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Just fiddlin' around at the Whitewright Fiddle Fest

By Allen Rich
Jun 2, 2008

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The T-shirts everyone was wearing in Whitewright on Saturday humbly stated, "Just Fiddlin'," but these weren't just any fiddle players.

Although he no longer enters Texas Old Time Fiddler competitions, Louis Franklin, seven-time winner of the World Champion Fiddle Contest in Crockett, Texas, will always be center stage, in a very real way, at every Whitewright Fiddle Fest.

Louis' son, Larry Franklin, not only followed in his father's footsteps by winning the World Championship Fiddle Contest, but Larry also has three Grammy Awards to his credit.

And the powerfully built rhythm guitarists accompanying many of the fiddlers were Ray and Royce Franklin, sons of a man regarded as one of the great breakdown fiddlers of all time and Louis' uncle, Major Franklin. Back in 1949, it was Major that walked off with the World Championship trophy at the annual contest in Crockett.

Maybe the shirts should say, "Just fiddlin' legends!"

For well over half a century, the Franklin family has been synonymous with fine fiddlers and certainly nothing changed Saturday at the 4th Annual Whitewright Fiddle Fest. Although Larry Franklin isn't a contestant and he is primarily there to entertain the crowd while the judges make their difficult decisions, his fiddling seems to get more brilliant every year.

Whitewright's own Julie Johnson, a superb vocalist now appearing in

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"Hello Dolly" on Lyric Stage, exceeded the free concert and even joined in with Larry Franklin's band for a couple of rousing tunes.

But all eyes were also on a gifted fiddler from Porter, Texas named Carl Hopkins that won the showcase event at the Whitewright Fiddle Fest, the Louis Franklin Championship round, in 2005 and 2007.

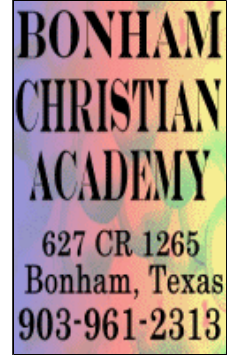
As good as Spavinaw, Oklahoma native Bubba Hopkins was, as talented as Tennessee fiddler "Wild" Bill Jones and Jenks, Oklahoma's Jake Duncan were on Saturday, when they put the fiddles away Carl Hopkins had his third coveted title.

Another special award, Accompanist of the Year, is selected by the performing musicians each year. The man voted top accompanist for 2008 was stand-up bass player Steve Williams from Lampasas, Texas. Steve edged out Ray Franklin for the award.

"This is like winning a state championship," Williams told the audience as he waved his trophy.

The Louis Franklin Championship round results are as follows:

- 1st** Carl Hopkins Porter, TX
- 2nd** Bubba Hopkins Spavinaw, OK
- 3rd** Bill Jones Martin, TN
- 4th** Jake Duncan Jenks, OK





Carl Hopkins





Julie Johnson



Larry Franklin and band



Royce Franklin (right) and another rhythm guitarist hard at work!



Louis and Larry Franklin





Top accompanist Steve Williams (right) and the man he edged out to win the award, Ray Franklin (center).





Larry Franklin



Wade Stockton



Tom Fonville



Jake Duncan



Faith Neugent



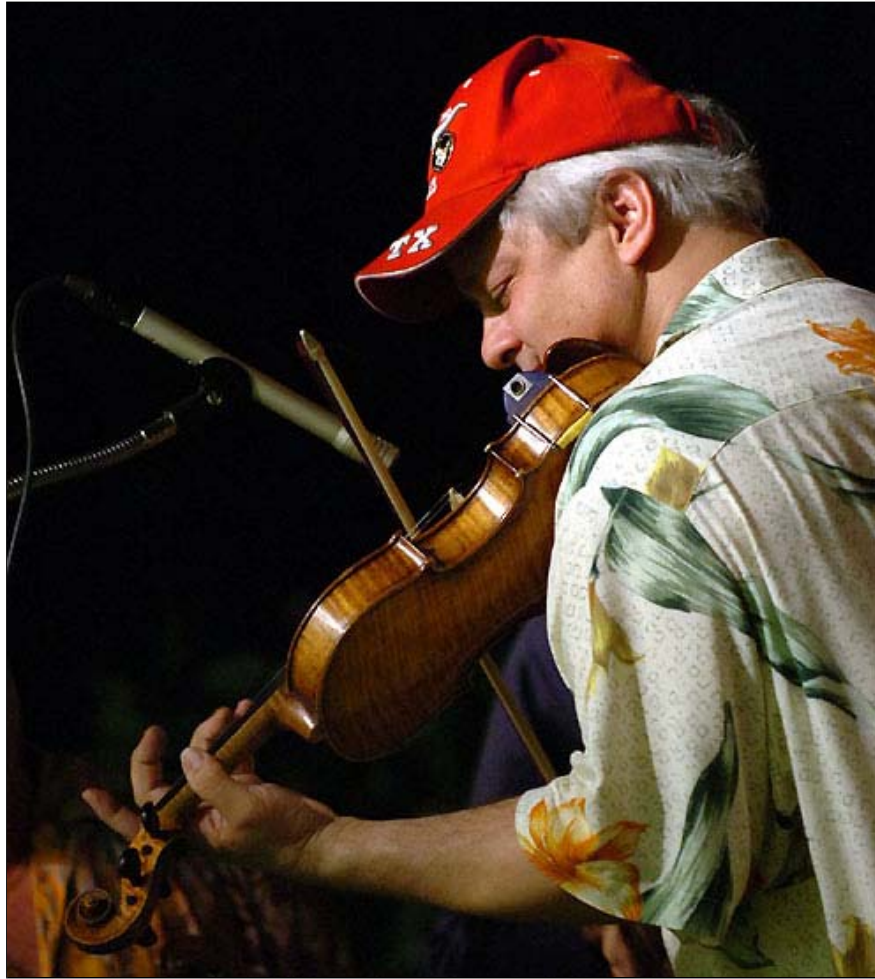
E. J. Hopkins



Bubba Hopkins



Bill Jones









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