



Visit our new web site at www.csotfa.org

“Preserving and Perpetuating Old Time Fiddle Music”

Presidents Message

Dear Friends,

For us, fiddle season has come to an end with the completion of the 40th Western Open. There were 151 first rounds and a good time was had by all. We are now looking forward to the season of joy, with all of the holidays and opportunities it brings to spend time with family and friends.

We send our best wishes, love, and prayers for a happy, healthy, and peaceful 2024.

Sharon



Something to Look Forward to!!!

2024
56th Annual
California State Old
Time Fiddle & Picking
Championships
April 19-20, 2024
Lodi Grape Festival
Fairgrounds
Lodi, CA

First Annual “Jim French Accompanist Award”

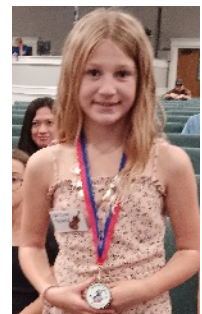


At the Western Open, Ben LiaBraaten was awarded the first annual "Jim French Accompanist Award" from Kathryn French, sponsored by Dr. Randy Warner. Congratulations to Ben!

“FIDDLIN’ DOWN THE TRACKS”



Oldest Fiddler
Willie Randal, El Cajon, CA



Youngest Fiddler
Kaitlin Prince, Hanford, CA

California State Old Time Fiddlers' Association

P.O. Box 1703 Oroville, CA 95965

State Officers

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V. Pres: Kathy Kampschmidt -kdkampy@sbcglobal.net
Secretary: Mary Rose Preston- maryrose@wavecable.com
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Editor: Cathy Agnew -catherineagnew448@gmail.com

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District 1: Zeke Walker - zeke103@digitalpath.net
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District 5: Lyle Dixson - Lyle@DATEQ.NET
District 6: Tex Ash -- texshar@pacbell.net
District 7: Dan Touchstone - dtouchstonefiddler@gmail.com
District 8: Sid Brown - sidnyb@outlook.com
District 9: Bob Palasek - r03palasek@sbcglobal.net
District 10: Tim Rued - timrued@aol.com

DISTRICT MEETING LOCATIONS, DATES, AND TIMES:

District 1 4th Sunday 1:00-5:00 p.m.: Feather River Senior Center, 1335 Meyer St. Oroville, CA
<https://csotfad1.weebly.com>

District 3 2nd Sunday 2:00-5:00 p.m.: 21100 Lonely Lane, Tehachapi, CA

District 4 1st Sunday 12:00-3:00 p.m.: 17392 Chicago Ave., Yorba Linda, CA RSVP at 714-524-6673

District 5 2nd Sunday 1:00-5:00 p.m.: Orangevale Grange, 5807 Walnut Ave, Orangevale, CA

District 6 1st Sunday 1:00-3:00 p.m. Open Circle Jam, 3:00 p.m. Board Meeting St. James Lutheran Church , 2500 Shasta View Blvd., Redding: 3rd Sunday, 1:00 p.m. Workshop & Jam, 2:00-4:00 p.m. Open Mic. , Palo Cedro Community Hall, 22037 Old Forty-Four Drive .
Website: <http://www.northstatefiddlers.com> Facebook :North State Fiddlers

District 7 2nd Sunday 12:00-2:45 p.m.: Terrace Estates Clubhouse, 1815 Sweetwater Road, Spring Valley, CA

District 8 2nd & 4th Sunday 1:30-4:00 p.m.: Oak View Community Center, 18 Valley Rd., Oak View, CA

District 9 4th Sunday 1:30-5:00 p.m.: United Methodist Church, 19806 Wisteria St., Castro Valley, CA

District 10 1st Sunday 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. Church of the Oaks, Janette Duncan 707-570-2745, Chris Carney 707-765-1937. 2nd Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Rotary Valley Senior Center, Pat Palmer 415-305-4250. 3rd Saturday 1:00 - 4:30 p.m. Charles Street Village Clubhouse, Heidi Chesney 510-846-7642.

