a few science fiction and filk conventions and written some memorable songs. Continuing east to Australia and New Zealand, we get more results. Au Contraire, a New Zealand fan-run convention, ran a filk competition in 2013 and maintains a [filk forum](#) on its website. The 2010 closing ceremony included a parody of "My Way." Conclave 2, run by the same organization and not to be confused with the Michigan convention of the same name, includes evening filking in its schedule.

Australia has had some level of filk, though it's never been closely connected with the rest of the filk world. In *PFNEN* #46, Bob Laurent reported on Aussiecon Two, held in Melbourne in August 1985. Bob was on a panel on filk with Leslie Fish and Australians Anne Poore and Ian Nichols. Filk wasn't heavily attended but did happen every evening; writer Dave Lockett was one of the Australians to attend and sing. In *PFNEN* #47, Paul MacDonald said that "Aussie filking does not have the numbers or cohesiveness North American filking has." Wail Songs released a tape, *The Wail from Down Under*, made from recordings at Aussiecon. Lockett published two songbooks, *Songs & Ballads by Dave Lockett* and *The Galactic Bard*, in 1985 and 1986 respectively.

In 1986, Australians Narrelle Harris and Fiona Undy produced a tape and songbook, both called [Voices from the Past](#), as a tribute to the TV show *Blake's 7*.

The Pegasus Awards website says that past nominees have included someone from Australia, but I've been unable to tell whom. Steve Macdonald, who currently maintains the site, says he inherited that information but is skeptical about it. Mitch Burnside Clapp has lived in Australia and won a Pegasus for his "Falling Down on New Jersey," but he isn't really Australian.

If we head north to Japan, it seems that we ought to find some filk, since there are conventions, but I

haven't been able to spot anything like western filksinging. There was filk at the 2007 Worldcon in Japan, but it was run by outsiders and not well supported by the convention. There's geeky music, and "karaoke" is a Japanese word, but do people get together and sing songs for each other within the science fiction or anime communities? I don't know.

It's very likely that other countries contain little enclaves of filk that I haven't mentioned. If search engines would stop thinking I must really want "film" or "folk," they might be easier to discover.

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12. Filk, pros, and prose

Some filk songs haven't just been inspired by science fiction, but have come directly from it. Gordon Dickson's Dorsai stories included the songs "Jacques Chrétien" and "Soldier, Ask Not," complete with notated music, and both have often been sung at filksings.

Probably the best-loved filk song to come out of a professional science fiction work is Poul Anderson's "Mary O'Meara." It originally appeared in his novel *World Without Stars*. Early in the book the narrator encounters Hugh Valland singing its first verse; the remaining verses are scattered through the novel, with the last just before the end. It's about his love back on Earth, on the coast of Maine, and coming home to her. The way he talks about her is strangely at odds with what the song seems to say, and we find out the full truth only at the end.

The song is usually sung to a tune by Anne Passovoy, published in the second *Westerfilk*, which gives scope for a moving solo performance or improvised group harmony. It's not the tune Anderson originally had in mind, though. His original model was a popular Norwegian song, "Anna Lovinda," on a similar idea. As he originally wrote the song, the penultimate line of each verse is "Mary, Mary O'Meara," fitting the original tune. His wife Karen advised him to omit the line, because she thought filkers would sing it to "Davy, Davy Crockett." (She was undoubtedly right.) This line is also omitted from Anne Passovoy's arrangement, as is the initial word of the first verse; it originally began "O Mary O'Meara," but everyone now sings it as simply "Mary O'Meara," and the 1978 edition of *World Without Stars* also has it that way.

The "Anna Lovinda" melody has a wider range and doesn't lend itself as well to group singing, but it's a very effective tune, and the repetition of Mary's name in each verse works well. For example, when it occurs just before "And whisper your name where you lie," it needs to be sung very softly. Karen said in an email that "to me it really belongs to that Danish tune." Several performances of "Anna Lovinda" can be heard on YouTube.

Tom Digby and Anne Prather also wrote tunes for the song, but they're rarely heard.

Another poem by Anderson which has become a filk song is "The Queen of Air and Darkness," from the novella of the same name. It's known by several different tunes. Heard by itself, it sounds like a fantasy song, similar in concept to "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," but in the context of the story it's a propaganda song by aliens who want the humans to think of them as powerful elves or fairies out of legend. His novel *The Avatar* contains several songs, some to obvious tunes, but none seem to have caught on with filkers.

Robert Heinlein's story "The Green Hills of Earth" includes fragments of several songs supposedly written by the blind poet Rhysling. "Jet Song," "The Grand Canal," and "The Green Hills of Earth" have all been expanded and given melodies by filkers. The best known of these is Mark Bernstein's setting of "The Green Hills of Earth," which has been arranged at least twice in four-part harmony. Heinlein's story says the reader probably has "never even heard of most of Rhysling's unpublished songs, such items as *Since the Pusher Met My Cousin*, *That Red-Headed Venusberg Gal*, *Keep Your Pants On*, *Skipper*, or *A Space Suit Built for Two*. Nor can we quote them in a family magazine." This hasn't stopped

filkers from inventing lyrics for those titles. Sourdough Jackson wrote in “A Short History of Filk Publishing,”

“The Green Hills of Earth,” in particular, has served as inspiration to any number of would-be filkers. Some of these spontaneously began writing filksongs after reading the story without having the slightest knowledge of the existence of a filk tradition, or even of fandom — I am one such filkwriter, and I am certain there must have been others.

A passing reference to a song called “Green Hills of Earth” appears in C. L. Moore’s 1933 story “Shambleau.” It’s possible the title stuck in Heinlein’s mind.

Lord of the Rings includes a comic song that Sam Gamgee sings about a troll. Tolkien never specified a tune for it, but it fits so well to the folk song “The Fox,” both in its scansion and some bits of text, that it’s generally assumed it was his model. The first verse, as given in Wikipedia, is:

The fox went out on a chilly night,
He prayed to the Moon to give him light,
For he’d many a mile to go that night
Before he reached the town-o, town-o, town-o,
He had many a mile to go that night
Before he reached the town-o.

It’s often sung to that tune at filksings, and Ellen Kushner mentioned that tune in connection with Tolkien’s song in an episode of her public radio show, *Sound and Spirit*. People have recorded the song with other tunes, but none fit as well.

Margaret and Kristoph Klover, who are active in the filk community, worked with Marion Zimmer Bradley to produce *The Starlit Jewel*, a collection of authorized settings of Tolkien’s poems from *Lord of the Rings*. It was licensed for a limited run and is permanently out of print.

Some filk songs have been officially sanctioned by the authors of written or graphic works. In 1984 Off Centaur Publications released an album and songbook, [*A Wolfrider’s Reflections*](#), based on the *Elfquest* series of graphic novels by Wendy and Richard Pini. Julia Ecklar, Cynthia McQuillin, Mercedes Lackey, and Leslie Fish wrote the songs. Most of them are serious pieces about the various characters, but one of the most popular is “Catatonia County Rag,” a funny piece about an elf who has been permanently transformed into an automatic door.

Mercedes Lackey, now a well-known fantasy writer, participated heavily in filk in the Off Centaur days. She collaborated on a number of songs with Leslie Fish and others. The album *Owlflight*, commissioned by Lackey and published by Firebird, includes songs by Michael Longcor and Cecilia Eng based on her *Valdemar* novels. *Heralds, Harpers, and Havoc* is based on her *Heralds of Valdemar* trilogy. Firebird issued companion tapes to the first two novels of her *Vows and Honor* trilogy, *Oathbound* and *Oathbreakers*, as well as one for the sequel, *By the Sword*. The first two of these feature several different singers, and Meg Davis recorded the last one. Most if not all of these albums are still available on CD.

Off Centaur produced *Songs of the Dorsai*, and Dodeka Records later produced *Shai Dorsai*, both with Gordon Dickson’s sanction. A few of the songs have Dickson’s own words, and others are based on

Dorsai stories. Not all of them are military songs; they explore many aspects of the culture and characters.

John Myers Myers' 1949 novel *Silverlock* presents a fantastic journey of redemption through many different legends. It includes a number of song texts, and filkers later gave tunes to several of them. The NESFA Press 2004 edition of the novel includes five of those tunes: "Widsith's Song" by Bruce Pelz and Ted Johnstone, "Little John's Song," "Taliesin's Song," and "Friar John's Song" by Bruce Pelz, and "Orpheus's Song" by Gordon Dickson as adapted by Karen Anderson. The titles show just part of the range of worlds presented in the novel, from Greek mythology to Robin Hood's England.

The children's book *I'm Bored*, written by Michael Ian Black and illustrated by Debbie Ohi of Urban Tapestry, was the basis for a song by Errol Elumir and Debbie. It features a very bored talking potato.

Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels include song fragments that filkers have picked up. Juliane Honisch wrote "Terror Time in Lancre" using a couple of lines sung by the witch Nanny Ogg, and various people have expanded on his lines with the chorus "The hedgehog can never be bugged at all" and added tunes.

Going in the other direction, authors sometimes incorporate filk songs into novels. Larry Niven, who regularly attends ConChord, makes this a habit. *Lucifer's Hammer* by him and Jerry Pournelle uses Ted Cogswell's "The Friggin' Falcon," in a somewhat different version from the one published by HOPSFA and NESFA. *Dream Park* by Niven and Steven Barnes incorporates "The Fighter's Lament" by Charles Luce and several verses of "Real Old Time Religion." Niven has a reputation for always getting permission for including songs and giving at least a token payment.

Fallen Angels by Niven, Pournelle, and Michael Flynn incorporates not just filk songs but whole filkers. The novel, in which science fiction fans carry out a rescue mission, is full of characters pulled straight out of fandom, sometimes under their real names, sometimes not. Julia Ecklar's "The Phoenix" is quoted in full, and one song, "Wanted Fan," seems to be original to the book.

[*Niven explains*](#) on his website, where he lists who all the characters are based on: "Many of the characters in *Fallen Angels* are actually based on real-life people, i.e. Larry and Jerry and Steven, some are other SF authors, some are personal friends of the authors and other name references in this book were auctioned off as prizes at SF conventions to fans." Some are more obvious than others. "Jenny Trout" is clearly Leslie Fish. "Bruce Hyde" is Bruce Pelz. ("Pelz" is German for fur, and the word sounds like "pelts.") Ron Ellik became "Ron Ellick," Eliot Shorter became "George Long," and a "Sergeant McDaniel" alludes to David McDaniel, known in filk as Ted Johnstone. "Poul Dickson" shouldn't need any explanation. Even Lee Jacobs, who accidentally invented the word "filk," is mentioned under his own name.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* stories provided the basis for several filk songs, the best known being Leslie Fish's long ballad "The Horsetamer's Daughter." Bradley was a friend of Jane Robinson and Cynthia McQuillin and worked with them on some projects. The anthology *Music of Darkover*, authorized by her estate, includes several songs by Cynthia McQuillin, as well as "The Horsetamer's Daughter" and Leslie's novella "Tower of Horses," which expands the song into prose. The Libertarian Futurist Society gave the song and novella a [*Prometheus Award*](#) in 2014.

S. M. Stirling's novels *Dies the Fire* and *The Protector's War*, among others, include a character named Juniper MacKenzie who has been described as reminiscent of Heather Alexander (now Alexander James Adams). Some lyrics attributed within the story to MacKenzie are by Heather and are acknowledged as such.

Filk songs have even inspired entire anthologies. *Carmen Miranda's Ghost Is Haunting Space Station Three* consists entirely of stories related to Leslie Fish's song of the same title. The song presents an odd situation; some people on a space station have seen the eponymous ghost, and hats full of fresh fruit mysteriously appear. It's the kind of idea that inventive writers can take in many directions.

Contributors include well-known authors such as Anne McCaffrey, Esther Friesner, and C. J. Cherryh. In an afterword to the book, editor Don Sakers attributes the beginning of the idea to a gathering of a writers' group called the Cedar Grove Movement. He played a tape of the song, and several people there (perhaps influenced by alcohol) said they could write stories based on it. The idea still seemed good the next day, so Sakers presented the idea to Toni Weiskopf at Baen Books, and his proposal was accepted.

A Celebration of Lammas Night, edited by Josepha Sherman, does something similar with Mercedes Lackey's song "Lammas Night." That song, too, presents a situation which leaves many questions unanswered.

Filk has also found a home in webcomics. *Girl Genius*, a long-running steampunk series by Phil and Kaja Foglio, one of the most popular webcomics today, has incorporated two songs which Tom Smith wrote for it: "Mechanicsburg Tourism Song" and "Transylvania Polygnostic Fight Song."

Sharyn McCrumb's underrated mystery novel, *Bimbos of the Death Sun*, is set at a science fiction convention. It includes a scene which portrays filkers fairly as a Scottish folksinger manages to come to terms with them. Several song fragments which I don't recognize may be originals by McCrumb; they're in the right style for filk.

None of these examples, though, goes as far as a scene in Spider Robinson's *The Callahan Touch*. Jordin Kare had written a song, "Callahan's Bar," which references one of Robinson's Callahan stories and invents several other scenes in the appropriate spirit. *The Callahan Touch* includes a scene in which a number of real-life singers visit Callahan's, including Jordin and his wife Mary Kay. The narrator, one of the Callahan's regulars, tells the reader:

And Jordin and Mary Kay Kare did a set of what science fiction fans call filksongs — clever new lyrics on popular tunes. A couple of them required a reasonable familiarity with sf, but others did not. I remember one in particular, to the tune of "Oh, Susanna"; people were roaring with approval by the end of the first verse.

The song, which appears in full, is "Callahan's Bar," with the chorus modified to avoid mentioning Robinson's name. That's real recursion: a novel which includes a song about itself, incorporating the real-life songwriter as a character!

Finally, let me include the story of an encounter that shows how far the interactions between pros and filkers can lead, in Leslie Fish's own words:

It was at a WesterCon, I think (after too many cons they begin to blend together), and I was pretty much

leading the Bardic Circle in the smokers' room, when a shy-looking lady in a subdued business skirt-suit tiptoed into the room and took a seat at the far end of the circle. She was carrying an electric autoharp, which is, to be blunt, a piss-poor instrument. In short, she looked the perfect picture of Neo. Well, be nice to Neos, I always say; remember, thou too wert a Neo once.

Well, when it came her turn, the shy little lady pulled out her autoharp and sang a long, slow, quavery, almost-tuneless ballad in such a tiny, shy little voice that I couldn't make out the words from less than ten feet away. Everybody else was yawning, shuffling through their filk-books for next choices, getting up to make a quick trip to the john, etc. Me, I stayed put and did my best to look intently interested in the Neo's song (remember, thou too...).

