‘New Harmonies’ explores American roots music

For Where It’s @

CEDAR CITY — “New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music” travels to Cedar City, the next stop on its Utah tour.

The Smithsonian traveling exhibit, brought to Utah by the Utah Humanities Council, examines the cultural significance of roots music in America. Cedar City will celebrate the grand opening of the exhibit on Monday at the Iron County Visitors Center, 581 N. Main St., Cedar City.

The exhibit and all associated events are free and open to the public. The exhibit tour in Cedar City continues through Sept. 10.

The exhibit highlights the nation’s unique musical traditions and provides communities in Utah with an opportunity to celebrate their own local music traditions.

The exhibit began in Park City, then on to Boulder, and will now tour to Cedar City, Moab and West Jordan through January 2011.

The run in Cedar City has community involvement from across Iron County and will include local exhibits, film screenings and discussions; live local music; a lecture series including folklorists Hal Cannon, Elaine Thatcher and Craig Miller; all of which give a local Utah twist to this inspiring, toe-tapping exhibit.

For more information, contact Megan van Frank at 801-359-9670 or visit www.utahhumanities.org/newharmonies.htm.

About the exhibit

The Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street exhibit, “New Harmonies,” tells the American musical story through photographs, instruments, lyrics and artist profiles.

Although “roots music” is a relatively new term that generally applies to forms of folk music, its influences run deep throughout American culture and can be heard in today’s commercial country, gospel, pop and hip-hop genres.

The exhibit explores the work of well-known folk, gospel, country and blues artists who have inspired generations of musicians, like Ma Rainey, B.B. King, Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter Family, Mahalia Jackson, Woody Guthrie and Joan Baez, and captures the spirit of musical styles that are at the heart of local heritage in the United States—Tejano, zydeco, polka, Cajun, conjunto and klezmer. New Harmonies focuses on how roots music gives Americans a soundtrack and a voice for their stories.

The exhibit provides a fascinating, inspiring, and toe-tapping listen to the American story of multi-cultural exchange. The story is full of surprises about familiar songs, histories of instruments, the roles of religion and technology, and the continuity of musical roots from “Yankee Doodle Dandy” to the latest hip hop CD.

Utah roots music

“When people talk about ‘roots music,’ they often think of the American South and its abundance of African-American, white, and mixed-influence music. Utah doesn’t immediately come to mind,” said Elaine Thatcher, state scholar for the Utah tour of “New Harmonies.” “We have a rich heritage of traditional music in this state, beginning with Utah’s first inhabitants.”

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