FIDDLIN' DOWN THE TRACKS 2023 OLD TIME FIDDLE CONTEST RESULTS

Congratulations to all the contest participants. Thank you for being a part of this contest.



Junior -Junior Fiddle

1. Ella Fernandes, Hanford, CA
2. Emma Giles, Tehachapi, CA
3. Lila Amos, Tehachapi, CA
4. Rorie Trapp, Tehachapi, CA
5. Kaitlin Prince, Hanford, CA



Senior Fiddle

- Lisa Rosa, Hanford, CA
- Karen Linde-Lucich, Los Osos, CA
- Brad Cole, Bakersfield, CA
- Jill Hall, Tehachapi, CA
- Carriellen Holmes, Las Vegas, NV
- Pat Cronin, Camarillo, CA
- Genie Lima, Tehachapi, CA



Open Picking

- Lucy Crary, Fresno, CA
- Brad Cole, Bakersfield, CA
- Wayne Agnew, Moorpark, CA
- Kristin Simmons, Tehachapi, CA
- Miriam Berglund, Tehachapi, CA



Junior Fiddle

1. Lucy Crary, Fresno, CA
2. Miley Fary, Camarillo, CA



Senior-Senior Fiddle

1. Kathy Kampschmidt
2. Gordon Mehling
3. Joe Johnson, Ojai, CA
4. Joe Hunsinger, Canyon Country, CA
5. Gayel Pitchford, Tehachapi, CA



Twin Fiddle

1. Ben LiaBraaten, Yuba City, CA
- Lucy Crary, Fresno, CA
2. Stacy Snodgrass, Hanford, CA
- Lisa Rosa, Hanford, CA
3. Wayne Agnew, Moorpark, CA
- Joe Hunsinger, Canyon Country, CA



Adult Fiddle

1. Ben LiaBraaten, Yuba City, CA
2. Carissa Hall, Madera, CA
3. Kelsey Schoenberg, Tehachapi, CA
4. Miriam Berglund, Tehachapi, CA
5. Kristin Simmons, Tehachapi, CA
6. Wendy Giles, Tehachapi, CA



Open Fiddle

- Stacy Snodgrass, Hanford, CA
- Willie Randel, El Cajon, CA
- Wayne Agnew, Moorpark, CA



Junior Band Scramble

"The Misfits"



Junior Picking

- Ella Fernandes, Hanford, CA



Cello/Bass

1. Johnnie Battistessa, Tehachapi
2. Samuel Torres, Tehachapi



Accompanists

- Bob Bueling, Tex Ash, Ben LiaBraaten, Gayel Pitchford, Stacy Snodgrass



Senior Band Scramble

"The Bottom of the Barrel"

Western Open Results

October 19-21, 2023

Peewee (age 8 and under) [11]

1. Kyla Kozlowski, Chico
2. Trevor Jensen, Meridian ID
3. Ada Torge, Redding
4. Ruby Herz, Reno NV
5. Rowan McNeil, Reno NV

Youngest Fiddler

Gavin McNeil, age 4, Reno NV

Junior Junior (age 12 and under) [14]

1. Kambri Jensen, Meridian ID
2. Chloe Nicolayeff, Meridian ID
3. Sophie McNeil, Reno NV
4. Robin Sorensen, Dixon
5. Thomas Huckins, Auburn

Junior (ages 17 and under) [10]

1. Adrienne Jensen, Meridian ID
2. Lars Høgbom, Burns OR
3. Lucy Crary, Fresno
4. McKenna Jensen, Meridian ID
5. Gracie Benham, Redding

Adult (ages 19-54) [5]

1. Tricia Ferguson, Redding
2. Libby Rogers, Boise ID
3. Ben LiaBraaten, Yuba City
4. Alisha Townley, Red Bluff
5. Kelly Cooper, Redding

Senior (ages 55-69) [2]

1. Eric Malme, Sacramento
2. Mikki Feeny, Willows

Senior Senior (ages 70 and up) [7]

1. Starr McMullen, Corvallis OR
2. Pat Scott, Red Bluff
3. Nicki Carlisle, Bethany OK
4. Avery Ellisman, Julian
5. Kathy Kampschmidt, Willows