When she'd finished, since I couldn't think of anything else encouraging, I praised her choice of song and asked, as gallantly as I could manage, "Did you write it?" She blushed, smiled, nodded, then packed up her autoharp and scurried off while the next song started up. Little seen, little heard, soon forgotten. Until next day, when I strolled down to the dealers' room to see how OCP's sales were doing. At the table, I found Teri bouncing up and down with excitement, waving frantically the minute she saw me. It seems that Hugo-award winner C.J. Cherryh had come up to the table an hour before, bought over \$100 worth of books and tapes — particularly my stuff — and she wanted to meet me at 2PM, table 4, in the hotel lounge upstairs. Wow.

Of course, at 2PM I showed up at the hotel lounge and went looking for table 4. Guess who I found sitting there, nursing a double dark-rum cooler? Uhuh. Not exactly a Neo: just new to filking. Well, the upshot was that she was intrigued by filking, wanted to authorize OCP to produce a tape of songs based on her stories and characters, and had I written anything besides filksongs? Well, I just happened to have with me a novel based on the *Mad Max* movies, which I was trying (unsuccessfully, it later turned out) to sell to Kennedy-Miller Ltd. I gave her a copy to read at her leisure and send back when she had time.

A few weeks later, while busy putting tunes to a clutch of Cherryh-universe songs for the tape *Finity's End*, I got a package from C.J. 'Twas the copy of the novel, along with a note saying that this was "the best novel by an unpublished author" that she'd ever read, and how would I like to contribute stories to her upcoming series, *Merovingen Nights*? Yup, that's where I got started as a pro SF writer. The moral of the story is: always be nice to Neos; you never know where they can take you.

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13. Filk's periphery

If you go to a filksing, you'll hear a lot of songs that weren't written by filkers. They don't always even have anything to do with science fiction, technology, or fandom. If filk is the music of a culture, can songs from outsiders be filk? Well, can teriyaki and tacos be American food? They're certainly part of our national culture. In the same way, songs with "mundane" origins can be part of filk culture. They're sung at filksings. People recognize allusions to them. Filkers write new lyrics to them.

You'll hear the term "found filk" to describe them. It's never made sense to me. In general, they aren't songs that someone found and recognized filk in the wild, even if you define filk only by topic. Is a song about a Canadian privateer during the American Revolution or about S&M dancing filk in any sense, apart from its adoption by filkers? I prefer the term "adopted filk." They're filk now because the filk culture has accepted them.

Some songs have subject matter that appeals to science fiction and fantasy fans. Elton John's "Rocket Man," Weird Al Yankovic's "The Saga Begins," Jonathan Coulton's "Skullcrusher Mountain," and Chris Hadfield's "ISS (Is Someone Singing)" are obvious examples. They weren't created within the filk culture, but they fit right in. Calling these "found filk" makes a decent amount of sense.

Other songs just appeal to a certain sensibility. Filkers like songs that take an unconventional approach to familiar subjects. The Arrogant Worms' "The Last Saskatchewan Pirate" puts the usual pirate shtick in the plains of central Canada. Tom Lehrer's "We Will All Go Together When We Go" finds grim humor in nuclear annihilation. Some songs, like Fred Small's "Everything Possible," reflect the sense of acceptance which filkers try to cultivate.

Sometimes it's just that well-known performers really like a writer's work and sing it until it's familiar. Dave Clement and Dandelion Wine in Canada and Marty Burke in the USA helped make Stan Rogers' songs familiar to filkers. Clam Chowder has made songs such as "Jacobites by Name" and "Bend Over, Greek Sailor" (which is as risqué as it sounds) well known to the community.

TV themes and songs from the shows are apt to be adopted by filkers. Michelle Dockrey took Joss Whedon's title song from *Firefly* and added verses to create "Mal's Song." The chorus from "Daisy Bell," slowing down at the end like a phonograph record running down, is familiar to filkers because that's how it was done in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Even filkers too young to know what a running-down phonograph record sounds like get it.

When filkers adopt songs this way, singers like to introduce other songs by the same people, and dealers start offering their CDs. This means that even if their first adopted songs have some SF or technological content, their other songs may show up in the filkroom even if they have no obvious connection to the usual subjects.

Sometimes the most popular adopted songs have no apparent connection to filk at all. What does Stan Rogers' "Lies," about a woman who looks in the mirror and sees the first sign of aging, have to do with space, robots, or ninjas? Yet at least a dozen new sets of lyrics have been written to it. Maybe it's that the structure of realization, denial, and resolution fits so many stories. Maybe it's that filkers like to

write songs about willful falsehood, and the song provides an obvious hook.

Rise Up Singing, a collection of more than a thousand folk song lyrics in small print, is popular among filkers, and if a song is in its pages, that increases the chances that filkers know it. It even includes some old filk songs. In the introduction, Pete Seeger expresses ideas that are dear to filkers:

Don't say, "I can't sing." Take this book next time you ride in a car with friends. Locate some songs you'd like to hear next time you're at a party or a picnic. ... Change a word. Add a verse. This is known as "the folk process."

Some songs have followed odd courses in filk. Lots of filk lyrics have been written to Alan Bell's "Windmills," yet most filkers don't know the original song. They all seem to have come from Gwen Zak's "Circles," written to that tune. Nearly every one uses the words "We are the children" in the chorus, which are found in "Circles" but not in "Windmills." The idea of something going "around and around" has inspired a lot of parodists.

The case of Sydney Carter's "[Lord of the Dance](#)" isn't just odd, but a little disturbing. His song, with a tune virtually identical to the Shaker song "Simple Gifts," approaches a familiar subject in an unusual way and so has some appeal to filkers. It's about Jesus, but with elements of the Hindu religion mixed in. We don't usually think of Jesus as urging people to dance, but it fits in with the Shaker view as well as the Christian idea of rejoicing.

Some West Coast filkers wrote not just new lyrics but a new tune to it, with the words of the chorus just slightly changed and the title not changed at all. This Pagan treatment was published in *The Westerfilk Collection, Volume II*, with no acknowledgment to Carter. For a while it was very popular at filksings, with all the percussion that could be mustered, the tempo increasing with each verse. Filkers who knew of the original song often referred to it as "the Christian version," as if the original song were just a "version" of their rewrite. Today there's a new balance, and at least on the East Coast the "Simple Gifts" tune is heard more than the *Westerfilk* tune. In the seventies some West Coast filkers were stridently anti-Christian, very likely explaining why Carter was slighted. The website of Stainer & Bell, which published Carter's song, claims, "The so called 'Pagan version' is simply a rip-off and parody of the song and has obviously never been authorised." This is also wrong: the publishing of parody lyrics requires no authorization, even if the lack of acknowledgment of the source is discourteous.

Some filkers set poems by non-filkers to music and make them familiar in the filk world. Juanita Coulson started the trend with her settings of Martha Keller's poems. The best-known example is Leslie Fish's settings of Rudyard Kipling's poems. She's released several Kipling albums with her own tunes, and some have become so well-known that they've had parody lyrics written to them or appeared on the Pegasus Award ballot. Her arrangements are so familiar in the community that filkers often refer to them as "Kipling Fish" or "Kipplefish." This doesn't stop other filkers from grabbing the same poems; Michael Longcor has written tunes for a number of Kipling verses, sometimes the same poems that Leslie has set to music.

Call them found or adopted filk, or just non-filk that filkers sing, these songs emphasize the variety of material that fits into filk culture. It's fitting to give [Kipling](#) the last word on the subject:

But my Totem saw the shame; from his ridgepole-shrine he came,

And he told me in a vision of the night:
“There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
“And every single one of them is right!”

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14. The future of filk

Warning: Personal views ahead.

We've looked at filk's past. What about its future?

There's one certainty: it will change. It might grow, shrink, or disappear. It might turn into something that shares only the name. It might change in ways we like or loathe. When I asked Juanita Coulson what she thought would happen, she said:

Twenty or thirty years ago I was saying, "Change happens, suck it up, fellows!" When the Childs-Heltons arrived with their wonderful musical abilities — and Barry could do rock, and do it superbly — this opened up an avenue for a lot of younger artists who said, "Gee, I don't know any folk songs, but I know a lot of rock songs." There was a groundswell of opposition from a bunch of purists who said, "That's not filk." I said, "It's being performed in a filk room, and it's about fantasy and science fiction. Why is it not filk?" There was at one point a complaint, "Where are all these young people coming from?" from older fans; and they were the same ones who were worried about who's going to carry on fandom after we're dead. There were a lot of complaints after Star Trek brought in a deluge of females. "Women don't read science fiction." I beg to differ.

It will change. And yes, there are stars, but there are so many more people now participating in filk. We went from a scattered horde of three, four, maybe five people in little enclaves from New York to California, some of which did not know the others existed. Now you've got dedicated filk cons.

How filk will change will depend on what filkers do today. We can bring people in or drive them away. We can be passive to good and bad changes alike, we can strangle filk by rejecting all change, or we can cultivate what we'd like it to be while working with those who have new ideas. These days people often run into filk songs on the Internet without learning anything about the culture from which they came. They might well be interested in attending and participating in filksings, but first they need to be told about them.

A story from LACon 1, the 1972 Worldcon, shows how important cultivating filk is, even in ways that seem small at the time. Ted Johnstone had agreed to meet Lee and Barry Gold at 2 AM in the hotel lobby by the elevators. He arrived at 2:30 without his guitar. Either he left it in his room or didn't bring it to the con; memories are vague on this point. If it was in his room, the elevators were extremely slow and it would have taken a long time to go back for it. Lee recounts:

I looked around, and there's a guy about a hundred feet away in the lobby, wandering around, with a big bag on his back that looks approximately guitar-shaped. So I went over and I said, "Is that a guitar?" He said yes. I said, "We would like to borrow you and your guitar, separately." He said, "Um ... OK." So I brought him back — I'd never seen him before — and I said, "Ted, I want to introduce you to Bruce. Bruce, this is Ted. I'm Lee. This is Barry. Bruce has a guitar. Let's go sing." So we went off to a corridor that nobody was using. We sat on the floor, and Bruce, who was wearing a little badge that he had made himself, which said "Bruce the Great Dane" (because his name was Bruce Dane), took out his guitar and gave it to Ted. Ted started singing. This was all just singing by memory. We joined in or didn't as we knew the songs, as we picked up the choruses. Around 5:30 Barry wimped out and went to bed. Other people dropped in as they walked by or dropped out as they left to go to sleep. Bruce stayed there because it was his guitar. I stayed there because in September 1972, I was 29, I still had lots of energy, and it might be the last time I'd have to hear Ted filking. (It wasn't, but we still lost him too young. He died on Halloween of 1977, when I was 35 and he was 38.)

Around 6:30 some people came and started vacuuming the lobby. It was very noisy, so we went out to the fire escape. There were only three of us by then.

Later on, several years later, I asked Bruce what his memories were of that convention, and whether he had cherished any animosity towards me for kidnapping him and his guitar and making him stay up till dawn. He said, “Lee, it was my first ever convention. I know better now, but I had just decided that I would go, for my first ever fannish convention, to a Worldcon. No one talked to me. I was on the point of never making any contact with fandom again. Then all of a sudden, you reached out and pulled me in. Here I was at the heart of fandom, at the heart of filk, and it was all happening the way I dreamed it might be.”

And part of the moral of this is: We’ve got to reach out to neos. We’ve got to say to neos, “I’ve got songbooks here. Is there anything you’d like to hear? Are there any songs you know the tunes to? Is there any song you’d like to hear someone sing?” We’ve got to reach out to people. Who’s going to carry on the tradition after we’re not around and when we get old and tired? If we don’t reach out to them, fandom’s going to get old and die.

The pull of mainstream music culture, with star performers and passive listeners, has sometimes affected filk. There have been periods when one person or group seemed to be a guest at every convention and dominate the Pegasus Awards, as well as getting requests every ten minutes in the filk circles. So far balance has always come back after a while. If filk ever becomes just another way to hear star performers, it will have died.

The expensive experiment of *To Touch the Stars* (discussed in Chapter 7) showed that filk isn’t made for the mainstream market. Some filk writers have produced songs that could reach it with the right breaks, but filk as such — including some of the very best filk songs — just isn’t the stuff of mass appeal. I can think of at least three different approaches to song writing. There’s the artistic approach: write the very best song possible, one that will appeal to those who really understand music. There’s the commercial approach: write the most marketable song possible, one that will appeal to lots of casual listeners. Filk doesn’t do either of these. You might call its approach conversational: write the song that speaks to your friends about things you all care about. Eli Goldberg put it this way in retrospect:

Filk songs just are not professional songs — no matter how many fan awards we may adorn them with. And there’s nothing wrong with that. Filk’s strength is in recognizing the uniqueness and scarcity of a culture that embraces and honors its amateurism, rather than trying to be what it intrinsically isn’t, and never will be.

Filkers observe customs and traditions, and these change over time. Some have gone away and shouldn’t be missed. For a while new female (and occasionally male) filkers often were “welcomed” with a performance of Flanders and Swann’s “Have Some Madeira, My Dear” while they were made to stand in the middle of the circle. That song sends up the melodramatic nineteenth-century songs about nefarious villains and engages in some clever wordplay. It’s also, when you come down to it, a song about raping a woman by getting her drunk, and her ultimately enjoying it. In the right context, where people understand no one’s excusing the villain’s actions, it can be funny, but there’s no sense in embarrassing a neo-filker with it. I think the custom is dead, and I hope I helped a little to kill it.

On the other hand, there are occasional attempts to declare whole topics unacceptable. Someone in a filk discussion on Google+ suggested it was never appropriate to sing songs about rape. This amounts to sweeping the subject under the rug and pretending it doesn’t exist. Some have declared that the word “gypsy” is a horrible insult and that no one should ever sing a song with that word in it. If there’s evidence for this, the people whom I’ve seen making the claim don’t offer it, or offer seriously flawed examples. The word simply reflects a mistaken view that they’re of Egyptian origin. French refers to

them as “Bohemians.” The word “Roma” suggests they’re Roman or Romanian. Their origins are obscure.

I once rejected a song for a songbook because it presented a somewhat insulting stereotype of gypsies, not because of the word. Using a different word wouldn’t have improved it.

Filk isn’t for the easily offended, but these days people are often taught to be easily offended. The preferred way to protest a song in filk circles is to reply with another song or leave the room quietly. I do the latter when anyone performs a dead cat song, and I’ve written a feline revenge song, “Samurai Moggy,” which has inspired at least two other songs.

