

Union Grove Blue Grass

New Interest In Traditional Music



Organizer Pierce Van Hoy

Bluegrass music is growing in popularity. Proof of the new interest in this traditional form of American music was seen over the past weekend at the Old Time Fiddlers Convention, north of Statesville at Union Grove.

Not too many years ago the annual festival attracted a few thousand Bluegrass fans, but in this its 48th year, attendance was estimated at 50,000. Young and old, short hairs and long hairs—all bluegrass fans.

"We had to close the gates Friday morning," said a convention official, "but they're still coming." The gates opened on Wednesday and as late as Saturday \$5 tickets were still selling fast. Cars were left parked along roadsides for over a mile in both directions from the main entrance, and traffic was backed up for miles most of the day Saturday, as law enforcement officials tried to keep the mass of automobiles moving.

Every Easter weekend thousands of music fans begin pouring into this small community in North Iredell County, foraging the cattle from the 75-acre pasture where the convention is held. By Saturday, the pasture and wooded area surrounding the big colorful circus-type tent where the actual competition is held, had been turned into a 75-acre mudhole by the chilling rain that fell on the campsites until Friday. But the bad weather or the mud didn't seem to bother those who had waited for three days in their cars, tents, vans and campers for the competition to begin.

"After wading in a foot of mud for three days, you either have to love it or hate it, and I'm beginning to like it," said a girl with blonde hair to her

waist and an ankle length dress that dragged in the mud.

The crowd, mostly young people with long hair and wearing faded jeans, looked more like they were waiting for a rock festival than the world championship bluegrass competition. But the sound around the campgrounds was unmistakably bluegrass, as crew-cut and long hairs got out their banjos, guitars, fiddles and harmonicas for a brief "jam session" outside a tent or by a campfire.

A number of youthful merchants were peddling their wares in spots around the campgrounds. Some were selling handmade items such as belts, candles, and pottery and dulcimers. Others sold more commercial items such as T-shirts, books, records, bumper stickers and buttons.

License plates on parked vehicles represented a wide variety of places. Florida, New York, Connecticut, Missouri, Texas, Colorado, Canada, and Alaska were only a few of the plates seen.

"I come every year, no matter where I am," said one young man, "and this year I was in Denver."

Despite the large crowd, there was little trouble from the group, according to law enforcement officials. There were only a few drug arrests, and the first aid tent set up near the main tent treated only cuts and scratches.

Pierce Van Hoy, organizer of the event, said that more than enough toilet facilities were provided, and that there were two large wells to supply water for the crowd.

Saturday night when the final hours of competition got underway, the main tent, which holds about 20,000 was filled to capacity. As the judges made their choices for world champions in the different categories, the shaggy haired, casually dressed audience, covered with mud to their knees, roared their approval of the judges choices.

At a high point in the excitement, one of the moderators, Doug Mayes, said, "Where is this generation gap all these people have been talking about? I certainly don't see it here tonight." And neither did most of the people who had gathered in Union Grove for three glorious days of bluegrass music.

Union Grove

Story and Photos

By

Jody Higgins



75 Acres Of Mud Didn't Dampen Enthusiasm



World Champion Bluegrass Band, Tom Smith And The Bluegrass Experience



Fiddling, Picking and Singing In The Bluegrass Tradition



A Believer In Bluegrass



No Generation Gap Where Blue Grass Is Concerned



Some People Didn't Care About Music Or Mud



Ronnie Stoneman (center) of the Famous Stoneman Family



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