

Fiddling jamborees lure musicians, callers, dancers

By TIM RICHARD

"We held a dance to locate musicians and people asked, 'Hey, who's holding this?' And I said, 'Um — er — the Original Michigan Fiddlers Association.'"

Robert M. Fleck tells that story about how he and Jane Allison co-founded a breezy, informal group while doing research on fiddling in Michigan.

"We want to meet old-time style musicians, callers and dancers and provide an opportunity for them to learn new tunes," said Fleck.

Today the Original Michigan Fiddlers Association has about 800 members. Membership is defined as subscribing to a quarterly newsletter and showing up at admission-free jamborees.

have been held around the state.

A jam session is scheduled for 6-11 p.m. Saturday, March 15 in the fire hall of the in Palmyra, a Lenawee County village six miles southeast of Adrian.

A local jamboree will be held April 26 in Vassar, a Tuscola County village almost due east of Saginaw.

"Our members come from all over the state, mostly outside the major urban metropolitan areas," said Fleck. "But some come from around the 'burbs.'"

Among them are Charles Gadd, a violin maker and fiddler from Orchard Lake, Jake and Pat Glover, banjo picker and fiddler from Canton; Gene Boyd, banjo player from Westland; Anita Dolen, a fiddler, and square dance caller Roy Faigle, both of Redford Township; and Bob Ewald, banjo and guitar player from Livonia.

A RECENT happening in Ypsilanti's Workmen's Hall drew 300 to 400 per-

sons and 40 participating musicians,

half of them fiddlers, said Fleck.

A jamboree ran all afternoon and a square dance was held in the evening. Welcome were all such non-electric instruments as fiddles, banjos, guitars, mandolins and dulcimers.

"Young people got tired of rock and roll," Fleck says in explaining the movement's strength. "It was a spinoff of the alternative lifestyles of the 1950s and '60s."

Michigan has a strong tradition of such music. Henry Ford I sponsored a radio program of fiddle and square dance music in the 1940s.

Scholars say Michigan was a fertile source of folk songs because its economy attracted such diverse groups — trappers, miners, sailors, lumbermen and unionized industrial workers, many of the latter from Appalachia.

"Many persons learned old-time mu-

sic from their grandparents," said Fleck. "Some are extremely talented."

WEEKDAYS, Fleck is a writer and producer of films and videotapes.

A graduate of Wayne State University's Montclair College, he got a degree in film and writing. He has made films on medium duty gas engine applications for Chevrolet, training procedures for the Mid-Michigan Law Enforcement Association and how to sell lumber for Wicks.

"I started playing classical violin at 9, but by the time I got to college I discovered girls and guitars," Fleck said. "Then I discovered fiddle music and learned to play by ear."

Through video work he met Ms. Allison, who edits videotape for commercials and plays the button accordion.

Ms. Allison brings more than musical and technical skills to the project. Raised in Hawaii speaking pidgin English, she came to Michigan State University to learn standard English and cultural communications.

Fleck conceived an idea for a documentary on old-time music and suggested it to Ms. Allison.

The first result was "Spring Meeting," a 17-minute film on the hammer dulcimer.

THEY HAVE grants to do a film on fiddling. The grant covers production costs — not their research or script writing.

Out of their research grew the Original Michigan Fiddlers Association, which sponsors about four events a year in its own name. One subscribes by sending \$8 to OMFA Quarterly Newsletter, Box 21173, Detroit 48221.

Members also organize their own jam sessions, such as the forthcoming one at Palmyra and Vassar.

Folk music today has many sources. Chief are English and Scotch ballads, narrative songs with many verses. Square dancing is pattered after English rural jigs (known in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach as gigues).

In America, blacks influenced folk music, and the result, said Fleck, was bluegrass.



Co-founders of the Original Michigan Fiddlers Association are Jane Allison, button accordion, and Bob Fleck, fiddle. (Staff photo by Steve Cantrell)

Miniatures created in workshop

County Miniatures offer one- and two-session workshops through March for persons wishing to learn how to cre-

ate scaled-down furniture and accessories for miniature rooms and houses. All workshops run from 7-9 p.m. in

the shop at 3335 Grand River, in Village Mall, and all classes are limited to 10 persons. The fee is \$5 per class, or \$10 for the two-session class.

Making draperies is the subject for Tuesday, March 11. Workshop participants are asked to bring window measurements, stainless steel pins and scissors.

Beginning Furniture is the two-session class on the agenda, beginning Tuesday, March 18. Participants are asked to bring their own box of miniature tools, if they have one. X-acto kits and lumber will be available at a discount for class members.

For Monday, March 24, the subject is upholstery, in a one session class. Kits will be available for sale.

For Monday, March 21, the subject is flooring. Participants must bring floor dimensions. Materials will be available for sale.

Registration and inquiries taken by calling Country Miniatures, 477-1760.

Albion College Choir stops here on tour

Albion College Choir has put Farmington Hills on its tour agenda with a performance at 7:15 p.m. Wednesday in Nardin Park United Methodist Church. The church is on 11 Mile Road, west of Middlebelt Road.

One of the members of the choir is Catherine Bennet, a junior at Albion, who took two scholarships in voice while she was attending high school here, in Farmington Musicals scholarship competitions. She is a 1977 Farmington High School graduate and the daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Gerald L. Bennett, 21205 Robinwood.

Albion College Choir is under the direction of Melvin S. Larimer, chairman and associate professor of the school's music department.

The choir, which will travel to 13 cities in Michigan and Illinois for its spring tour this year, includes a woman's chorus and a men's glee club.

Selections to be performed are by Nysted, Christiansen, Bach, Graun, Handall Thompson, Schubert, Ralph Vaughn Williams, Brian Kelly and Brahms.

Spirituals on the playbill have been arranged by Burleigh and William Dawson.

Corned beef and cabbage is on the menu March 15

Traditional corned beef and cabbage dinner, followed by community singing, will be on tap when St. Patrick's Day is celebrated Farmington Community Center style.

"You'll hear the angels sing when you hear our entertainment," said Betty Schwehr, who is chairing the center benefit.

The Mitten State Music Company will headline the entertainment, then

conduct the sing-a-long. The company is a Farmington Hills Sweet Adelines Barbershop Quartet, made up of Susan Baughman, Linda Thompson, Diana Dalia Vecchia and June Yaglia.

Things get underway at 7 p.m. March 15 for the reservation-only dinner in the center at 24705 Farmington Rd. Donation is \$12.50 per person. Reservations are available by calling the center, 477-8404.-30-

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