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Flea Market
J104 (001)
Oct. 18, 2007

W.C. 796

It sounds kind like one of those cheesy retail-store music displays – the ones that play sample tracks from niche instrumental CDs that no one ever buys – except here the music never stops. Actually, its more like hundreds of people decided to sample songs from *Stringed Ambience* and *Celtic Highlands* and *Medieval Music for Lovers* and every other cliché title, all playing at different speeds, all at the same time.

Add in a chorus of several grown men singing off-key pub songs and you are pretty much set. A few women here and there add their voices to the sound, but most of them sound no more musically talented than the men. Amongst the discord, the Ohio Renaissance Festival is underway.

Each fall for the past 18 years, in a 30-acre field just south of Dayton, Ohio, the Ohio Renaissance Festival has been entertaining guests and enthusiasts and bringing the 16th century back to life. Nearly 150 vendors from all over the country come here each year to sell their goods. The atmosphere is similar to a modern flea market, but everything also has a partial focus on entertainment.

After crossing the drawbridge and pushing through the crowded gate to into the authentically recreated village, the magic of the scene takes over. Costumed individuals forget their lives and the worries of the modern world and transform into their characters. Most speak only in Old English; tourists often receive no mercy from the merchants, who poke fun at the “futuristic” accents and dress.

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Not far from the entrance is an aptly named store, Uncommon Adornments. Large tables that resemble the terraced rice fields of Asia display the jewelry; each individual piece is sticking out of its own foam base. Sue Watson, 36, from Dayton runs the store.

The jingle as she walks comes from the bracelets on her wrist and the many necklaces around her neck. Watson has been selling handmade rings and slave bracelets, a bracelet with extra chains that connect with a ring on the middle finger to form a triangle, at festivals for 13 years. Celtic-themed pendants and necklaces are also a major staple of Uncommon Adornments, and, according to Watson, each design is historically based and accurate. Smooth, gel colored gems are attached to much of her work and form the base of most of the necklace charms she sells.

Across from Watson's store, is one of the many food venues. Steak on a Stake is popular item, as is the full-size turkey drumstick. A greasy face is a telltale sign of indulgence. The smell of the food is everywhere, and blends together to tempt potential customers from all across the village.

Around the corner and down the lane is Swan Lace, a clothing store owned by Kathy Drake. The 54-year-old from Austin, Texas, learned knitting and crocheting from her mother and grandmother at an early age, and has been using that knowledge to make and sell renaissance-styled blouses and dresses for more than 30 years.

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Drake's clothing style emphasizes comfort and all of her items are made from all-natural materials. She has been glad to see the peasant-styled dresses and skirts reemerge in popular culture, because she can now sell to everyone. But because the festival season is typically only in the fall, Drake relies on Swan Lace's online sales to keep up sales throughout the year.

Customers in the store point out the dresses of every color that are on display. Some are adorned with lace and others with ruffles and pleats. There are even clothing items for men, like suits and various hats, though they are not nearly as common. Capes and cloaks are also commonplace, and many are near stores specializing in brooches to hold them around the neck.

While clothing seems to be the biggest seller overall, there are plenty of weapons foundries and glass-blowing shops that make glimmering keepsakes right in the open. The clinking sounds of live swordfights advertise the shiny blades and draw in customers (mostly children), who are dazzled by the heroics. Entertainment shows provide something for all ages and often sell recordings of their work on either DVD or CD. Live shows include acrobatics, theater and water glass music.

One of the most noticeable things about all of the goods is the lack of packaging when compared to modern stores. This allows everything to be inspected fully and leads to an appreciation of the craftsmanship and work put into each piece. Every item is unique and nearly everything is handmade, often by the vendor, which helps to justify the relatively high prices of the merchandise. The cost, however, is well worth the chance to see how a marketplace from long ago would have functioned, and how they have changed over the years.