

The Folk Music Society of New York – A Jackson Heights Love Story

By Clarice Kjerulff

Folk music has a home in Jackson Heights, where it has been thriving for many years, kept vital in many ways by the Folk Music Society of New York (FMSNY), now marking its 52nd year. Although FMSNY is not officially based in Jackson Heights, many of its governing board members have lived in the community since the group’s inception – bringing friends and romantic partners to join them.

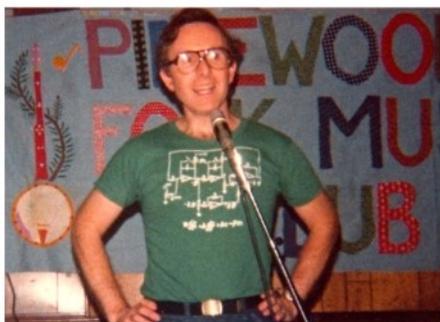
Since its founding, FMSNY has organized folk music concerts, workshops, music sessions, and folk music getaways in the country.

The group was created in 1965 by six enthusiastic folkies who had recently spent a week at an adult camp devoted to folk music. Located in the woods near Plymouth, Massachusetts, Pinewoods Camp seemed like a magical experience to the six founders, and they wanted perpetuate that feeling back in New York. To that end, they formed FMSNY (originally known as “Pinewoods Folk Music Club”).

One of the first people to join the new organization was Don Wade, who first came to Jackson Heights as a child in the '40s. Don quickly became involved in the new organization and took on the task of producing FMSNY’s monthly newsletter. Don’s mother, Marian Wade, who also lived in Jackson Heights and performed as a folk singer, soon joined him on the FMSNY board.

It was through association with Don Wade that one of the founders, Jerry Epstein, became acquainted with Jackson Heights. In 1972, Jerry moved from Manhattan to Jackson Heights, taking an apartment in Don Wade’s house on 72nd Street. Seven years later, Jerry bought his own home on 87th Street.

About the time the Jerry Epstein moved out of Don Wade’s apartment, Don became involved with Eileen Pentele, with the couple marrying in 1986. Eileen joined the FMSNY board and has been the editor of the group’s newsletter for many years.



Long-time Jackson Heights resident, Don Wade, a FMSNY board member from its earliest years.



The author, Clarice Kjerulff, with her late husband, Jerry Epstein, a founder of FMSNY.

FMSNY continues to sponsor a variety of folk music events, for a full listing, visit folkmusicny.org.

Through FMSNY, Jerry Epstein met one of the members, Clarice Kjerulff (full disclosure: that would be me). In 1988, Clarice moved in with Jerry, and, after 22 years of unwedded bliss, they were married in 2010. Jerry lived in Jackson Heights, and served on the FMSNY board, until his death in 2015. Clarice still lives there and has served on the FMSNY board for many years.

Another FMSNY board member, Lynn Cole (also an editor of *Views*), moved to Jackson Heights a few years ago because, through her involvement with FMSNY, she came to see the many advantages of the neighborhood.

FMSNY’s newest board member, Vincent Cross, also lives in Jackson Heights. Vincent, who was born in Ireland and raised in Australia, teaches in the New York public schools and performs folk music.

Today FMSNY continues to sponsor a variety of folk music events, including concerts, workshops, music parties, and getaways in the country. On-going events include weekly music sessions on Wednesday nights at the Aubergine Café in Woodside, where anyone who likes to make music is welcome to come and participate. The group owes its longevity in no small part to the dedication and hard work of the many folk aficionados who call Jackson Heights their home.

Clarice Kjerulff, a long-time FMSNY board member, has lived in Jackson Heights for 29 years.