

# Arkansas State Old-Time Banjo Championship



Ozark Folk Center State Park  
Mountain View, Arkansas

## CONTEST INFORMATION

### PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Arkansas State Old-Time Banjo Championship is:

- to help perpetuate and promote pure, traditional old-time banjo, i.e., frailing, clawhammer, two-finger up-picking (thumb and one finger);
- to help develop a more genuine audience appreciation, understanding, and participation;
- to preserve the old-time banjo tunes;
- to develop and encourage old-time jam sessions and contests.

## GENERAL RULES AND STANDARDS

The contest rules and standards may be amended depending on the situation and events at hand during the contest. Anything not covered in the Rules and Standards will be decided by the judges. Before the contest starts, judges will be pleased to answer your questions.

### DIVISIONS:

1. **Junior** is for ages up to 16. Any contestant who has won first place in the Junior division in two different years will not be allowed to compete in the Junior division again but will be allowed to play in the Adult division.
2. **Adult** is for ages 17 to 59. Any contestant who has won first place in the Adult division in three consecutive years will either sit out for one year or judge the following year. Children 16 and under who have won first place in the Junior division in two different years will be allowed to compete in the Adult division.
3. **Senior** is for ages 60 and over. Any contestant who has won first place in the Senior division in three consecutive years will either sit out for one year or judge the following year. No other age groups are allowed to play in the Senior division.
4. **Grand Champion** is for the three first place winners of the above divisions.
5. Contestants may compete in only one division during the championship contests.

### TUNE SELECTIONS:

1. **Number of Tunes** -- Each contestant will select two (2) tunes to play in the contest.
2. **Tune Selections** shall be a breakdown suitable for square dancing and a tune of choice and will be played in that order in the competition.
3. **Tune length** -- Each of the selected tunes should be played through three or four times.
4. **Tune of choice** doesn't have to be (but can be) another dance tune.

5. **Submitting the names of the tunes** - The names of the selected tunes shall be written down on the card provided at registration and will be presented with the registration card at registration.
6. **Changing Tune Selections** - Contestants may not change their tune selections after turning them in at the drawing. Contestants who play a tune other than the announced tune will be marked down or awarded no points.
7. **Tune Selections for Playoffs** – In the event of a playoff, contestants shall play a breakdown and a tune of choice. These tunes cannot be the same tunes that were played in the earlier round.
8. **Tunes for Grand Champion Competition** – The first-place winner in each division should be prepared to play a breakdown and a tune of choice for the Grand Champion division. These tunes cannot be the same tunes that were played in earlier rounds.
9. **Age of Tunes** – In the first round of competition, one of the two tunes should originate from the period before 1941. The other tune can be newer than 1941 but must have the old-time style and sound of the earlier tunes. The newer tune can be an original tune that was written by the contestant. In play-off and Grand Champion rounds, all tunes must be older than 1941.
10. **Old-Time Only** – Contestants who deliberately play a tune or style not classified as “old-time” (a traditional tune played by frailing, clawhammer, or two-finger up-picking) in the opinion of the judges will be disqualified from winning any of the places in the competition. This means no playing in Scruggs-style, Reno-style, melodic-style, Bluegrass, etc., nor modern, progressive arrangements of old-time tunes.

