The Newsletter of the Saline Fiddlers

Fiddlin' Around

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Sweet Summer

Fiddlers take two week-long tours

Relief tour benefits all involved

By Will Warner,
Executive Director, Saline Fiddlers

The 2006 Katrina Relief Benefit tour took the Saline Fiddlers 3000 miles, through 11 states, including five the Fiddlers had never traversed: Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and Missouri. I was lucky enough to go along.

In nine days the group:

- Did six shows
- Cleaned up a relief camp
- Helped restore a historic home
- Witnessed firsthand the effects of a defining event of their generation
- Made two trips to the emergency room for stitches (glue, actually)
- Saw New Orleans and ate Cajun
- Toured swamp/bayou/river
- Delivered $2,500 to the people of Mississippi
- Waded the length of a topographically accurate scale model of the Mississippi River
- Ate Memphis BBQ and looked around Beale street
- Toured Sun Records studio (think Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison, etc.)
- Went to the top of the St. Louis Arch
- Found the people in the South to be very warm and friendly

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Fiddlers helped restore the historic Bond house in Biloxi by scraping paint and rescuing original bricks from a pile of ashes.

"It was so much fun! I loved being able to help even if it wasn't that much. The shower after that was one of my favorite parts of the trip," says Jordan.

New perspectives of the All Around Michigan Tour

By Jen Lahnala

Only the Fiddlers who have been playing with the group for a year normally get to go on an extended summer tour. This year new Fiddlers were able to go on the second trip of the summer, joining the rest of the group on Day 5 of the "All Around Michigan Tour." Since I was not able to travel with the group myself, I thought I would ask the newest Fiddlers to describe the touring experience.

The ten new Fiddlers joined the trip at about its midpoint, in Montague for a two-set performance in the evening. They played at three of the seven gigs in total. Before their arrival, "old" Fiddlers had already played in Gaylord for the Alpenfest, Mackinaw City twice and at the Castle at Canadian Lakes, and had already visited Fort Michlimackinac, Michigan Adventure and Canadian Lakes for boating and picnicking. So, their story is about half of the tour.

"It was fun. I didn't expect much and the trip was more fun than I thought," Kevin says. "I got to be friends with everybody, working with all these people."

"It was fun. I had a very good time. I got to get to know everyone really well," remembers Brendan.

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Newcomers describe

All around Michigan

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Opening up to the group was the highlight for Joe also.

"It was really nice having everyone be friendly to us because we were new," adds Drew.

"Watching [the Fiddlers] from the inside is much better than from the outside," says Ian, who found the trip to be more fun for that reason.

What is life 'on the road' like?

Michael's face lights up. "It was so fun. I had a blast. All the places we visited (well, that I visited) were fun. The hotel near Bay City had a pool with an underpass to the outside."

"I liked the host housing. I stayed in this house by a lake with one other Fiddler. The people were really nice," says Hannah.

"I really liked Bay City and the tall ships. … I really liked the bus rides, and playing around at the guitar shop. Bay City was probably the best part," decides Drew. Jacob also liked wandering around downtown Bay City, looking at the tall ships and for places to eat.

"There was a guitar store in Bay City that sold lots of PV basses. I only brought $5.00 with me and these basses were in the thousands of dollars," explains Brendan, a bassist, who loved the guitar store nevertheless.

But all that equipment setup and teardown for each show. Equipment rides along separately in its own truck and everything has to be connected and tested before each show, then all torn down and put away properly afterwards. Isn't that a lot of hassle?



Unloading from the bus, Fiddlers head to tour Fort Michlimackinac before playing in Mackinaw City later in the day. In the center, foreground is Alex. Behind him is Casey, in front of him is also Casey.

"I didn't feel like setting up but I just did it," explains Joe.

Jacob says, "I don't mind setting up and tearing down. Sub snake setup is my specialty—everyone does a certain part [of setup and teardown] by habit."

So that leaves the feeling of performing for the audience. I asked the new Fiddlers what their experiences were.

"I didn't really expect anything. I was just excited," says drummer Joe. For him, the worst part of tour was the worry about learning to play all the songs. In the end, he says, it was fine. "I was able to just feel it and play."

"Gigs were more laid back than I thought they would be," adds Drew. "We go out there and have fun."

"It's really fun and exciting to perform for an audience, a big one especially," Michael says. "I've watched performers and wondered what it was like. Now I know."



Half in uniform and tuning before the Montegue show are, from left: Evi, Aubrey, Michelle, Tyler, Jacob, Andrew, Mary, and Hannah.

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Jen Lahnala, Editor.
Photos courtesy of loving Fiddler families.

