



Fiddlin' Around

Volume 11, Number 2

www.salinefiddlers.com

Winter 2005

Hometown Concert Series

Fiddlers to host Celtic group Millish

By Jen Lahnala

It has been discussed for some time now: "Let's bring back some of the Saline Fiddler alumni for a Hometown Show."

Well, we've done it. The Fiddlers proudly announce a first: a concert with the young Celtic band **Millish** for the Winter Hometown Concert Series, Saturday, February 5 at 7:30 PM.

Millish features two Fiddler alumni, Jesse Mason and Brad Phillips, along with fellow band members Tyler Duncan and Mike Shimmin.

Jesse Mason, a 1998 Saline graduate, is currently the

Fiddlers' Assistant Director. He attends Eastern Michigan University, where he is finishing up degrees in music and physics. Brad Phillips, the 2001 & 2003 State of Michigan Old Time Fiddle Champion, attends the University of Michigan, majoring in jazz violin. He graduated from Saline in 2003. Mike Shimmin is from Western Michigan University, where he plays with University Symphonic Band (of which he is Principal Percussionist), and three other groups. Tyler Duncan attends University of Michigan. He is the first American to win the *All-Ireland Championship* (the World Championships of Irish Music) on the uilleann pipes in 1999 and 2000 on the bodhran in 2001.

Millish, in its third year, has already earned a reputation with their own sound. "From jaw-dropping jigs and reels, to dark instrumental sagas, to cross-cultural medleys, to funky originals, to combining all of the above, Millish will never stop surprising you, while

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Members of Millish, from left: Jesse Mason - guitar; Mike Shimmin - percussion; Brad Phillips - fiddle, mandolin; Tyler Duncan - uilleann pipes, whistle, bodhran

Tickets for the Hometown Concert are \$15 for adults and \$8 for K-12 students and can be purchased online:

www.salinefiddlers.com

or by calling
866-257-5333

Board of Directors assembled

By Will Warner, Secretary,
Board of Directors for the Saline Fiddlers

A year ago, after 10 years under the auspices of the Saline Area Schools, the Saline Fiddlers became a private organization. The group remains an ensemble of Saline High School music students, but it is now in the hands of a nonprofit corporation created by Fiddler parents.

The corporation is governed by a Board of Directors. They are:

Walt Byers, Chairman
Will Warner, Secretary
Stacey Breedveld
Fred Manuel
Terry Walters

The board acts in an oversight capacity, but does not involve itself in day-to-day operations. It approves policy for the corporation, does long-range planning, and appoints an executive director.

The board members look forward to serving the organization as it continues to take fiddle music to people far and wide, to expose the students of Saline High School -- present and future -- to these American traditions, and to create lifelong memories for all its members.

Board members for the Saline Fiddlers can be reached at info@salinefiddlers.com.

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Fiddlin' Around is the official newsletter of the
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Editor: Jen Lahnala

Photos courtesy of loving Fiddler families.

Walt Byers, Executive Director

www.salinefiddlers.com

Millish to appear on new Saline stage

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never losing their unique, high-energy sound. This young band has already made quite a splash in the Celtic music scene, playing at such venues as The Detroit Festival of the Arts, Hill Auditorium, The Wheatland Music Festival, The Chicago Celtic Festival, The Harbor Springs Celtic Festival, The Saline Celtic Festival, Farm Fest, twice at The Ark, and twice on the nationally syndicated Mitch Albom Show." -*Millish website.*

The Fiddlers, energized from sharing the stage with Reba McEntire, playing with President Bush, and recent trips to Washington, DC, Lexington, Kentucky, and the North American International Auto Show, bring their own combination of bluegrass, folk, Celtic and dance back to the new Saline High School auditorium. The Fiddlers feature tunes by Jesse Mason as well as Artistic Director Ben Culver, and many old favorites from back to the beginning of the group's inception. Look for some lively new pink-themed costumes and the clogging quartet.

Come out and see the Fiddlers and Millish Saturday, February 5, for a show sure to bring a smile to your face and a tapping to your foot. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$8 for students and can be purchased at the website, www.salinefiddlers.com, or by calling **866-257-5333**.

Announcing: The 2nd Saline Fiddlers
Hometown Fiddle Power Workshop

featuring instruction by Ben Culver
Saturday, February 5, 2:00 - 4:30 pm
at the Saline High School

- ◆ \$35 fee includes instruction, a ticket to the evening Hometown Concert and a workshop t-shirt
- ◆ Participants must have a minimum of two years playing experience or a letter of recommendation from their music teacher
- ◆ Adults and students alike are welcome!
- ◆ Reservations are available by calling

866-257-5333

Boys' night out... or the Fiddler DC trip

By Brian, Rhythm Section

The Washington, DC trip was a grand tour. We played for kids in Arlington, VA, gave them a workshop, went sight-seeing in DC, and we played in the WHITE HOUSE! But another highlight of the trip was when the guys were hanging out.

