

Jackson Pines revive the “Unquiet Grave” ——— By Pat Johnson

The Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission celebrates the stories of the county and works to preserve them. Part of that has been recognizing and recording the talents of folk artists like Valerie Vaughn, ‘New Jersey’s Troubadour’ and now, Jackson Pines, a group deeply interested in resurrecting the music of the Pine Barrens, has been recorded. Joe Macoviecki and James Black created Jackson Pines in 2016. They perform folk and original music locally and around the country.



Jackson Pines performing. Photo credit: Ocean County.

Recently the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission sponsored the production of Jackson Pines performing “The Unquiet Grave.” Brendan Walsh of Oak Leaf Productions produced the video.

The “Unquiet Grave” tells the tale of a heartbroken suitor of a maiden who has died and although he has mourned her as custom declared, for a year and a day—he can’t stop wishing for a kiss from her “cold, clay lips.”

His pining over the ghost of love awakens the maiden’s spirit to complain that he’s keeping her from eternal rest. She tells him to get back to life, “Until God calls you away.”

The Child Ballads are 305 traditional folk songs collected with multiple variations by Harvard scholar Francis James Child (1825-1869) in English and Scottish Ballads, 1882-1898. These ballads preserve centuries-old stories of love, loss, and folklore. Inspired by the fieldwork of the Lomaxes, folklorist Herbert Halpert obtained a WPA New Deal grant in 1938 to record folk songs passed down by oral tradition. He recorded extensively in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, mostly in Ocean County. These recording included many Child Ballads that had survived

almost unchanged since immigrants first brought them across the Atlantic hundreds of years before. Although commonly remembered in England and Ireland, “The Unquiet Grave” (Child ballad #78) has only been found in North America in Newfoundland, Kentucky, and finally in Collier’s Mills, Ocean County.

“A lot of people think these kinds of ballads were only sung in the Appalachians but we found that people were singing them in New Jersey all the time,” said Macoviecki, who picked “The Unquiet Grave” for the video. “What we learned is that there was this student in Columbia University, Herbert Alpert, that got a grant from the WPA (Works Project Administration) and in 1937 and 38, he recorded musicians in the Pine Barrens of Burlington and Ocean Counties. In 1938 he recorded Alan Clevinger who lived on Magnolia Road in Burlington singing, “The Unquiet Grave.”

“There were other songs that figure in New Jersey,” said Macoviecki, “There’s a song, “Come all you Lakehurst Rummies,” played during Temperance times, and “This Colliers Mills is a Fine Place.” One of

the group's favorites is "Mt. Holly Jail," originally recorded in 1936 and sung by Oliver Minny, a musician of Lenape and African American descent. Macoviecki gives much credence and gratitude to the Pinelands Cultural Society and the original musicians who played at the Albert Brothers' (Joe and George Albert) Homeplace and went on to form the Society's Albert Hall in Waretown where folk and bluegrass music is played every Saturday night. Macoviecki is particularly interested in the music of both Merce Ridgway Sr. and Jr.

Ridgway Sr. formed a group called the Pinehawkers who were recorded and promoted by folklorist Dorothea Dix Lawrence in the 1940's. Ridgway Jr. went on to play at the Homeplace. Both Ridgway's wrote their own folk songs of the Pine Barrens culture.

Macoviecki has received permission from Merce Ridgway Jr's widow Arlene to play and record songs written by Merce Ridgway Sr. of the original Pinehawkers and by Merce Ridgway Jr. of the second Pinehawkers.

Though they grew up in Jackson Township (hence the name of their group) on the fringe of the Pinelands, Macoviecki and Black spent much of their youth adventuring in the thick forests of pines and oaks.

In the past few years they released two albums of Pinelands tunes, "Pine Barrens Vol. 1" and "Vol. 2" to

critical acclaim. "Why are we doing this? Releasing 100-year-old, 100-year-old and 400-year-old songs at a time when people are interested in 'What's next?'" Macoviecki asks rhetorically on his website, "Because this is what some folk music really sounds like where we grew up, where the pines meet the bay."

The performers on the video are Macoviecki on guitar, James Black on upright base, Cranston Dean on mandolin and Max Carmichael on wooden flute. The video is available on the County's website and Jackson Pines has been given the right to use it on their own website.

On August 23, Jackson Pines headlined The New Jersey Folk Festival in South Brunswick and in September, they will be playing with Cole Quest, the grandson of folk legend Woody Guthrie. That special free performance at Albert Hall in Waretown is on a Friday, September 26, 5:30 doors open and 6:30 performance. Visitors to the Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy & Gunning Show can watch them perform on Saturday, September 27, 11:30 – 1:30 at Tip Seaman County Park in Tuckerton.

Visit the Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission YouTube page to view the Unquiet Grave video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2bHcVVert-M>

Jackson Pines performing. Photo credit: Ocean County.

