

2023 Richmond Highland Games Irish and Scottish Fiddle Judges

Mr. Robert Spates

Our fiddling judge is back in the USA! After a recent two-month summer tour performing Irish Donegal and Clare fiddle styles in Ireland and the UK, Robert Spates just returned this early autumn from Zurich after performing an exciting concert in Switzerland, then another different one immediately in Philadelphia. You may not realize it, but you have already heard his violin playing on countless film scores, TV and radio soundtracks, commercials, and artist recordings. A master of many musical styles, Robert Spates has toured, performed, or recorded with legendary figures in the music industry like Aretha Franklin, Smokey Robinson, Christina Aguilera, Usher, Willy Nelson, and many famous Country, Bluegrass, Irish and Scottish folk music performers- and far too many other famous artists to mention here. He was a popular jazz violinist at the prestigious Montreux Jazz Festival and is also a baroque violin specialist. Robert is currently concertmaster and soloist in Philadelphia's acclaimed Vox Ama Deus Orchestra as well as concertmaster of the Washington DC Capital City Symphony. In addition, he was awarded the leading concertmaster position at the Library of Congress, where he performed with the Martha Graham Dance Company and later with the wild avant-garde contemporary ensemble from Birmingham England. Once a competitive champion in Scottish and Irish fiddle styles, Robert still passionately enjoys fiddling those favorite styles of music-especially the blend in the traditional Donegal fiddle tunes. Playing and listening for fun creates a haunting connection to the ancient traditions, so be sure to listen to the heart and soul of the beautiful tunes played by all of our contestants!

Dr. John Turner

Dr. John Turner is a ten-time National Scottish Fiddling Champion, and has taught, trained, mentored or coached dozens of other national champions. He has performed on stage, radio and television throughout the US, Canada, the U.K. and numerous other countries around the world, including a performance on a popular talk show on TV Tokyo, that had an estimated viewing audience of 60 million people. He has made more than twenty recordings, and has composed more than three thousand tunes in traditional Scottish style. This summer, he conducted the 40th annual Jink and Diddle School of Scottish Fiddling in the mountains of North Carolina, where he has been teaching and promoting the Golden Era of Scottish Fiddle Music since the early 1980's. He is a past president, a lifetime member, and the longest serving judge of Scottish FIRE, an organization that promotes Scottish fiddling and competitions in the U.S.