

## ARTICLE



### SESSIONS - HOOT STYLE

by Bob Nelson

We recently participated in an amazing [hoot](#). It was our annual get-a-away to a gorgeous [B&B at Skamokawa](#), Washington. This was the fifth year when a bunch of us Seattle folkies come down and take over the facility for music, food and good times. Each year seems to surpass the previous gatherings.

In addition to the ten of us that traveled south, another fifteen local musicians that live in the Willipa Hills joined us. These gatherings have become much anticipated, and by mid afternoon the locals began arriving with baskets of food, drink and many instruments. The music started at three in the afternoon.

As usual, the musicians formed a circle and we started singing “round robin style.” Once a singer finished a song, the person next to him or her started their song. It’s become something of a usual and accepted routine. But as opposed to past habits, this year I suggested that we abandon that boring style and instead we start singing more spontaneously. It’s the way hoots were held when I cut my teeth in folk music in Seattle in the early 1950’s.

The “hoot style” is where anyone can jump in with a song, a poem, a story, or any other contribution as they please. You need not be governed by the “it’s not your turn” rule. Whenever this happens, I’ve always noticed that it leads to a much more interesting exchange. I saw, and heard, some amazing material. There was an easy and comfortable flow between everyone in the room. I was enthralled as a fellow sang a version of “Cotton Eyed Joe” that he learned as a youngster in the hills of Kentucky. Then, from across the circle, another person sang one verse of the same song, ballad style. The same song sung two different ways. That led to a discussion of the folk process. When you know a song only one way, to hear other versions can be illuminating. If the person who sang the second version had had to wait until his turn arrived, he probably would have forgotten his very interesting contribution.

Later in the evening, one of the musicians played a very moving voice and fiddle piece in Yiddish. This was quickly followed, again from “out of the circle”, by a voice, cello and ukulele offering from Bosnia. Next came, from across the room, a song from Finland,

Then came a contribution from Guatemala. After we had sated ourselves with songs in other languages, we got into duets and trio songs. It was all very spontaneous and exciting stuff.

Sometimes it's good to break out of the box. This wonderful day and evening of music certainly stretched our imaginations. This was one hoot we'll remember for many years.

[Bob Nelson](#)