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Potpourri of 'out-of-step' folks adds more life to country fair

It was a people-watcher's paradise. More than 20,000 people beat the heat and flocked to the Oregon Country Fair this weekend, and, as tradition would have it, the faces and bodies in attendance were anything but dull.

There were jugglers and clowns and children sporting painted faces. A man wearing a loin cloth and sandals danced with abandon to the Celtic folk music of "Just Friends" on the Main Stage. Several onlookers joined him.

The fair's parade was an extravaganza of brass and color; everyone out of step but un-



Musicians made the midway a maze of melodies, with each turn offering a new song.

doubtedly in tune. Teetering high above the crowd was a woman on stilts wearing satin pants; she answered no questions, even from the awed five-year-old who wanted to know, "How does she do that?"

A fellow with a paper mache swan's head extending three feet in the air wandered through the crowd, white cotton wings flapping in the warm breeze. An Indian chief and a silver-skinned woman with silver hair also drew stares.

There were others who, perhaps not so obviously, fit into the scene just as well, and added their own shade of color to the myriad souls. A great-grandmother of 82 years was there, although she didn't even attempt to make it all the way around the midway. Then there were the



A giant towered over the crowd.

teenagers wearing Van Halen t-shirts and dark glasses, meandering from booth to booth, never losing sight of each other. Mothers with newborn babies and small children rested at the base of the Shady Grove Stage.

The Oregon Country Fair differs from the Lane County Fair, because of its setting. The "fairgrounds" is a mostly-shaded, figure-eight path that winds its way through the forest just west of Veneta. There are no carnival rides and, besides the ponies available for children's riding, the only animals to be seen were two parrots near an earring booth and some horses with riders herding cars in the parking lot. And there's a pervading friendly spirit not entirely uncommon to Eugene, but refreshing nevertheless.

If you missed the experience this year, the fair will be back next summer for its 16th showing. Everyone should attend at least once. As Seattle-based musician Scott Cossu said after playing at the fair, "It's like being in another country."

Story by Kim Carlson
 Photos by Michael Clapp



Out 2 Lunch, a local juggling group, demonstrated the "carrot and club" aspect of American foreign policy on an unsuspecting audience volunteer.

the Shutterbug

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