Oldest Fiddler

Carl Malotte, Lincoln, age 90

Open (any age) [10]

1. Tristan Clarridge, Mt. Shasta
2. Katrina Nicolayeff, Meridian ID
3. Tashina Clarridge, Mt. Shasta
4. Eliza Beck, Melba ID
5. Rachel Beck, Melba ID
- T6. Grant Wheeler, Portland OR
- T6. Eric Anderson, Lincoln CA
8. Sevina Versales, Reno NV
9. Holly Sternberg, Sparks NV
10. Randy Warner, Washoe Valley NV

Junior Twin Fiddle (age 17 and under) [4]

1. Rachel and Eliza Beck
2. McKenna & Adrienne Jensen
3. Kyla Kozlowski/Briley Davenport

Open Twin Fiddle (age 18 and up) [6]

1. Tashina Clarridge/Alisha Townley
2. Libby Rogers/Katrina Nicolayeff
3. Ben LiaBraaten/Lucy Crary

Open Picking (any age) [8]

1. Jacob Akana, Redding
2. Robert Sorensen, Dixon
3. Lucy Crary, Fresno

Junior Picking [8]

1. Maxwell Sorensen, Dixon
2. Lars Høgbom, Burns OR
3. Andrew Beck, Melba ID

Open Jukebox (any age) [10]

1. Oorin Lindley, Ashland OR
2. Rachel Beck, Melba ID
3. Nathan Townley, Red Bluff

Junior Jukebox (17 and under) [9]

1. Adrienne Jensen, Meridian ID
2. Andrew Beck, Melba ID
3. Kyla Kozlowski, Chico

Robert Strawn Waltz [13]

1. Tashina Lindley, Mt. Shasta
2. Katrina Nicolayeff, Meridian ID
3. Lars Høgbom, Burns OR

Swing Fiddle [6]

1. Katrina Nicolayeff, Meridian ID
2. Tashina Clarridge, Mt. Shasta
3. Adrienne Jensen, Meridian ID

Celtic Division [7]

1. Tashina Lindley, Mt. Shasta
2. Katrina Nicolayeff, Meridian ID
- T3. Orin Lindley, Ashland OR
- T3. Nathan Townley, Red Bluff

Junior Piano (17 and under) [7]

1. Emmalyne Stultz,
2. Max Sorenson, Dixon
3. AJ Nicolayeff, Meridian ID

Junior Junior Piano (9-12) [6]

1. Kambri Jensen, Meridian ID
2. Ferrin Henry, Corning
3. David Hansen, Willows

Peewee Piano (age 8 and under) [3]

1. Kyla Koslowski, Chico
2. Trevor Jensen, Meridian ID
3. Ander Sorensen, Dixon

Accompanist [8]

1. Ben LiaBraaten, Yuba City
2. Tom Spence, Redding
3. Eric Anderson, Lincoln
4. Al Myers, Redding
5. Bob Gardner, Atherton

Piano Judges

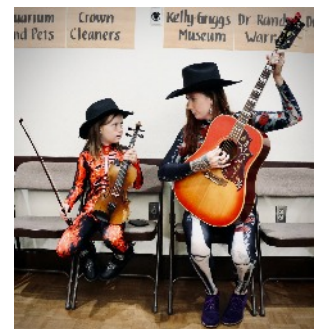
Adrienne Jacoby, Redding
Jackie Feeser, Redding
Nathan Townley, Red Bluff

Fiddle Judges:

Chris Daring, Pueblo CO
Cody Stadelmaier, Ft. Collins CO
Julie Miller, Caldwell ID
Danita Gardner, Atherton
Melissa Troberg-Southwick, Red Bluff
Tricia Ferguson, Redding

