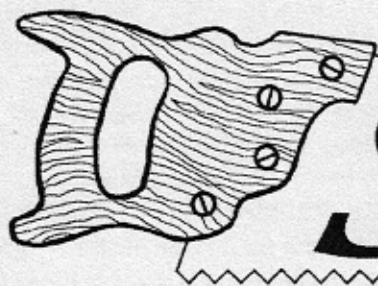


INTERNATIONAL MUSICAL SAW ASSOCIATION



SAW PLAYER NEWS

Vol.11, No.2 www.SawPlayers.org Email: Info@SawPlayers.org (415)331-9661 Designer: Ken Ball Summer 2006

Not For Woodwork... Saws Manufactured for Music



By Natalia 'Saw Lady' Paruz

Part One: Made in U.S.A.

It is not a secret that most any hardware store saw plays. Why then, are there saws manufactured especially for making music?

One reason is that people were seeking to improve upon the qualities of the woodwork-tool to make it better suited for music making: making the blade easier to bend, having a finer tone quality, a longer sustain and more notes. The other reason is that saw manufacturing companies were seeking a good advertisement gimmick to create a buzz about their line of saws.

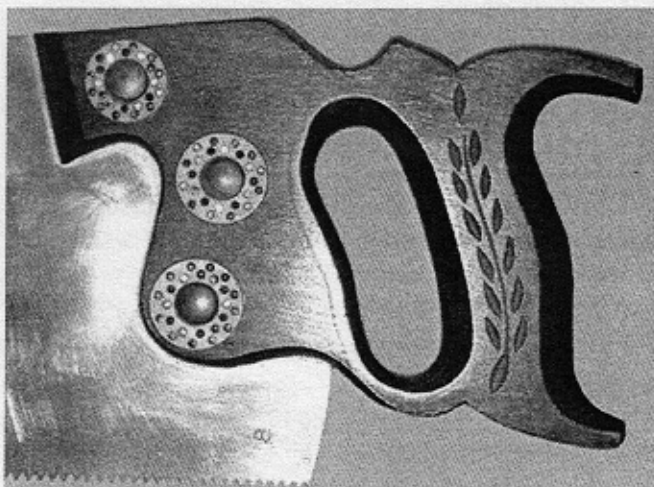
One such company was the **Disston** Company of Pennsylvania. They manufactured a 29.5" long musical saw which was marked: "Henry Disston and Sons, Established 1840 D-8 Philadelphia, For beauty, finish and utility this saw cannot be excelled, Henry Disston. Reg U.S. Pat off Disston Phila"

The **Columbia** musical saw was crafted by the Columbia Saw Works in Indiana, USA in the 1920s. The blade of this 33.5" saw is inscribed with the Company logo "Columbia Saw Works", "Indianapolis, Indiana", "Made in USA" and "Cast Steel - 31 - Warranted". At the handle we find a round brass plate with an eagle inscribed 'Warranted Superior'.

The Disston and the Columbia saws are examples of saws marketed as a musical instrument but not stamped with the word 'musical' on the blade. Most manufacturers stated the saw's purpose in the stamp, such as the **Professional Trophy** musical saw and the **Radio** musical saw, both marked with 'musical saw' on the blade. Some companies went as far as to stamp the blade with pictures depicting music.

The **Broadcasting** musical saw is 26" along the bottom edge and is marked 'Broadcasting Musical Saw' and 'Warranted Superior' with a picture of a microphone printed on the blade.

Some companies even included a carrying case, a bow and an instructional booklet of how to play the saw. The **Tonk Bros. Co.** musical saw was their model #217, measuring 30" in length. It came with a bow, an instruction book and a heavy canvas carrying case for the saw, bow and book. The case has a compartment for the saw, a special compartment for the bow, a two snap storage area for the book and a draw string at the top. The case is lined with soft wool-like material on the inside to protect the saw during transportation and storage.



Close-up of the most coveted of the Mussehl & Westphal saws is the one which was discontinued in the 1950s - the gold plated saw. Originally copper and then 14-karat gold-plated with rhinestones inserted in celluloid washers surrounding the gold plated bolts that hold the handle to the blade and a mahogany handle.

