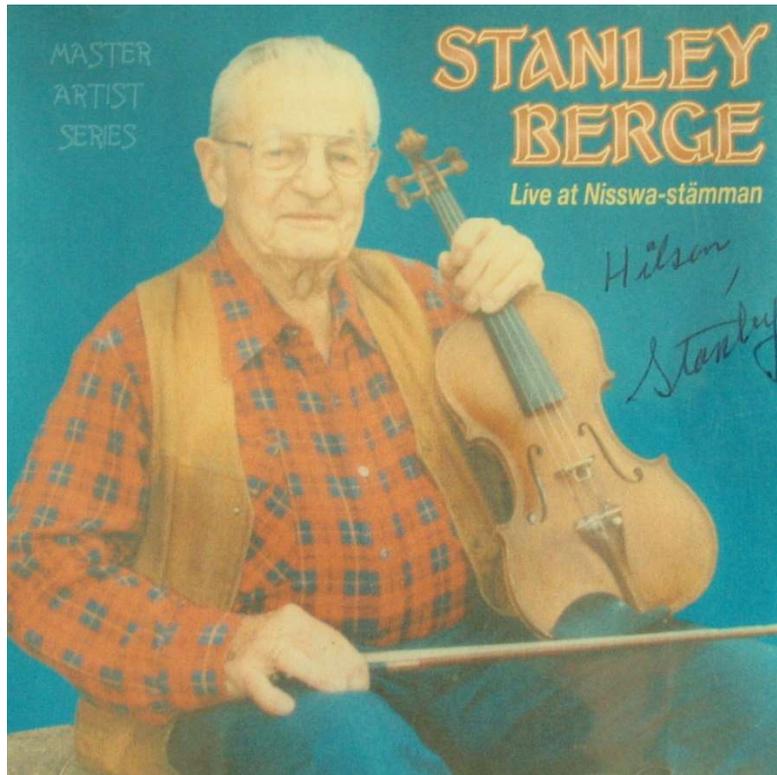


Stanley Berge

Another Minnesota fiddler who was a regional icon in our state was Stanley Berge.



He was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on July 5, 1916, to Henry and Edith (Collin) Berge. On June 16, 1938, he married Ruby Stalker. They lived together in their home in Wahkon until her death in 1992. He was a farmer until the late 1950s after which he worked as an independent builder/contractor. He built several homes and cabins and also did beautiful finish carpentry. In his later years he worked for the Volunteers of America at Galloway Boys' Ranch, a home for troubled teenage boys. He was a grandfather-figure and mentor to the boys. Many of them returned in their adult years to thank him for helping turn their lives around. He retired at age 75. In 2009 he moved to LakeSong Assisted Living in Onamia. He died in 2012 just 2 months short of his 96th birthday.

Music was among his great passions. He was once quoted as saying “Music has given wonderful meaning to my life.” He played many instruments over the years, but the violin was his favorite. Stanley’s grandfather, Andrew Collin built and played violins in Sweden. When Stanley was seven years old his mother gave him one of his grandfather’s violins. Stanley began teaching himself to play (as there were no violin instructors in the area at that time).

Typical of being the town fiddler he had to do his own instrument repair. Local people started donating old unused violins to him, which gave him other instruments to experiment on. Eventually other fiddlers began asking him to fix their fiddles for them. He had a collection of forty instruments which he began lending out. Anyone wanting a fiddle but lacking the money to buy one, could make arrangements to go his farm and get one at no cost, with just one simple

Stanley Berge

rule; you can keep it as long as you keep playing it, if not, bring it back. He encouraged countless fiddle players who might have given up on their craft.

He played at local jams, made local performances around the area, was made the centerpiece of the 2004 Nisswa festival and was a member of the Great River Strings Orchestra.



Stanley eventually made his own fiddle, a beautiful instrument with maple tiger-tail grain. This violin became his favorite in his final years.

His repertoire ranged from Old Time, to Scandinavian, but he said he had a preference for classical music. He composed two pieces when he was in his 80's: Tomte-Gubbans Reel (see video) and Minnesota Springtime Waltz. One of his dreams was fulfilled in his later years when he played first violin in concerts with the Great River Strings.

There was a group of 4-5 fiddlers that met in his kitchen every couple of weeks. It didn't matter if someone couldn't read music because he expected everyone to play by ear.

Stanley had a lifelong interest in human rights. In 2009 the Mille Lacs Area Human Rights Commission recognized him for his lifelong, tireless efforts to foster greater understanding between non-Indian and American Indian residents of the community. Stanley was known for his great patience in teaching others to play the violin. At age 94 he wrote a short story about a mouse and a violin (titled "A Mouse Tale") for his great-grandchildren. The fiddle he is holding in the picture at the top of the page is one that he made, and it is a pretty typical picture of him and the way you might find him around the farm.

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