



## ***The Holidays Were Made For Jug-Band Music***

by Will Rhys, Education Director

*Twang, bwong, buzz, brrrack, ooom-oom-oom, plink and plunk* are just a few of the infectious sounds of a classic jug band. The cigar box banjo, washtub bass, kazoo, nimble-thimble fingers on a washboard and, of course, the ceramic moonshine liquor jug (the “poor man’s tuba”) all produce a distinctly American sound that sets toes to tapping and brings smiles to faces. It’s a sound that had its beginnings around the turn of the century when African-American musicians in Louisville played tunes on “found” or homemade instruments. The sound developed and spread up and down the Mississippi.

Perhaps it’s that river connection that made Emmet Otter and his friends in Frogtown Hollow, the setting for our show, so partial to the jug band sound, so partial, in fact, that Emmet was willing to sacrifice a very important piece of household equipment to create that sound. But, that’s getting ahead of the story....

The Goodspeed Opera House and the river that runs by it do have a connection with Emmet and his jug-band. *Emmet Otter’s Jug-Band Christmas*, adapted from the children’s book of the same name, was originally directed by Jim Henson in a television Christmas special that used his magical puppets to tell the story. Director and choreographer Christopher Gattelli was always of the firm belief that this beautiful holiday story would be ideal for combining the famous Henson puppets with live actors and orchestra. Having worked here at Goodspeed on several projects in the past, Chris also felt that our home here on the river would be just the place to work on such a project, because the story takes place in the woods, on a river, with an Opera House and a Riverside Rest. “Goodspeed audiences know this place,” Chris has said, “and they’ll be surrounded by the atmosphere of Frogtown Hollow before they even walk in the doors of the theatre.” We agreed with this and were delighted and eager to collaborate with him on this world premiere production.

Working with Chris in this collaboration is co-book writer Tim McDonald and Paul Williams, who wrote the music and lyrics for the 1977 Henson TV special. Williams returns with all the original music as well as incredible additions written just for our production. Director Gattelli notes that Williams’ score “ranges from Country, to Bluegrass, to Rock, to Vaudeville, even Gospel, and every song [will] stay with you long after the curtain has dropped.”

And, then, of course, there is the Jim Henson Company.

Under the direction of Jim Henson’s son Brian, The Jim Henson Company has been an integral part of the production process. Brian has gathered a team of extraordinary puppet creators and craftspeople to bring the Henson wit, whimsy, warmth and brilliance to the Opera House stage. Puppets created especially for this production will share the stage with actors eagerly plunging into the work required to develop this musical and make it as special as the television broadcast that director Gattelli and so many of the actors in the cast (and perhaps you as well) remember with great fondness.

Over the years, Goodspeed Musicals has managed to explore a wide range of musical styles. We’ve re-thought, re-imagined and re-worked the old and beloved. We’ve committed ourselves, as well, to the creation of new works that will enrich and nourish the world of musical theatre and, we sincerely hope, provide more than just a modicum of pleasure to those who support and participate in our efforts. This is one of those moments. So sit back and welcome to Frogtown Hollow, where love and family and the hope of the holiday period take the chill off a frozen river, where the sounds of the season bring an infectious boost to the spirit, and where Emmet Otter and his friends make a little bit of magic right before your eyes. Welcome to the *oom-oom-oom* of the jug, the *buzzing hum* of the kazoo. And welcome to our home on the river. We’re glad you’re here to unwrap this present with us.

Happy Holidays!