Will Warner, Executive Director

www.salinefiddlers.com

Hurricane Katrina Benefit Tour: meeting some awesome survivors

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Like everyone, we had seen on TV the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina and read about the thousands of volunteers streaming to the region to help with recovery. We were told that the residents and volunteers could really use some diversion. So we put together a series of free concerts across the Mississippi Gulf Coast.



Upon our arrival in Mississippi, we played at the Cracker Barrel in Gulfport.

With so much demand for the show, there wasn't much time to participate in actual reconstruction work, but we managed to squeeze in one day of it. Guest book entries from our website indicate that the Fiddlers nevertheless accomplished some emotional reconstruction:

I hope these kids know what a blessing they were to us on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

You will never know how much it means to all of us who were able to hear your performances. Your music truly lifts the spirit. I will not soon forget you all and hope I have the chance to see you again one day. Until then I will buy a new CD when I wear this one out.



We found these minstrels in the French Quarter of New Orleans a classic. They recruited Jacob, Tyler, Andrew and Casey to sing refrain.

Where did the people go who once lived here in Bay St. Louis? The Fiddlers found a city smaller than it was before the eye of Hurricane Katrina met the gulf shore here. Below, Fiddlers set up for a performance at St. Stanislaus High School, whose band instruments were all washed away by the storm and subsequent flooding. They raised money and delivered three donated instruments to the hurricane-ravaged school. Behind them is a footbridge that once connected the private school to the beach beyond.





There were several unforgettable gigs. One took place in a work camp full of teenaged volunteers. Those kids went wild, dancing in a big "mosh pit" in front of our microphones. Our bass player joined the dancers for a short time; from the back of the hall one could see a lone Fiddler cowboy hat bouncing amid a mass of flying arms and legs. By the third encore, the music was barely audible with all the hollering. Unbelievable.

The group spent a memorable day with the Muleskinners Association, a local bluegrass/gospel band. The Muleskinners arranged a tour of the Pascagoula River for us, fed us lunch and dinner, and made us feel welcome. That evening the two groups played a joint concert to a very responsive crowd. The show ended with the two bands combining to lead the audience in singing "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." Unbelievable.

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Katrina Relief: awesome survivors

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Behind the scenes our kids showed their toughness. They slept on cots in two big rooms in a former school and overcame adversity in many forms, including grits and corned beef hash every morning for breakfast. On stage they displayed their talent and professionalism. The crowds loved them and mobbed them after each performance.

Several people said they were surprised to see fiddlers from Michigan; they thought it was more of a mountain thing. As always, people couldn't believe that all that talent came from a single high school. One old gentleman remarked with a wink that our group forced him to reconsider his claim that the South has a monopoly on pretty girls.

As individuals, the Fiddlers work very hard. They are tough and uncomplaining. As a group, they are a well-oiled machine; they make it happen, whatever it takes. They like and respect each other. With these qualities, they impressed --- dumbfounded --- hundreds of people on this tour. I admire them more than I can say.



Long bus rides: Once Ben Culver put the television program "Lost" on the monitors, most of the kids got hooked and ended up watching the entire first season.

A dance party on the tour bus has become a Fiddler tour tradition. While the group was partying, driver Jim was working out a route around construction closures in downtown St. Louis, MO. You could say "Lost" became reality that night.



You know, *stuff* happens!

By Casey, Junior violinist

It was another relaxing pre-gig bus ride on the annual Saline Fiddlers Michigan tour. They were on their way to Mackinaw to explore the fort and perform at a local bandshell. Students lounged about, gazing groggily out of the bus at lush deciduous trees, speckled in the morning sun. Ben Culver ambled vaguely towards the back of the bus. He stopped frequently to offer students bits of bubble tape with characteristically quirky enthusiasm and charisma. Soon all the students were called to attention and instructed by their director to conglomerate into an attentive mass in the last few rows of seats. It was announced the ride would be used to touch up on students' announcing skills. One by one, they went before each other and their director and improvised an announcement for "Blackberry Blossom," their nerves hypothetically soothed by pre AND post-announcement applause. Every student was given 'constructive criticism' for personal improvement. After every Fiddler had practiced, the tour bus magically arrived at its destination.

Hours of exploring, shopping, and performing went by quickly. It was a lovely evening. The setting northern sun lazily shining its last rays upon the undulating waters of Lake Huron as Fiddlers tore down their equipment after another crowd-pleasing show. Newly senior Fiddler Mary, (who had just met up with the rest of the Fiddlers at Mackinaw and thus missed the announcement workshop) was reminded by Fiddler Dad Mr. Martinus to annunciate whilst announcing "Blackberry Blossom" so as not to be misheard as saying, "please crap." Mary immediately made a mental post-it to be reviewed before the next night's gig.