Legal issues can complicate filk recording and conventions. At one time, one could usually publish a recording of a parody song either by paying for a mechanical license for the original song or by requesting permission. Publishers didn’t much care as long as they got some money for the song. Today, they’re much more likely to give trouble about songs that replace the original lyrics. (Contrary to widespread belief, the Supreme Court’s *2 Live Crew* decision did not grant carte blanche legality to recording songs that re-use copyrighted tunes; the conditions for a parody exemption from copyright are quite limited.)

There’s been a long-term trend for regulations to get more complicated for small organizations, as the ones which used to apply only to large organizations have extended downward to them. In Massachusetts, it was once possible for small, infrequent conventions to host a dealer room without any special paperwork; the dealers were individually responsible for collecting sales tax. Now every convention must pay the state a fee if there is more than one dealer. Conventions that don’t notice changes in a vast body of law may find themselves in trouble, and they’ll be stuck with extra costs if they do comply.

At the same time, technology offers more ways to go under the radar. Many filkers release their own songs, uploading them to the Internet or making their own CDs. This doesn’t make them any more legal, but publishers won’t usually go beyond cease-and-desist orders if the filker doesn’t make a lucrative target for a lawsuit.

Technology has brought the world, and filkers, closer together. The Internet makes it easy to stay in touch with people from other countries. Songs can be streamed, either publicly or to a restricted audience. Some people, though, have encountered filk songs, especially on YouTube, without knowing about the culture they arose from. You’ll hear people at science fiction conventions talk about these songs even though they don’t know about the filk community. Some of them would undoubtedly love to connect up with the community if they knew it existed. Helping them to find out is a new challenge for filkers, one which can add a lot of life to filk if it’s properly met.

A big issue is the duality which has developed in fannish music since the turn of the century. Fan bands, to coin a generic term for all the performing groups associated with various fandoms, have been flourishing. It seems as if even the fan bands are divided into niches, with some singing just about the Potterverse, others about *The Hunger Games*, others about any number of specialties. Communication between them and the filk culture is sparse; many aren’t aware of filk, and filkers are only marginally aware of them. In the documentary *Trekkies 2* (2004), a member of a Trek tribute band said, “We didn’t think anybody else was writing music about *Star Trek*.”

Finding common ground may be difficult. The fan bands clearly follow the model of performers on stage and an audience that responds. This is essentially different from filk's ideal of getting everyone to create and offer songs. Many perform in costumes and makeup. It's hard to imagine them dropping in on a filksing to swap songs in somebody's living room. Some performers do bridge the gap, though. There are "geek groups," such as Debs & Errol, the Doubleclicks, and the Blibbering Humdingers, who move to varying degrees in both the filk and the performance worlds.

A recent cultural feature which is very compatible with filk culture is the maker movement. Makers produce their own gadgets, clothing, musical instruments, anything they can create with their own personal efforts. The maker movement overlaps with steampunk; a lot of people like steampunk because it lets them imagine a world where tinkering still has a place and everything isn't mass-produced. "Makerspaces" and "hackerspaces" provide an environment for experimenting and creating. It's a chance to be a mad scientist without laying waste to the world.

[Brit Morin writes](#) on the Huffington Post website:

Welcome to the Maker Movement, an evolution of millions of people who are taking big risks to start their own small businesses dedicated to creating and selling self-made products. In a world of mass-produced products, modern technology has made it easier than ever for a single individual to create and distribute items that are customizable and unique without having middlemen like manufacturers.

Filkers create and distribute their own songs, bypassing the "manufacturers" who regard us as passive consumers of their products, who put albums on our players whether we want them or not. *Filkers are Makers of music.* The synthesis of the maker and filk music cultures could result in something new and beneficial. Makers are very technology-oriented, and plain old guitars might bore them. But imagine a culture that made not just its own songs but its own instruments.

This happens already, of course. Ed Stauff, a New Hampshire filker, has made his own harpsichord. Filk and folk musicians often assemble simple instruments such as dulcimers. But imagine using a 3-D printer to create new instruments. In fact, you don't have to imagine it; people are doing it. There's a [wiki](#) dedicated to creating 3-D printed instruments, featuring both new and traditional designs.

Should filkers be visiting Maker Faires, looking for common ground? Why not? If nothing else, they're bound to have some interesting instruments to demonstrate or sell.

This synthesis would probably take filk into heavier use of computers. Acoustic instruments are traditional in filk, but there's nothing about participatory music that requires them. Many fans are already making imaginative videos from filk and other fannish songs. Electronic equipment can also modify the sounds of instruments. Betsy Tinney has combined a cello with a looper pedal to create impressive performances with just one instrument. Tablet computers with the right software can be used as musical instruments, though the lack of tactile feedback limits them.

Styles and approaches will change. Maybe someday technology will solve the lag problem and it will be practical to conduct virtual filksings with group participation. The essential thing is encouragement of personal creativity and participation at all levels. If this remains, it's still filk, and it has a bright future.

A culture is the people who make it up and the way they interact with each other and the world. It's a

fragile thing, and its ideals can easily turn into mere slogans. Filk culture is the creation of people who love making and trading music, who appreciate odd humor, who can deal with differences, who are committed to making their community work. As Barry Childs-Helton describes it, filk culture is “a different space for the imagination to occupy, a different way to share time together, a different basis for relationship and community; a culture operating to include folks, to encourage folks, and to protect folks against the incursions of the outside world that make certain demands on them.”

How long can something like this last? It all depends on whether and how the current generation brings in new people and conveys its ideals to them, and on what they do with it. It’s not the names and styles that matter; it’s the making of music together, the choice to nurture musical growth, the sense of wonder that goes with exploring ideas and contemplating futures, the strength of a community that comes together by choice.

Filk is a rare achievement that has lasted for decades and can last for decades more.

15. Living in the future (2015-2023)

The first edition of *Tomorrow's Songs Today* came out in 2015, and it's now eight years later. This is the "future" we once sang about. It's not the future we hoped for or the one we feared. We have robots, but they're made for specialized tasks and aren't very controversial. No human has set foot on the Moon since 1973, or on any non-terrestrial planet ever. Politics has taken some unexpected turns, and there's a war raging in Europe.

We still don't have flying cars, but there are positives that we might not have expected. We have devices in our pockets that would once have qualified as supercomputers. We can hold international filksings where we can see and hear each other through screens and speakers.

And, of course, there has been a pandemic. It wasn't on the scale that Mira Grant and other novelists envisioned, but a respiratory plague that killed about seven million people worldwide is nothing to sneeze at. It changed our lives drastically, and its effect on filk events was huge.

The graying of filkdom has continued. New people of all ages have come into filk, but the average age at filksings and conventions keeps going up.

Some conventions have run out of steam. As of the first edition of this book, ConChord had skipped a year in 2014 and would presumably come back. It never did. Its website now says, "There are no plans for ConChord in the near future. It appears that there not enough people interested in filk in Southern California to support a separate filk convention. We recommend that you consider attending Consonance instead."

Several factors contributed to ConChord's decline. Attendance was too low to sustain two annual filk conventions in California. As a result, there wasn't enough money coming in to pay for the hotel space. The last few ConChords were held in conjunction with other conventions, but it was difficult to maintain this as a long-term strategy. Staffing was also an issue; having two conventions in the same state put a strain on the number of available volunteers.

ConChord's parent organization, Los Angeles Filkers Anonymous (LAFA), still holds online filksings. Lee Gold continues to turn out an issue of *Xenofilkia* every two months, and the conchord.org website still exists to provide mostly filk-related information.

The FilKONtario committee retired in [2021?] It looked for a while as if this might be the end of the convention, but a new group has picked up the convention. It will continue to be the home of the Filk Hall of Fame.

A new convention name appeared in Germany, but it wasn't really a new convention. In some years, Kirstin Tanger has been unable to run FilkContinental due to other demands on her life. In those years, a substitute convention called Intermezzo has been held, falling in the same time of year, using the same venue, and having similar programming. It's simply that if Kirstin isn't running the con, it isn't FilkContinental.

The last in-person NEFilk was ConCertino 2018. The groups running ConCertino, Conterpoint, and Contata decided it would be more effective to merge their efforts into a single convention that would run every year, most likely within a hundred miles of New York City. MASSFILC, as a healthy 501(c)(3) corporation, was the obvious source of organizational backing. However, plans didn't come together for a 2019 convention.

Then 2020 came. In January there were reports of a nasty virus spreading in Wuhan. People worried, but there had been similar incidents before, and most hadn't amounted to much. By March, though, the new COVID-19 virus was clearly the worst since the flu pandemic of 1918-1919. Hospitals were overwhelmed with cases, schools closed, and businesses moved to a work-at-home mode wherever they could. State and national governments imposed travel and assembly restrictions.

Consonance, scheduled for March 20-22, cancelled just a couple of weeks before the scheduled date. The website optimistically declared:

Due to the COVID-19 threat, we are officially postponing Consonance to a date sometime later in 2020. ... We are very sorry about this, but we'd rather err on the side of caution than risk losing (permanently) a large chunk of our membership.

On March 16, FilKONtario followed suit, cancelling its April convention. Most conventions had "Force Majeure" or "Act of God" clauses in their hotel contracts, allowing them to cancel if a catastrophic event made the event infeasible. At the same time, many hotels were forced to close or cancel events because of emergency regulations. Getting the hotels to acknowledge the cancellation, or even reaching the necessary people at the hotels, wasn't always easy.

If a convention cancelled before it was official that it couldn't be held, the organizers could find themselves subject to massive penalties, since the con could, in principle, still be held. The committee for Discon III, the 2021 Worldcon, didn't publicly acknowledge that it would be unable to hold the convention at the Marriott Wardman Park and would need to reschedule until months after the hotel had permanently closed.

The 2020 North American Science Fiction Convention (NASFiC), which was to have been held in Columbus, said on its website: "Like so many conventions affected by Covid-19, NASFiC has been involved in some very challenging negotiations. Because Ohio is trying to open up its economy, we are likely to have some heavy cancellation fees imposed by our facilities. Therefore, we are unlikely to be able to offer any meaningful level of membership refunds." I haven't been able to learn whether they got out of those cancellation fees.

Most con committees didn't have to pay large cancellation penalties, but they still had to deal with paid registrations and expenses they had run up in advance of the con.

The new, unified NEFilk was all set for a 2020 convention in Danbury, Connecticut on the 4th of July weekend. It would be a low-key relaxacon, but still a convention. A guest of honor, Gary Ehrlich, was invited, and a hotel contract was signed. Then the pandemic hit, and that had to be cancelled. The hotel shut down, and the hotel liaison (me) had to make repeated efforts to reach the appropriate

managers and make the cancellation official without liability to us. The \$500 deposit was never refunded.

So fell all the dominoes. There were no more in-person filk conventions until October 2021, when OVFF was held under strict masking and vaccination requirements. Similar issues affected local filk groups and gatherings in people's homes.

However, the filk didn't stop! Online concerts were already common. In the wake of the Consonance and FKO cancellations, many people scheduled online events. There were so many in late March that they had to be careful to avoid conflicting with each other. Blind Lemming Chiffon and Summer Lorraine Russell talked to each other about this, and the idea started growing into thoughts of an online convention.

This led to the first Festival of the Living Rooms, which Lemming says he intended as a play on "Night of the Living Dead." The first one, from March 20 to 22, 2020, relied mainly on Facebook live video, with a few people using YouTube. There was open singing in the evening, using Zoom. The Germans followed just a week later with the first "Bleib auf der Couch" (stay on the couch) online convention.

Online events led to technical and social issues. Zoom is primarily designed for conferences, not singing, and performers will sound terrible if they don't know what settings to use. It took a while for filkers to figure out how to configure their clients for the best sound.

Group singing online doesn't work. There are inevitably delays in conveying sound from one place to another. Even in the best case, the speed of light is a limit. Sending a signal 300 kilometers takes at least a millisecond. Routers and hubs add unpredictable amounts of latency, and Internet signals seldom take a straight-line route from point to point. The net delays can be measured in seconds, making a mess of singing along.

Another problem is people whose aim in life is to make things unpleasant for others. "Zoom bombers" discover links on social media, drop in on events of all kinds, and disrupt them with yelling and unpleasant images. This has forced event organizers to be discreet about how they disseminate the links. Some events screen participants as they try to enter. In a few cases, people with good credentials have been turned away because the moderator didn't know them or didn't recognize their user names.

The word "virtual" is overused in connection with online gatherings. Something which is virtual has only the appearance and some of the functionality of the real thing. We can talk about virtual meetings and virtual conventions, but it's more of a problem when applied to people. Human beings are real even when they aren't physically present; would you say you talked with a "virtual friend" when you made a phone call? People who attend an online convention or filksing aren't "virtual attendees" or "virtual guests."

Zoom has had its problems. In 2020, it misrepresented itself as offering end-to-end encryption. True end-to-end means that the hosting company can't eavesdrop on conferences, but that wasn't the case. Since then it has started offering end-to-end encryption as an option, if conference hosts are willing to disable some features.

Zoom's ability to eavesdrop was a real problem. On December 21, 2020, the US Department of Justice issued an arrest warrant for Zoom executive Jin Xinjiang, who served the Chinese government as an insider agent to disrupt dissident meetings and fabricate evidence against participants. The Chinese government had forced Zoom to hire him.

Most filkers don't need that much privacy; it was Zoom's misrepresentation more than the lack of protection that was the problem. It's a Chinese company, and it was caught suspending the accounts of users internationally to satisfy the Chinese government. Since then Zoom's operations outside China have been mostly separated from its Chinese ones, reducing the likelihood of influence by authorities in Beijing. Conveying nuclear secrets or plotting a revolution over Zoom would still be a bad idea, but most filkers find the current situation acceptable.

There are, however, still concerns. In 2023, its terms briefly allowed the use of all Zoom conversations in the training of AI systems:

You consent to Zoom's access, use, collection, creation, modification, distribution, processing, sharing, maintenance, and storage of Service Generated Data for any purpose, to the extent and in the manner permitted under applicable Law, including for the purpose of product and service development, marketing, analytics, quality assurance, machine learning or artificial intelligence (including for the purposes of training and tuning of algorithms and models), training, testing, improvement of the Services, Software, or Zoom's other products, services, and software, or any combination thereof, and as otherwise provided in this Agreement.

In the face of massive customer protests, Zoom removed this provision. It now says (as of late August 2023):

Zoom does not use any of your audio, video, chat, screen sharing, attachments or other communications-like Customer Content (such as poll results, whiteboard and reactions) to train Zoom or third-party artificial intelligence models.

The Zoom that hosts online meetings is, by the way, a completely different company from the Zoom that makes the digital recorders which filkers often use.

