



Thomas Ross Sr. of Inuvik in Canada's Northwest Territories is one of the fiddlers.

Photo by Rob Stapleton

Nov. 19-21 in Fairbanks

60 fiddlers to be at festival

More than 60 Athabascan musicians are expected at the Fourth Annual Athabascan Old-Time Fiddling Festival, Nov. 19-21, in Fairbanks.

The musicians who attend each festival have anecdotes to tell of their involvement in fiddling music.

Vincent Yaska of Galena has been playing since he was 8 years old, having learned from his father. He remembers the first time he played in public. He was 9 years old.

He learned to play "Jingle Bells" for the Christmas

Eve play, but when he got up to perform he got all confused and quit. Yaska continued to learn by listening to the radio and records on an old wind-up phonograph. He taught fiddling at Rampart School in the village of Rampart, and his first students performed at the 1983 festival.

Berchman Esmailka Sr. of Nulata is a fine traditional fiddler, having played for many years in the Interior with

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Fiddling festival to be in Fairbanks

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his brother, the late Rudolph Esmailka Sr. His style is well-founded in the traditional style and is relatively uninfluenced by the more modern style of fiddling.

Berchman Esmailka learned to play the fiddle, as others did, by listening and practicing. His style is best demonstrated when he fiddles to the tune of "Eagle Island Blues," a traditional Athabascan love song.

"They used to be shy about their talent. Now they've become a very proud group of artists," says Mabel Generous, Berchman Esmailka's daughter and festival

coordinator at the Institute of Alaska Native Arts Inc. The institute sponsors the festival.

The festival this year will be held at Eagles Hall in Fairbanks. The three-day event will begin with a full day of educational sessions on fiddling and dance steps.

The remaining two days will be devoted to public performances during the day and dances in the evening.

The institute received matching grants for this year's festival from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Fairbanks North Star Borough Arts Committee. Also, the Fairbanks-based Doyon Ltd. has once again provided support.