

# Fiddling championships ...

Some 200 years ago, in the Blue Ridge and Ozark Mountains of the deep south, people first began drawing a horsehair bow across the strings of a fiddle, dancing and singing into the wee hours to the sprite, cheerful music of the old-time fiddler.

Old-time fiddling music, once the folk music of America, occupies a much smaller niche in today's musical culture, yet it remains vicariously alive in the fiddles, guitars, pianos, banjos and string basses of both young and old, county and city dweller throughout America.

Last Saturday at the College, the young and old of old-time "fiddlin'" music gathered to spend a day swapping tales and sharing their music with all who came to the Oregon State Old Time Fiddling Championship. The 700 people who came to the event saw fiddlers ranging in age from 9 to 84 displaying a form of music that has passed through generations of family, being taught by playing and listening because most of the songs were never written down.

The purpose of this meeting was to decide the Oregon old-time fiddling finalist, who would go to the National Fiddling Contest in Wiezer, Idaho, in

June. Actually, it was more of a chance, according to Barney Alexander, a senior fiddler, "to get together with old friends, make some new ones, and play and listen to some good fiddling music."

Perhaps the best performances were not in the gym, but outside Randall Hall, where groups of fiddlers and guitar players would gather together and play a few tunes. "How about Sweet Adeline in the key of C?" one would ask, and off they'd go.

One of the most interesting parts of the show was the wide range of people who came to play, not only the wide range of age, but the wide range in lifestyles. There were farmers, loggers, people dressed in work jeans and people dressed in suits and ties. One woman fiddler was a second grade teacher in Portland.

From 11 a.m. until very late, the fiddlers played. Those who won their competitions will go on to Idaho to compete in the nationals. Those who did not win will probably go anyway, packing up their families and fiddles to join again with old friends, new ones, and play and listen to some good fiddlin' music, carrying on one of America's oldest cultural traditions.



**TENSION**—Leroy Simms wooed crowd with his lilting fiddle sound and facial expressions reminiscent of B.B. King.



**YOUNG-N-Old**—George Rowe—left—a newcomer to fiddling, is accompanied by Marshall Jackson an old favorite among fiddle players.

really just  
another chance  
to play



**RELIEF**—Fiddle player grimaces happily at the end of his preliminary performance.



**HARMONY**—Bronnie Griffen—left—and Tiffany Wheeler played along with fiddlers during a group number before the finals.

Story and photos by Duffy Coffman