Another online conferencing system, Jitsi Meet, looked attractive for a while. It's fully open-source, meetings use end-to-end encryption, and no account is required to start a meeting. However, users ran into many technical problems, such as clients crashing. Other services, such as Google Meet, are heavily business-oriented and aren't well-suited toward song circles where anyone can drop in.

Most conferencing software is aimed primarily at people who want to talk rather than sing. By default, it tries to eliminate noise. Unfortunately, "noise" in this context includes musical instruments. Online singers have regularly run into situations where their instruments sounded terrible or were inaudible. Using the right settings on Zoom mostly eliminates this problem. During online filksings, performers are constantly reminded to "turn on original sound."

Another Internet service which has gained prominence since the start of 2020 is Discord. It's a real-

time interaction site which supports text, audio, gaming, and many add-on features. Filkers use it mostly to post text, images, and links. It's organized into "servers," which are virtual servers maintained by Discord. Each server has its own moderators and rules, and most require an invitation to enter.

The most popular Discord server for filk is #Filkhaven, which is a continuation of the IRC chat channel that started decades earlier. (The # in the name is a token of its original home.) Other Discord filk servers are associated with specific organizations, conventions, or geographic areas.

In December 2016, LiveJournal moved its servers to Russia without notifying the users. The Russian government probably forced the move. Posts became subject to Russian censorship laws, and most filk activity on LiveJournal ceased after that.

Filk activity continues on Facebook. There are many relevant groups, some covering filk in general, others focusing on conventions, regions, organizations, and other subcategories of the community.

There has been some use of Discord servers for singing online, but most filkers have been dissatisfied with it. Problems have included severe lag and skipping. By default, Discord offers a low level of bandwidth. Paid subscribers can assign "server boosts," and a server gets additional features, including increased audio bandwidth, depending on how many boosts it has. An unboosted server, which is what people will experience most of the time, isn't a very inviting gateway to Discord audio. Buying a boost costs \$4.99 a month at the time I'm writing this, which isn't a lot but requires some motivation.

Concerts are less of a technical challenge than song circles; it's easier to set up one performing location and many listeners. Many-to-many real-time connections are inherently hard. (The effort that goes into doing a concert well is a different issue.) The most popular sites for hosting filk concerts, in addition to Zoom, are Twitch and YouTube.

Internet technology has shifted filk publishing as well. Just as it's easier than ever to self-publish books, publishing one's own recordings is easier than ever before. Bandcamp, SoundCloud, and YouTube are frequently used channels. Bandcamp is especially popular because it lets musicians get a direct income. They can set their prices or make payment optional, and Bandcamp takes only a small percentage. Streaming services like Spotify are another option, but the financial return from them is tiny.

Many old recordings have gone up on YouTube; while they may technically violate copyright, the original songwriters and performers generally don't see any income potential in them and don't object. Making money by posting one's own recordings on YouTube is possible, but the service (run by Google) is notorious for capriciously demonetizing channels or reducing their visibility. Some artists have been hit by copyright takedown notices for their recordings of folk songs from the nineteenth century or earlier.

Podcasts have made more recorded filk available online. The most prominent one is FilkCast, which Eric Coleman and Lizzie Crowe started in November 2018. It presents an hour of varied filk with each episode, along with links to upcoming filk events on the website and a news section at the end. In April 2020 it went from biweekly to weekly.

The downside of direct digital sales and uploads is that many of these recordings are living room jobs,

created without a studio or sound engineer. Some publishers are still working on higher-quality recordings, and filkers who are professional musicians still maintain their standards. Eli Goldberg, operating as Prometheus Music, has remastered some classic filk recordings and released them with a choice of CD or digital download.

Eli has also released a PDF of Leslie's lyrics and melodies as a fundraiser for preserving her songs. It's a collection of scans, some printed out, some handwritten and discolored, arguably giving more insight into Leslie's methods than a typeset book would have.

As filk has an ever longer history behind it, preserving recordings and information has become a growing concern to many. No one publishes filk on cassettes anymore. Some cassettes have been reissued on CD. Most haven't, due to rights issues or lack of interest and money. Many recordings that are no longer available for sale have been put up on free websites. YouTube has many recordings of filk songs from the 20th century. Technically, it's a copyright violation if the person posting them hasn't gotten the needed permissions, but usually no one cares, or the songwriters and performers are glad to have their recordings still available.

The uploading of filk "classics" has led to an odd periphery of filkdom whose members know of filk only from these recordings and don't grasp that they were originally part of a participatory culture. Many of these people live far from any areas of filk activity, and they think of music as just something to listen to. They have their own online communities, including one on Reddit.

Even if these recordings no longer make money, people in filk want accurate records of the albums so the writers and performers get the credit that's due. A group which is closely associated with core filk activity maintains a wiki on fandom.com, which is mainly devoted to maintaining filk discographies. Its main page states: "The filkwiki started with a focus on cataloging all the filk (and related) albums that have been produced, but is not limited to that. We hope it will be a resource for all filkers and to people curious about filk and the filk community." Other information includes general filk history and an explanation of filk circles and participation.

Justin Eiler started a website on filk discography in 2000 and migrated it to the Fandom (called Wikia at the time) wiki in 2008. Activity was sporadic for the next decade or so. Karl-Johan Norén started contributing to it in 2020 and decided in early 2021 that it was a "valuable resource that needed to be properly taken care of." He applied for and was granted the administrator role. Luke Bretscher was added as co-admin. The wiki now has a list of songs and other metadata for the large majority of filk albums that have been sold publicly.

Another body of filk preservation activity has grown out of the many recordings which Harold Stein made at filk conventions. At every convention with filk programming which he went to, including some Worldcons, he set up his Zoom recorders in the filk rooms. He made the recordings available to the performers and put some of them on albums that were provided to convention members. Anything that went onto an album got there only with the permission of the performers and songwriters. The majority of the recordings were never heard publicly.

It was a major loss to filk when he died in 2018. Fortunately, his library of recordings passed to Merav Hoffman, who instituted the Harold M. Stein Memorial Filk Archive, which calls itself "the largest repository of filk documents and recordings in North America." This project has included a

crowdsourcing project to identify songs and singers on the many recordings that came from open filk circles and had nothing resembling a playlist or credits. His collection included recordings by others, among them a nearly complete set of recordings at Chambanacon dating back to the early 1970s. Other key participants in this archiving project include Jonathan Lenox, Jesse Weinstein, and Luke Bretscher.

Her work has expanded to several other collections of recordings. Wail Songs had been inactive for years before the deaths of Bob and Lindy Laurent, but it had a large collection of unreleased recordings. Spencer Love is still alive and well, but he has many recordings which hadn't gone to good use and were very unlikely to be released in albums. Another collection, from Confluence (the Pittsburgh regional convention), is largely stored on digital audio tape (DAT), an obsolescent and fragile format.

The main goal of these efforts is to make sure that the recordings aren't lost, not to publish them. Fannish historians and the people who created the songs could find value in them.

Some parts of the academic world have taken an interest in filk as a form of folk music and fan activity. The Cushing Library at Texas A&M maintains an extensive fanzine collection. Since 2013, this has included filk material. Lauren Schiller, a member of Sassafrass, worked at Cushing at the time and was largely responsible for getting the collection started. In an interview in 2014, she said:

Collecting filk was my idea. I'm involved in the filk community (I perform with an a-cappella group called Sassafrass and go to conventions and filk circles) and one of the first things I did when I started working at Cushing was search the manuscript collection for 'filk' to see if we had anything. We did have a few songbooks and recordings as part of the Science Fiction collection, and when I did research to see if there were other libraries collecting filk, some places did have some filk, but there didn't seem to be a big effort to collect filk materials anywhere. So I thought that since I'm working at a library with one of the largest Science Fiction research collections of its kind I could use my connections with the filk community and be involved with actively collecting filk, made a pitch, and here we are.

Bowling Green State University, thanks to the efforts of David Lewis and Angela Pratesi, has undertaken a filk preservation project, known as the Buck and Juanita Coulson Collection. The materials didn't come from the Coulsons, but the site explains that "the donor asked that the collection be known as the Buck and Juanita Coulson collection to honor their contributions to the art form." It consists mostly of 158 master audiotape reels as well as printed materials from Off Centaur Publications. Another collection at Bowling Green, the Robert "Buck" Coulson Collection, consists of printed materials from the Coulsons.

The Wail Songs Collection at Bowling Green consists of audio masters from Wail Songs, founded by Bob Laurent.

Finally, Bowling Green's Jennifer Donaldson Milewski Collection of Filk Research Material contains eight boxes of materials dating from 1979 to 1993. The site description says:

The collection includes Jennifer Donaldson Milewski's field recordings, convention programs, filk songbooks, notes, thesis drafts, correspondence, and interviews. Of particular note are Milewski's interviews with big-name filkers such as Joey Shoji, Kathy Mar, Leslie Fish and Cynthia McQuillen [sic].

A new filk convention, or at least a near-convention, has arisen in the UK. Mike and Anne Whitaker hosted two weekend-long housefilks in 2023. The first, in February, was called Mill House Filk and has been retroactively renamed MillCon 1. A second MillCon was held in August of the same year. Both events had registration, a guest of honor, a schedule, and information about a nearby hotel.

We've lost people at an increasing rate since 2015. It would be a hopeless task to list every name, but we need to remember, among others, Bruce Adelson, Renee Alper, Karen Anderson, Daphne Eftychia Arthur (formerly D. Glenn Arthur), Andrew Barton, Ariel Cini, Kira Heston, Ed Hutnik, Jordin and Mary Kay Kare, Creede Lambard, Bill Laubenheimer, Bob and Lindy Laurent, Teri Lee, Rennie Levine, Zanda Myrande (formerly Zander Nyronde), Helva Peters, Colleen Savitzky, Pat Silver, and Harold Stein.

Filkers come and go, and the ways we meet, sing, and listen change, but filk is still going strong, and it has more international reach than ever. People from Sweden, France, Israel, Australia, and other countries now make regular appearances at filksings. There are new topics to sing about, new tunes to parody, and new technologies to play with. Filk will be around for many more years.

If I live long enough, this may not be the last chapter of this book.

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20200715162158/https://columbus2020nasfic.org/>

Zoom terms of service: <https://explore.zoom.us/en/terms/>

Filk discography wiki: <https://filk.fandom.com/>

Harold M. Stein Memorial Filk Archive: <http://filk.meravhoffman.com/>

Interview: Doing A Fandom Archive With Jeremy Brett and Lauren Schiller (Internet Archive):
<https://web.archive.org/web/20140407132736/http://www.musehack.com/blog/2014/01/doing-a-fandom-archive.html>

Buck and Juanita Coulson Collection at Bowling Green State University:
<https://lib.bgsu.edu/findingaids/repositories/3/resources/1310>

Robert "Buck" Coulson Collection at Bowling Green State University:
<https://lib.bgsu.edu/findingaids/repositories/2/resources/1059>

Wail Songs Collection at Bowling Green State University:

<https://lib.bgsu.edu/findingaids/repositories/3/resources/1612>

Jennifer Donaldson Milewski Collection of Filk Research Material at Bowling Green State University:
<https://lib.bgsu.edu/findingaids/repositories/3/resources/1306>

Appendix A: The Filk Hall of Fame

Each year since 1995, two or more people or organizations have been named to the [Filk Hall of Fame](#) at the FilKONtario convention in Canada. People are chosen as “recognition for long-standing achievement,” often in areas less conspicuous than writing or performing songs. More details are in the chapter on Canadian filk. The following people have been named to the Filk Hall of Fame as of 2014:

1995

Robert Asprin, Leslie Fish, Off Centaur Publications

1996

Juanita Coulson, Julia Ecklar, Bob Laurent, Kathy Mar, Bill Maraschiello

1997

Lee and Barry Gold, J. Spencer Love, Margaret Middleton

1998

Rafe Culpin, Cynthia McQuillin, Erwin Strauss

1999

Gary Anderson, Dave Clement, Mary Ellen Wessels

2000

Zander Nyron, Jane Robinson, Bill Roper

2001

Gordon Dickson, Gytha North, Bill and Brenda Sutton

2002

Lissa Allcock, Kirstin Tanger, Alan Thiesen

2003

Karen and Poul Anderson, Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, Bob Kanefsky, Chris Malme

2004

Katy Dröge and Juliane Honisch, Valerie Housden, Gary McGath

2005

Clif Flynt, Judith and Dave Hayman, Tom Smith

2006

Franklin Gunkelmann, Steve Macdonald, Lois Mangan, Gretchen Roper

2007

Chris Croughton, Bruce Pelz, Kathleen Sloan

2008

Bob and Anne Passovoy, Steve and Colleen Savitzky

2009

Frank Hayes, Erica Neely

2010

Jan DiMasi, Kristoph Klover, Mike Whitaker

2011

Ellen Kranzer, Howard Scrimgeour, Urban Tapestry

2012

Gary Ehrlich, Tom Jeffers, Persis Thorndike

2013

Cecilia Eng, Roberta Rogow, Volker Tanger

2014

Talis Kimberley, Kathy Hamilton, Michael Longcor

2015

Kay Shapero, Nick Smith, Steven Joel Zeve

2016

Mark Bernstein, Eli Goldberg

2017

Maya & Jeff Bohnhoff, Gary Hanak, Judi Miller

2018

Sibylle Machat, Paul Willett

2019

W. Randy Hoffman, Harold Stein

2020

Blind Lemming Chiffon, Juliana McCorison, Rob Wynne

2021

John and Mary Creasey, Merav Hoffman

2022

Mark Peters, Mary Crowell & Wesley Crowell, Peggi Warner-Lalonde & Ken Lalonde

Appendix B: The Pegasus Awards

The Ohio Valley Filk Festival (OVFF) has issued the [Pegasus Awards](#) at each convention since its beginning. There are fixed categories, which have changed only a few times since the beginning, and two variable song categories. The awards are presented at the Pegasus Awards Banquet. In 2020 there was no in-person OVFF, but the awards were made anyway.

You don't have to be a member of OVFF to vote. There are no qualifying tests, but people are asked to nominate and vote only if they consider themselves part of the filk community. For the 2003 awards and ever since, there has been a "brainstorming list" on the OVFF website, where people can suggest potential nominees for any of the categories. Sample audio files of nominated songs started appearing the same year. In a few cases, nominees have had to vocally discourage their non-filk supporters from ballot stuffing. The Pegasus Awards have never been a contest for who has the most friends willing to take advantage of an open voting process.

The early OVFFs had the categories "Best Male Filker" and "Best Female Filker." In 1987 they were replaced with "Best Writer/Composer" and "Best Performer." "Best Classic Filk Song" was added in 2003 for older songs.

