

THE TEXAS FIDDLER

Membership Application

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☐ Change of Address
 Please type or print clearly.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Email _____

Card delivered.

Phone Number _____

Birthday _____

- _____ Fiddler ... \$30/year
 _____ Accompanist ... \$30/year
 _____ Out of State Fiddler ... \$30/year
 _____ Associate ... \$20/year

Total enclosed \$ _____
 (Make checks payable to TOTFA)

☐ **YES...** We are a multi-membership TOTFA family, and we agree to accept a single issue of *The Texas Fiddler* each month in place of multiple issues.

Card given? (circle) **YES** or **NO**

Mail application and check to:
Texas Old Time Fiddlers Association
 PO Box 653
 Hempstead, TX 77445

NOTE to TOTFA Members: Check your expiration date above. If it expires this month, you should fill out the application and mail this with your payment for continued TOTFA membership.

Texas Old Time Fiddlers Association
 Post Office Box 653 • Hempstead • Texas • 77445

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THE TEXAS FIDDLER

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GROESBECK, WHITEWRIGHT & EARLY UPCOMING CONTESTS IN OF MAY, SAVE THE DATE FOR CROCKETT IN JUNE



Above, left to right: Granddaughter (Baby) Isabella Jane, Daughter Jennifer Kloesel, Cousin Sarah Smith, Daughter Julie Morris, Lydia Ryals Stuart & Valerie Ryals O'Brien

Photo Credit: Mary Lamb

Far Right: Fiddle Feature Valerie Ryals O'Brien



Fiddle Feature: Valerie Ryals O'Brien

Congratulations to Valerie for her Induction into the Fiddlers Hall of Fame

"Why, when she was born I thought she was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. We could tell she was musical ever since she was a little bitty thing. She'd go around humming and trying to sing before she could even talk," recalled Phern Ryals, proud mother of Valerie Delaine Ryals O'Brien. Valerie's fascination with music led to an epiphany when she was three years old; she discovered her mother's fiddle stored under her parents' bed. "I'd just pluck the strings and I fell in love with the sound. I knew then that I had to learn to play the fiddle."

Valerie's formal instruction with music began at age nine. Upon entering fourth grade she enrolled in orchestra where she learned the rudiments of technique and reading music on the staff. Her dedication and obvious passion for the instrument came to the attention of her grandfather, O.G. Ryals, a fiddler of the old time folk tradition, who introduced little Valerie to Rubber Dolly. And although she has never forsaken her connection with the classical realm, she knew that the tunes her granddaddy played struck a resonance in her very heart and soul.

Following the advice of L.T. Childress, Valerie's parents began taking her to local fiddle contests where she could, as a spectator, absorb some of what the fiddle players were doing. Moreover, she was able to meet and receive one-on-one guidance from such icons as Dale Morris, Claude Henson, Eck Robertson, Benny Thomasson, Jim "Texas Shorty" Chancellor, Major Franklin, Tommy Hughes, (continued on next page)

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(cont. from front page) Jesse Mears, and the legendary Solomon brothers, Norman and Vernon. "At that time, there weren't many females in the fiddling world who seemed to really stick with it," recalls Valerie. "But I'll always remember the kindness and patience of the wonderful gentlemen who helped me get started playing. They became like family members." At age thirteen, Valerie's dedication finally started paying off when she won the Junior World Championship in Crockett, Texas.

After graduating high school in 1973, Valerie enrolled in the Suzuki teacher-training program at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. The Suzuki – or "mother tongue" – approach has proven itself a valuable resource in teaching not only classical, but music in the old time Texas genre. Valerie remembers her mother cautioning her when she was a teenager that she'd better practice and stay serious about her music because some day she may have to rely on it for a livelihood. Phern's advice turned out to be more prophetic than she probably realized at the time.

Valerie's Music Studio in Burleson, Texas has launched hundreds -if not thousands- of students into the world of Texas fiddling over the past 25 years. The studio has grown to the point that, without the help of sister Lydia, daughters Julie and Jennifer, longtime friend Mary Lamb, and a score of other generous and able assistants throughout the years, its continuing growth and success would be difficult to achieve. Valerie reminisces that she had always wanted to be in business for herself so operating a teaching studio seemed the obvious thing to do. (cont. page 3)

Become a fan of **Texas Old Time Fiddlers Association** on Facebook to get more TOTFA updates!