Tonk Bros. Co. was located in Chicago, Illinois. Another musical saw sold from that area was the **Lion & Healy** musical saw, whose 29-inch long crosscut saw read 'Lion and Healy musical saw Chicago Illinois, No. 217'. I wonder if the Lion & Healy Music Company (founded in Chicago in 1864) purchased their saws from Tonk Bros, as both their saws are marked as model 217.

Lion & Healy actually had 2 saws they were selling for music, the other one being the **Simonds** musical saw. Its logo reads: 'The Simonds saw works, Fitchburg Mass., Chicago, Ill, USA, Branch houses New York, New Orleans, Portland Oregon, Seattle Washington, San Francisco Cal., London England'. At the bottom it reads 'Musical saw' and off to one side it reads 'Made expressly for Lyon & Healy'. This blade is 26" long.

The **Simonds Saw Co.** also manufactured a musical saw for **Ditson** (not to be confused with Disston) - the large 19th century Music store and supplier Oliver Ditson. The etching on the blade says 'The Simonds Musical Saw... Manufactured Expressly for... Oliver Ditson Co... Boston, New York'. This 26" long musical saw is uncommon in that its teeth are filed rip.

An unusually long instrument is the **Jetel** musical saw. Overall, the instrument measures 39 inches long and 7 1/2 inches at its widest point. My guess on the age of this saw is the 1930's. Another musical saw from the same time frame is the **Jedson** musical saw which measures 39 1/2" long.

Most saws manufactured for music were not really functional for cutting wood with. An example of a saw that was manufactured for music but prided itself on being a great cutting tool as well was the **Atkins saw-violin**, manufactured by E.C. Atkins & Co., Indianapolis, Indiana. The logo on the blade promises 'Our "A" blade with perfection handle adapted for rapidity and ease in cutting'. On one side it is inscribed VIOLIN. The saw itself is a 24" blade with a wood handle with 5 screws. What's unique to this saw is that it comes with a tip handle: hard wood, possibly walnut that measures 3 1/2" long, held onto the blade with 2 brass screws. The overall length of this saw is 30" long.

Why would a manufacturer make a saw for music yet strive to keep its wood cutting power? A popular 'bit' with saw playing performers back at the turn of the 20th century (when Vaudeville and traveling medicine shows were common) was for a saw player to cut the leg off a chair or stool to show the unbelievers that it was a real saw he/she was playing. Some musicians had a chair with one leg that was replaceable so that it didn't require a new chair every performance.

The Atkins Company was definitely in existence from 1888 to 1942. As far back as 1860, Elias C. Atkins

received patents for saw blades and for machines for manufacturing saws but it is uncertain when he started manufacturing and when "E. C. Atkins & Co." was formed.

Just as saw manufacturers of the past made and sold some saws for musical saw playing, today the **Valley Saw Company** in San Jose, California makes musical saws for **Charlie Blacklock**. The Charlie Blacklock musical saws have a mellower sound, and are commercially available today. 4 sizes are available: 26, 28, 30 and 36-inch lengths.

His saws have a wider blade near the handle than an average saw, and have a plain laminated wood handle. The handle of the C.B. saw has a straight cut along the back side, with the wood not protruding into the blade too much, thus elongating the usable length of the blade for music - the blade gains an extra note or two.

Here is a hint for telling the age of Charlie Blacklock musical saws: the 28" musical saw that has the blue painted edge on the handle was made from the late 1960's up until the end of the 20th century. Saw that were made in the 21st century have a new handle design. The very early ones have thicker steel than the current ones.

A few years ago Ed & Carolyn Wilcox, of Batesville, Arkansas, found a great sounding 26" saw made by the **Great Neck** tool company of New York, which they used to sell as a musical saw. For a while Great Neck had the name "**Bluegrass**" on it. Today the same blade is sold as the 'Homeowner' saw - still a great saw for playing music.