As they stand now, the permanent categories are Best Filk Song, Best Classic Filk Song (a song at least ten years old), Best Performer, and Best Writer/Composer. There are also two categories of songs which are usually different each year.

1984

Best Filk Song: Leslie Fish, "Hope Eyrie"

Best Male Filker: Bill Maraschiello

Best Female Filker: Julia Ecklar

Best Parody: Frank Hayes, "Twelve Years of Worldcon"

Best Original Humorous Filk Song: Clif Flynt, "Unreality Warp"

1985

No awards

1986

Best Filk Song: Leslie Fish, "Witnesses' Waltz"

Best Male Filker: Bill Sutton

Best Female Filker: Leslie Fish

Best Parody: Murray Porath, "Daddy's Little Boy"

Best Original Humorous Song: Diana Gallagher, "A Reconsideration of Anatomical Docking Maneuvers in a Zero-G Environment"

1987

Best Filk Song: Anne Passovoy, "Harbors"

Best Writer/Composer: Leslie Fish

Best Performer: Julia Ecklar

Best Ose: Clif Flynt, "Ian the Grim"

Best Schtick: Clif Flynt and Bill Roper, "Kinda Mediocre, Actually"

1988

Best Filk Song: Bill Roper, "Wind from Rainbow's End"

Best Writer/Composer: Mercedes Lackey

Best Performer: Barry and Sally Childs-Helton

Best Historical Song: Debra Doyle and Melissa Williamson, "Song of the Shieldwall"

Best Media Song: Tom Smith, "Superman's Sex Life Boogie"

1989

Best Filk Song: Duane Elms, "Dawson's Christian"; Kathy Mar and Mercedes Lackey, "Arafel's Song" (tie)

Best Writer/Composer: Mercedes Lackey

Best Performer: Technical Difficulties

Best Fantasy Song: Mercedes Lackey and Leslie Fish, "Wind's Four Quarters"

Best Techie Song: Bill Sutton, "Do It Yourself"

1990

Best Filk Song: T. J. Burnside Clapp, "Lullaby for a Weary World"

Best Writer/Composer: Julia Ecklar

Best Performer: Mitchell Clapp

Best Fannish Song: T. J. Burnside Clapp, "Weekend-Only World"

Best Literature Song: Julia Ecklar, "Daddy's Little Girl"

1991

Best Filk Song: Tom Smith, "A Boy and His Frog"

Best Writer/Composer: Tom Smith

Best Performer: Tom Smith

Best Love Song: Kathy Mar, "Velveteen"

Best War/Vengeance Song: Julia Ecklar, "Temper of Revenge"

1992

Best Filk Song: Julia Ecklar, "God Lives on Terra"

Best Writer/Composer: Jane Robinson

Best Performer: Michael Longcor

Best Tribute: Duane Elms, "Madame Curie's Hands"

Best Genre Crossover: Tom Smith, "Return of the King, Uh-huh"

1993

Best Filk Song: Robert Heinlein and Mark Bernstein, "Green Hills of Earth"

Best Writer/Composer: Leslie Fish

Best Performer: Tom Smith

Best Humorous Song: Michael Longcor, "Rhinotelexomania"

Best Space Song: Barry Childs-Helton, "Lightsailor"

1994

Best Filk Song: Kathy Mar, "Drink Up the River"; Tom Smith, "PQR" (tie)

Best Writer/Composer: Tom Smith

Best Performer: The Black Book Band

Best Children's Song: Diana Gallagher, "Monsters in the Night"

Best Risqué Song: Frank Hayes, "Like a Lamb to the Slaughter"

1995

Best Filk Song: Steve Macdonald, "Journey's Done"

Best Writer/Composer: Steve Macdonald

Best Performer: Michael Longcor

Best Military Song: Michael Longcor, "When Tenskwatawa Sings"

Best Sing-along/Choral Song: Cat Faber, "Acts of Creation"

1996

Best Filk Song: Kathy Mar, "When Giants Walked"

Best Writer/Composer: Heather Alexander

Best Performer: Heather Alexander

Best Eerie Song: Joey Shoji, "Bloodchild"; Michael Longcor, "Monster in My Head" (tie)

Best Spiritual Song: Gwen Zak, "Circles"

1997

Best Filk Song: Karen Linsley and Lloyd Landa, "Road to Roswell"

Best Writer/Composer: Rand Bellavia and Adam English (Ookla the Mok)

Best Performer: Urban Tapestry

Best Science Song: Steve Savitzky, "World Inside the Crystal"

Best Sorcery Song: Susan Cooper and Julia Ecklar, "The Dark Is Rising"

1998

Best Filk Song: Frank Hayes, "When I Was a Boy"

Best Writer/Composer: Cat Faber

Best Performer: Steve Macdonald

Best Myth Song: Steve Macdonald, "Cold Butcher"

Best Adaptation: Anne Passovoy and Poul Anderson, "Mary O'Meara"

1999

Best Filk Song: Cat Faber, "The Word of God"

Best Writer/Composer: Cynthia McQuillin

Best Performer: Dave Clement

Best Fool Song: Tom Smith, "Operation Desert Storm"

Best Hero Song: Leslie Fish, "A Toast for Unknown Heroes"

2000

Best Filk Song: Zander and Soren Nyronnd, "Sam's Song"

Best Writer/Composer: Bob Kanefsky

Best Performer: Ookla the Mok

Best End of the World Song: Jane Robinson, "Out of the Clear Blue Sky"

Best Food/Drink Song: Debbie Ohi, "My Jalapeño Man"; Tom Smith, "307 Ale" (tie)

2001

Best Filk Song: Brenda Sutton, "Strangers No More"

Best Writer/Composer: Talis Kimberley

Best Performer: Talis Kimberley

Best Computer Song: Jeff Hitchin, "Tech Support"

Best Creature Song: Cat Faber, "Least of My Kind"

2002

Best Filk Song: Talis Kimberley, "Velvet"

Best Writer/Composer: Zander Nyronnd

Best Performer: Three Weird Sisters

Best Chilling/Spine-tingling Song: Brenda Sutton, "In a Gown Too Blue"

Best Song that Tells a Story: Leslie Fish, "The Horsetamer's Daughter"

2003

Best Filk Song: Michael Longcor, "Shooting Star"

Best Classic Filk Song: Leslie Fish, "Banned from Argo"

Best Writer/Composer: Cat Faber

Best Performer: Dandelion Wine

Best Parody: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff, "Knights in White Satin"

Best Original Humorous Song: Bill and Gretchen Roper, "My Husband the Filker"

2004

Best Filk Song: Jodi Krangle, “The Lady”
Best Classic Filk Song: Julia Ecklar, “Ladyhawke!”
Best Writer/Composer: Kathy Mar
Best Performer: Urban Tapestry
Best Comic Book Song: Rand Bellavia and Adam English, “Arthur Curry”
Best Tribute: Matt Leger, “A Simple Country Doctor”

2005

Best Filk Song: Tom Smith, “Rocket Ride”
Best Classic Filk Song: Frank Hayes, “Never Set the Cat on Fire”
Best Writer/Composer: Tom Smith
Best Performer: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff
Best Space Opera Song: Mercedes Lackey and Leslie Fish, “Signy Mallory”
Best Sword and Sorcery Song: Mercedes Lackey and Leslie Fish, “Threes”

2006

Best Filk Song: Michelle Dockrey, “The Girl That’s Never Been”
Best Classic Filk Song: Tom Smith, “I Wanna Be Peter Lorre”
Best Writer/Composer: Cynthia McQuillin
Best Performer: Judi Miller
Best Battle Song: Heather Alexander, “March of Cambreadth”
Best Torch Song: Talis Kimberley, “X-Libris”

2007

Best Filk Song: Tom Smith and Rob Balder, “Rich Fantasy Lives”
Best Classic Filk Song: Mitchell Burnside Clapp, “Falling Down on New Jersey”
Best Writer/Composer: Talis Kimberley
Best Performer: Mary Crowell; Seanan McGuire (tie)
Best Dorsai Song: Steve Simmons and Steve Macdonald, “Shai!”
Best Song of Home: Michelle Dockrey and Tony Fabris, “Emerald Green”

2008

Best Filk Song: Andy Eigel, "Uplift"

Best Classic Filk Song: Talis Kimberley, "Archetype Cafe"

Best Writer/Composer: Seanan McGuire

Best Performer: Michelle Dockrey and Tony Fabris

Best Tragedy Song: Cynthia McQuillin, "Black Davie's Ride"

Best Comedy Song: Daniel Glasser, "Close Your Eyes"

2009

Best Filk Song: Brooke Lunderville, "The Wreck of the Crash of the Easthill Mining Disaster"

Best Classic Filk Song: Talis Kimberley, "Still Catch the Tide"

Best Writer/Composer: Michelle Dockrey and Tony Fabris

Best Performer: Heather Dale and Ben Deschamps

A Little Bit Country: Bill Sutton, "Stray Dog Man"

A Little Bit Rock and Roll: Michelle Dockrey and Tony Fabris, "Six String Love"

2010

Best Filk Song: Ju Honisch and Katy Dröge-Macdonald, "A Thousand Ships"

Best Classic Filk Song: Jordin Kare, "Fire in the Sky"

Best Writer/Composer: Heather Dale

Best Performer: S. J. Tucker

Best Mad Science Song: Seanan McGuire, "What a Woman's For"

Best Magic Song: Paul Kwinn, "Where the Magic Is Real"

2011

Best Filk Song: Seanan McGuire, "Wicked Girls"

Best Classic Filk Song: Julia Ecklar, "The Phoenix"

Best Writer/Composer: S. J. Tucker

Best Performer: Amy McNally

Best Badass Song: Seanan McGuire, "Evil Laugh"

Best Romantic Song: Heather Dale, "As I Am"

2012

Best Filk Song: S. J. Tucker, "Cheshire Kitten"

Best Classic Filk Song: Rand Bellavia and Adam English, "Tiberius Rising"

Best Writer/Composer: Juanita Coulson; Mary Crowell (tie)

Best Performer: Betsy Tinney; Wild Mercy (tie)

Best Gaming Song: Mary Crowell, "I Put My Low Stat"

Best Travel Song: Michelle Dockrey, "No Hurry"

2013

Best Filk Song: Heather Dale and Ben Deschamps, "Joan"

Best Classic Filk Song: Jonathan Turner, "Second-Hand Songs"

Best Writer/Composer: Talis Kimberley

Best Performer: Alexander James Adams

Best Fairytale Song: Betsy Tinney, "Dryad's Promise"

Best Alien Song: Frank Hayes, "Little Fuzzy Animals"

2014

Best Filk Song: Talis Kimberley, "Paper Worlds"; Cheshire Moon, "Snow White, Red Road" (tie)

Best Classic Filk Song: Gary Hanak, "Grandfather"

Best Writer/Composer: Tim Griffin

Best Performer: Cheshire Moon

Best Adapted Song: Jeff Bohnhoff, "Midichlorian Rhapsody"

Best Song of Passage: Cat Faber, "Outward Bound"

2015

Best Filk Song: Seanan McGuire, "My Story Is Not Yet Done"

Best Classic Filk Song: Meg Davis, "Captain Jack and the Mermaid"

Best Writer/Composer: Cat Faber

Best Performer: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff

Best Adapted Song: Steve Macdonald, "Grabthar's Silver Hammer"

Best Time-Related Song: Phil Allcock, “Precious Moments”

2016

Best Filk Song: Batya Wittenberg, “Creatures of Dream”

Best Classic Filk Song: Kathleen Sloan, “Take It Back”

Best Writer/Composer: Barry Childs-Helton

Best Performer: Play It With Moxie

Best Adapted Song: Bob Kanefsky, “Six Transit Genitalia Centauri”

Best Exploration Song: Roger Burton-West and Jodi Krangle, “Starsoul”

2017

Best Filk Song: Michelle Dockrey and Tony Fabris, “We Are Who We Are”

Best Classic Filk Song: Betsy Tinney, Cade Tinney, and S. J. Tucker, “Alligator in the House”

Best Writer/Composer: Jordin Kare; Jun Honisch (tie)

Best Performer: Judi Miller

Best Horror Song: Seanan McGuire, “Dear Gina”

Best Perky Song: Graham Leathers, “Chocolate Is a Vegetable”

2018

Best Filk Song: Katy Dröge-Macdonald and Ju Honisch, “Pageant Legend”

Best Classic Filk Song: Heather Alexander and Philip Obermarck, “Creature of the Wood”

Best Writer/Composer: Leslie Hudson

Best Performer: Random Fractions

Best Roadtrip Song: Tim Griffin, “Oregon Trail”; Heather Dale, “Road to Santiago” (tie)

Best Song About Community: Steve Macdonald, “Many Hearts, One Voice”

2019

Best Filk Song: Tim Griffin, “Lucy on the Line”

Best Classic Filk Song: Don Simpson, “Ship of Stone”

Best Writer/Composer: Eva Van Daele-Hunt

Best Performer: Playing Rapunzel

Best Sing-Along Song: Tom Jeffers, “Gone Filkin”

Best Family Song: Sabine Kinder, “Golden Rule”

2020

Best Filk Song: Piers and Gill Cawley, “Child of the Library,” and Heather Dale, “Mordred’s Lullaby” (tie)

Best Classic Filk Song: Ada Palmer, “Somebody Will”

Best Writer/Composer: Andrew Ross

Best Performer: Margaret Davis and Kristoph Klover

Best Media Song: Talis Kimberley, “Goodnight Sara Jane”

Best Space Song: Valerie Housden, “Following in Valentina’s Footsteps”

2021

Best Filk Song: Lawrence Dean, “Second-Hand Heaven”

Best Classic Filk Song: Dr. Jane Robinson, “Nessie, Come Up”

Best Writer/Composer: Lawrence Dean

Best Performer: The Faithful Sidekicks; Rhiannon’s Lark (tie)

Best Mad Science Song: Eric Distad, “I Built a Time Machine”

Best Cheery-Ose Song: Rhiannon’s Lark, “Tiny Kraken”

2022

Best Filk Song: Summer Russell, “The Entwife”

Best Classic Filk Song: Cecilia Eng, “Helva’s Song”

Best Writer/Composer: Cecilia Eng

Best Performer: Jen Midkiff

Best Furry Friend Song: Jen Midkiff, “Underfoot”

Best Song that Tells a Story: Mich Sampson and Marilisa Valtazanou, “Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine”

Appendix C: (Nearly?) all the filk conventions ever held

This list as complete as I could make it through the middle of 2023. There is a gray area between a convention and a large party. To qualify as a convention for this list, a gathering has to have public registration, at least a full weekend's duration, programming, and a public venue such as a hotel or convention center. (The last criterion is a change from the first edition, where I specified overnight accommodations rather than a public venue.) Online events without a substantial in-person component aren't included in this list.

