

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Junior performers practice before competing at the South Carolina State Fiddling Championship last year.

A toe-tapping good time

SC State Fiddling Championship coming to Hagood Mill Saturday

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
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PICKENS — Music will fill the hills and hollers at noon Saturday as Hagood Mill hosts the annual South Carolina State Fiddling Championship.

This traditional contest goes back to the 1920s, when Clemson University opened the doors of Tillman Hall to the local musicians of the nearby South Carolina mountains for their music competition. Some of the best fiddlers in the Southeast will gather to compete for the title of South Carolina State Champion on Saturday.

"We are pleased to host the fiddling championship," Hagood Mill director Billy Crawford said. "It's our premiere event in our Music in the Mountains series that we hold on the third Saturday of each month."

But the fiddling championship isn't just for fiddlers — musicians may also compete in the categories of guitar, old-time banjo, old-time string and wildcat open.

"Wildcat open is where anything goes," Crawford said. "People can get up and play other instruments that aren't in a particular category. They can play mandolin, harmonica, washboard, spoons or they can sing — basically however they like to make music."

The event usually draws more than 2,000 people, the largest crowds both on and off stage. Crawford anticipates an even larger crowd this year.

"We hope to see a surge in the number of musicians and in our audience," he said. "Every year we're hoping to create a bigger and better event."

Contestants are judged on tuning, rhythm, timing, creativity, execution and expression. Expression scores are based upon the feeling of the contestant's performance. Flat, mechanical or showy performances will result in fewer points.

The historic Hagood Mill site continues to operate a water-powered gristmill since its construction in 1845. The mill will operate from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fresh stone-ground corn meal, grits and wheat flour will be available for sale in the old mill.

Saturday's event will also include a variety of folk life and traditional arts demonstrations — from blacksmithing and bowl-digging to beekeeping and basket-making. Spectators can ask the artists questions and purchase their work.

Admission is free, but there is a $5 parking fee. Contestants can register online or by calling (864) 898-2936. Only contestants competing in the senior fiddle competition must pay a $10 registration fee.

"So come on out and sit a spell," Crawford said. "Bring a lawn chair or blanket and enjoy lively music and good food on the grounds of the historic old grist mill that is the central destination for traditional music in the South Carolina Upcountry."

Contestants can register online at visitpickenscounty.com. For more information, call (864) 898-2936.

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