Almost every night, it was all boys including Jim the bus-driver, Mr. Shea as the chaperone, and nine fiddlers with testosterone. On the way to our host home, we did stand-up, sang campfire songs, made fun of celebrities, and made banjo jokes.

We tried to stay away from each other during the day so that we wouldn't annoy each other too much. But throughout the trip, we always whispered inside jokes and laughed hysterically while people gave us funny looks.

We stayed with a very, very nice and hilarious family. They fed us a lot of food and entertained us very kindly. When the saying "Our house is your house" was said, it was meant. We stayed up till 2:00 pretty much every night even though we had to get up at 5:00 the next morning. Many different events took place during our stay at the home: bubble gum wars with their two kids Amanda and John, Pokemon video games, pictures, and laughing.

The very last day was the best (not really for Fiddlers). The bus wouldn't start so we had to wait for a company to come and fix it. However, we didn't go back to sleep. We couldn't. Instead, all the boys gathered in front of the 15-inch TV and played Zelda. Pat was upset because we wouldn't let him catch more Pokemon, but he got over it. After four hours and when Link was on his way to Death Mountain, Jim called and told us the bus was ready to leave. We all said our goodbyes and thank-yous to our hosts and took our leave.

We got back home at around 9:30 PM and unpacked everything like we always do. Then the guys all stood around and looked at each other. There was a long pause, and Scott said, "Dude, we gotta do that again."

And if there's one thing I've learned on this trip, it's the definition of a perfect pitch: when you throw a banjo into the dumpster and it doesn't hit the sides.



Pat, sound tech, had to wield an acoustical instrument in order to play at the White House. He is holding a shaker and a whistle. The group was not allowed to use amplification. Brian is at right, holding the dobro.

The Saline Fiddlers once again had the opportunity to play for guests at the White House, this time at the beginning of winter break. Friends and relatives graciously hosted the group for three nights, while they went back and forth into town to play and tour. The especially brave family of a fiddler's uncle hosted all the guys in the group. Rhythm Section member Brian relates his experience on this page. Business Director Shelly Banet shares her story about the trip on page 4.

First-timer describes her experience

White House performance

By Shelly Banet, Business Director

There is a first time for everything. On December 19, 2004, I visited the White House for the first time, accompanying the Saline Fiddlers for a holiday performance. Although the group itself had performed there twice previously, for this particular group of Saline Fiddler students, it was the very first time. This visit seemed ultra-special. Since the 9/11 tragedies, invitations to the White House have become particu-



At the White House: Alex concentrates on his technique while, from left, Nick, Kathryn, Brian and Kristen join in the melody. Fiddlers played their favorites along with some holiday tunes.

larly rare. The sharp increase in security strictly limits those allowed to enter the White House. Holiday tours in particular have been scaled back, and now consist largely of dignitaries, "special guests" and families of government staff.

As our group chaperone, "photographer" and spokesperson, I was the only "extra" Saline Fiddler allowed in the White House that day. Following the group through the security clearance and back hallways of the White House, I pulled out the lone camera to capture practically every move throughout the visit. We soon reached the mezzanine where poster-size photos of famous entertainers lined the walls. While our Artistic Director, Ben Culver, led the students through warm up, I wondered if our kids would

recognize the photos of The Temptations, Aretha Franklin, and Ray Charles, among others. Did it register yet how amazing it is to be here?

A brief walk took us to the East Room where the group took to the "stage" before an astonishing 14-foot tall frosted Christmas tree. A large poster, illustrated by the artist chosen for the pages of the year's White House Holiday Booklet, "announced" the group to guests. A few stately-looking folk were then privately escorted through the room, followed by other special guests. As fiddle music resonated amongst the glistening garlands, trees and floral arrangements, the secret service guard assigned to the East Room quipped, "the best group we've had in here yet." Between camera shots and responding to audience inquiries, I smiled with those watching as Scott spun his upright bass in circles throughout some tunes. Performing beneath the original life-size painting of our nation's first President, I wondered again if the Fiddlers themselves truly grasped the honor, privilege and incredible opportunity in performing on the floor of the East Room at the White House, home to our country's Presidential history. I closed my eyes to imprint this ultra special memory in my soul.