Notations:

* Guest was listed in the program but was unable to attend.

** Guest died before the convention.

1979

FilkCon I, July 28-29, Arlington Heights, Illinois.

1980

FilkCon II, August 8-10, Toledo, Ohio. Guest: Marty Burke.

1981

FilkCon III (FilkCon West), June 5-7, Los Angeles, California. Guests: Buck and Juanita Coulson.

1982

BayFilk I, aka FilkCon 4.1 (West), March 5-7, Oakland, California. Guest: Margaret Middleton.

FilkCon 4.2 (East), May 28-30, Kansas City, Missouri.

1983

ConChord 1, aka FilkCon 5.1 (West), March 11-13, Fullerton, California. Guests: Bob and Anne Passovoy.

FilkCon 5.2 (East), July 1983, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

1984

BayFilk II, March 2-4, San Jose, California.

OVFF 1, Cincinnati, Ohio. Guest of Honor: Julia Ecklar.

1985

ConChord 2, March 1-3, La Reina, California, Guest: Clif Flynt.

1986

Bayfilk III, March, San Jose, California.

OVFF 2, October 31-November 2, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Bill Sutton, Margaret Middleton.

1987

ConChord 3 (FilkCon 9.1), March 6-8, Los Angeles, California. Guests: Robin and Diana Bailey.

MuseCon, May 1-3, Wilmington, Delaware. Guests: Julia Ecklar, Meg Davis, Clam Chowder.

OVFF 3, Delaware, Ohio. Guests: Mercedes Lackey, Michael Longcor.

1988

ConChord 4, October 7-9, Los Angeles, California. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Jordin Kare.

Bayfilk 4, California.

OVFF 4, October 28-30, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Bill Roper, Diana Gallagher-Wu.

1989

Contabile (UK filk con), February 3-5, Newbury, England. Guests: Leslie Fish, Gytha North.

Bayfilk 5, March 3-5, Oakland, California. Guests: Joe Haldeman, Ann Sharp, Buck and Juanita Coulson.

ConChord 5, October 6-8. Guests: Bill Roper, Carol Poore, Cathy Cook MacDonald.

OVFF 5, October 27-29, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, Joey Shoji.

1990

Con2bile (UK filk con), February 2-4, Peterborough, England. Guests: Meg Davis, Mike Whitaker.

Consonance 1990, March 2-3, San Jose, California. Guests: Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, Chris Weber, Tom Smith.

ConCerto, June 8-10, Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Guests: Kathy Mar, Linda Melnick.

ConChord 6, October 12-14, Los Angeles, California. Guests: Julia Ecklar, Joey Shoji.

OVFF 6, October 26-28, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Musical Chairs, Mary Frost Pierson.

1991

Treble (UK filk con), February 1-3, Eastbourne, England. Guests: Bill Sutton, Zander Nyron.

Consonance 1991, March 1-3, San Francisco area, California. Guests: Gytha North, Rilla Heslin.

FilKONtario (1), April 12-14, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton.

ConChord 7, September 27-29, Los Angeles, California. Guests: Michael Longcor, Juanita Coulson.

Consonance, March 1-3, 1991, Oakland, California. Guest: Gytha North.

OVFF 7, November 1-3, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Cynthia McQuillin, Robin Bailey, Howard Scrimgeour.

1992

Musicon 1, January 3-5, Nashville, Tennessee. Guests: Naomi Pardue, Murray Porath, Phil Cooper, Margaret Nelson.

Fourplay (UK filk con), January 31-February 2, Wolverhampton, England. Guests: Cynthia McQuillin, Jane Robinson, Colin Fine.

Consonance 1992, March 6-8, San Jose, California. Guests: Mark Bernstein, Nick Smith, Mike Whitaker.

FilKONtario 2, April 10-12, Mississauga, Ontario. Guest: Tom Smith.

ConCertino, June 19-21, Westboro, Massachusetts. Guests: T. J. and Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Duane Elms, Lindy Sears, Naomi Pardue, Randy Farran.

ConChord 8, October 2-4, Los Angeles, California. Guests: Tom Smith, Joe Bethancourt.

Muse, October 9-11, Birmingham, UK. Guests: Razing Arizona, Alchemy*.

OVFF 8, October 23-25, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Kathy Mar, Larry Warner, Marie Schneider.

1993

Musicon 2, January 1-3, Nashville, Tennessee. Guests: Renee Alper, Alisa Cohen, Joe Waldbaum, Harry Smothers (Gerald Bliss).

Pentatonic (UK filk con), February 5-7, Weston-Super-Mare, England. Guests: Kathy Mar, Rhodri James.

Consonance 1993, March 5-7, San Jose, California. Guests: Carol Roper, Gary Anderson.

FilKONtario 3, May 7-9, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Michael Longcor.

Conterpoint, June 4-6, Baltimore, Maryland. Guests: Bill Roper, Dick Eney, Sue Trainor.

Harmonicon I, February 19-21, Independence, Missouri. Guests: Meg Davis, Gerald Burton.

ConChord 9, October 8-10, Burbank, California. Guests: Dave Clement, Molly Bennett, Steve Macdonald, Heather Rose Jones.

OVFF 9, October 22-24, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Duane Elms, Mary Ellen Wessels, Helen Parker, Zander Nyronnd.

1994

Musicon 3, January 7-9, Nashville, Tennessee. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Allen Street String Band, Cave McConnel, Naomi Pardue, Bill Rintz, Harry Smothers, Kristoph Klover.

Vibraphone (UK filk con), February 4-6, Brighton, England. Guests: Tom Smith, Talis Kimberley.

Harmonicon II, February 18-20, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Margaret Middleton.

Consonance 1994, March 4-6, San Jose, California. Guests: Larry Warner, Jane Robinson.

FilKONtario 4, April 15-17, Etobicoke, Ontario. Guests: Kathy Mar, Mary Ellen Wessels, Heather Rose Jones.

Contata 1994, June 10-13, Secaucus, New Jersey. Guests: Joey Shoji, Mary Ellen Wessels.

ConChord 10, September 30-October 2, Burbank, California. Guests: Joe Ellis, Moira Breen, Urban Tapestry (Debbie Ohi, Jodi Krangle, Allison Durno), Jane Robinson.

OVFF 10, October 21-23, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Juanita Coulson, Bill and Brenda Sutton, Buck Coulson.

1995

Musicon 4, January 6-8, Nashville, Tennessee. Guests: Margaret Middleton, Michael Longcor, Todd Alan.

Transept (UK filk con), February 3-5, Cambridge, England. Guests: Joey Shoji, Phil Allcock.

Harmonicon III, February 17-19, Wichita, Kansas. Guests: Kathy Mar, Lee Billings, Mark Osier.

FilKONtario 5, Toronto, Ontario, March 31-April 2. Guests: Dave Clement, Steve Macdonald.

ConCertino '95, June 9-11, Westboro, Massachusetts. Guests: Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, Judith Hayman, Jordin Kare, Bob Laurent.

ConChord 11, September 29-October 1, Van Nuys, California. Guests: The Duras Sisters, Windbourne, Chris Weber, Karen Willson.

OVFF 11, October 27-29, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Steve Macdonald, Heather Alexander, George 'Lan' Laskowski, Paul and Catherine Macdonald.

1996

Musicon 5, January 5-7, Nashville, Tennessee. Guests: Mark Bernstein, Tom Smith, Rennie Levine.

Obliter-8 (UK filk con), February 2-4, Milton Keynes, England. Guests: Julia Ecklar, Chris Malme.

Consonance 1996, March 1-3, Oakland, California. Guests: Murray Porath, Alan Thiesen, Mike Rubin*, Timelines (Teri Wachowiak, Dave McConnell, Brian Killian, Russell Hall).

FilKONtario 6, April 19-21, Etobicoke, Ontario. Guests: Mary Ellen Wessels, Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, Steve Dixon.

Conterpoint Too, June 21-23, 1996, Quantico, Virginia. Guests: Heather Alexander, Leslie Fish, Rennie Levine, Cynthia McQuillin*, Jane Robinson.

OVFF 12, October 25-27, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Dave Clement, Leslie Fish, Ann Cecil, Nick Smith.

1997

HarmonIX (UK filk con), January 31-February 2, Weston-super-Mare, England. Guests: Sue Mason, Mary Ellen Wessels.

ConChord 12, March 7-9, Van Nuys, California. Guests: Graham Leathers, Larry Warner.

FilKONtario 7, April 11-13, Etobicoke, Ontario. Guests: Talis Kimberley, Clif and Carol Flynt, Doug Wu.

The Second ConCerto, June 13-15, Cherry Hill, NJ. Guests: Urban Tapestry, Ian Hanley, Philip Allcock, Ellen Kranzer.

FilkContinental 1997, September 26-28, Castle Blankenheim, Germany.

OVFF 13, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Bill Roper, Clif Flynt, Mary Ellen Wessels, Elaine Richards, Cat

Faber.

1998

Decadence (UK filk con), February 6-8, Eastbourne, England. Guests: Mitchell Burnside-Clapp, Valerie Housden.

Consonance 1998, March 6-8, San Francisco area, California. Guests: Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, Heather Alexander, Diana Huey.

FilKONtario 8, April 17-19, Etobicoke, Ontario. Guests: Heather Alexander, John Hall, Juliane Honisch, Katy Dröge.

FilkContinental 1998, October 16-19, Castle Blankenheim, Germany. Guests: Phoenix.

Contata 98, June 10-12, Saddle Brook, New Jersey. Guests: Steve Macdonald, Mike Browne, Marc Glasser, Marc Osier, Jane Mailander.

ConChord 13, October 7-9, Los Angeles, California. Guests: Mary Ellen Wessels, Kathy Mar.

OVFF 14, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: The Black Book Band, Jordin Kare, Solomon Davidoff, Cecilia Eng.

1999

GAFilk 1, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Juanita Coulson, Lee Billings, Glenn Simser.

XIlophone (UK filk con), February 5-7, Basingstoke, England. Guests: Dave Clement, Lawrence Dean.

Consonance 1999, March 5-7, Santa Clara, California. Guests: Clam Chowder (Bob Esty, John Huff, Kathy Sobansky, Cliff Laufer, Sam Van Wyck, Carl Zwnzig), Cecilia Eng, Gary Ehrlich.

FilKONtario 9, March 26-28, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Urban Tapestry, Don Neill, Harold Groot.

ConCertino 99, July 9-11, Westboro, Massachusetts. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Mike Browne, Ed Hutnik, Alan Thiesen.

FilkContinental 1999, September 3-6, Jugendgästehaus (Youth Hostel) Gütersloh, Germany. Guest: Leslie Fish.

OVFF 15, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Tom Smith, Kathleen Sloan, Leslie Larkins, Mary Miller.

2000

GAFilk 2, January 7-9, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Margaret Middleton, Walt Baric, Puzzlebox.

Didgeri-Douze (UK filk con), February 4-6, Milton Keynes, England. Guests: Urban Tapestry, Brian Biddle.

Consonance 2000, March 3-5, Santa Clara, California. Guests: Steve Macdonald, Margaret Davis, Kristoph Klover, Jeff Hitchin, Heather Borean, Juliane Honisch, Katy Droege.

FilKONtario 10, March 31-April 2, Mississauga, Ontario. Larry Warner, Diana Huey, Scott Snyder.

Conterpoint Three, June 16-18, Triangle/Quantico, Virginia. Guests: Joe Bethancourt, Clam Chowder, Steven Joel Zeve, Lynn Gold.

ConChord 14, September 22-24, Los Angeles, California.

FilkContinental 2000, September 29-October 1, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guest: Joey Shoji.

OVFF 16, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Talis Kimberley, Mark Bernstein, Joy Parker, Lee and Barry Gold.

2001

GAFilk 3, January 5-7, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Tom Smith, Robert Cooke, Tim and Annie Walker, Phoenix.

Conthirteena (UK filk con), February 2-4, Eastbourne, England. Guests: Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, Tim and Annie Walker, Scott Snyder.

Consonance 2001, March 2-4, Santa Clara, California. Guests: Urban Tapestry, Mike Stein, Dave Weingart.

FilKONtario 11, April 5-7, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Steve Simmons, Erica Neely.

Filky Days, June 8-10, Leverkusen, Germany.

Conterpoint Four, June 22-24, Rockville, Maryland. Guests: Michael Longcor, H. Paul Shuch, "Downtown" Freddy Brown.

Pondfilk I (Victoria Filk Getaway), June 22-24, Victoria, British Columbia. Guest: Steve Dixon.

HarmUni 1, August 24-26, Langwidth College, University of York, England. Guests: Juliane Honisch, Katy Dröge.

FilkContinental 2001, September 28-30, 2001, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Puzzlebox, Steve Macdonald.

ConChord 15, Los Angeles area, California.

OVFF 17, October 26-28, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Three Weird Sisters, Michael Longcor, Ed Jones, Terence Chua.

2002

GAFilk 4, January 11-13, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Echo's Children, Randy and Diane Walker, Mike and Marsha Diggs, Lois McMaster Bujold, Carla Ulbrich.

Contabile Fortean (UK filk con), February 1-3, Basingstoke, England. Guests: Margaret Davis and Kristoph Klover, Roger Robinson, Joe Bethancourt.

Consonance 2002, March 1-3, Milpitas, California. Guests: Tom Smith, Jordin Kare, Sherman Dorn, Karen Linsley.

FilKONtario 12, March 29-31, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Joey Shoji, Dave Weingart, Anke Teschke, Tanya Huff.

Filky Days, May 24-26, Leverkusen, Germany.

Contata 3, June 21-23, South Plainfield, New Jersey. Guests: Dandelion Wine, Solomon Davidoff, Andrew Eigel, Steve Brinich.

Pondfilk II, June 21-23, Victoria, British Columbia. Guests: Callie Hills, Elsybeth Morris.

ConChord 16, August 2-4, Los Angeles area, California.

HarmUni 2, August 9-11, University of Gloucestershire, England. Guest: Alexa Klettner.

FilkContinental 2002, October 4-7, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guest: Chris Malme.

OVFF 18, November 1-3, 2002, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Heather Rose Jones, Joe Ellis, Dave Hayman, Rob Wynne.

2003

GAFilk 5, January 10-12, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Robert Asprin, Sherman Dorn, Jeff Hitchin, Marty Burke, Diane Gallagher, Scott Snyder.

Quinze Filk Festival (UK filk con), February 7-9, Suffolk, England. Guests: Teri Wachowiak, Simon Fairbourn.