Visit www.texasoldtimefiddlers.org for more information. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please send comments to Mark Seale or any of the directors.



The Texas Fiddler

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Burnet Cook-off & Fiddlers Festival Burnet Fair & Rodeo Grounds May 15-16, 2009

**\$5,000.00
BBQ Cash Prizes**

**0-18 Division
19-30 Division
31-64 Division
65 & Over Division**



**Old Time Fiddlers Contest
(formerly held in June)
\$5,000.00 Cash Prizes**

**Concert Saturday night
Headliner TBA 1/15/09**

For more information:
www.burnetcookoff.com or burnetchamber.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

TOTFA Benefit in Nacogdoches

What: TOTFA Benefit

When: May 9

Where: VFW Hall 3893, 2406 Hunter Road, Nacogdoches

Start time is 11am and we will be serving BBQ lunches beginning around 12:30 or 1pm. Cost of the lunch is \$8.00 per plate. We will be playing music throughout the day and we will also have an auction where we will sell items donated by the TOTFA membership to the highest bidder. The number for the VFW Hall is (936) 569-9670 and it is located at 2406 Hunter Road just off the south end of loop 224 about a half mile east of US 59 North. For those of you who wish to come a day early or do not wish to drive home afterwards, we have a block of rooms available at the Clarion Inn for May 8 and 9 where we are more than welcome to continue our music and fellowship. The Clarion is located just south of the loop on US 59 South and the room rate is \$60 per night. Just call (936) 569-8100 and be sure to ask for the TOTFA special rate. Benefits like this are very important to our association so please make plans now to attend this event and come ready to play. If you have any questions feel free to contact Bryan Jimmerson at (936) 553-8180.

Groesbeck Contest Info

What: 43rd Annual Southwest Fiddlers Contest

When: May 16, Registration 10 a.m., Contest 10:30 a.m.

Where: City Park Pavilion (west of city), Groesbeck

Divisions & Prizes in Order of Play:

0-15 years, 65+, 16-35, 36-64, Accompanists:

1st \$125, 2nd \$100, 3rd \$75, 4th \$50, 5th \$30

Champions: 1st \$250, 2nd \$200, 3rd \$100, 4th \$50

*The final two from each division will play for Grand Champion

Gatesville Contest Info

**** CANCELLED****

Gatesville contest was canceled because of a reduction in available funds for the Shivaree committee.

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UPCOMING EVENTS Cont.

Whitewright Contest Info

What: Whitewright 5th Annual Louis Franklin Championship Contest

When: May 23, Registration 9 a.m., Contest 10 a.m.

Where: Whitewright Civic Center downtown

Early Contest Info

What: Early Contest

When: May 23

Divisions & Prizes:

0-12, 13-20, 21-45, 46-69, 70+: 1st \$125, 2nd \$100, 3rd \$75, 4th \$50, 5th \$25

Accompanists: 1st \$125, 2nd \$75, 3rd \$50

Champions: 1st \$200, 2nd \$100, 3rd \$75

Crockett Contest Info

What: Crockett Contest

When: June 13

Save the date - more information to come.

Belton Contest Info

What: Belton Contest

When: July 4, Registration 12:30 p.m., Contest 1 p.m.

Save the date - more information to come.

Announcements

In Memory

Jason' Andrew's Grandmother, Louise Franklin, (Larry Franklin's mother) passed away in her sleep this morning. So far, Jason is handling it ok. He was/is VERY close to his grandparents. Please keep him & the Franklin family in your prayers. The Viewing and, Funeral took place Friday, April 24th, at the Bethel Baptist Church in Whitewright (off Hwy 160). All of your prayers & calls are much appreciated!

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TOTFA Fiddle Camp

The 3rd Annual TOTFA Fiddle Camp will be held on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX August 2-6, 2009. We will check into the dorm on Sunday, August 2nd and the lessons will begin Monday, August 3rd and run through Wednesday, August 5th. We will check out of the dorm on Thursday, August 6th. We have tried to build this camp around some of the greatest teachers in the country the first couple of years and this year will be no different. The list of teachers this year will include Ricky Turpin, Danita Gardner, Roberta Rast, Wes Westmoreland, and Justin Branum of Missouri. For those of you not familiar with Justin, he is an outstanding young musician and teacher with a deep respect for Texas fiddle music and we think he will be a great addition to our camp. We are also very happy to announce that we will be offering guitar classes during the camp since we have had many requests over the first couple of years to do so. We are very excited to be able to offer a quality fiddle camp and we hope that you will make plans now to attend this year. More details will be available in the upcoming newsletters as well as our website or you may contact Bryan Jimmerson if you have any questions.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

