



# Arkansas State Fiddle Championship

## Ozark Folk Center State Park

### Mountain View, Arkansas

## CONTEST INFORMATION

**PURPOSE:** The original and continuing purpose of the Arkansas State Fiddle Championship is:

- to help perpetuate and promote the old-time fiddling styles and tunes (specifically, the style in which the melody is never obscured, and the rhythm encourages dancing and toe tapping). This style is often called “old-time mountain music style” and is exemplified in many of the old-time fiddle recordings from the 1930s and 1940s. The contest is limited to this style of fiddling. This means no Bluegrass, Texas swing, trick fiddling, Cajun, Celtic, blues, contest style, or other styles and tunes that are not considered old-time mountain music.
- to help develop a more genuine audience appreciation, understanding and participation.
- to preserve the old-time fiddle tunes.
- to develop and encourage old-time fiddlers' 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. **Youth** is for ages 11 and under. Any contestant who has won first place in the Youth division in two different years will not be allowed to compete in the Youth division again, but will be allowed to play in the Junior division.
2. **Junior** is for ages 12 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 Open division. Youth 11 and under are allowed to compete in the Junior competition if they have won first place in two different years in the Youth division.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **Grand Champion** is for the four first place winners of the above divisions.
6. Contestants may compete in only one division, not including the Grand Champion Division.

**TUNE SELECTIONS:** For all divisions except Youth: Each contestant will select three (3) tunes to play in the contest.

1. **Tune Selections** shall be a breakdown suitable for square dancing, a waltz, and a tune of choice, and will be played in that order in the competition. **YOUTH** Contestants will play a breakdown and a waltz.
2. **Tune length** Each of the selected tunes should be played through twice. **YOUTH** Contestants will play each tune through one time only.
3. **Tune of choice** doesn't have to be (but can be) another dance tune.
4. **Cross-tuning** is permitted.
5. **Submitting the names of the tunes** - The names of the selected tunes shall be written 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 waltz. 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 waltz. These tunes cannot be the same tunes that were played in earlier rounds.
9. **Age of Tunes** -- In the first round of competition, two of the three tunes should originate from the period before 1941. The third 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" (also known as traditional or old time mountain music) in the opinion of the judges will be disqualified from winning any of the places in the competition. This means no Bluegrass, Texas swing, trick fiddling, Cajun, Celtic, blues, contest style, or other styles and tunes that are not considered old-time mountain music.
11. **Five-String fiddles** -- Five-string fiddles are not traditional instruments and are not allowed in the competition.

#### **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 temperature changes in the building and should be re-tuned 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 suitable for an old-time dance is welcome; for example: piano, guitar, banjo (4- or 5-string,) reed organ, tenor guitar, or bass. Mandolin and second fiddle are discouraged, and must play only chords or rhythmic back-up, if used. Solo fiddling is welcome.
4. Contestants may restart a tune in the event of a broken string or equipment malfunction. 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 microphone 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. Contestants are allowed to bring more than one fiddle on stage.

### **JUDGING:**

Judging will be done by three (3) qualified judges who are chosen by the Ozark Folk Center. Judges will be sequestered, and no judge can see any contestant. The contestant is identified only by number. The decisions of the judges will be final.

The Judges are not permitted to enter, nor play in any contest division.

The Judges are not allowed to advise contestants in their selection of tunes to be played.

**JUDGING CRITERIA** for all three 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. It is common in some fiddling traditions for the fiddler to lead the beat, but this must be consistently utilized throughout the tune. For the breakdown and waltz, this criteria correlates with danceability, and the judges will listen for the unique drive that makes a dance tune danceable.
- **Authentic Performance Style** (30 points). The purpose of this contest is to promote pure, traditional old-time fiddling, without the characteristics of the more modern, progressive style that is commonly heard today. Therefore, only authentic old-time performance style will be acceptable. The judges will be listening for specific bowing techniques, phrasing patterns, repeating and alternating notes, drones and double stops, syncopations and strong beat patterns that are commonly heard in the recordings of old-time (born before 1935) fiddlers. Playing Bluegrass, Texas style, western swing, and other such variations will result in disqualification from winning any place in the competition.
- **Execution/Intonation** (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.
- **Difficulty** (15 points) A difficult tune will receive additional 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).