Consonance 2003, March 7-9, Milpitas, California. Guests: Talis Kimberley, Simon Fairbourn, Jane Mailander, Mark Mandel, Ookla the Mok (Adam English, Rand Bellavia, Luis Garcia, Mike Mallory).

FilKONtario 13, March 28-30, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Jane Robinson, Cynthia McQuillin*, Mark Bernstein, Robert Cooke.

Filky Days, June 20-22, Leverkusen, Germany.

PondFilk III, June 27-29, Victoria, British Columbia. Guest: Joe Bethancourt.

ConCertino '03, July 18-20, Worcester, Massachusetts. Guests: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff, Erica Neely, Ellen Kushner, Priscilla Olson, Ed Stauff, Rika Körte.

ConChord 17, Los Angeles area, California.

FilkContinental 2003, October 3-5, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guest: Heather Alexander.

OVFF 19, October 24-26, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Bill Roper, Margaret Middleton, Kerry Gilley, Blake Hodgetts.

2004

GAFilk 6, January 9-11, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Mich Sampson, Mary Crowell, Rand Bellavia, Adam English, Howie Harrison, Chris Conway, Nate Bucklin.

Sixteen Tones (UK filk con), February 6-8, Bromsgrove, England. Guests: Bill Roper, Chris Conway.

Consonance 2004, March 5-7, 2004, San Francisco area, California. Guests: Dave Clement, Tom Jeffers, Franklin Gunkelmann, Steve Savitzky.

FilKONtario 14, March 26-28, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Michael Longcor, Kathleen Sloan, Blind Lemming Chiffon.

Conterpoint 2004, June 11-13, Rockville, Maryland. Guests: Chris Malme, Bob Esty, Jordan Mann.

PondFilk IV, June 25-27, Victoria, British Columbia. Guest: Blake Hodgetts.

Filky Days, July 16-18, Leverkusen, Germany.

ConChord 18, August 6-8, Woodland Hills, California. Guests: Alan Thiesen, John Hall, Paul Willett.

FilkContinental 2004, October 1-3, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Cosmic Trifle.

OVFF 20, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Ookla the Mok, Scott Snyder, Mary Frost Pierson, J. Elaine Richards, Heather Dale.

2005

GAFilk 7, January 7-9, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Kathleen Sloan, Terri Wachowiak, Steve Savitzky, Tanya Huff, Daniel and Melissa Glasser.

Dixseption (UK filk con), February 4-6, Portsmouth, England. Guests: Terence Chua, Andy and Martin

Gordon-Kerr.

Consonance 2005, March 4-6, San Francisco area, California. Guests: Terence Chua, Blake Hodgetts, Adam Selzer, Juanita Coulson, Adam English, Rand Bellavia.

FilKONtario 15, April 1-3, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Steve Macdonald, Judith Hayman, Carla Ulbrich, Michelle Sagara.

Contata 2005, June 24-26, Secaucus, NJ. Guests: Carla Ulbrich, Joe Giacoio, Harold Feld, Persis Thorndike, Mara Brener.

PondFilk V, June 24-26, Victoria, British Columbia. Guest: Steve Macdonald.

Filky Days, July 15-17, Leverkusen, Germany.

ConChord 19, August 26-28, Woodland Hills, California. Guests: Three Weird Sisters, Joe Bethancourt, Larry Niven, James Lee Stanley, Martin and Andrea Gordon-Kerr.

FilkContinental 2005, September 30-October 2, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Urban Tapestry.

OVFF 21, October 21-23, Dublin, Ohio. Guests: Frank Hayes, Seanan McGuire, Terry Wolfe-Ellis, Eric Gerds.

2006

GAFilk 8, January 6-8, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Dandelion Wine, Dave Rood, Carolyn Brown, Karen Anderson, Katy Dröge, Juliane Honisch.

1812Tone (UK filk con), February 3-5, Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. Guests: Sam Beardman, Mich Sampson.

Consonance 2006, March 3-5, California. Guests: Bill and Gretchen Roper, Puzzlebox (Paul Kwinn, Taunya Gren, Alisa Garcia, Luis Garcia), Chris Conway, Peter Beagle, Marty Coady Fabish.

FilKONtario 16, March 31-April 2, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Chris Conway, Tanya Huff, Judi Miller.

ConCertino '06, June 16-18, Worcester, Massachusetts. Guests: Mike Whitaker, Mary Crowell, Mabel Liang, Bob Leigh, Nancy Louise Freeman.

PondFilk VI, June 23-25, Victoria, British Columbia. Guests: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff.

FilkContinental 2006, September 29-October 2, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Talis Kimberley, Judith Hayman.

OVFF 22, October 20-22, Dublin, Ohio. Guests: Mary Crowell, Paul Kwinn, Judi Miller, Tony Fabris.

2007

GAFilk 9, January 5-7, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Urban Tapestry, Linda Melnick, Summer and Fall, S. M. Stirling, Graham and Rebecca Leathers.

D'Zenove Convention (UK filk con), February 2-4, Basingstoke, England. Guests: Lady Mondegreen, Mike Richards.

Consonance 2007, March 2-4, California. Guests: Jeff, Maya, and Alex Bohnhoff, Kathy Mar, Dave Rood, Gwen Knighton.

FilKONtario 17, March 23-25, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: The N'Early Music Consort.

Filky Days, June 15-17, Leverkusen, Germany.

Conterpoint 2007, June 22-24, Rockville, Maryland. Guests: Wild Mercy, John Hall, Seanan McGuire.

PondFilk VII, June 22-24, Victoria, British Columbia. Guests: Puzzlebox.

HarmUni 3, August 10-12, University of Cambridge, England, England. Guest: Franklin Gunkelmann.

ConChord 20, August 17-19, Woodland Hills, California. Guests: Tanya Huff, Andrea Dale, Tom Digby.

FilkContinental 2007, September 28-October 1, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Dandelion Wine, Heather Dale.

OVFF 23, October 26-28, Dublin, Ohio. Guests: Michael Longcor, Marty Coady-Fabish, Bob and Anne Passovoy, Ellen McMicking.

2008

GAFilk 10, January 11-13, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff, Brian Richardson, Brobdingnagian Bards, Peter Beagle, Tom Smith.

2t0nic, February 1-3 (UK filk con), Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. Guests: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff, Rika Körte, Steffi Zurek.

Conflikt 1, January 25-27, Renton, Washington. Guests: Steve Macdonald, Stephen Joel Zeve, France Andrews, Callie Hills.

Consonance 2008, March 7-9, San Francisco area, California. Guests: Becca and Graham Leathers, Mary Crowell, Carl Thiel, Summer and Fall (Eva Van Daele-Hunt and Crystal Blum), Judi Miller.

FilKONtario 18, April 4-6, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Michelle Dockrey, Tony Fabris, Bill Roper, Marilyn Miller, Heather Bruton.

Contata 5, June 20-22, Parsippany, New Jersey. Guests: Heather Dale, Tom Smith,* Crystal Paul, Carla Ulbrich, Nate and Louie Bucklin, Christine Lavin.

Filky Days, June 27-29, Leverkusen, Germany.

PondFilk VIII, June 27-30, Victoria, British Columbia. Guests: Peter Alway, Judi Miller.

FilkContinental 2008, October 3-5, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Margaret Davis and Kristoph Klover.

ConChord 21, September 12-14, 2008, Woodland Hills, California. Guests: Alexander James Adams, Steve Savitzky, Paul Estin.

OVFF 24, October 26-28, Dublin, Ohio. Guests: Tim and Annie Walker, Graham and Rebecca Leathers, Jan DiMasi, Sibylle Machat.

2009

GAFilk 11, January 9-11, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Barry and Sally Childs-Helton, Larry Kirby, Harold Feld, Emma Bull, Bill and Gretchen Roper.

aXXidental (UK filk con), February 6-8, Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. Guests: Rand Bellavia, Adam English, Richard Wheatley, Trudy Wenzel.

Conflikt 2, January 30-February 1, Renton, Washington. Guests: Seanan McGuire, Lawrence Dean, Frank Hayes.

Consonance 2009, March 6-8, San Jose, California. Guests: Tony Fabris, Michelle Dockrey, Erica Neely, Mary Bertke, Playing Rapunzel.

FilKONtario 19, April 3-5, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Heather Dale, Urban Tapestry, Gerry and Sandy Tyra, Rob Sawyer.

DFDF (Das Frühlingsfest der Filksmusik) 2009, May, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guests: Juliane Honisch, Katy Dröge.

ConCertino 2009, June 19-21, Worcester, Massachusetts. Guests: Bill and Gretchen Roper, Kathleen Sloan, Harold Stein, Brooke Lunderville, John Caspell**.

PondFilk IX, June 26-28, Victoria, British Columbia. Guest: Joey Shoji*.

HarmUni 4, July 31-August 2, Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge, England. Guest: Sibylle Machat.

FilkContinental 2009, October 9-11, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff.

ConChord 22, September 11-13, California. Guests: Carla Ulbrich, Joe Giacoio, Gary McGath.

OVFF 25, October 22-26, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Duane Elms, Dianna Gallagher*, Margaret Middleton, Larry Warner, Mary Ellen Wessels, Karen Anderson.

2010

GAFilk 12, January 8-10, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Alexander James Adams, Terence Chua, Andrew Ross, Ellen Kushner, Delia Sherman, Daniel and Melissa Glasser.

Van der Filk (UK filk con), February 5-7, Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. Guests: Michelle Dockrey, Tony Fabris, Gwen Knighton Raftery, Lastalda.

Conflikt 3, January 29-31, Renton, Washington. Guests: Tom Smith, October Country, Andrew Ross.

Consonance 2010, March 5-7, Newark, California. Guests: Tricky Pixie, Chris O'Shea, Judi Miller, Ju Honisch, Katy Dröge.

FilKONtario 20, April 9-11, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff, Erica Neely, William Mark Simmons.

DFDF 2010, June 11-13, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guests: Summer and Fall.

Conterpoint 2010, June 25-27, Rockville, Maryland. Guests: Ed Stauff, Mary Ellen Wessels, Juanita Coulson, Char MacKay, Jonathan and Debbie Baker*.

ManorCon 2010, August 13-15, Halsway Manor, Somerset, England.

FilkContinental 2010, October 8-10, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guest: Kathy Mar.

ConChord 23, Los Angeles area, California.

OVFF 26, October 22-24, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Urban Tapestry, Mitchell and T.J. Burnside Clapp, Kathleen Sloan, The Bedlam Bards, Tim Jennings.

2011

GAFilk 13, January 7-9, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Seanan McGuire, Matt Leger, Howard Scrimgeour, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Antithesis.

Cre2c3ndo (UK filk con), February 4-6, Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. Guests: Heather Dale, Ben Deschamps, Marilisa Valtazanou, Kamen.

Conflikt 4, January 28-30, Renton, Washington. Guests: Mary Crowell, Ben Newman, Mark Osier.

Consonance 2011, March 4-6, San Francisco area, California. Guests: Carla Ulbrich, Joe Giacoio,

Denise Gendron.

FilKONtario 21, April 1-3, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Wild Mercy, Karen Linsley, Ghost of a Rose.

DFDF 2011, May 27-29, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guest: Rika Körte.

Contata 6, July 1-3, Parsippany, NJ. Guests: Judi Miller, Tom Smith, Pavlov's Duck, Deb Wunder.

FilkContinental 2011, September 30-October 2, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Tim and Annie Walker, Ed Stauff, Mary Ellen Wessels.

OVFF 27, October 21-23, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff, Juanita Coulson, Tim Miller, Cindy Turner, 19 Action News, Nick and Linda Winks.

2012

GAFilk 14, January 6-9, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Michelle Dockrey, Tony Fabris, Scott Snyder, Shaya and Pug, Elise Matheson, Patrick Nielsen Hayden and the Deaf Tones.

Duple Time (UK filk con), February 3-5, Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. Guests: Mary Crowell, Lissa Allcock, Sebastian Kinder, Franklin Gunkelmann.

Conflikt 5, January 27-29, Seattle, Washington. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Riverfolk, Brooke Lunderville.

Consonance 2012, March 2-4, Newark, California. Guests: The Four Three Weird Sisters (Brenda Sutton, Gwen Knighton, Teresa Powell, Mary Crowell), Partners in K'Rhyme, Seanan McGuire, Brooke Lunderville.

FilKONtario 22, April 20-22, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Kathy Mar, Paul Estin, Steve and Dorothea Biernesser.

DFDF 2012, June 22-24, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guest: Silke Kovàr.

ConCertino 2012, June 29-July 1, Boxborough, Massachusetts. Guests: Playing Rapunzel, Partners in K'Rhyme, Peggi Warner-Lalonde, Ariel Cini.

Halsway Con Days, August 3-5, Somerset, UK.

FilkContinental 2012, September 28-30, Castle Freusburg, Germany. Guests: Tricky Pixie.

ConChord 24, October 5-7, San Diego, California. Guests: Heather Dale, Creede Lambard.

OVFF 28, October 26-28, Columbus, Ohio. Guests: Ju Honisch and Katy Dröge-Macdonald, Steve Macdonald, Bill Henley, The Blibbering Humdingers.

2013

GAFilk 15, January 11-13, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Sandy “Sam” Baardman, Susan Israel, George and Teresa Powell, Fianna, Larry Niven, Tim Griffin.

Conflikt 6, January 25-27, Seattle, Washington. Guests: Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff, Bob and Sue Esty, CD Woodbury.

Quarter Tone (UK filk con), February 1-3, Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. Guests: Cat Faber, Tom Nanson.

Consonance 2013, March 1-3, Milpitas, California. Guests: Rand Bellavia, Adam English, Luis Garcia, Merav Hoffman, Scott Snyder, “Downtown” Freddy Brown.

FilKONtario 23, April 19-21, 2013, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Tim and Annie Walker, Rand and Erin Bellavia, Katt McConnell.

DFDF 2013, June 14-16, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guests: Franklin Gunkelmann, Chris Conway.

Conterpoint 2013, June 21-23, Rockville, Maryland. Guests: Stone Dragons, Andrew Ross, Lissa Allcock, Jonathan and Debbie Baker.

ConChord 25, Los Angeles area, California.

OVFF 29, October 25-27, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: S. J. Tucker, Alexander James Adams, Roberta Slocumb, Joe Abbott, Betsy Tinney, Talis Kimberley.

2014

GAFilk 16, January 10-12, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Gwen Knighton Raftery, Cat Faber, Allegra Sloman, Brad Denton, Greg and Susan Csikos, Terence Chua.

Semibreve (UK filk con), February 7-9, Grantham, Lincolnshire, England. Guests: Deborah Crook, Puzzlebox.