The most famous brand of musical saws in the USA is **Musseh & Westphal** - the only saws made for music, which went on sale at 1921 and are still being sold today! M&W musical saws come in a variety of lengths, but the most coveted of their saws is the one which was discontinued in the 1950s - the gold plated saw. Originally copper and then 14-karat gold-plated (a dollar's worth of gold in 1926), with rhinestones inserted in celluloid washers surrounding the gold plated bolts that hold the handle to the blade and a mahogany handle - this saw is a real beauty.

M&W saws have evolved during the years - different lengths, different logos (at one time the logo appeared on both sides of the blade!). The most unusual saw they sold was a Bass one: this musical saw has a wooden resonator box that sits on the floor with a large blade that comes out of the top & a wooden dowel handle. Back in 1976 they sold for around \$90.

To conclude this article and to lead us onto it's companion article (in a future 'Saw Player News' issue) of

saws manufactured for music outside of the USA, there is the 'Australian' musical saw: made in the USA but distributed in Australia by the Century company of Sydney, Australia in the beginning of the 20th century (1920s or 30s). It came with an instruction book by the Century Company "Novelty Musical Instruments" Roma House,

Sydney, Australia. The book is not illustrated; it's all text but it's quite understandable.

Manufactured for music and distributed by music houses - I'd say the saw has earned its recognition as a legitimate musical instrument.

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For info on the different M&W saws, as well as photos of all saws mentioned in this article and additional info, please visit www.SawLady.com

"NEW! - Now you can join or renew your **Membership payments by "PayPal"** at: www.sawplayers.org/form.html You can pay in your local currency or by credit card! Please note that we still need to have your contact information on file for our records - so even if you pay by PayPal, please fill out and mail a copy of the Membership application as requested. We hope this will simplify dues paying for you - especially if you live outside the U.S.A! In the future, we will try to update the PayPal link so that you can purchase other items such as Contest entries, T-shirts and back issues of the Saw Player News - but for now only regular Membership dues are available through this link."

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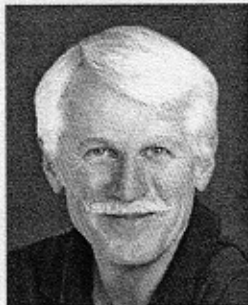
>>> THE SAW PLAYER NEWS <<<

DO YOU HAVE THE COMPLETE SET?

We have a limited number of back issues of the Saw Player News going back to the first issue (Vol 9, No 1) for \$5.00 ea - which includes shipping costs. Send your check and which issues you want to: Kenny Blacklock, 31 South 40 Pier, Sausalito, CA 94965 (USA)

Calling All Saw Players (and friends)!

Come to the 28th Annual Saw Player's Picnic and Music Festival!!!



By Morgan Cowin

The Saw Festival is for current saw players, as well as for those interested in learning to play the saw - or seeing, hearing and meeting some of the best saw players in the world. It is also for those who sing or play other acoustic instruments (for jamming), and for anyone

curious about the musical saw.

Of course we would love to have YOU join us, but it would also be great if you could help us get the word out about the Saw Festival! In this newsletter is a copy of our Festival Flyer, as well as our publicity announcement (printed on the back of the flyer) with details on all the events. They are printed on heavy paper "cardstock" so that you can make good "clean" copies of the flyer and the press release to distribute. Here is what we'd like you to do:

- **The Saw Festival Flyer** - Please copy and give out and/or mail to your musician friends and others interested in possibly attending. You might also hang a copy on the bulletin boards at your local music stores, college music departments, music associations you belong to, pass them out at other music festivals and events or other venues you think appropriate.

- **The Saw Festival Press Release** - Please copy and mail out to your local media (newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations in your area). We have some time left before the Festival, but many in the media schedule their event calendars months in advance of the event, so please contact them soon to find out who can help us to generate some publicity for the Saw Festival.