Contest MC

Tex Ash, Red Bluff



The B Strings representing the Western Open Fiddle Championships



Western Open Snap Shots

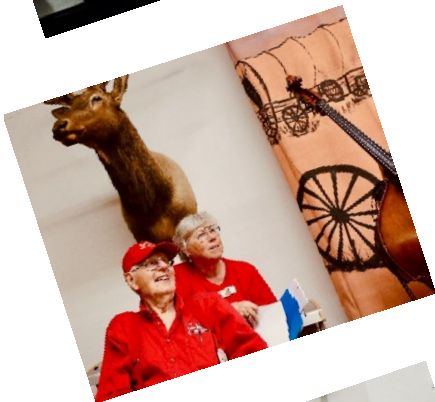
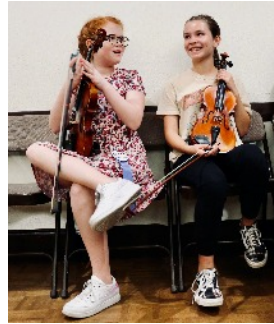
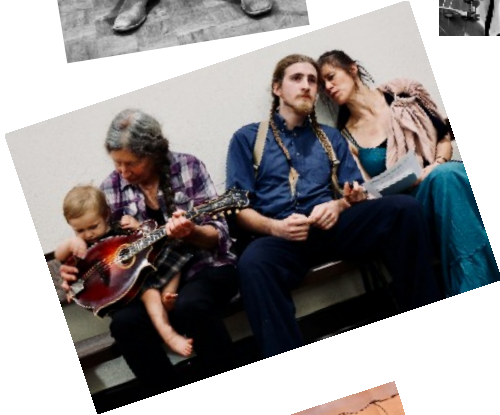
Courtesy of Carol Ann Wheeler



Twin Fiddle awards.



Oldest Fiddler
Carl Malotte, Lincoln, age 90



Judges



District 1

Zeke Walker

Our Sunday Jams (4th Sunday of the month) are still starting with a circle jam but then we break at 3 PM for Stage Performances and then restart the circle jam and continue until 4 PM and then break again for more Stage Performances and so far, it is working well. A stage performance can be a single individual or group to perform a maximum of two tunes unless they are practicing a contest routine then they can do their 3-tune contest set.

During the Holiday Season we are canceling the First Friday Fiddle Group Workshops for November and December but will still have the Fiddle Group Workshop on the third Friday of the month. In January we will return to our normal 1st and 3rd Friday Fiddle Group Workshop Schedule.

We have been invited to perform at Forbestown Christmas on Saturday, November 25th and at the Lights of Christmas in Oroville which runs through the Christmas Season.

The Riverside String Band plays at Pacifica Country Crest to the delight of the residents on Tuesday, October 24th and is planning to play this monthly gig through February 2024.

Our Christmas Party will be Sunday, December 10th from 2 to 5PM. We will be serving Turkey and Ham and ask participants to bring side dishes and their own plate and silverware.

Best to all of you,

Marian (Zeke) Walker

District 4

Pat Nelson

District 4 continues to meet monthly to share our music. We are looking forward to our Christmas potluck and jam on December 10, which is a week later than usual. We wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday season!

District 3

Wayne Agnew

The District 3's Fiddle contest was successful in Sept. We had a large open jam session called "Jammin with the Judge" in down town Tehachapi on Friday night.

The Jam included the State President, State Vice President, State Chairman of the Board of Director, State Membership Secretary, State Editor, all three contest judges, plus members from many districts. (Should of had a State Board meeting.) The owner of the establishment wants us to come back.

The contest was well attended. The Senior divisions were well represented. I'm proud that the Old Time Country, Bluegrass, Gospel Music Association from Ventura County had eight members participate in the contest!! If you weren't there you missed a lot of fun.

I'm proud to say that I finished 4th in my division. There was three in my division. (Ha Ha) I'm glad Willie Randal showed up so I wasn't the oldest fiddler.



Jammin' with the Judges was a huge success. Fifteen or more musicians participated. Because it was publicized that the "fiddlers" would be there, the patio was crowded with folks enjoying the music. Thank you to the owner of the Four Seasons Cafe for inviting the fiddlers to come and jam.



The First Place winners in each division qualify to be certified for the National Oldtime Fiddle Contest in Weiser, ID in 2024.



We would like to thank our all female crew for judging the 2023 Fiddlin' Down the Tracks Contest: Katie Glassman, Heather Bennett and Kathy Kampschmidt.

District 8

Sid Brown

What's Up at District Eight

At first appraisal, not much happens here at District 8 but when thinking back on the last few months, we've been quite busy. As most of you all know we hold bi-monthly meetings on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month here at District 8. We are supposed to start at 1:30 and end at 4:00, but most of the time there are folks here at 12:00 noon setting up and anxiously getting ready to play. And more to the point, some of the same people are still seriously jamming long past 4:00 sometimes till 6:00. What makes us do this? I surely don't know, but for me playing is just fun. Finding a new lick, new sound, beat or driving rhythm is just exhilarating and if I can play it well, that's just cream cheese peanut butter icing on the cake.

While some of us are jamming outside, others are performing on stage in front of a small audience. These on stage performances help the members with their team building, playing, and singing skills. Additionally, musicians develop the ability to connect with the audience and give back to the community. One of memorial solo acts last month was Anders Shennum. He played guitar and sang the Luis Armstrong tune, "What a Wonderful World". One could feel the tension and emotion in the room; it was that good. The point I'm making here is we strive to improve our performances and we give back by taking them out into the community. Anders has played solo at a senior's facility, on a couple occasions and he tells me that it's an easy gig because the audience is so appreciative. He plays a number of the older pop tunes the seniors remember from long ago. They sing along and dance when they can.

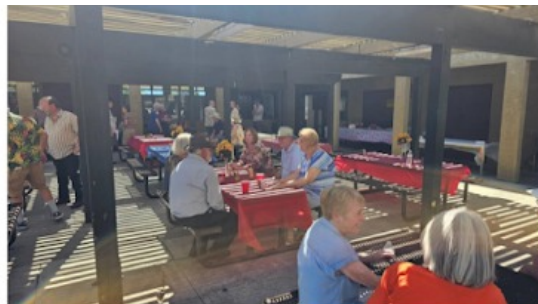
Several of the member musicians form bands to play at gigs throughout the community. One of these bands is the Range Riders. Here's a picture of them playing at the Olivas Adobe. Two things in the picture are to be noted. One, Frank will soon be 90 in two months. We celebrated his 90th last year but it turned out he was only 89. Secondly, on stage you can see the small sound system that I talked about in an earlier edition. It is a very portable Yamaha 600 Passport. Our old multi-channel sound board is for sale to anyone that needs a reliable but not so easily portable package at a very reasonable price. If interested please contact Joe Johnson or Ray Magee.



We have a band called the Range Riders that does cowboy songs and some old time (before county rock) country tunes. From left to right the members are Joe Johnson, Frank McCormick, Sid Brown, Jean Garcia, and Darrell Wallace. We're playing at Olivas Adobe on Olivas Adobe days in Ventura.

About 75 people attended our BBQ this year. The BBQ was held a week later than the usual last week in September because some of us wanted to attend District 3's fiddle contest, "Fiddlin Down the Tracks" in Tehachapi. Darrell Wallace and Joe Johnson were the chefs again this year and the food was great. The BBQ is one of the best events because we get a large turnout, several people come that we haven't seen in a while, and old friendships are renewed. It's just great fun.

The membership is holding steady with several very talented new members signing up. We're planning the Christmas dinner but it is not going to be easy as prices are very high. But other than that the rent is paid and we still have a home in the Oak View Community Center. Stop by and visit us some Sunday.



District 10

Judith Jones

Hello everyone! We've had a lot more happening over our way. Our musicians have been busy playing gigs at different sites & eateries. We've had jams, fiddle workshops- and more jams- where we've been totally enjoying learning and playing old-timey tunes.

I ran into Paul Shelasky the other day at Walker Creek Music Camp,(an AWESOME camp) and had the chance to congratulate him on his recent induction to the Western Swing Hall of Fame. I also asked if he would write a short bio.... short 'cuz, we all know something of him..... he is one of our Sonoma County treasures! So, here it is.

Paul Shelasky Bio:

"I have recently had the honor to be inducted into the Western Swing Society Hall of Fame. Based in Sacramento, CA, this society has been preserving and promoting the Bob Wills style of music since 1981 and I want to thank my sponsor, Ronnie Elkan, and all the members of the society for this honor.

