

# Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

## “THE MAGIC BANJO”

created and performed by Michael J. Miles

### Musician’s one-man banjo show is magic

Banjo music, American history, and gentle humor are the fabric of Michael J. Miles’ one-man show, “The Magic Banjo.”

Miles took the Stackner Cabaret stage alone Wednesday evening, flanked by seven banjos and a guitar. Moving from instrument to instrument, and from character to character in the process, **he told a captivating story** that traced the banjo through the annals of American history.

The show is **an entertaining, thoughtful mix of music, prose, and poetry**, delivered by Miles in the characters of Woody Guthrie, Mark Twain, Carl Sandburg, Picayune Butler, Walt Whitman and others. Through these voices, and with his own, **he creates vivid images of American from colonial times through the McCarthy era.**

**His co-stars, the banjos are as unique as the characters he brings to the stage.** He plays a gourd banjo, long-neck banjo, Lowden guitar, Senegalese halam, octagon banjo, minstrel banjo, ode banjo and a 1911 Fairbanks Little Wonder.

**Each instruments has its own history and unique voice.** Ranging from bright metallic twangs to gentle, plaintive sounds, the instruments are **a treat to hear.**

He delivers such numbers as “Sweet Georgia Brown,” “Oh Susannah,” “Union Maid, and Bach’s “Jesu Joy of Man’s Desiring,” with artful banjo playing, on some, an earthy folksinger’s voice.

It takes a moment to settle into the unhurried pace of Miles’ show. He delivers simple wisdom, spoke and sung, at a relaxed pace, sometimes playing as he speaks, sometimes just facing the audience and telling a story. Sometimes he just plays, letting the instruments speak for themselves.

He asks the audience to sing along on several folk songs, illustrating how much a part of American culture these old songs are by the fact that people can indeed sing along—and using the right words.

**Elaine Schmidt, Theatre Critic**