Before you deliver or mail out the Press Release and/or Festival Flyer - it will be most effective if you do some research in the Yellow Pages, and call the stations or businesses for the names (get the correct spelling!) and addresses of the people most likely to help you get the word out. (You can also search for the information on your computer - ie: www.google.com)

and make a list of people to send it to - then you'll know approximately how many copies to make. Call (and/or email) each media company (etc.) and tell them there is a unique, fun musical event coming up and that you want to send a press release for a "PSA" (Public Service Announcement) or a story idea. The title of the person will obviously vary for each company, but it may include something like: an assignment editor, entertainment editor, community relations, events, culture, what's happening, calendar, datebook etc. **"Plan to do the above ASAP!"**

People in the media are swamped with information, so if you *make a follow-up call a few days after you send them the Press Release and/or Festival Flyer*, it will increase the chances for them to remember the event and do something with the Press Release. The more media attention we can generate, the more people will come to the Festival, and the more successful it will be!

By the way, you can check out the IMSA website: www.SawPlayers.org (then go to "Festinfo" to get information about finding lodging or camping in the vicinity of the Saw Festival, and to read about last year's Saw Festival. (The Festival Flyer and press release can also be viewed from the website.)

You never know who is going to make the trip to the Saw Festival (August 12 & 13, 2006). We just heard that *Alan Pitts* from Auckland, New Zealand is returning to the Saw Festival this year. Alan won First Place at the 1999 Saw-Off Competition. *Irving Francis* from Brooklyn, NY will also be returning this year (Irving won Second Place at the 2005 Festival). Saw Tips columnist *David Weiss* will also be coming... **Good people, good saw playing/music and good FUN - we hope to see YOU there too!**

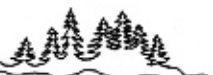
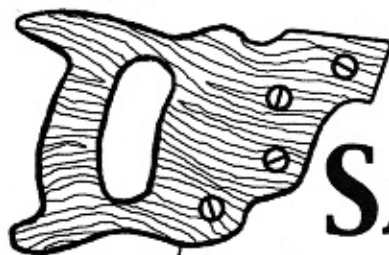
Thank you for your help with publicizing the Saw Festival, and for your Membership in the IMSA!

CORRECTION: In the last issue of the Saw Player News, we incorrectly said that Irving Francis is from Queens, but he is actually from Brooklyn, NY.

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Musical Saw
Association



SAW PLAYERS

(And Friends)

PICNIC & MUSIC FESTIVAL

To be held near Santa Cruz, California at

SINCE 1978!

Roaring Camp

International
Musical Saw
Contest

Musical Saw
Workshop

SUNDAY, AUGUST 13, 2006

10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

ALSO, join us for a pot-luck dinner & jamming Saturday night, August 12 at the Roaring Camp outer parking lot (6-10 PM). Come on down & PLAY!

▶ ALL MUSICIANS INVITED! ◀

Jamming all day - Open mike throughout the day

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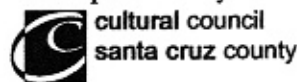
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For Festival Information:

www.SawPlayers.org

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(415)459-7722

Write: 31 South 40 Pier

Sausalito, CA 94965



For Directions to
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in Felton (just North of Santa Cruz)
Call: (831)335-4484
www.RoaringCamp.com

Take the Mt. Hermon Exit off Hwy. 17 to Graham Hill Rd., Then Left 1/4 mile to Roaring Camp.

For more information contact:
Morgan Cowin, President
International Musical Saw Players Association
(415)459-7722 Email: Sawman@DistinctivePhotos.com
Download a Saw Festival Flyer at: www.SawPlayers.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

For great music that's a cut above the rest, come to the 28th annual International Musical Saw Festival, Saturday and Sunday, August 12 and 13, in beautiful Santa Cruz county, California.

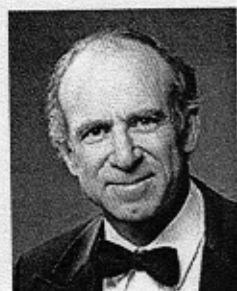
The cutting edge music starts Saturday, August 12, 2006 at 1:00 PM, with a free acoustic jam near the world's only life-sized bronze statue of a saw player - in front of Bookstore Santa Cruz, located at 1520 Pacific Avenue. Next comes a free potluck dinner and jam at 6:00 PM in the outer parking lot of Roaring Camp in Felton, just seven miles north of Santa Cruz.