#### **PERFORMING AT THE CONTEST:**

1. Contestants must be present and in the order of drawn position for entry onto the stage when number is called from the staging area. Late arrivals, or no-shows will be eliminated from the event. Allowances may be made for broken strings and other happenings judged to be beyond the control of the contestant(s).
2. Contestants must have instruments tuned and ready to play when called to stage. Instruments may require re-tuning due to the heat of the lighting in the auditorium, so check your tuning before going on stage.
3. Contestants may have only one accompanist. Accompanist may not play the melody or a harmony part that follows the melody line. Any acoustic instrument (other than another banjo) suitable for an old-time dance is welcome; for example: piano, guitar, fiddle, mandolin, reed organ, tenor guitar, or bass. Accompanist must play only chords or rhythmic back-up, if used. Solo banjo is welcome.
4. Contestants may restart a tune in the event of a broken string or unavoidable problem. One false start is allowed, but false starts are discouraged. Please keep the Execution aspect of the judging criteria in mind. Faltering (stopping during the performance of a tune not due to equipment problems) will result in a loss of points.
5. All contestants/performers are urged to consider the placement of the microphones and the efforts of the people responsible for the sound system. They are there to help the contestants/performers be clearly heard by the judges and audience alike. The judges will judge exactly what they hear through the audio system. An instrument too close or too far away, or pointed away from the microphone, could distort or drop out the sound, resulting in a loss of points. Please make sure your instruments are miked properly prior to starting your performance.
6. No sheet music or music stand is allowed in the stage area.
7. No electrical instruments and no drums will be allowed on stage.
8. Instruments may not be amplified by contact microphone, pick-up, etc.
9. Alternate tuning is allowed.
10. Contestants can bring more than one banjo on stage.

11. Five-string banjos only. Fretless finger-boards are allowed. Keith-style, or Scruggs-styles tuners may not be used in playing for the contest. Please keep in mind the Authentic Performance Style of the judging criteria.
12. Contestants are asked to conduct themselves with common courtesy and a spirit of fair play. Contestants exhibiting inappropriate behavior toward the audience, other contestants, officials, or sponsors may be excluded from future contests.

#### JUDGING:

1. Judging will be done by three (3) qualified judges who are chosen by the Ozark Folk Center. The Judges will be sequestered and no judge can see any contestant. The contestant is identified only by number.
2. The decisions of the Judges will be final.
3. The Judges are not permitted to enter, nor play in any contest division.
4. The Judges are not allowed to advise contestants in their selection of tunes to be played.
5. **JUDGING CRITERIA** for all tunes include Rhythm & Timing, Authentic Performance Style, Execution, Expression/Feeling, and Difficulty.
  - **Rhythm & Timing** (25 points). The rhythm and timing should be consistent. Any jerking, rushing, dragging or unevenness in tempo of the performance will result in a loss of points. For the breakdown, this correlates with danceability, and the judges will listen for the unique drive that makes a dance tune danceable.
  - **Authentic Performance Style** (30 points). Judges will listen for authentic old-time styles of frailing, clawhammer, or two-finger up-picking. The judges will listen for minor variations and improvisations, commiserate with the uniqueness of a player's style. However, any creativity should not be excessive so as to change, nor destroy the basic melody line of the tune, which will result in a loss of points.
  - **Execution** (15 points) The judges will listen for the tonal quality and clarity of the performance together with the general command of the instrument.
  - **Expression/Feeling** (15 points) The judges will listen for the "feeling" that the contestant puts into the performance. Flat, mechanical and unfeeling performances will result in lost points, as will excessive "showmanship."
  - **Difficulty** (15 points) A difficult tune will receive points in the overall score of the tune.

Copies of the judges' score sheets may be requested by the contestant by email after the day of competition. Please send an email to the Music Director at the Ozark Folk Center State Park. Include your name, contest division and contestant number in your email to [daren.dortin@arkansas.gov](mailto:daren.dortin@arkansas.gov)

#### REGISTRATION: (NO ON-LINE REGISTRATION)

1. Registration and payment of any entry fee will be at the registration table on the day of the contest. Please bring exact change in cash for the \$10 registration fee.
2. Registration for all divisions will be closed 30 minutes prior to the published start time of the Banjo contest. All divisions will close at the same time. No contestant will be allowed to register for any division after the registration for the contest has closed. No exceptions will be made.
3. Drawing for contestants' numbers will be done during the registration process. Contestant numbers will be posted in the lobby and in the rehearsal hall after registration has closed.
4. Badges are required for entering the rehearsal hall/practice rooms/staging area. Contestants and accompanists will be given badges at registration. Parents and teachers of JUNIORS will be given badges for assisting their registered children/students in the practice rooms only. Parents and teachers will not be allowed in the staging area. No other parents or musicians or guests will be allowed in the rehearsal hall/practice rooms/staging area.
5. ADULTS AND SENIORS should allow children to use the practice rooms first.