

Jeff Davidson – WMA CD

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

It's a debut. Not exactly with red carpet, spotlights, and paparazzi, but it is a debut. In this case, it is a debut of a CD featuring western artists from across Kansas and beyond. This is a new project of the Kansas Chapter of the Western Music Association. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Jeff Davidson is President of the Kansas Chapter of the Western Music Association or WMA. Jeff is a long-time extension agent who is now a watershed specialist in southeast Kansas. He is also a talented singer and guitar player who is an expert on Kansas and western history.

In January 2011, Jeff agreed to serve as President of the Kansas Chapter of WMA. The WMA is an organization of performers and fans of western music and cowboy poetry. The Kansas chapter was meeting to discuss various ways to promote this particular genre of musical performance. One of the ideas which surfaced was for the Kansas chapter to produce a CD which would include a compilation of samples of work, primarily songs, produced by its members.

“It seemed like a good idea, but I wasn’t sure just how we would get it done,” Jeff Davidson said. “Then when (WMA member) Jim Farrell volunteered to do it, that’s what made it work.”

Jim Farrell is a long-time performer and producer in the western music industry. He is a member of the award-winning group, the Diamond W Wranglers. Jim also operates his own recording studio in the rural community of Towanda, Kansas.

So the Kansas WMA invited each of its members to submit the best of their western songs or cowboy poems for use on the CD. Jim Farrell recorded and produced it. WMA member, western musician and radio personality Orin Friesen added brief narrative tracks among the music and poetry to give a little history or background information about the music and the performers.

The result is a “double barreled CD set” called Kansas Cowboy. It includes 29 tracks with 20 artists or groups performing music and poetry, most of which was penned by the artists themselves. Several of the tracks have never before been recorded.

The 20 performers are all members of the Kansas chapter of the Western Music Association. For purposes of full disclosure: Those members include me.

“Featured performers are from all corners of the state, from Dodge City to Kansas City and from Medicine Lodge to Manhattan, representing ages from early 20’s to mid 80s,” said Roger Ringer, Kansas WMA Vice-President. “While all of the songs are of the western genre, there is as much diversity found in the music as you will find in the varied landscape of Kansas. This is just the thing to get 2014 started off with a song in your heart,” Roger said.

Performers come from as far away as Colorado, Louisiana, and Arizona but mostly from Kansas in both urban and rural communities. These include Topeka, Kansas City and Wichita, plus rural communities such as Eureka, population 2940; Medicine Lodge, population 2126; Humboldt, population 1964; Benton, population 821; Alma, population 785, and Elmdale, population 55 people. Now, that’s rural.

“It’s a good project,” Jeff Davidson said. “This is a way to strengthen our membership and bring us together.” Participating artists are donating their work, and proceeds from the sale of the CD go to the chapter.

The release of the CD is being celebrated with a debut event on Sunday, January 19, 2014 at 3:30 p.m. at the Emma Chase Music Hall in Cottonwood Falls. The public is invited to attend at no charge, although RSVPs are requested at 620-273-6020. The debut will include live performances, refreshments, and opportunities to visit with the entertainers featured on the CD. For more information or to order the CD, go to www.kansaswma.com.

It's a debut. No, not with red carpet and Hollywood paparazzi, this is a debut of a CD of Kansas western entertainment produced right here in Kansas. We commend Jeff Davidson, Jim Farrell, Roger Ringer and all those involved for making a difference by sharing this western entertainment. For Kansas western music, this should be a debut to remember.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.