



THE EUPHORIA STRINGBAND was off and running Saturday night at The Gateway, courtesy of the Oberlin Arts and Humanities Commission. The five-member band played a sunny mix of country, bluegrass, blues and ragtime.

Stringband brings swing to The Gateway

The Euphoria StringBand was a perfect contrast to the cold, dark, rainy weather outside Saturday, making the 40 or so people inside of the Morgan Theater at The Gateway feel positively sunny.

"We're going to be playing some good 'ol music from way back when," said Dick Powers, also known as Asa Diamonds, who played the guitar and spoons with the five-member group.

The others included Reva Friedman on stand-up bass, Pat Dickey on fiddle, mandolin and bodhran; and Pete Gilbreath on banjo and harmonica. All took turns singing.

The concert was going out live on KFNH Radio, but that didn't seem to fluster them at all. The group bantered between songs, cracking corny jokes to one another the whole time. They seemed delighted to be performing out West, kicking the evening off with a song called "Way Out in Kansas."

The music included jaunty, happy tunes reminiscent about good times on the band wagon, headed out to new frontiers. While the lyrics sometimes could be darker, the tunes were usually upbeat, and even with somber subjects,

everything usually came out OK in the end.

The second song was a perfect example: "I wish I'd bought myself half a pint and stayed in the wagon yard," intoned Mr. Dickey, who sang mournfully despite the cheery chorus.

The event was put on by the Oberlin Arts and Humanities Commission and introduced by board member Mary Henzel, who said the band has been playing together since 1987. One member, Ms. Basgall, had her mother, Elenor Karls Basgall, in the audience. Eleanor grew up in Selden, and now lives in Lawrence, but came back to her hometown to catch the special performance.

Each member wore a hat that seemed to reflect his or her personality, if only subtly. The violinist, Ms. Basgall, cute and small, had a similar bowler hat. The other woman wore a black hat that matched her curly hair, and the men each wore a version of the cowboy hat, well-worn yet well taken care of.

Every song had a chorus where everyone sang, even the audience sometimes, making it feel more like a Dust-Bowl era campfire sing-along.

"Got any fans of jug-band music out there?"

Mr. Powers asked at one point. "Well, we came from Memphis, and we're going to do a little jug-band mixture of blues and jazz."

It was a slow tune, the kind you like to whistle while you walk around the land with your old dog.

Miss Basgall played her fiddle so fluidly that the notes seemed to pour off her bow. She raised her eyebrows, eyes closed in the moment, shaking her hips and fingering the fiddle.

And so the evening continued. There's something about somber subjects approached with major keys and music you can dance to—it seems to melt the sharp edges, to make it just a little softer for the swallowing.

And it seemed right that such a band should come here on a night when it rained. The beautiful, life-giving rain that the county has finally been blessed with allowed the land to heave a collective sigh. To hear this Dust Bowl-era music cheering us on, though the times again could be tough, was perfect.

Sometimes all you need is some good music, the group seemed to remind us, to remember that everything will be OK in the end.



MOST OF THE SONGS were sung by stand-up bassist Reva Friedman, often accompanied by guitarist Dick Powers. The whole group took turns at the microphone, however, relishing their moments in the spotlight.



THROUGHOUT THE PERFORMANCE, all of the musicians joked and played, including Dick Powers (right photo), who was clearly no stranger to the limelight. The choice for most impressive person on stage was hard, but multi-instrumentalist Pat Dickey (above photo, left) came close, playing fiddle, mandolin, banjo and ukulele. Richelle Basgall, the youngest member of the group, mostly played fiddle, but did it with such charming gusto that it was hard to keep your eyes off her.



Photos and story by Stephanie DeCamp