

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

The traditional music band Off'n Ensemble is appearing at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_. Admission is free.

Off'n Ensemble plays the traditional music of New England, Appalachia and Ireland for dances, parties, weddings, civic events and festivals along the Mid-Atlantic region from Washington to Boston. The band features Heidi Hammel on hammered dulcimer and concertina, Steve Smith playing guitar and saxophone, and Bob Yarbrough on wooden flute, tin whistle, banjo and bodhran. Heidi, Steve and Bob have been performing together as Off'n Ensemble since 1991. For dances, they are joined by Elliott Schmuckler on upright bass. Vocalist Murray Callahan also appears with the band.

The most striking instrument in the Off'n Ensemble lineup is Heidi's hammered dulcimer. The hammered dulcimer has many strings stretched across a trapezoid-shaped body. Heidi hits the strings with small 'hammers' that she holds in her hands to make the haunting sounds of the instrument. "The hammered dulcimer is the grandmother of the piano," says Heidi. The origins of the hammered dulcimer are murky, but most believe that the instrument originated in the Middle East in the early part of the last millennium. Hammered dulcimers under various names are part of the folk music traditions of many places, including China, the Middle East, Europe and the United States. Heidi discovered the hammered dulcimer shortly after returning from a year spent teaching English in China in 1979. She has been a hammered dulcimer performer and teacher for many years.

Also of interest is Bob's bodhran. The bodhran is an Irish drum – a wooden frame covered by a goat skin. Bob plays the bodhran with a two-ended 'tipper' or beater. Said Bob: "the best thing about the bodhran is how expressive it is. By pressing on the back of the drum head, the player can draw a wide range of sounds from the instrument." Bob's flute also is unusual. It is a 'simple system' wooden flute based on the 'concert' flutes of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the modern silver flute was developed. "Irish flute music developed using the old style flutes," said Bob. "The simple system flutes achieve sounds that are very difficult, if not impossible to obtain on a modern flute." Bob discovered Irish music from the record rack in his local bookstore at a small town in Kentucky in the late 1970s. "For years, I thought I was the only one who liked this kind of music," Bob said.

Steve has played guitar for decades and was an early member of the 'Spuds' contradance orchestra. He has returned to the saxophone after a long absence and now enjoys playing in jazz and big bands.