The next evening the performance was in Canadian Lakes at something of a medium-sized castle-like edifice. Mary bowed the last few notes of "Appropriate Dipstick" with anticipation. It was her turn to announce. With shoulders squared and tap shoes a'clickin', she sauntered up to and adjusted her pre-assigned microphone with determination. The glare of stage lights impeded her view of the elderly audience, many of whom would be hosting Fiddlers for the night. The venue was deathly hot, and the hum of fans accompanied the fading applause as she swallowed and opened her mouth. Smoothly, she thanked them and gave title to the preceding tune, recalling Mr. Martinus' words and thinking "don't say crap, don't say crap." Intently she announced "Blackberry Blossom," inviting the audience to rhythmically smack their hands together throughout the song. Or so she had thought. Suddenly, Fiddlers broke out of their usual collected stage personas – giggling madly! Old men in the audience slapped their knees, old ladies hooted at the hilarity! She had done it! Mary had thought "DON"T SAY CRAP" with such gargantuan effort she had inadvertently announced over the sound system to an audience hanging on her every word, "FEEL FREE TO CRAP ALONG TO BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM!" She couldn't help but laugh before correcting herself, waves of giggling still shuddering across the stage behind her. The irony of her timing (right after an announcement-awareness workshop) was lost on no one.

To this day, students in need of a smile on stage recollect Mary's messy little mishap with fond Saline Fiddlers nostalgia.

Meet Chris Wild



Chris has a little fun bowling with the Fiddlers during the Katrina Relief Tour. At left, he appears to be in a pensive mood at the gulf shore in Bay St. Louis.

Now in his second season as Assistant Director, Chris Wild is a cellist and artist. A graduate student at the University of Michigan, Chris is working on his Master of Education degree.

Chris was raised in Vancouver, British Columbia, where he began playing cello Suzuki-style (with a fake instrument) at age five. His mother moved to Ann Arbor later on, thus creating the connection to U of M, where he also earned his Bachelor's degree. He found the Fiddler organization there.

"I first heard about the group a couple of years ago when (Fiddler alumni) Reid Smith and Jeremy Kittel were some of my roommates, and I asked Reid where he was disappearing to on Sundays." When Professor Bob Culver, Ben's dad, told him the group was looking for another assistant director, he visited the group and decided to take the position. Chris wanted the experience teaching and working with youth and the exposure to different kinds of music, especially bluegrass, with which he had no previous experience.



With the Fiddlers, Chris focuses on the cello players, and conducts sectional rehearsals. He fills in for Director Ben Culver at gigs when Ben is away.

Chris accompanied the group on the Katrina Relief Tour this June. He enjoyed the pranks the kids played there and during summer camp. He has become famous for encouraging the 'Mosh Pit' at the relief camp concert in Biloxi, MS, by standing up along with the audience there and clapping along, er, wildly. He could be seen working alongside the kids restoring the Bond house in Biloxi as well.

His musical awards include the New Sun Millennium Award from Canada's National Arts Centre along with first place in the Canadian Music Competition and the U-M Concerto Competition.

As an artist, Chris paints with oils and acrylics and had his first public exhibition at Detroit's 555 Gallery in October 2005.

Chris has a younger sister who is studying violin and music education in Montreal. He has a black lab/German shepherd mix back home in Vancouver.

***Read all about our new Fiddlers in the next two issues of* Fiddlin' Around!**

Top ten things *Fiddlers* has taught me

By Scott, Class of 2006

10. Don't date other Fiddlers. Ever.
9. Memorizing music really isn't that hard.
8. Being in the studio isn't as much fun as it seems.
7. Always keep an extra set of strings on you.
6. When you're on stage, be silly, the crowd digs that.
5. Valuable information about working with a professional sound system
4. Don't be irritating on a bus full of people.
3. There are some really cool people out there.
2. How to play in front of people
1. Be nice to people.



Dan exits the chute at Michigan Adventure during the All Around Michigan Tour.



SALINE Fiddlers

Will Warner, Executive Director
Ben Culver, Artistic Director
Doug Rhine, Event Manager
Lynda Shea, Administrative Manager
Ed Brosius, Technical Manager

For bookings call: 1-866-257-5333

www.salinefiddlers.com

Upcoming Public Events

- September 10, Adrian MI, 6:00 PM, **Swingin' at the Shell** at Victory Park Bandshell
- Sept 16, Holly, MI 12:30 & 2:15PM, **Michigan Renaissance Festival**
- October 1, Saline, MI, 1:30 PM **Chili Cookoff** at Washtenaw County Fairgrounds, benefiting Washtenaw County Fire Fighters
- October 8, Lathrup Village, MI, 1:00 PM, **Lathrup Village Fall Family Festival**
- October 14, Cleveland, OH, **Cattle Baron's Ball** Fundraiser for the American Cancer Society
- December 31, Cadillac, MI, **First Night @ Cadillac 2007**

For the latest info visit our website:

www.salinefiddlers.com

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To: