

# Athabascan Fiddling Festival draws musicians from all over

by **Jim Benedetto**

Tundra Times Editor

The Third Annual Athabascan Old-Time Fiddlers Festival drew sellout crowds for three days and nights in a row. Musicians, dancers and spec-

tators came from many areas of the state, in addition to a very popular contingent from Canada's Yukon Territory.

The event combined fiddle and guitar music, singing, dancing, workshops, food, and fun for all who attended.

But how did Athabascan Indians get exposed to folk/fiddle music? Over a century ago, around 1860, Hudson

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Bay Company traders of Orcadian and Scottish descent travelled to Alaska's Interior and introduced fiddle music to Athabascan people. Athabascans were so taken with the instrument that they adopted it as their own, learning how to play by listening to and watching others. They quickly adapted the Athabascan musical tradition to the fiddle. The result, with some help along the way from Gold Rush miners and, more recently, Country & Western/Bluegrass influences.

The Institute of Alaska Native Arts

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*Alfred Grant (foreground), Master of Ceremonies joins in a jam session during the Third Annual Athabascan Old-Time Fiddling Festival.*

photo by Jim Benedetto

# Fiddling

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(IANA) began its involvement with Athabascan Old-Time music in 1982, when they were awarded a contract from the Alaska State Council on the Arts to identify performers and produce a festival. The first festival was held in 1983, and featured over 50 musicians representing more than 15 villages in the Alaskan Interior.

Community and regional support for the Fairbanks event, one of the more popular by all accounts, was evident by the variety of services and donations provided by businesses, organizations and individuals. These include: the National Endowment for the Arts; the Alaska State Council on the Arts; Fairbanks North Star Borough; Doyon Limited; Harold's Air Service; Arctic Circle Air; Gwitschyaa Zhee Corporation and the Eagles Hall.

Special efforts towards the success of this year's festival were made by the Solomon family, especially Hannah Solomon, who kept everyone dancing and assisted with the workshops.

Alfred Grant was the Master of Ceremonies. He kept the crowd amused, hurried the musicians towards the stage, and even filled in with some fine music of his own on occasion.

Tapes of the First and Second Athabascan Old-Time Fiddling Festivals are available from IANA, P.O. Box 80583, Fbnks, AK 99708, at a cost of \$6.00 each.

This year's festival was dedicated to the late Charlie Peter, who was a popular fiddler from Fort Yukon.