Amidst the vast crystal chandeliers, original paintings of past presidents and first ladies, display of White House Christmas cards of the past decades, and the famous gingerbread house that adorned this presidential home, the Saline Fiddlers energized an audience and even inspired a secret service agent to purchase the group's past four CDs online. I relished the honor and privilege to stand aside this vibrant and accomplished group of youth as they entertained guests invited to the White House for Christmas 2004 festivities.

As a teenager, I would have struggled to grasp the magnitude of such an experience. Decades later, I am grateful for having the opportunity to participate, even more so that the 2004-2005 Saline Fiddlers will have memories that include a performance at the White House. They can share the photos and tell stories about "the first time I visited the White House..." for years to come.

Group conducts three workshops, concert

Fiddlers share heritage with Lexington students

By Kim, senior violinist

“Welcome to Kentucky!” Through the darkness and the rain-spattered windows of the bus, we peered out into the dim parking lot to see our host families waiting excitedly in the rain for us to get off the bus. Our five-hour trip through Michigan and Ohio had brought us to Lexington: the land of sprawling, orderly horse farms, the University of Kentucky, and welcoming hosts for one rockin’ performance and three huge workshops.

Stef, Mary, and I were fortunate to stay with a wonderful family who happened to have two high school string-playing daughters. We were able to bond with them, learning about the UK as our “Mom” drove us back and forth to the auditorium, and listen in awe to their slight Kentucky drawl. They made us delicious food, hot breakfast, midnight snacks, and even let us have a slumber party with other Fiddlers staying at a house next door.

It wasn’t all fun and games. In one day we had two 90-minute workshops, each with two hundred plus string players, and a performance, followed by another packed workshop the next day and the return five-hour trip home.

The workshops were great. We were able to fill a humongous stage with standing room only with elementary, middle, and high school students all eager to learn what we had to teach. Artistic Director Ben Culver led each workshop despite a forthcoming cold, his voice magnified through sound technology so each and every student could hear his insightful comments. By the time each workshop was over every student had learned at least two new songs, improved other repertoire, and gained new fiddling technique.

We followed up with an evening concert at the UK Singletary Center for the Arts, a massive hall with a big echo. Despite the acoustics, it was one of our most successful concerts ever. Averaging 16 years of age, the audience really got into our music, clapping along exuberantly, singing to Nick’s “The Rainbow Connection,” and even doing the wave. They were really excited to have us there and even wanted to have us stay a couple more days so we could play

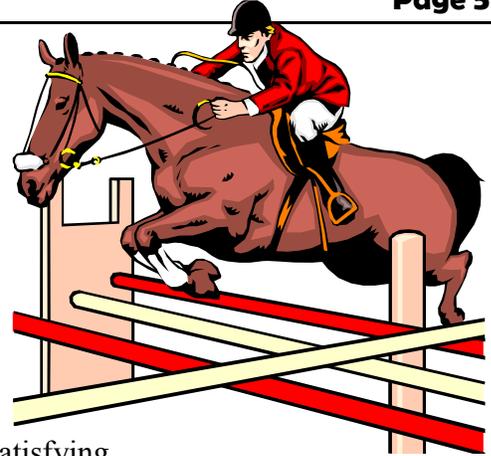
more shows!

The trip to Kentucky was a great means of satisfying the Saline Fiddler’s mission: to share our music, both through teaching and performance, and to help people realize all the opportunities music can create.

On to the next stage!



(Good segue, Kim...)



Upcoming Public Events

- ♫ January 15: **North American International Auto Show**, Detroit Cobo Hall, 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM. For maps, directions, and general information visit www2.naias.com
- ♫ February 5: The 2nd **Saline Fiddlers Fiddle Power Workshop** featuring instruction by Ben Culver, Saline High, 2:00 – 4:30 PM
- ♫ February 5: **11th Annual Winter Hometown Concert**, with guest artist Millish, featuring Saline Fiddlers alumni Jesse Mason and Brad Phillips, Saline High, 7:30 PM
- ♫ February 27: **Auditions for 2005-2006 Saline Fiddlers**, Saline Middle School Orchestra Room, 6:00 – 8:00 PM
- ♫ April 9: **Cattle Baron’s Ball** – Fundraiser for American Cancer Society, Cleveland, OH
- ♫ April 16: **Fundraiser for St. Thomas Church**, Ann Arbor, 7:00 PM
- ♫ May 21: **West Michigan Bluegrass Festival**, Lowell 4H Fairgrounds, Lowell, MI. Visit www.wmbma.org/wmbma/ for more information.

For bookings call: 1-866-257-5333

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Must Reads:

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SALINE
Fiddlers

Walt Byers, Executive Director
Ben Culver, Artistic Director
Shelly Banet, Business Director

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Thanks from the staff at *Fiddlin' Around*.



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To:

Fiddlers visit the White House, December 2004