



ALLAN BLOCK

Block's fiddling means good time

By BARBARA STACK

Allan Block, "The Dean of the New England Old Time Fiddlers", showed his well crafted, heart- and foot-felt music to a packed Iron Horse audience recently and we were nourished and inspired. That's what he wanted. He'd driven down from Frankestown, N.H., where he still plays regularly for community contra dance and he busks, plays the street corner still, this accomplished contemporary of Pete Seeger.

He played some awfully nice music from traditions as diverse as Appalachian mountain banjo music, (both frailing and picking), French Canadian fiddle tunes from the late Louis Beaudoin, and country blues. When he sings, he wants us to take his meaning along with his music, this poet and teller of folks strong and ordinary.

He played that night with his friends and Valley pickin' partner, Andy May. And they played. Each of them has an extraordinarily sensuous right hand style, Allan on his bow, and Andy with a flat pick. Each controls a range of styles and a technical balance out of which arises the sweetest up strokes, and syncopations you'd ever want to hear. They tickled each other, showed off a bit, tossed bits and riffs back and forth, and generally had a good time right there in public. Laughed at what their hands did.

Allen started playing classical fiddle at age 9 in his home state of Wisconsin. He said, "My parents spoke Yiddish to each other, but I didn't know it was Yiddish until I moved to New York. As a sandal maker and old time banjo player Allan has a Greenwich Village identity which goes back at least to the early Beatnik days. These days he lives up country, does a number of different things, squinches his eyes and plays it sometimes greasy, sometimes nasty, but always fresh.