Here are a few words about my background as a fiddler. I was born in Vallejo, CA, in 1951. My father was a symphony violinist and my mother a classical pianist, but I had no classical training and learned strictly by ear. After I had been playing about a year and a half, in 1971, I was asked to audition for the band Asleep at the Wheel which was playing around Berkeley, CA, at the time. Perhaps wisely, at my level of experience, I chose not to.

I started off, from the very beginning, playing Bluegrass and Jazz on the fiddle. I went to my first California fiddle contest in 1971. There I found little Bluegrass jamming but most all the older fiddlers played the Bob Wills style. I learned a lot from fiddlers such as Doc Denning, Glenn Tarver and, especially, Tiny Moore. It wasn't until the early 1980s that I first got to play in a large Western Swing band, led by Don Burnham, and I've been playing with him ever since, as well as with Tommy Thomsen and Mylos Sonka. I moved to the LA area and played Bluegrass and Swing at Disneyland from 1987 to 1992. I moved back to the Bay Area in 2002 and resumed playing with Don Burnham and Lost Weekend. In recent years I've been playing a great deal with Tommy Thomsen in combinations of up to eight pieces and it's a great swinging dance band. Incidentally, I was the California State Fiddle Champion in 1975 and again in 1981. I haven't been to a contest in years but I'd like to go to one—if only to marvel at the skill of the younger generation."

Paul Shelasky

I also asked Michelle Blakeley, to give me a follow-up on the article that she wrote which was in last years Nov/Dec Soundpost issue. Michelle, and husband Charlie, and their 3 youngsters, are very busy making music in Lake County. One year has passed and it looks like they are as much involved as ever!!

"With a whoop and a holler' That line popped into my head as I started writing. It is apropos of the season.....we are enjoying the cooler temps up here in Lake County which always brings whooping and hollering of joy after the hundred-degree-plus days of summer finally end. Summers get too hot here! Then there are the protesting hollers of disgruntled children packed off to school for a new school year, a sound which does not belong in August in my unhappy opinion on the subject. The appearance of scarecrows and plans for pumpkin patch trips bring happy memories of whooping, hollering kids running through a corn maze and searching for just the right pumpkin with the expectation of another fun trip this year. The Blakeley crew are 15, 12, and 10 now so I have some more years to look forward to fun falls with family and friends. But these years are going by fast, oh so fast.

I will miss the sounds of my children in the house when they're all grown and off on their own. Thankfully, that is not now. Now, is Karin, the 15 year old, playing around on the glockenspiel and making lesson plans for an Intro to Music class for young learners while the younger siblings are just waking up. Teaching is on her list of possible careers. She (and her siblings) have been blessed with wonderful music teachers in their lives. I think being a teacher would be a great choice for Karin. She is coming along beautifully on her violin. She works with Jeff Ives on classical violin and will be resuming fiddling with Don Coffin in October.

She did get the Allegro Scholarship I mentioned when I wrote for the Soundpost last. She studies with Clovice Lewis in Upper Lake under the scholarship. She also has a cello teacher on Outschool courtesy of our charter school funding. She will be working out of the Fiddling book for cello with Don Coffin starting up again in October.

Cooper did go back to the orchestra when it started up again in September but he decided he didn't want to do it after all so currently we won't be doing orchestra. He had so much put on him right from the start of the school year, and the kids are part of a play production this fall, it's just been too much and he is only ten. Cooper, along with his sisters, are joining in group piano lessons offered by Victor Hall through C.M.A.S. (Children's Museum of Art & Science) in which they are learning scales and the circle of fifths.

The kids are part of a New Vintage Productions play called Merry Christmas, Scrooge! A Christmas Carol Panto. A panto is a type of play where audience participation is wanted and encouraged. It's going to be a very fun play. It will be performed December 8th-10th at the Soper Reese Theater in Lakeport. The Soper Reese Theater was originally a one-room movie theater. Built in the thirties? Maybe the twenties or maybe the forties? I do not recall exactly how old it is but it is a venerable and much-loved local institution with a great deal of history. I love the classic stadium seating and the ambiance. It is something to say you got to perform at the Soper Reese.

