

Roots museum tour shares harmony

By LINDA EAST BRADY

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The great Texas singer/songwriter Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter was once asked by a reporter if he played folk music. He is said to have replied, "Well, I reckon so. I play music for folks."

And that is the gist of the music we call folk — and other homegrown styles, such as blues, zydeco, conjunto, bluegrass and American Indian music. It is music by the people and for the people. Such genres are often gathered today under the banner of roots music.

Thanks to the Smithsonian Institution and the Utah Humanities Council, an exhibit called "New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music" is visiting Utah through Jan. 21. The show, currently on display at the Park City Museum, will travel to four other towns during that time.

The show is courtesy of the Smithsonian's "Museums on Main Street" program, the goal of which is to place exhibits in smaller cities and rural museums that normally could not afford to stage such a show.

Elaine Thatcher is the program writer for the Mountain West Center for Regional Studies at Utah State University, and also the "New Harmonies" exhibit's state scholar. Thatcher admits also to being an aficionado of roots music and of Utah's contributions to that style.

"This exhibit shows how these roots music (styles) have been at the base of popular music as a whole in this country," she said. "'Roots' implies the fact that these styles have branches and leaves, also — that the modern popular styles are influenced by it. Even hip-hop, for example, has

PREVIEW

- **WHAT:** 'New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music,' Smithsonian Institution exhibit
- **WHEN:** Now through May 25. Open 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday and noon-6 p.m. Sundays
- **WHERE:** Park City Museum, 528 Main St., Park City
- **TICKETS:** \$10; \$5/children. For further details, call (435) 649-7457.

its roots in African-American folk and blues — it goes back that far.

"It's a small exhibit, so none of the styles gets intense treatment. But it is meant as an introduction and an overview."

What's on display

At all of the Utah locations, the exhibit will include photos and artifacts from the Smithsonian, as well as listening stations so that visitors can get a taste of the many facets of roots.

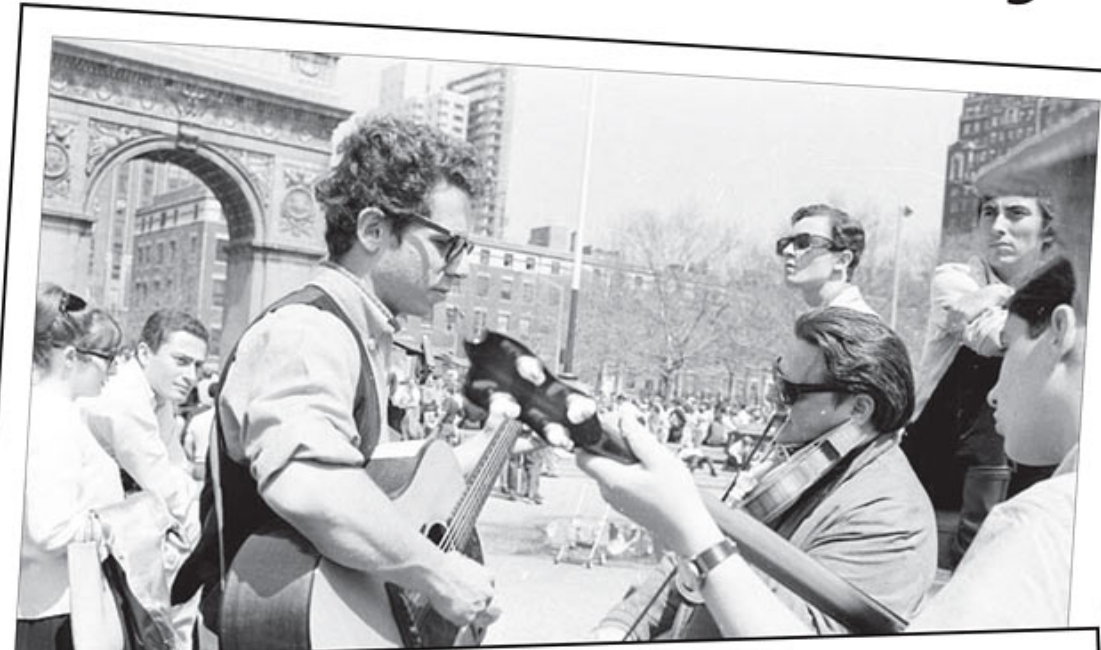
Said Thatcher: "As part of this, each museum is encouraged to look into its own collection to see what they have to add to the exhibit — do they have instruments or ... historic things that have to do with music? Each local place will have its own program to go along with the exhibit, to localize it. In Park City, for example, they have what they are calling a musical petting zoo — very clever. Kids can touch these instruments, see what they are like up close."

Speakers who are experts in Utah music will also be giving lectures at the various locations (contact museums for specifics). Thatcher expects to present a talk about the Mormon and non-Mormon music of Utah. Hal Cannon, the founder of the Western Folklife Center and Elko's Cowboy Poetry Gathering, plans to cover cowboy music traditions.

The exhibit walks the visitor through each style's history.

"It begins with a panel on Native American sacred music, which is likely the earliest music in North America," said Thatcher. "Then it moves on to immigrant-influenced styles, the strands of anglo and African music. It has a section on gospel. It looks at transplanted folk from Great Britain — which morphs into hillbilly music and that, in turn, morphs into country."

One section deals with a single instrument that has shaped so many roots styles — the accordion. American styles, from conjunto to



Tex-Mex to zydeco, have distinct sounds featuring the instrument.

Utah roots

Thatcher notes that Utah has roots music of its own.

"We've got everything — wonderful Native American talent, for example," said Thatcher. "We have five tribes in this state, and each have fabulous music. You can go to the Ute's Bear Dance. Or you can go to the Navajo Nation Fair and see several different kinds of their music."

Cowboy music and Mormon music are obviously part of the Beehive State's soundtrack as well.

"With the Mormon music, there are several influences — Scandinavian and British Isles styles came over, and so did styles already taking on their own sound in the eastern part of



the United States. People converted to the (LDS) church and came out here, where they made up new words to traditional melodies and current popular songs of the day."

THE TOUR SCHEDULE

Park City Museum, 528 Main St., Park City — Now through May 25. \$10, \$5/children. (435) 649-7457.

Anasazi State Park Museum, 460 N. State Road 12, Boulder — June 2-July 18. \$4. (435) 335-7308.

Cedar City Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum, 581 N. Main, Cedar City — July 26-Sept. 10. Price TBA. (435) 586-5058.

Museum of Moab, 118 E. Center St., Moab — Sept. 18-Nov. 3. \$3, free/age 11 and younger, \$7/families. (435) 259-7985.

West Jordan Historical Society, 2053 W. 7800 South, West Jordan — Nov. 11-Jan. 21, 2011. Price TBA. (801) 568-0938.