

Back to the stage | Mountain Xpress | Asheville, NC

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By **Margaret Marchuk** on **03/15/2011 07:01 PM**

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It's been more than a decade since local band Braidstream has performed a concert in a public venue. The first time I saw them was during Asheville's New Year's Eve First Night celebration in 1999, where they played to and mesmerized a standing-room-only audience at the Basilica of Saint Lawrence. On March 20, the group is back to take the stage at the Masonic Temple in celebration of the spring equinox.

Braidstream's backstory begins more than 25 years ago, when Rita Hayes, flutist, vocalist and hammered dulcimer player, performed some music at her brother's wedding with Jeff Johnson, guitarist and sitar player.

As Hayes tells it, "Months later, after the wedding, we heard the music tape and agreed we sounded pretty good. We thought maybe we could play some gigs." They formed a band, and have been playing ever since, everywhere from private parties to The Biltmore Estate to regional festivals.

The band's name was actually conceived a decade before the group existed. A friend dubbed their sound braidstream back in 1976, Hayes says. "I was being an Earth Mama living in a cabin off the grid on top of a mountain," she says. "Jeff would come to visit and we would sit on the front porch and play duets. One day, a friend who was visiting left and could hear our music as he walked down the mountain along a stream."

Lulled by the music of the flutes mixing and mingling with the sound of the flowing water, the word "braidstream" came to him. Hayes and Johnson liked the word. For them the term represented the confluence of musical energies, the mix of sound and the spirit.

That mix will be part of the musical repertoire for the spring equinox performance, Hayes says. She describes the program as "World music — a bit of Celtic, Asian, some Middle Eastern." Like the occasion it celebrates, Braidstream's intention is to capture the essence of the return of light and warmth and bring it to the audience.

The current core formation of Braidstream consists of Hayes and Johnson, both classically trained with a jazz background, joined by Paul GhostHorse on cello and harpist Judy Wolter-Bailey. Hayes, who has been playing in the Asheville Symphony Orchestra for nearly 20 years, met GhostHorse when he became an orchestra member. He joined Braidstream in 1998. Along with his classical pedigree, GhostHorse brings a confluence of Native American sounds and teachings, picked up through travels with his Native American elder father who lectured on the university circuit.

Bailey, an award-winning harpist who has been perfecting her talent since she was 9 years old, discovered Braidstream more than 15 years ago when she was touring the Biltmore House where the musicians were playing. She loved their sound, and thought it would be nice to play with them. When the opportunity arose six years ago, she joined. She also continues to perform as the principle harpist of the Hendersonville Symphony Orchestra and the Blue Ridge Harp Ensemble.

Well-known percussionist River Guerguerian, Canadian born (of Armenian-Egyptian extraction) often joins Braidstream on gigs. He will add his magical beat to the equinox performance.

Accomplished keyboardist Daniel Barber also joins Braidstream's March concert. A percussionist as well, Barber is known for helping to facilitate the famous downtown Asheville Friday night drum circle.

What advice would veteran musician Hayes offer to other local artists considering music as their life's work?

"Do what you love to do," she says. "Don't worry about chasing public taste — who knows whatever that is. Stay with the integrity of what you want to bring forth; what satisfies your soul. If you feel good about what you are doing, then the audience is going to respond."

— *Margaret Marchuk can be reached at mmarchuk@me.com.*

who: Braidstream

what: Spring equinox celebration

where: Masonic Temple, 80 Broadway St., downtown Asheville

when: Sunday, March 20 (3 p.m. \$10 general admission. braidstream.com)

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