Conflikt 7, January 24-26, Seattle Washington. Guests: Amy McNally, Tim Griffin, Sunnie Larsen.

Consonance 2014, March 7-9, San Jose, California. Guests: Kristoph Klover, Margaret Davis, Jonathan Turner, Robin Holly, Mark Osier, Rika Körte.

FilKONtario 24, April 25-27, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: S. J. Tucker, Gary Ehrlich, Piers Cawley.

DFDF 2014, May 16-18, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guests: Pavlov’s Duck.

Contata 7, June 20-22, Morristown, New Jersey. Guests: Amy McNally, David Perry, T. J. and Mitchell Burnside Clapp, Peter Alway, Sheryl Ehrlich.

FilkContinental 2014, October 3-5, Jugendherberge Wernigerode, Germany. Guests: Michelle Dockrey, Tony Fabris, Seanan McGuire.

OVFF 30, October 24-26, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Dave Clement, Stone Dragons, Howard Scrimgeour, Debs and Errol.

2015

GAFilk 17, January 9-11, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: S. J. Tucker, The Blibbering Humdingers, C. D. Woodbury, Robin Bailey, Marc Gunn.

Conflikt 8, January 30-February 1, Seattle, Washington. Guests: Cecilia Eng, Toyboat, Alexander James Adams.

Con27ilkin (UK filk con), February 6-8, Marks Tey, Colchester, Essex, UK. Guests: Graham Leathers, Becca Leathers, Clare Goodall.

Consonance 2015, March 6-8, Milpitas, California. Guests: Wild Mercy, Gary Hanak, Jim Mills, Jim Partridge.

FilKONtario 25, April 16-19, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Talis Kimberley, Kari Maaren, Heather Borean, Nicole Dieker.

DFDF 2015, June 5-7, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guest: Daniela Festi.

ConCertino 2015, June 19-21, Boxborough, Massachusetts. Guests: Summer and Fall, Rand Bellavia, Kari Maaren, Mark Mandel.

HalswayCon 2015, August 28-31, Halsway Manor, Somerset, UK.

FilkContinental 2015, October 2-4, Wernigerode, Germany. Guests: The Crooklets, Tim Griffin.

OVFF 31, October 23-25, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Heather Dale, Ben Deschamps, Trace Hagemann, Alexa Klettner, Margaret Davis, Kristoph Klover.

2016

GAFilk 18, January 8-10, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Michael Longcor, Judi Miller, Glen Raphael, Elizabeth Moon, Rand and Erin Bellavia.

Conflikt 9, Seattle, Washington. Guests: T. J. and Mitchell Burnside-Clapp, Jackie Mitchell, Dara Korra'ti.

Con2bil8 (UK filk con), February 5-7, Marks Tey, Colchester, Essex, UK. Guests: Piers Cawley, Tom Jeffers, Sue Jeffers.

Consonance 2016, March 4-6, ?, California. Guests: Cheshire Moon, Tim Griffin, Jela Schmidt, Kathleen Sloan.

FilKONtario 26, April 8-10, ??, Ontario. Guests: Cecilia Eng, Peggi Warner-Lalonde, Batya Wittenberg.

DFDF 2016, May 6-8, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guests: Kirstin and Volker Tanger.

Conterpoint 2016, July 1-3, Timonium, MD. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Callie Hills, Kip McMurray.

FilkContinental 2016, September 30-October 2, Wernigerode, Germany. Guests: Sally and Barry Childs-Helton.

OVFF 32, November 4-6, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Michelle Dockrey, Tony Fabris, Ed Chamberlain, Kay Shapero, Tim Griffin.

2017

GAFilk 19, January 6-8, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Kristoph Klover, Margaret Davis, Myra Hunter, Alex Bledsoe, Leslie Hudson.

Conflikt 10, January 27-29, Seattle, Washington. Guests: Judi Miller, Mark Peters, Michelle Dockrey, Tony Fabris.

Quoi de Neuf (UK filk con), February 3-5, Marks Tey, Colchester, Essex, UK. Guests: Cecilia Eng, Jackie Mitchell.

Consonance 2017, March 24-26, Milpitas, California. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Leslie Hudson, Deb Baudoin.

FilKONtario 27, April 21-23, Mississauga, Ontario. Guests: Mike Whitaker, Cat Faber, Shawna Jacques.

DFDF 2017, May 26-28, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guests: GeBORGt.

Contata 2017, June 23-25, Morristown, NJ. Guests: Bob Kanefsky, Mary Ellen Wessels, Jane Sibley, Angry Antz (Zornige Ameisen).

FilkContinental 2017, September 29-October 2, Wernigerode, Germany. Guests: Playing Rapunzel, Stone Dragons, W. Scott Snyder.

OVFF 33, October 20-22, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Seanan McGuire, Harold Feld, Mike Briggs, W. Randy Hoffman.

2018

GAFilk 20, January 5-7, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Joey Shoji, Cameron Webb, The Faithful Sidekicks, Catherynne M. Valente, Lauren Cox.

Conflikt 11, January 26-28, Seattle, Washington. Guests: Urban Tapestry, Brett Glass.

Enharmonicon (UK filk con), February 2-4, Marks Tey, Colchester, Essex, UK. Guests: The Crooklets, Betsy Tinney, Omega.

Consonance 2018, March 23-25, Milpitas, California. Guests: The Blibbering Humdingers, Summer Russell, Art Warneke, Heather Dale, Ben Deschamps.

FilKONtario 28, April 20-22, Brampton, Ontario. Guests: Leslie Hudson, Tim Griffin, Sabine Kinder, Michael Kinder.

DFDF 2018, May 11-13, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guests: Pair O' Dice.

ConCertino 2018, June 29-July 1, Dedham, Massachusetts. Guests: Cecilia Eng, Errol Elumir, Erwin Strauss, Gabrielle Gold.

OVFF 34, October 19-21, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Cheshire Moon, Rob Wynne, Harold Stein, Julia West, Wreck the System.

2019

GAFilk 21, January 11-13, Atlanta, Georgia. Guests: Carla Ulbrich, Joe Giacoio, Jared Walker, Catherynne M. Valente, S. J. Tucker.

Conflikt 12, January 25-27, Seattle, Washington. Guests: Leslie Hudson, Lauren Cox, PDX Broadsides.

31-ET (UK filk con), February 1-3, Marks Tey, Colchester, Essex, UK. Guests: Chantelle Smith, Cheshire Moon.

Consonance 2019, March 22-24, ?, California. Guests: Tomboat (Toyboat + Tom Smith), Vanessa Cardui.

FilKONtario 29, April 12-14, Markham, Ontario. Guests: Juanita Coulson, Margaret Davis, Kristoph Klover, Summer Russell.

DFDF 2019, May 30-June 2, Bad Salzdetfurth, Germany. Guests: Alexa Klettner, Bill and Gretchen Roper.

Intermezzo 2019, September 27-29, Wernigerode, Germany. Guests: Don Neill, Sebastian Kinder.

OVFF 35, October 19-21, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Playing Rapunzel, Teresa Gunderson, Dana Katz-Buchshtav, Rhiannon's Lark, Judith Hayman.

2020

GAFilk 22, January 10-12, Atlanta Georgia. Guests: Talis Kimberly, Lauren Cox, Susan Moerdyk, Phil and Kaja Foglio, Wreck the System.

Conflikt 13, January 24-26, Seattle, Washington. Guests: Cheshire Moon, Allegra Sloman, Daniela Festi.

Demi Semi Quaver, February 7-9, Marks Tey, Colchester, Essex, UK. Guests: Annie Griffith, Sunnie Larsen.

2021

FilkCONTinentaLight 2021, Wernigerode, Germany. No guests.

OVFF 37, October 29-31, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Misbehaving' Maidens, Via Bella, Dennis, Sharon, and Kaitlin Palmer, James Manffey, Familiar.

2022

Consonance 2022, March 25-27, Milpitas, CA. Guests: T. J. and Mitch Burnside Clapp, Karl-Johan Norén. Toastmistress: Lauren Cox.

DFDF 2022, April 29-May 1, Hanstedt (Nordheide), Germany.

FilKONtario-TLY ("The Lost Years"), August 12-14, Markham, Ontario. Guests: Stone Dragons, Vanessa Cardui, W. Randy Hoffman.

FilkContinental 2022, September 30-October 2, Wernigerode, Germany. Guests: T. J. and Mitch Burnside Clapp, Linda Melnick, Jean Stevenson.

OVFF 38, October 28-30, Worthington, Ohio. Guests: Beth Patterson, Tom Smith, Spencer Love, Fred Capp, Robin Baylor.

2023

GAFilk 23, January 6-8, Atlanta, GA. Guests: Heather Dale, Ben Deschamps, Erin Bellavia, Kim Fortuner.

Mill House Filk, February 3-5, Peterborough, England. A weekend housefilk at the Whitakers' that appears to have been retroactively named MillCon 1. Guest: Robert Beckwith.

Consonance 2023, March 31-April 2, Milpitas, California. Guests: Valerie Housden, John McDaid, Rhiannon's Lark (Alyssa Yeager).

DFDF 2023, May 18-21, Hanstedt (Nordheide), Germany. Guests: Bill and Brenda Sutton, Loewenthal.

MillCon 2: August 25-27, 2023. The sequel to Mill House Filk/MillCon 1. Guest: Edwin Brady.

Appendix D: Online filk events

Starting in 2020, most filk activity has been online. There had been online concerts long before that, but events with song circles and multiple participants were new, devised as a response to the pandemic. This appendix lists events consisting of multiple concerts and/or song circles. Concerts by one person or group aren't listed, since there have been too many of them for a manageable list.

Even listing each online circle would be tedious, so this appendix lists them by name or organizing group, with a summary of when and how often they have occurred. One-shot events, except where they filled in for ongoing conventions, aren't listed here.

The primary technology is Zoom except when otherwise noted.

Conflikt and GAFilk

The Conflikt filk convention held online conventions in 2021 and 2022. The convention wasn't held in any form in 2023, but the committee has announced an online convention for 2024. GAFilk hasn't held any online conventions on its own but combined with Conflikt in 2022.

(c)Onflikt 2021: January 29-31, 2021.

TRIFILKTA: January 28-30, 2022. A joint online convention comprising GAFilk, Conflikt, and Festival of the Living Rooms.

UK filk convention

Online UK filk conventions were held in 2021 and 2022. In 2023 a large house filk, "Mill House Filk," was held in lieu of a con.

Long (Distance) Play, February 5-7, 2021. This convention ran combined with Capricon, a Chicago-based science fiction convention, online. Hence the "long distance."

UK Filk Con 2022: February 5-6, 2022.

Consonance

In 2020 Consonance was cancelled on very short notice. The next year it was an online convention.

Nonsonance 2021: March 5-7, 2021.

Bleib auf der Couch

Translated as "stay on the couch," this springtime online German filk convention roughly corresponded very loosely to DFDE.

Bleib auf der Couch (I): March 28-29, 2020.

Bleib auf der Couch II: November 28-29 2020.

Bleib auf der Couch 3: March 20-21, 2021.

FilkOntari-NO (FilKONtario)

The online version of FilKONtario has been held on four occasions. The typography of the shortened name varies; it's FK-NO or FK_nO. Filk Hall of Fame inductions have happened each year. The association between FilKONtari-NO instances and FilKONtario numbers is unclear. The FilKONtario number has advanced on the website, but the second progress report for FilKONtario: The Lost Years expressed bewilderment on how the con should be numbered.

FilkOntari-NO 1: April 24-26, 2020. Also designated as FilKONtario 30. Guests: Stone Dragons, the Blibbering Humdingers, the PDX BroadSides.

FilkOntari-NO 2: April 9-11, 2021. Held in conjunction with the New York regional convention Heliosphere. Also designated as FilKONtario 31. Guests: Vanessa Cardui, W. Randy Hoffman, Eli Bar-Shalom.

FilkOntari-NO 3: April 1-3, 2022.

FilkOntari-NO 4: March 24-26, 2023.

NEWhere (NEFilk)

Plans had been under way to merge the three northeast filk conventions (ConCertino, Conterpoint, and Contata) into a single ongoing convention called NEFilk. This hasn't happened yet, but in 2020 the planned convention was replaced by an online convention called NEWhere (pronounced "anywhere," not "new here.") The committee took 2023 off.

NEWhere 2020: July 3-5, 2020. Guest of Honor: Gary Ehrlich.

NEWhere 2021: June 18-20, 2021. Guest of Honor: Dave Weingart.

NEWH3re: June 10-12, 2022. Guest of Honor: Astrisoni.

FilkCONtinenta

The fall German filk con held a small in-person event in 2021 as well as an online convention in the same month.

FilkC-ON-tinenta 2020: September 25-27, 2020.

FilkC-ON-tinenta 2021: November 26-28, 2021.

OVFF

The OVFF convention skipped only 2020 as an in-person convention. That year it was online:

NOVFF 2020: October 23-25, 2020.

Festival of the Living Rooms

This recurring weekend event has been held every two months from March 2020 through March 2022 and has been quarterly since then. The first one, organized by Blind Lemming Chiffon, was on March 20-22, 2020. The program runs from Friday through Sunday and has been heavy on concerts while including workshops, presentations, and song circles.

Filk Bytes

A Canada-oriented online filksing, associated with the United Filkers of Ontario and a Facebook group, Filk Bites held its first circle on May 9, 2020. Like all online filksings, it drew participants from everywhere. In early 2021 the name changed to Filk Bytes.

Friends of Filk

A nonprofit organization centered in Portland, Oregon, Friends of Filk predated the pandemic. It provided help in adding filk guests to cons in the Pacific Northwest. In late 2019 it shifted from this role to improving its Web presence and starting monthly filksings. They ran from November 2019 to March 2020. After the pandemic hit, the group followed the model of Festival of the Living Rooms, holding monthly online filksings. In October 2021 it started holding joint sessions with Filk Bytes, which quickly gained the name “Friends of Filk Bytes.” The combined sessions have included 24-hour New Year’s Eve marathons in 2020, 2021, and 2022.

MASSFILC

MASSFILC holds a meeting and filksing every month. Starting in March 2020, the large majority of them have been online using Zoom. They have been held on Saturday or Sunday evenings at 7 PM Eastern time, starting with a business meeting and continuing into open filk. One meeting was held jointly with Friends of Filk Bytes.

Eurofilk

Karl-Johann Norén started the first Eurofilk on April 30, 2020, and has hosted them since then. It’s held at 6 PM Central European Time on alternate Thursdays and has missed only a few dates. Some early experiments with Jitsi online conferencing didn’t turn out well, and since then the Eurofilks have used Zoom.