

2015 Posthumous Award—Warren Argo

The late Warren Argo, a much-beloved Seattle old-time musician who worked with the Northwest Folklife Festival, Centrum's Festival of Fiddle Tunes, and the Seattle Folklore Society, will be honored this fall by the Country Dance and Song Society. He died in 2010 and will be the recipient of CDSS's first Posthumous Lifetime Contribution Award (see <http://www.cdss.org/lifetime-contribution-award.html> for more info). The article below is adapted from a tribute written by fellow musician and Seattleite Mike Richardson shortly after Warren's death.

Warren Argo (1942-2010) cast a long shadow over the Northwest and national folk scene for several decades. I've personally run into him staffing the Northwest Folklife Festival, Wannadance, the NW New Year's Camp, the Lady of the Lake Camp, the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes, the Alaska Folk Festival, and several of CDSS's Pinewoods camps. That's a lot of landscape that will seem a lot emptier without Warren around.

A tune played at a dance shortly after his death was Argo's Reel, by Bob McQuillen. Bob's inscription for that tune sums up a lot about Warren: "Warren Argo, sound man, caller, musician, indefatigable spark plug of the West Coast music and dance scene, is a great friend of the entire contradance community. I am so glad this tune came through with your name on it, Warren!"

Warren was trained as an engineer, but no mere job description can adequately describe a man of such protean interests. A conversation with him might ramble through topics as diverse as quantum mechanics, Malthusian genetics, or the care and feeding of a skin banjo head. You could often get a clue as what he was reading and what was buzzing in his brain by the snippets of speech that would pop up in his dance calling.

In Warren-speak, a long lines forward and back became, "Smash, Bash, Crash, Bang!" A partner swing might be signaled by "Swing, you devils!" and one particular dance move was taught at Folklife by, "...the ladies now wander down the center of the set, like an errant photon...". Other tasty Warrenisms can be gleaned from "So What Is It About This Contra Dancing Anyway?" (www.tacomacntradance.org/ArgoVictoryReview.pdf), an article he wrote for the May 2002 issue of Victory Music Review.

I first met Warren in 1985, during the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes, in Port Townsend, WA. I had recently moved to the Upper North Left, after wrapping up a zillion years of medical training. Fiddle Tunes was a Technicolor orgy of music, dance, late night jams, and bear hugs—lots different from the tight-sphinctered academic world I had just left. At the end of the week, just as we were all getting a little blue at the thought of leaving, these little flyers started popping up that said, "Have a good time at Fiddle Tunes this week?" Yeah, I sure did! "If so, come to the New Melody Tavern Monday night for Warren Argo and the Dregs of Fiddle Tunes, for one more night!" Wow, what a great idea! So, my wife and I showed up at the dance, where, as advertised, Warren and all of the other folks who couldn't quite give up Brigadoon back into the mists carried on for several more hours of goodness.

At the end of the evening, I went up to Warren and gushed, "Gosh, Warren. It was awesome having one more night of Fiddle Tunes. Wouldn't it be great if everyday were like Fiddle Tunes?" His answer: "Yes, it would. You know, Mike, personally, I'm up to about three or four days a week!"

A fine philosophy, and one that I've spent the last twenty-five years trying to emulate.

A celebration of Warren Argo will be held on October 10, 2015 at Littlefield Farm, Arlington, Washington, afternoon into the evening; Sandy Bradley will be emcee. For information, please contact Thelma Leuba at leuba@comcast.net. Our thanks to Mike Richardson for allowing us to reprint his 2010 tribute to Warren.



(photo courtesy Thelma Leuba)