



Chris Thile, 1993 WVA Mandolin Champion, was one of Andy's advanced kids.

Andy May's Acoustic Kids

Hi Folks,

The Front Range of northern Colorado is covered in snow, and "Headin' Home to Winfield" is a sunny memory!

Interest in the '93 "Acoustic Kids" program was definitely high. I started getting inquiries from kids, parents and grandparents as early as last December, and it kept up till a week before the festival. As a result, we had a large and enthusiastic roster of young musicians from all over the country — and a great audience to cheer for them.

For those who aren't familiar with Acoustic Kids, the program is a non-competitive (NOT a contest!) workshop and showcase situation that is part of the Walnut Valley Festival. It is set up for youngsters who want to share their musical skills and experiences with each other and with the festival audience. My wife, Lauren, and I start things off with an informal get-together early in the festival. This is our organizational meeting to see who this year's crop of talent is, and to organize them into beginner, intermediate and advanced groups. Then for the rest of the festival, we showcase the groupings of kids, ending with a Sunday morning talent extravaganza.

For the third year now, the youngsters and their families who participated were a wonderful bunch. We had lots of promising and talented young fiddlers in the beginner/intermediate category, including Amanda Grey, Brooke Wehner, Jeffrey Reavis, Liesel Wilson, Drew McDaniel, Ann and Tori Toler, and last year's December *Occasional* cover kids, Brandon, Katie and Maria Hall, and Rachel and Harriet Rosenberg, as well as the singing of Briana Baker.

In the advanced workshops we had a real variety of skills. Jeremy Sharp delighted the audience with arrangements on harmonica, concertina and cello. Jason Luton on guitar and Heather Luton on fiddle featured fine duets and a few of Jason's great new solo pieces. Leon Casselman did a beautiful job on guitar and mandolin tunes. Talk about showmanship, we found out later that Leon was running a fever during most of his performances. Nica Christensen wowed everyone with her banjo playing, and Adriane Hall came in from Dodge City and sang some wonderful Country & Western tunes for us. Jacob Cantrell did some hard-driving banjo picking, leaving everyone looking forward to hearing him again next year.

Jeff Graham's fiddling was on fire. His fiddling buddy, Kyle Nix, also did a super job. Sean Watkins, who participated in the workshop last year, returned this year with his Nickel Creek band-mates. Added to Sean's terrific guitar and mandolin playing was his sister Sara's superb fiddling and Chris Thile's outstanding mandolin and guitar playing, and Chris's dad, Scott on driving bass. Not only did the group make enthusiastic fans of the entire workshop audience with their playing and tight trio singing, they also scored high in individual contests at the festival, including Chris's world championship performance in the mandolin contest.

There was some great dialogue from the kids and their families this year, both on and off stage. They discussed, among other things, successful practice techniques, finding good teachers to study with, and ways of fitting music into family, school, and community life. In all, it was a very full program.

We were glad to see Acoustic Kids '93 so successful. Our thanks to all the participants and their families, the festival audience (which, as everyone knows, is the **best** in the universe), the great sound crew, and to Bob and Kendra Redford for making a place for the kids at the festival. Hope to see you next year!

Yours Truly,
Andy May