The big event happens Sunday, August 13, at Roaring Camp when the world's greatest saw players come out of the woodwork to join other acoustic musicians in a variety of musical performances. You'll hear bluegrass, country, folk, gospel, blues, classical, and even show tunes (believe it or not, no heavy metal) throughout the day. Festivities start at 10:00 AM, with spontaneous acoustic jams throughout the day. There's a Saw-Off competition from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM, and a Chorus of the Saws at 3:00 PM., with up to 50 saw players trying to play in unison.

And for those who want to learn how to play music that really has some teeth in it, there's a free Musical Saw Workshop at 4:00 PM.

The entire event is free, and fun for the whole family. For more information, check out www.SawPlayers.org, or www.RoaringCamp.com. Held by the International Musical Saw Association, this event is sponsored in part by KUSP radio and the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County. Come to the 28th annual Musical Saw Festival, and say you saw it here first!

####

*Saw Tips -***HAVE SAW, WILL TRAVEL***By David Weiss*

For most of us, traveling with the saw is a given.

I mean, we "don't leave home without it!" But how many of you have been stopped at airport security and told, "NO, you can't take that on the plane!?"

Unlike a violin or flute, a saw can be a real pain to travel with. One of my first airline trips with my saw was to attend the 1985 Saw Festival in Portland, Oregon. I was just going up for two days, and didn't want or need to pack a suitcase. So I took the saw through security (which in those years was a lot more lenient than it is today). They took one look at it and said, "Are you kidding?" I then took out a bow and played them a tune. After a moment of giggles and shrugged shoulders, they allowed me to take it on the plane - with the warning to "never try this again!" - which of course I never did - not in the cabin, anyway.

Since that incident, I have used rather large suitcases that measure close to 30" diagonally. Even larger ones are available if you want to travel with a longer saw. Keep in mind that if you unscrew the handle of the saw, you can manage with a smaller suitcase! Saws, of course, are pretty indestructible. I keep mine in the cardboard sheath that it came in when I bought it, so that the teeth don't do damage to my clothing.

The bow, however, needs a bit more protection. Up until now I used to just strap it to the saw with rubber bands to keep it fairly immovable. I'd sandwich that with two pieces of sturdy cardboard cut roughly in the shape of the saw (thin plywood would work, too), and wrap that with clothing in the suitcase. But Morgan Cowin recently gave me a more interesting idea: he uses a length of PVC tube, inserting the bow and then protecting the tip and frog

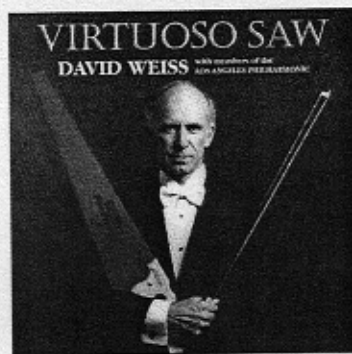
ends with foam rubber and end caps. The main thing is to prevent excess flexing of, or impact to the bow.

No doubt many of you have devised your own unique methods of traveling with your saw, and strategies for playing in public as a street musician in various parts of the world. Please write in with your ideas and experiences, and we'll try to print them in a future issue. (Email to: info@sawplayers.org, or snail mail to the address printed on this newsletter.) In a future "Saw Tips" article, I'll talk about some of the joys and opportunities that I've experienced as a street performer.

Hope to see you at Roaring Camp this August!

David Weiss

www.davidweissgallery.com



David Weiss bends steel in his bare hands, backed by members of the L.A. Philharmonic in this cutting edge CD of pop and classical favorites. "The most beguiling sounds emanated from David Weiss... heavy metal maestro enralls with his handsaw artistry..."

