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Dwight Lamb: Passing It Down

A 30-Minute Public Television Documentary of Music, Dance and Story

Among Danish folk music enthusiasts, the story is legion.

Ten years ago, visiting Danish folk musicians at a small music festival in Minnesota, USA find an older man from Iowa playing on his simple accordion old tunes of unmistakable Danish origin but, as it turns out, which are unknown in Denmark. This meeting sets into motion a whirl of musical and genealogical research that results in old time fiddler and accordionist Dwight Lamb confirming his ancestral cultural pedigree – yes, he’s playing tunes heard from his father and grandfather, his being “discovered” by the Danish folk music community, collaborations with Danish musicians on CDs and performing tours in both Europe and America, and the repatriation of “lost” tunes that had gone extinct where they originated.

The story of Dwight and his music is both specific to the history of Danish-American immigration and dispersion, and general to the beauty, pain and ironies of many colliding cultures, and to the universal hungers for enjoyment, romance, meaning, and community continuity and cohesion. It is a story of how something both powerful and fragile might be kept alive.

Dwight Lamb was born in Moorhead, IA, on May 16, 1934 to Clarence G. and Mary Lamb. Descendants of Danish immigrants, the Lamb family cherished the traditions of home self-made music and entertainment. Dwight's grandfather, Chris Jerup, played traditional Danish melodies and American-style fiddle tunes on a single-row button accordion. His father, Clarence Lamb, played the fiddle. Dwight took to both instruments and mastered them. Dwight plays left handed – opposite to how violins are usually played – in a style of fiddling referred to as Missouri Valley Style. Also called "North Missouri Hornpipe Style," this manner of playing and repertoire of tunes is both melodically complex and technically demanding.

However, as Danish folk music researchers with trained ears assert and genealogical research confirms, while some of the tunes Dwight plays may have English names – with their syncopated beats, drones, double stops and ornamentation – they sound

like unmistakable Danish polkas, waltzes and “svøpsk” threesome dances from very specific geographies in Denmark.

In old Denmark, the fiddler had a central role in small town life, often being called upon to play house parties, wedding marches and funeral dirges. On both sides of the Atlantic, impromptu gatherings are still where the best music often happens. But now where are the villages where communal music, song and dance provide a center for belonging, enjoyment, meaning making, grieving, celebration, romance and courtship? Contemporary scientific research confirms the value of these activities to promote physical, emotional and social health.

In *Passing It Down*, we go looking for these villages of music, song and dance that may temporarily appear, and plumb the value they may have for us. We explore Dwight's musical life and heritage, how he learned from his father, grandfather and other fiddler mentors. We explore the musical lives of his younger protégés Amber Gaddy and Dave Cavins of Colombia, MO, Nate Kemperman from Ames, IA and Bill Peterson from Canton, SD, to whom Dwight is passing down his legacy. We see reunion, mirth and rebirth in Denmark.

In May 2017, we travel with Dwight and Bill Peterson as they travel once more to meet and enthrall audiences in Denmark. Dwight says it's his last trip. There, they will travel and play at venues large and small with Danish fiddler Kristian Bugge and accordionist Mette Katharine Jensen, whose meeting with Dwight in Minnesota started this whole thing.

Dwight is retired from the U. S. Postal Service in Onawa, IA and also served as the town's mayor. He has judged major fiddler competitions such as Cotton, MN, The Missouri State Fair Fiddling Championship and the National Fiddling Championship at Weiser, Idaho. He competed and placed in this event in 1966 and 1967. In 1968 he judged served as a judge. He has taught fiddle playing at the Bethel Youth Fiddle Camp in Missouri and Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend, WA. He has performed at the Smithsonian's Festival of American Folklife and The University of Chicago Folk Festival. In 1998 he received the Iowa Arts Award for his work in preserving traditional fiddling. He is very active in fiddling and enjoys playing tunes with friends and sharing his music with aspiring players interested in learning his style of music.

Music, dance, personal stories, old photos, community art making, enjoyment, connection, heritage and belonging. Joys, humor and poignant grief. Something powerful and precious passed down from generation to generation. Don't miss the party!

Journalist and filmmaker Cristopher Anderson received national awards for his PBS documentary with John de Graaf and KCTS/Seattle, *Visible Target*, and is associated with the documentaries, *Building a Dream* (scriptwriter) and the award-winning *Journeyman* (story consultant). He plays folk fiddle on the American Swedish Institute Spelmanslag CD, *Love is Hard to Hide*, and at local Minneapolis dances. He serves as a Teaching Artist with Kairos Alive!, whose work was featured in the PBS documentary, *Arts and the Mind*. He is currently in production on a video documentary portrait of the Norwegian-American folk fiddler Jeff Anderson.



Join the Music:

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