

Celebrating Fifty Years of Maunder Music in New Brunswick



Sheila & George



John, Sheila & George



Lawrence LaFrance & John

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Those of a certain age who grew up in Victoria County and in Northern Carleton County will remember the Maunder Band and many people growing up today will know the music of the Nackawic based Common People which, under leader John Maunder, is celebrating fifty years of Maunder music with a dance July 8 at the River Valley Civic Centre in Perth-Andover.

"I wanted to get as much of the history of the band as possible into the show," John Maunder said in an interview last week in Perth-Andover, "but not stay too long in the past, just carry it on up through. The first hour will be pretty well dedicated to the old-time music if possible and some of the songs that Sheila and Kathy and I used to do back then - maybe some Everly Brothers and then moving on up." He said that after that the show that starts at 9:00 and goes until 2:00 am would 'accelerate into a party'.

"We're hoping to be able to bring back some good memories of people who went to the Arthurette dances and our other dances. We're working on doing a slide show; we're trying to get as many pictures of band and band members over the years as possible. We'll have a big screen there in the River Valley Civic Centre with a short slide show or shows - we haven't decided yet on just how we're going to do that." He said that many of the photos from early days had been lost in house fires. "We couldn't just have one house burn, we had to have two burn," he said, "so we don't have many pictures going back to the original years."

Arthurette dance hall burned in 1966 putting an end to Maunder dances there, but the band continued to play in other halls. "That's when I took the band over," John Maunder remembered, "because dad wasn't going to rebuild. I was coming back from Plaster Rock that night; I had been playing hockey up there and saw this glow in the sky. We had left all our equipment in there and I had a set of blue Ludwig drums in the hall. It wasn't totally burned and I ran in there and I saved them out the side but one of my tom-toms got heat blister on it. I used them until about 1972 or 1973."

The Maunders started playing for dances fifty years ago after years of having a houseful of people (many of them young men there to get a look at teenage beauties Sheila and Kathy Maunder and hear them sing) every weekend. One such weekend when there were 52 people on hand George Maunder announced: "Folks, the next time you want to hear the girls sing you are gonna have to pay because we're having a show and dance at the Arthurette Legion next Saturday."

And so the Maunder Band was born, with George playing a mean fiddle (John's words) and acting as MC, John, age nine, on guitar and singing Elvis tunes and other

popular songs of the day, and Kathy and Sheila singing and playing piano or guitar. The children's mother, Kit Maunder, took money at the door wherever the band played which was all along the St. John River Valley as much as six nights a week at stretches. At the age of fourteen Sheila was offered a recording contract with Quality Records in Toronto but decided to stay at home.

In the early 1960s, when John Maunder was fifteen, George ordered a set of drums from Sears and within a week their previous drummer was gone and John and George were the Maunders' new drummers. After that time one of the most enjoyed features of Maunders dances were John's vocals and drum solos on tunes like "Wipe Out". The band carried their equipment in the trunk of their car and had a small trailer attached to hold chips, pop and other necessities of life. Whenever they heard on the radio a song they liked they had it incorporated it into their show within a week.

In later years many musicians joined the band for short or long periods with Denzileo Barr rocking the dance halls with his piano, Lawrence LaFrance playing lead guitar and fiddle for more than twenty years, Bill Nugent, James (Nort) Hargrove, Ronnie DeMerchant, and Daryl Dunster - to name a few of the dozens - adding their skills.

In those days it wasn't a bit unusual for the band members to finish a dance in Arthurette at 1:00 am on a Sunday morning and then decide to drive to Beechwood for a bite to eat. "Generally after a dance in Arthurette about ten of us guys would pile into a car," John Maunder said. "We used to go to Beechwood or Woodstock or Meductic or someplace 'real close' to get something to eat. As long as we got home before daylight we were all set.

"This one time we went to Beechwood and after we ate we decided our hands were dirty so we thought we'd go to Hartland to wash them and then we needed to dry them so we decided to go on to Woodstock and then I think we went on down to Meductic so I don't know if it was Monday or Tuesday before we got back."

In the middle 1970s John Maunder, well known from his many years of cymbal testing for the Sabian (formerly Azco) company and his work with the band, started the band The Common People with his sister Kathy, Nort Hargrove, Lawrence LaFrance, and Daryl Dunster. From the beginning leader John has been the drummer and lead singer of the group. Both George and Kit Maunder are now deceased. Sheila also occasionally sings with the band and Rick, the youngest Maunder, is now the sound man after playing bass with the band for a few years.

Note from the writer: I played, or tried to play, rhythm guitar in George Maunder's band in the summer of 1966, and received \$5 a show - not bad for a couple hours of fun. As John said in the story, we used to drive to Beechwood after a dance in Arthurette, and have a hot chicken or something at Mark Cox's Diner. It cost \$1.25 including pop. Usually by the time I got home at 3:00 or 4:00 am, I had about a dollar left. Another note: When I came back from out west many years later - not having picked up a guitar the whole time - George offered me \$25 a dance to play with the group. I would have been embarrassed to take \$5 by that time and declined.