

OSKAR SINGS BLUE SKIES INTO OUR LIVES

in memoriam, Oskar Graf, 1944-2025

Some sorta funky farmer-luthier cross
Oskar finds himself
on this side of the pond
planting a seed
back in the mists
& back to the land
in the Clarendon Station boonies
that surprises everyone
even himself—
one moment wall-to-wall crickets,
the next
a field full of another kind of homegrown music
handmade & so well crafted
this horse of a different colour festival
continues to prance, trot, canter and gallop
carrying 1000s along
in homespun harmonies
that keep toes tappin'
& spirits lifted
year after year,
decade after decade—
in the dead of winter
warmin' yer heart,
in the dog-days of summer
helping you chill,
& on that wondrous August weekend
exorcizin' yer demons
& calling in yer angels.

A man practical enuff
to entertain visions
Oskar looks at a field
& sees a festival,
hears tunes welling up
out of acres of silence,

& brings blue skies
down to earth.
Ever since that big bang banjo moment
they've had a hankering
& an uncanny knack
for pitching their tent
in the sweet spot
where body & soul shake hands,
kick up their heels
& dance their fiddle-fried brains out.

When founders, friends & festivals
like this
come along
outta the blue
the sky's the limit
& then some.
You could call it grace
of a kind,
or random acts of culture
having their way with you.
What are folks for
anyway
if not to feel at home
camping out in each's lives,
getting to know the neighbours
round a campfire
or the loo line—
a gathering of the tribes
& usual suspects
much given to square dancing & singing,
sharing good cheer & communal food,
listening to the rhythms of sun-baked land
& the stories the stars tell
as they tuck you into bed,
your dreams merging into music,
a distant train whistle,
an owl's echoing hoots...

All unlikely & all made possible,
coaxed & cajoled & called into being
by someone who knew
how to befriend quiet
& solitude & the fellowship of the fiddle,
able to catch the drift of his days
& attend faithfully
to the work
of the heart & the hands
that now have reached out
and touched ours,
bequeathing to generations
the gift of blue skies
that graces our lives so beautifully,
keeping them tuned up, turning over
& keyed to something a little larger
& a little lighter
that enjoys gathering us all together,
hearing us play & frolic
& sing community one to another.

So we doff our cap
to the maestro
who found it
in himself
to work in concert
with a few friends
& bring a little bit of heaven
to our corner of the world—
& make it dance.

*-Michael Hurley,
the Sydenham countryside,
30 August 2025*