Well’s Workshop

Students Learn to Fiddle in Lehman

By Noelle Selb Staff Writer

Their musical flow through Lehman Auditorium Saturday afternoon, but they weren’t playing from the roof. Instead, these fiddlers came together for the annual fiddle concert and workshop led by renowned fiddler Robbie Wells.

Participants waited with excitement for Wells, who played with Dukes of Hazard’s “Cooter” this summer, to perform. Wells was accompanied by his two fourteen-year-old sons, Cory and Jesse. The workshop opened up with an hour-long concert of both traditional and self-composed pieces.

For the two hours that followed, with fellow fiddlers circled around him, Wells guided the group through pre-arranged music, giving mini-lessons and scattered advice. He focused on incorporating Irish rolls into traditional pieces.

Wells has a natural ability with the fiddle, despite a late introduction to the instrument; he didn’t begin playing until age 15. “When I was younger and nobody else played fiddle at that time, I was like the only fiddle player around the area,” said Wells. “I grew up playing bluegrass, that was the most important instrument,” he added.

What is unique about Wells is the way he learned how to fiddle. “All musicians back in the 70s, we didn’t have access to all the learning material and teachers that people do today. I think back in the 70s, all my friends, they all learned by ear by just playing records and listening to them over and over and over again to get it right and that’s kind of the way I learned,” he said.

This is the fourth workshop Wells has led at EMU. He enjoys the chance to instruct as well as perform. Said Wells, “one of my God-given gifts is to be able to teach. And teaching, as far as that goes, is not something you dream about doing, if you’re a musician; you dream about being a great performer. And I never thought I would be a good teacher.”

His audience was grateful that Wells chose the educational route of occupation. Bianca Bowman, a sophomore at local Broadway High School, said she liked the way the workshop was set up because it, “got you into the mood.”

 Fellow sophomore, Morgan Kraybill of Eastern Mennonite High School, said she showed up on Saturday because, “I take lessons here. I’ve been here the past few years and I’ve enjoyed it.

Although EMU emphasizes its diversity and global awareness, student approaches to awareness of current events vary greatly.

“I scan the headline of the Washington Post occasionally,” said Souder, “but if it’s really important I often find out from someone else.”

Many of Souder’s housemates also read the Washington Post, which they subscribe to as a house, but they have other varying sources of information as well.

“I check the Post about three times a week, and I work at Mercy House, so I hear about local community issues there,” said Junior Lindsey Frye.

“I read local paper on the internet,” said Rachel Weaver, “and we talk about issues in Harrisonburg in some of my classes.”

Several classes at EMU both discuss current events and require students to look at news sources. Sophomore Matt Ganegy expressed appreciation for his first-year college writing class with Professor James Bomberger, which required reading of various columns in Newsweek magazine.

Sophomore Emily Miller voiced appreciation for her curriculum of her International Conflict and Peacemaking class. Inventing Reality, a book about the media’s bias, is required. “It was eye-opening to read,” Miller said.

“Students may be keeping up, but I don’t hear them talking about it more than any other alternative sources such as The Economist,” I read the Washington Post an average of three days a week, and occasionally the New York Times. But I think they give more inclusive coverage than a lot of papers and are probably the best nationally, but you’re still not getting the whole story at all,” Miller added.

International students also expressed frustration with current media bias. “Newspapers tend to use vague terms and don’t really define things, so we just have a vague idea of what’s going on,” said Senior Heather Menzies, from Canada. She explained that she compares Canadian news sources with American newspapers, as well as with the BBC.

Canadian Junior Conrad Erb of seemed less optimistic about students’ awareness of world events. “Students may be keeping up, but I don’t hear them talking about it more than any other alternative sources,” he said.

Erb, who reads the Washington Post regularly, stressed that it is important to listen to what people are saying about events; he checks the opinion page of the paper as well as the headlines.

Current issues, such as the prospect of war with Iraq, have increased interest in current events for some. Students have recognized however, that awareness of current events takes not only time and effort, but discernment, as well as source’s trustworthiness.