

Article for the "Deming Headlights" by Charles J. Scanlon, May 2010:

On Friday, May 7, 2010 Scott and Johanna Hongell-Darsee brought folklore from Finland to the Columbus Elementary Sixth Grade.

Johanna Hongell-Darsee was born in Helsinki, beginning her education in theater and mime at the Lecoq School in Paris. She also studied Classical East Indian Dance and Mime in India. Until 2001 she led the Swedish dance and theater company Theater Bava, touring Europe, India and the USA.

Scott Hongell-Darsee comes from Iowa and is a poet, composer and painter who spent fifteen years in Europe. He also worked as a therapist for ballet companies like the Dance Theater of Harlem, the English National Ballet, the Royal Danish Ballet and the Hamburg Ballet. He taught at Denmark's State School of Modern Dance and worked with Theater Bava.

They moved to New Mexico from Scandinavia in 2001, settling in Albuquerque, and perform for festivals, schools and arts councils, including the National Public Radio Storytelling Festivals in Taos and Los Angeles.

On Friday they came to Columbus with music and stories. Dressed in traditional robes, Johanna opened by playing flute with Scott on classical guitar. Scott then switched to an electric Stratocaster guitar to make sound effects with several pedals to support Johanna's storytelling. The students later recalled his sounds of flies and a creaky door.

Sixth grader Guadalupe Lopez reported hearing first the tale of the Sea Lady, which is much like our regional story La Llorona. Lopez also recounted hearing the much longer tale of the Wolf Prince, in which a princess married a wolf who was really a prince enchanted by a troll. She had to marry the wolf because her father, the king, promised anyone who could identify the strange pelt nailed to the castle wall would marry his daughter. The pelt came from a louse which his daughter had pulled from his hair which grew very large. The wolf prince identified it, and married the princess, who could never watch him sleep because of his enchantment.

The students loved the presentation and were glad they came. The boys were very interested in the guitars, and the girls in the dance movements of Johanna as she told her old tales.