May

May 1 Trenton Parr	May 21 Sharon Marie Colon
May 2 Jordan Franklin	May 23 Tom Fikes
May 2 Valerie O'Brien	May 23 Mia Orosco
May 3 Zachary McCaig	May 24 Cheyenne Craig
May 5 Sina Thompson	May 24 Albert B. Harlan
May 7 Robert N. Wingate	May 24 Loren Lykins
May 8 Julie Morris	May 24 Kathy McVicker
May 9 Smokey Butler	May 25 Bryan Jimmerson
May 9 Sammy Reel	May 25 Jacob Johnson
May 14 Gilbert Johnson	May 26 Janet Roberts
May 14 Bryce Jordan	May 26 Skip Thompson
May 14 Michael Thompson	May 28 Clifton Bowren
May 15 Thea Rusch	May 29 Nonie Orosco
May 16 Rachel Francois	May 31 Jason Andrew
May 18 Phil Baker	May 31 Jenny Green
May 19 Billy Bean	May 31 Cody Marriott

(continued from front page) Moreover, raising two young daughters precluded the thought of touring and playing in a "band- type environment."

Other highlights of her career include 1st Runner-Up in the World Champion Contest, the first woman on the Texas Old Time Fiddlers Association Board of Directors and as a Master Artist with Texas Folklife Resources. She has performed in such diverse venues as public and private schools, car lots, churches, and neighborhood bars across Texas. She has also served as an educator for the Texas Commission of the Arts, taking her all over the Lone Star State. She has been an instructor at both Johnny Gimble's and Randy Elmore's fiddle camps, as well as an instructor for DFW WOW Suzuki Violin Institute and TCU's Fiddle Workshop. In 2005, Valerie was honored by being chosen, along with Bob Wills and Johnny Gimble, to represent Texas' rich tradition of fiddling by having her fiddle on loan for exhibit in the Bob Bullock Museum of Texas History in Austin.

Although the operation of a teaching studio demands much of her time, Valerie continues to find opportunities to play her fiddle for appreciative audiences all across the U.S.A. "Now that my daughters Jennifer and Julie are grown, I enjoy going to places like California, Wyoming and Tennessee for a few days and playing. My husband, Rich O'Brien, performs at quite a few cowboy gatherings across the country and I enjoy going and playing with him. But I'm always glad to get back home and be with my three beautiful little grand babies, Bernard, Nicholas, and Isabella. They are a source of incredible joy to me."

Valerie's skill as a fiddle player has enabled her to share the stage with such luminaries as The Chieftains, with whom she performed at Fort Worth's Bass Performance Hall in 2000. Her style fit Paddy Maloney's Emerald Isle style like a glove and, though it need not be said, a good time was had by all in the sold- out performance! In 2006 Valerie returned to Bass Hall at the invitation of singer/songwriter Michael Martin Murphey as his special guest for his annual Cowboy Christmas tour. Lately, Valerie has performed with Texas music legend Red Steagall both onstage and in the recording studio. Additionally, she coordinates and organizes the fiddle contest held at the annual Red Steagall Cowboy Gathering and Western Swing Festival in the historic Fort Worth Stockyards each October. And if all the above isn't enough, she still manages to play a few gigs each year with her all-girl instrumental band, The Half Note Heifers, which features daughter Julie on guitar, sister Lydia on mandolin, and friend Billie Kauhs on upright bass.

Valerie's reputation as a consummate instrumentalist is eclipsed only by her dedication and skill as a perpetuator and teacher of the music she loves. In 2004 Valerie was recognized by the Zonta Club of Johnson County as a Women of Achievement in business.

"The world seems to get crazier every day and to be able to do something positive in a wholesome environment, like teaching in my little studio, is something I'm very grateful for. It's like I heard Dolly Parton say once, 'If you can make a living doing something you enjoy, you'll never have to work a day in your life.' And I don't plan to ever fully retire because I love what I do."

Valerie Ryals O'Brien is a Lone Star treasure. Phern and Lenn Ryals are proud of what she has done... and rightfully so.

Biography Credit: Rich O'Brien

