

Wisconsin Public Radio “Simply Folk”: Celebrates 40 years with statewide singalong

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About Wisconsin Public Radio

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Madison, Wis. – Folks from across the state will gather around their radios Jan. 6 with family and friends for what has become an annual tradition, the “Simply Folk” singalong. Tune in for three hours of great music beginning at 5 p.m. and celebrate the program’s 40 th anniversary. The “Simply Folk” staff has made the lyrics to all the singalong songs available at wpr.org/simplyfolk. “‘Simply Folk’ began on the first Sunday of 1979 and we’ve been honoring that date every year with the singalong,” said host Dan Robinson. “We’ll be celebrating with prizes, music from our archives and the ‘Simply Folk’ house band.”

The program’s first hosts, Tom Martin-Erickson and Becca Pulliam, turned on the microphone on Jan. 7, 1979, and featured recordings made at the 1978 Great River Folk Festival in La Crosse. In addition to drawing from the program’s extensive folk music library, “Simply Folk” continues to showcase recordings from numerous Wisconsin folk festivals, house concerts and in-studio performances. “That’s one of

the things that makes the program a favorite for listeners,” said Michael Arnold, WPR’s chief operating officer. “It’s exciting to be able to highlight our state’s rich folk music heritage through ‘Simply Folk’”.

“Simply Folk” was later co-hosted by Martin-Erickson and Judy Rose, with Rose eventually assuming solo hosting duties following Martin-Erickson’s retirement. In 2011 Stephanie Elkins became host, with Robinson succeeding her in 2016. Jeff Durkee and Sile Shigley also serve as occasional hosts.

For Robinson, folk music is about bringing people together, promoting participation, and just having a great time playing and listening. That’s the power of folk music, whether it’s friends sitting around a fire singing songs that have been around for hundreds of years, or a concert by a new folk band, the music creates a bond. That’s really the legacy of “Simply Folk.”