

Junior Hoedowner

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Issaiah Baltzell Interview by the Argus (Idaho) Observer

By JESSICA KELLER

ARGUS OBSERVER (Used by permission from the editor.)

WEISER - Although playing in the “small fry” division at the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest and Festival in Weiser, 8-year-old Issaiah Baltzell packs plenty of experience behind her fiddle. Baltzell, Portland, is competing for the third year at the festival, but for her and her older brother, Gabriel, Weiser is the next to last stop in the fiddler competition season, which began in the early spring. Baltzell, who placed fifth among the small fry category last year, is hoping to at least place third this year, she said prior to going on stage in the first round Monday at the fiddle festival.

She was excited but anxious Monday waiting for her first stage appearance this year and making a few last runs through her songs before taking stage second. “I just like the competing, and lots of my friends come too and grandpas and grandmas too,” Baltzell said of the competition.

Baltzell has only been playing the fiddle for three years but the precocious musician began her musical career at age 3 with the violin. “I was jealous of my brother,” Baltzell said, adding her brother started to play the violin that year, and she wanted to learn as well. She said she takes classical violin lessons with a teacher and also has a separate teacher for the fiddle. “I practice all year round, just to get ready” for competition, Baltzell said.

She has already played in three contests this year - the Oregon Old Time Fiddlers Association state contest in Salem, the Northwest Regional Fiddle Contest in Spokane, Wash., and the Columbia Gorge Fiddle Contest in Hood River. Baltzell won first place at the Willamette Valley Fiddle Contest in Corvallis in August. “This one is more scary,” Baltzell said of the Weiser festival, which wraps up on Saturday.

Baltzell said, whereas other contests just have a stage and maybe a few hay bales placed around it, the Weiser festival features a stage in the darkened Weiser High School gymnasium with bright lights centered on the performers and widescreens placed strategically around the stage that show close ups of the players and accompanists.

“The only time I get rid of my nerves is afterwards,” Baltzell said, adding, up until she begins playing she has “butterflies.” “They're almost impossible to get rid of,” she said. Her nerves did not show Monday afternoon when she took the stage with her two accompanists and played “Gray Eagle,” “Doc Harris' Waltz” and the “Clarinet Polka,” and afterward, Baltzell said she was happy with her performance. “I'm glad that it's over, but it was fun,” she said, adding she will

spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing while she waits to find out if she qualified for the second round Tuesday, which is also when her brother will take the stage for the first time at the event.

This article was written before the Weiser contest was over. Isaiah went a head to win the Small Fry Division competing against many other fine young fiddlers.

Tune of the Month. Hull's Victory is an American tune which celebrates the victory of the USS Constitution over HMS Guerriere during the War of 1812. Shown here in the key of F, it can easily be transposed to the key of D by dropping the initial note down from F on the E string to D on the A string.

Hull's Victory

