

# Chicago Tribune

## Concert series takes off at the Merion in Evanston

By **Lilli Kuzma**

Pioneer Press

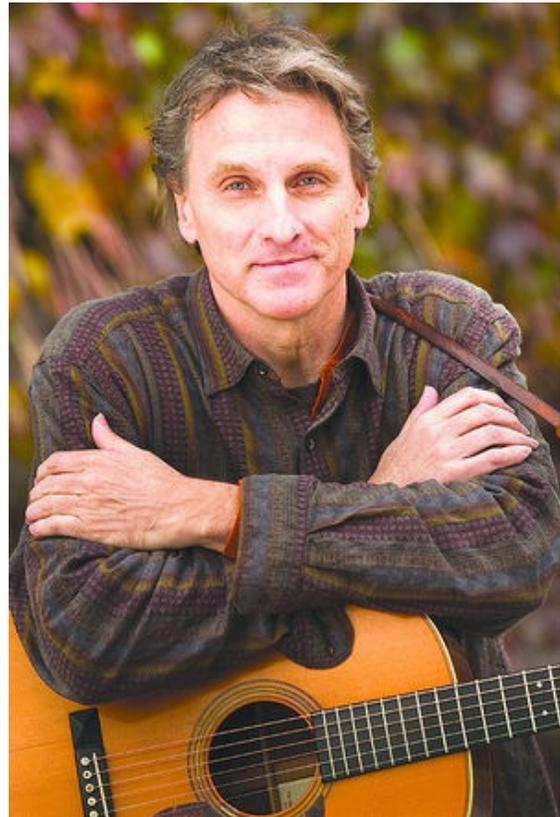
MARCH 11, 2016

Evanston is home to a newer venue, one that is sparkling with excellent music. The Crystal Lounge at The Merion, 1611 Chicago Ave., Evanston, is multi-faceted in its entertainment, presenting a range of live performances, known as the Acoustic Sound Musical Series, three times weekly. Music lovers are appreciating the Thursday night concerts curated by Evanston resident, Nan Anderson.

The Merion, formerly called the North Shore Hotel, is a retirement community, but the public is welcome to attend the events. The lounge area offers comfortable seating and tables, and people can buy food, coffee or drinks. There is no cover charge for the live music.

"We encourage people to tip the artists generously," said Anderson, whose involvement in the series began with her speaking skills. She also has a background in social work and is involved with the Association on Aging.

"The series was actually started by an organization and the hotel, and they asked if I would do the emceeing," she said. "Then the organization dropped out, and I decided to take it over. You could say that I took it over before it got started. I am delighted to be doing this and am having a ball."



Folk artist Mark Dvorak has become a popular favorite at the Acoustic Sound Musical Series at The Merion in Evanston. (Eric Young Smith)

Anderson's early bookings involved musicians she was already familiar with, and also emerging acts. But she has found that established artists are very interested in playing at The Merion, and she is hoping to book touring acts passing through Chicago, while continuing to support the local music scene.

The upcoming lineup of musicians includes Jamie O'Reilly on March 10, Al Day and Bob Long on April 14, Donna Herula and Tony Nardiello on May 12, Jim and Vivian Craig June 9, and Andina and Rich July 14.

One of the Chicago area's most established and renowned folk artists, Mark Dvorak, has become a favorite at The Merion.

"One of the interesting outcomes has been that Mark (Dvorak) was so appreciated by the residents, they went out into the lobby and waited for Margaret, who is the manager, to tell her that they wanted him back," Anderson said. "Dvorak is now performing monthly."

Anderson went on to describe how the Thursday concerts typically evolve as the night goes on, influenced by the different ages in the audience, and the arrival of walk-ins who come for the music.

"This is a unique venue, because it is within a retirement community. The residents come down for dinner generally at around 5:30, and we do play a CD of the person who is going to be on that night from 5:30 to 6:30. Then, from around 6:30 to 7:30, the residents are still there, and some may tend to be a little talkative. Initially, it wasn't really a 'listening room', but increasingly it is, as the residents tend to leave about half-way through. The second set turns into a listening one, as other people will come in about that time. So it's a two audience kind of situation with some overlap."

"The multiple and overlapping audiences make this a very unique venue," said Anderson.

She is intent on enhancing the series with a variety of bookings.

"The Thursday series is still a work in progress," said Anderson. "I'm planning on presenting more diversity in both the music and in the players."

Anderson's efforts are warmly acknowledged by the music community. Singer-songwriter Amy Dixon-Kolar has performed at The Merion, and had this to say:

"Nan Anderson is lovely to work with, and she makes sure that it's as comfortable as possible for the performer. She's such an enthusiastic host and is doing her best to bring in quality music for people who live at the Merion, as well as for the larger community."

Anderson's interest in music has been life-long.

"I go way back in music, starting with a classical background," she said. "Then I found folk music with everyone else in the '60s and '70s. About 10 years ago I got re-interested,

hung out at (former Evanston venue) Bill's Blues a lot, emceed there, have gone to a lot of folk concerts, folk festivals, and house concerts, and have kind of put it all together."

Some of Anderson's personal favorites include Joan Baez, Dar Williams, Tim Grimm, Edie Carey and Cheryl Wheeler, along with a long list of Chicago-based artists.

Anderson loves the old folk songs, but made it clear her interest goes beyond music from "the day."

"I have not gotten tired (of the older folk songs), but I am thrilled to be part of something newer at the same time."

For more information on the Thursday concerts at The Merion, contact Nan Anderson at [nan1anderson@aol.com](mailto:nan1anderson@aol.com).

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