

Old-time fiddling on display at fest

By Geoff Parks

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When Truman Price, perpetually in blue jeans and flannel shirt, starts sawing at his fiddle and rearing his head back to sing, he has the look of the evening's entertainment at a West Virginia fiddle convention — which he has been.

Price now lives on a bucolic patch of land full of apple trees and Jersey cattle south of Monmouth, but he did his time in West Virginia's Appalachia region and elsewhere learning the art and craft of old-time fiddling and dance calling.

A measure of his learning will be on display at the upcoming Independence Hop & Heritage Festival on Saturday. Price, 70, will be a part of the True West String Band and Friends — "we hope to create the feeling of a jam session," he said — in the Town Square's main stage for entertainment.

"I've known Truman for about 20 years, from the time we both were part of the Luckiamute River Band when we were all starting out," Sally Clark said. She is manager of the Guthrie Park Community Center, where Friday night jam sessions have become a staple of Polk County music events.

"He has been kind of a mentor to us because he was well-established in fiddle tunes," she said. "I don't know anyone who knows as much about pioneer music as he does."

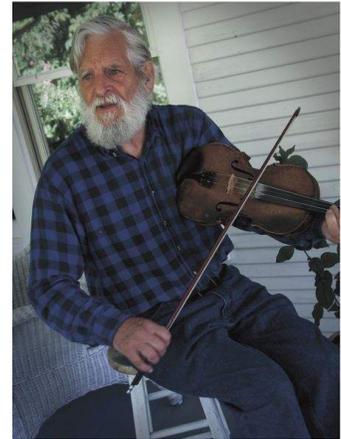
Price's training and learning had an early start. He said he had several years of violin lessons as a young man.

"My father, though, wanted me to learn to play fiddle like my great-uncle," both of whom lived in the mountains of the Appalachian region of Georgia, he said.

After several years of what he called "fiddling around," he put down his instrument for 15 years to concentrate on raising his family and making a go of it as a seller — with his wife, Suzanne — of antiquarian children's books.

While living in Seattle, he saw a performance by legendary Texas fiddler Benny Thomason, which started him studying the history of folk music. He then picked up the fiddle again and began playing coffeehouses in the Seattle area.

Price eventually moved to the Appalachia region of West Virginia,



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Truman Price practices his fiddling and singing on the porch of his home south of Monmouth.

Learn more

Truman Price will play with the True West String Band and Friends at the Independence Hop & Heritage Festival's Town Square, Main and Monmouth streets, about 4 p.m. Saturday.

To contact Price for more information, e-mail truprice@wvi.com, truprice@oldchildrensbooks.com or call (503) 606-3176 or (505) 606-3605. His Web site is www.trumanprice.com.

If you go

What: Independence Hop and Heritage Festival

Events

Friday: 6 p.m., barbecue at Riverview Park; 7 p.m., Ghost Walk; dusk, movie in the Amphitheater; book sale at the Old Library

Saturday: 7:30 a.m., Fly-In at the

where he built a house, began farming and integrating himself into the "biggest events of the year for every county in West Virginia" — fiddle conventions.

There were seemingly "pie socials" every weekend as well, he said.

"We'd play nonstop all weekend, every weekend," he said. "I learned a lot about fiddle tunes for flat-foot (clog) dancing, and all I had to do was show up, pass around the hat, play fiddle and sing. It was a great education in music."

Moving back to Oregon and the Salem area, Price began doing carpentry work while playing fiddle at various small events, then hooking up with the Oregon schools Artists-in-Residence program for 60 weeks in the early 1980s, teaching square and circle dances and playing fiddle.

"That was a heck of a lot more fun than carpentry and really good practice," he said. "I never expected to make a dime teaching fiddle." His practice throughout the years has given him the skill to fiddle and sing — or even call dances — at the same time.

He said he tries to play the fiddle every day and that if he can time it correctly, "the third day of that kind of practice is when I play the best."

"Truman is an excellent technical musician, but what really makes him special is that he plays from his soul and from his heart," Clark said. "He is really pretty unique that way."

Price said he has played at about 50 library events in Portland in the last several years, events in which he talks about old-time fiddle songs and tells stories of their genesis and the beginnings of pioneer fiddle music, as well as playing and singing.

He also plays in Seattle quite a bit because he can combine gigs with his son Adam, a banjo player, and sales of his Jersey beef cattle.

"The Independence Hop & Heritage Festival actually represents a rare opportunity to see me play and sing in the Polk County area," he said.

Independence State Airport with 8 a.m. pancake breakfast; 9:45 a.m., car parade from Pioneer to Riverview parks; entertainment begins at 10 a.m.; noon, tractor pull and other events

Sunday: 8 a.m., pancake breakfast and Fly-In continues

Web site:
<http://independencepolice.org/hop/index.html>