He came, he sawed, he conquered." (Los Angeles Times)

Play List:

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A Sawyer's Memory

By Thomas Spearance

Toms River, New Jersey, 1968 - the Ocean County String Band, featuring Doc Mickiewicz on musical saw - my seven-year-old ears were mystified. My older brother married Doc's daughter, and saw music came sideways into the family.

By 1994 I'm a big-time radio star, and I get front row passes to see The Cheap Suit Serenaders, featuring Bob Armstrong and Terry Zwigoff on saws. They played "Melancholy Baby" in harmony, I watched how they did it, and said to myself, "*I CAN DO THAT!*" I sent away for a Sandvik Stradivarius, and set about teaching myself how to play.

The initial results were questionable, if earnest, but, after awhile, it became tolerable to myself. Being a big-time radio star helped get me some pretty good gigs for a saw player - duets with Bob Brozman, opening for Joe Ely, Robert Earl Keen, and the Rev. Billy C. Wirtz. I got to play the national anthems of Canada and the



U.S.A. at a San Francisco Giants game in 1997. One of my great life thrills!

In 2001 I was a washed-up disk jockey, wandering through a myriad of life adventures and misadventures. The one constant for me was the saw, and coming to the Saw Players Picnic and Music Festival at Roaring Camp. One of the proudest moments of my life was being awarded second place in that year's contest, and sharing a podium with Terry Bergman of Ventura, CA, and the Hon. Sylvain Pichet, President of the French Saw Players Association. I was grateful to win the competition in 2003, proud indeed to be a Saw Champion.

These days I work with a man with special needs in Fort Bragg (Northern California). I don't play as much as I'd like, but as much as my hands will allow anymore. I am very happy to be Master of Ceremonies for the Saw Festival, and I look forward to seeing you at Roaring Camp come August. Peace.

THE IMSA REQUESTS YOUR HELP:

To continue to improve and enliven the content of the Saw Player News, we need your contributions! (We will return them upon request)

Please mail (and/or email to: Sawman@DistinctivePhotos.com) the following:

- Please submit any musical saw-related photos, illustrations, cartoons, humor or ideas for articles.
- Please send us anything you have about the history of the saw or saw players.
- Please help us update our historical records. Unfortunately, the IMSA does not have complete records of contest winners from 1978 through 1997 Saw Festivals.
- Please send us news articles about the saw or saw players from your area or around the world.
- Announcements wanted: Send us information about saw festivals or festivals including the saw.
- Letters & photos wanted: We enjoy reading the many fascinating letters that we receive from our Members. We plan to start publishing your letters in the Saw Players News. Please note that we may edit or abridge them as necessary for publication.

Please mail your items to: Morgan Cowin, c/o IMSA, 5 Windsor Ave., San Rafael, CA 94901 (USA)
Or email to: Sawman@DistinctivePhotos.com

Musical Saw CD Review

by Kenny Blacklock

Sawdust Melodies

Al Felman, musical saw and vocals

Tim Allan, banjo, guitar and mandola

Sawdust Melodies is a self-produced and self-published CD by IMSA member Al Felman. It is a collection of old standards and popular songs played on the saw and sung by Dr. Felman, with banjo, guitar, and mandola accompaniment provided by Hall of Fame banjoist, Tim Allan. When I first heard about this CD, I was told that Dr. Felman had only been playing the saw for a year, so I was naturally skeptical about the quality of the music that I would hear on it. Now that I've listened to it I must say that I was pleasantly surprised by Dr. Felman's beautiful tone and fine musicianship. While the saw playing on this CD is not technically complex, it is generally in tune and precise. I especially appreciate Dr. Felman's sparing use of vibrato.

Most of the tracks on the CD are saw and banjo duets along with an occasional vocal. Tim Allan plays a four-string banjo in a lively jazz style. His playing is of a very high caliber. The other instruments are used here and there to fill out the arrangements. One thing I learned from this CD is that saw and banjo sound surprisingly good together. The banjo's lively and percussive sound is nicely complimented by the flowing melodic singing of the musical saw. This CD has twelve tracks and includes old standards such as, "World is Waiting for the Sunrise," "When I Lost You," "Somebody Stole My Gal," "Jerusalem of Gold," "See You in My Dreams," and many others.

