

Allemande Left and Do-si-do:

Missouri Folk Arts Turns Corners With Rural Schools

by Lisa L. Higgins,

Director of Missouri Folk Arts Program

In early May, emeritus Professor Howard W. Marshall taught a four-day school residency program about Missouri fiddling at two rural Shelby County R-IV elementary schools. Monday through Thursday, he traveled between Clarence (population 915) and Shelbina (population 1,943) to introduce fourth and fifth graders to the historic and contemporary significance of old-time music and dance. Marshall was joined by the schools' music teacher Lola Rist, who had prepared the students throughout April by teaching relevant songs and basic square dance steps; both also connected the residency content across the disciplines to other subjects like history, geography and physical education.

Each day, Marshall built on the previous day's lessons with the addition of a new artist. Tuesday, octogenarian Jim Lindsey, an acclaimed rhythm guitarist from nearby Knox County, joined him. Wednesday, square dance caller Steve Young of Sturgeon joined them, and the students practiced their new dance steps with live music. Thursday, Knox County's Larry Ayers, an accomplished luthier, demonstrated techniques for building fiddles. The residency was topped off on Thursday night with "Fiddler's Frolic," a square dance and cakewalk for the children and their families.

For "Fiddler's Frolic," two buses delivered Shelbina children to the Clarence Elementary School gym. Clarence students arrived with their parents and grandparents in tow. For the opening dance, the gym was filled with ninety-six dancers, mostly children—enough to complete twelve dance squares. On stage, Marshall was joined by Lindsey, Ayers, fiddler John

White (2005 Traditional Arts Apprenticeship master artist) and six other musicians, including three local children. The young dancers executed do-si-dos, allemandes and the complicated grapevine twist as called by Steve Young. To my surprise, many students even stayed on the dance floor to waltz, though it was no surprise that most of them stayed on the floor for the cakewalk.



Larry Ayers (standing), Howard W. Marshall and John White play tunes for "Fiddler's Frolic" in Clarence, Mo., accompanied by local school children. Photo by Deborah A. Bailey.

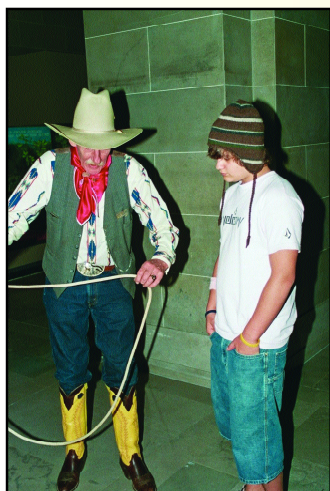
Thank you so much for the experience that you gave us! I wasn't there on Monday so I don't know what went on, but from what I heard, it sounded like a load of fun! It must be awfully hard to learn to play by ear!

—Jacie E., Shelbina Elementary School

Dear Dr. Marshall, Thank you very much for coming to our school. I learned a lot. I hope you can come back! The first day was fun, but my legs kept falling asleep on me from sitting too long. So, please have more dancing.

—Joanne N., Shelbina Elementary School

The Missouri Folk Arts Program (MFAP) has produced educational projects for school children for several years, from traveling exhibitions to school performances. The most long-lasting project is "Tuesdays at the Capitol." Since 1988, MFAP has partnered with the Department of Natural Resources' Missouri State Museum. Master and apprentice artists who participate in the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program (TAAP) perform and demonstrate at venues in and around the Capitol. The primary audience for Tuesdays is school children who tour the Capitol each spring and fall, usually fourth and fifth graders who are studying Missouri history, government and culture.



Cowboy poet and saddle maker Martin Bergin demonstrates lasso to students at the Capitol in Jefferson City, Mo. Photo by Lisa Rathje.

“Tuesdays” gives children the opportunity to observe the artists as they work, to touch instruments, tools and objects and to ask questions. Still, this project only offers children brief introductions to the long-term and emerging folk arts associated with our state.

Nationally, the last few years have marked a concerted increase in Folk Arts in Education (FAIE) projects, especially with the establishment of the Task Force on Folk Arts in Education and its recent shift

in name and mission to the National Network for Folk Arts in Education. Network coordinator Paddy Bowman has engendered collaboration between the fields of Folk Arts and Arts Education and advised Louisiana and Wisconsin state arts councils with their award-winning FAIE projects. With guidance from Bowman, the MFAP and the Missouri Arts Council

I just want you to know that you all have inspired me to want to even call for square dancing, play the fiddle, make the fiddle, or, the one I want to do the most, play the guitar.

—Justin B., Shelbina Elementary

submitted a successful grant application to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to fund a pilot folk arts residency project. The \$20,000 grant helps MFAP to increase its outreach to public schools via in-depth residencies. Residency artist-educators interact with



Colombian dance master Carmen Dence demonstrates the “cumbia.” Photo by Lisa Rathje.

children in the classroom for a minimum of twenty hours. Each residency culminates in a program where the children share their new knowledge and skills with peers, family and, sometimes, the public.

Initially, MFAP staff and nationally recognized FAIE specialist Sue Eleuterio trained three traditional artist-educators to create and conduct residencies for schools. Dr. Marshall is both Professor Emeritus of Art History and Archaeology and an accomplished “Little Dixie style” fiddler. Gladys Coggsell is an award-winning African-American storyteller, counselor

and education specialist. Carmen Dence is an active Colombian folklorico dancer and choreographer, as well as a Research Scientist in Radiology at Washington University.

Currently, MFAP staff is working with teachers, community arts partners and artist-educators to produce and assess the residencies.

- Ms. Coggsell paired with Laura Speed Elliott Middle School, particularly Mrs. Desiree Jones’ Social Studies classes, in Boonville, February 22–25, 2005. The Friends of Historic Boonville was the community arts partner for the residency.
- Dr. Marshall paired with the Shelby County schools, May 2–5, 2005. The Historic Bethel German Colony was the community arts partner.
- Two residencies are planned for the fall of 2005. Ms. Dence will pair with the West Plains School District and the West Plains Council on the Arts. MFAP staff also is working with community arts partner Raintree Arts Council in northeast Missouri to coordinate one residency that features all three artist-educators.

The Folk Arts School Residency pilot project will end in December 2005, though MFAP and the Missouri Arts Council intend to apply for additional NEA funding to support a second round of residencies and training for additional artist-educators. We have received high praise from Boonville and Shelby County teachers, students and communities, and we look forward to reaching more children around the state.