

<https://www.flyoverpeople.net/news/2009/09/22/tallgrass-express-string-band-2/>

Emporia Gazette Sept 22, 2009

"Flyover People" column - by Cheryl Unruh (see also cherylunruh.com)

Today's Flyover People column as seen in The Emporia Gazette:

Tallgrass Express String Band

September 22nd, 2009 at 9:16 am

TALLGRASS EXPRESS STRING BAND

THAT ANNIE WILSON, she can write some songs. If you want to understand life in the Flint Hills, then she's your gal.

Annie gets her inspiration when she pulls on her boots and steps out her back door onto the family ranch near Elmdale — where lyrics and melodies apparently fall from the clear, blue sky.



Living the life of a cowgirl (and English teacher), nothing in the natural world gets past Annie.

She has written a love song to tallgrass, "Big Bluestem: The King of the Prairie," and one to the prairie chicken (and the killdeer, meadowlark, red-tailed hawk...) in "Sail the Summer Sky." In "The Kaw Trail," she tells the tribe's story, "On westward we go toward the last buffalo... ."

I first met Annie seven or eight years ago at the Tallgrass Writing Workshop and for a short while we were part of a small writing group.

For five years, Annie Wilson has played American roots music in the **Tallgrass Express String Band** with Charlie Laughridge of Council Grove and Loren Ratzloff from Canton.

The Tallgrass Express String Band has plenty of strings. While Annie sticks with guitar; Charlie plays fiddle, mandolin, concertina and harmonica; Loren picks up the banjo, mandolin and dobro.

The band performs at events across the region, playing about once a week during the warm months. On September 12, Dave and I watched the band perform in Cottonwood Falls.

I had been anticipating an outdoor concert, and had pictured myself sitting in a folding chair on the brick street in front of the Emma Chase Café, as birds swirled overhead in the darkening sky. However, the clouds held unanswered questions, so the concert was moved inside the old city auditorium.



I sensed a strong camaraderie among the three musicians and heard it in the harmony of voices and instruments. The performance was a transfer of energy, each song a gift to the audience. During one piece, I glanced over my shoulder and saw that every face in the room had a smile.

They played a couple of Charlie Laughridge's instrumentals, "Coming Home from the Z-Bar," and "Scuffalong," as well as traditional tunes, and music by current artists.

As a lyrics hound, I'm taken by Annie's original songs. One of her beauties is "Clean Curve of Hill Against Sky." That title was inspired by Zula Bennington Greene's introduction to the "History of Chase County."

Annie begins that song with "As we hop on our ponies to climb up the hill / While the morning breeze sleeps and air is so still / We see up ahead in the early half light / That clean curve of hill against sky."

To introduce another tune, she said that various regions of the country have homesick songs and she thought there ought to be one about being homesick for the Flint Hills. So she wrote "The Moon Can Bring Me Home," which includes these lines:

"I remember how the sun sets on the prairie / As the coyotes sing the evening hills to sleep / And the meadowlark's sweet cry seems to linger in the sky / And the moonlight gives the Earth a silver sheen."

The song takes us through the seasons in the Flint Hills and we, too, understand the longing we would feel if we were far from home.

After the concert, I asked Annie where she writes — indoors or out.

"I write them when I'm walking my dog," she said. "It's the rhythm. With walking you can do 3/4 time or 4/4."

"It's a little obsession right now in my life," Annie grinned. "I've written 20 more songs — and I have all these ideas — but we just can't play them all.

"These guys are great," she said, nodding toward Loren and Charlie. "And they're very supportive."

This band is the real deal; their music rises from the land they love.

It's a joy to hear Loren and Charlie stir up the strings. Add Annie's songs about horses and coyotes, sunsets, green pastures and still morning air, and, well, we just can't help but fall in love with the Flint Hills — all over again.

Copyright 2009 ~ Cheryl Unruh

[Listen to music by the Tallgrass Express String Band.](#)