Dr. Felman says that he became interested in the saw when he heard it played in Boone and Blowing Rock, NC during his summer vacation. He says he was in a jam session and a fellow named, Rick Ramseur, pulled one out of a trombone case and started to play. He says he was hooked and bought one a week later and started to play. Dr. Felman has played the tenor banjo for about 35 years. He has played with Tim Allan at banjoramas and on jazz cruises for many years. He also plays the gut-bucket

bass, the spoons and the paper bag. Dr. Felman plays a Mussehl and Westphal saw. In case you're wondering what kind of a doctor he is, Dr. Felman is a retired pediatric radiologist. He has also written a book, "Legend of the Feather Pillow," on the ethical issues in modern medical practice, intended for young adults of high school age and older.

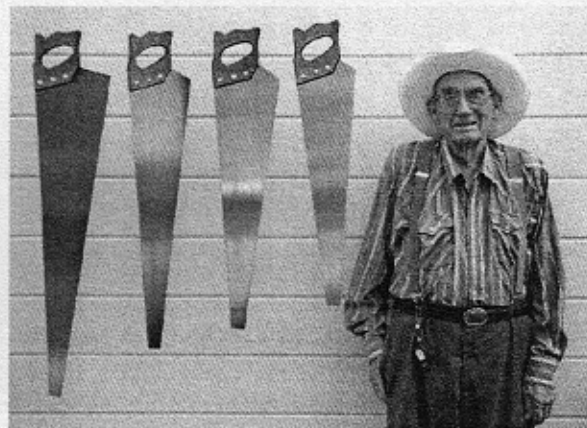
To order Sawdust Melodies: Send a check to:

A. H. Felman, 3301 Bayshore Blvd, #1409, Tampa FL 33629.

Cost: \$10 per CD plus \$2 shipping & handling.

NOTE: This is the first review of a Musical Saw CD in the Saw Players News. If you have a CD you would like considered for a review, please send it directly to: Kenny Blacklock, 31 South 40 Pier, Sausalito, CA 94965

"Charlie Blacklock Special" Musical Saws



Some years ago, Old-Time Country Music Hall of Fame saw player Charlie Blacklock designed these saws for a better tone and a greater range. These saws come in 26, 28, 30, and 36 inch lengths. The 28" saw is the best tenor saw on the market, while the 30" or "baritone" saw has a few more low notes, and the 36" has the biggest range of any saw.

C. Blacklock saws are now available only from:

Elderly Instruments (888) 473-5810, www.elderly.com
Lark in the Morning (877) 964-5569, www.larkinthemorning.com

NOTE: If a green dot appears next to your name, your membership has expired. To continue to receive the SAW PLAYER NEWS, please send a check and a completed Membership Application. Thanks for your support!

International
Musical Saw
Association

IMSA, c/o
31 South 40 Pier
Sausalito, CA 94965



Application for Membership to the International Musical Saw Association

Annual Membership Fees (in U.S. Dollars only) are \$20/Individual, \$25/Family.

Dues entitle Members to 3 issues of the Saw Player News, and eligibility to enter (with \$5 entry fee) the "Saw-Off Competition" at our annual Saw Players Picnic and Music Festival.

Please send your check* with completed application to: IMSA, c/o 31 South 40 Pier Sausalito, CA 94965 U.S.A.

*Membership payments can now be paid by "PayPal" at: www.sawplayers.org/form.html You can pay in your local currency or by credit card!



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9-Digit ZIP code: _____ Country: _____

Phone #:(_____) _____ Email: _____

Saw players frequently contact us to look for fellow saw players in their areas, but we don't want to give out your name and contact information without your permission. We do not intend to share your information with anyone but fellow saw players.

Please check the box or boxes that best represents your privacy preferences:

- I do not wish to share any of my contact information
- It is all right to give out my name and telephone number only
- It is all right to give out my name and Email address only
- It is all right to give out my name and address only
- It is all right to give out any or all of my information