I would like to end with gratitude. Gratitude to all the teachers in our own lives who keep the music going in us, and gratitude to all of you who are reading this Soundpost for which I would not be writing, without your reading. Our gratitude, unto eternity."

The Blakeley Crew

Michelle & Charlie, Karin, Delaney, & Cooper

District 9

Bob Palasek

District 9 meets regularly for its 4th Sunday jam at the Castro Valley United Methodist Church hall, 19806 Wisteria Street, Castro Valley. The jam starts at 1:30. Our next jam will be on Sunday, November 26, 2023.

Because the fourth Sunday in December comes too close to the Christmas holidays, our December jam will be on the second Sunday, December 10. After that, we will return to our regularly scheduled fourth Sunday jams, starting in January. We look forward to fiddling and picking with you all.



**California State
Old Time Fiddlers Association
2024
56th Annual
California State
Old Time Open Fiddle
& Picking Championships
April 19,20, 2024
Lodi Grape Festival Fairgrounds
Jackson Hall
413 E. Lockeford St.
Lodi, CA**

**RV Camping
at Fairgrounds \$40
per night. Limited
hookups. Tent/vehicle
camping
\$10 per night.
Reservations required
Contact:
Deblivermore@California
Bluegrass.net**

**In coordination with
CALIFORNIA
BLUEGRASS
ASSOCIATION**

**CBA Spring Campout April 16-21,2024
For More Info Call Contest Co-Chair
Mark Hogan 707-479-5529
email: hogiemoon@comcast.net
Sharon Barrett 530-604-5279
email: texshar@pacbell.net**

Visit our website www.csotfa.org for full listings of schedules, divisions, rules & guidelines

CALIFORNIA STATE OLD TIME FIDDLERS ASSOCIATION DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION & PERPETUATION OF OLD TIME FIDDLE MUSIC

How To Learn Fiddle Tunes by Ear

by Pat Cronin

Learning to play the fiddle (or any instrument) by “ear” requires work and patience. It takes time.

Q: Do you know what the difference is between a fiddle and a violin? They say:

A: You play a fiddle with your “fangers” and you play a violin with your “fingers”!

.....It’s really all in the way you play it.

Let’s start with a little history....

What is a Fiddle, and where did it come from? A fiddle is a bowed string musical instrument, commonly called a “violin”. Fiddle is a colloquial term for the violin, used by players in all genres of music, including classical music. What determines the difference between a fiddle and a violin is the style of music played. It is basically the same instrument, played with different techniques.

Fiddles may be set up with a flatter arch to the bridge, to allow bowing techniques such as double stops, shuffle bowing, double shuffling (a series of rapid alternations between pairs of adjacent strings, known as “Hokum Bowing”).

Fiddlers often use steel strings to achieve a brighter tone than the deeper tones of gut or synthetic core strings, which are used to play classical music.

The Fiddle is associated with “traditional styles” of musical tunes which are most often learned by ear; for example, folk, old-time, bluegrass, country, Appalachian or hillbilly musical tunes, plus others which will be discussed in future articles.

Fiddle tunes are usually based on rhythms that focus on dancing, with quick note changes, and do not contain vibrato or sustained notes, as in classical music.

The medieval fiddle emerged in 10th century Europe, derived from the ancient Greek “Aupa” (Latin = Lira, English = Lyre) during the Byzantine Empire. It was a bowed instrument. The Lira or Fiddle spread widely throughout Europe in the 11th and 12th centuries.

West African fiddlers brought the instrument to America and many black musicians in America, made home-made fiddles from gourds strung with 1 to 3 strings, which they learned to play by ear in order to accompany dancers and singers.

By 1690, in the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam (New York City) and Virginia, slave fiddlers routinely provided music for plantation balls and street celebrations.

Over the centuries, Europe continued to have 2 types of fiddles: 1.) square shouldered, held in the arms and became known as the “viola da braccio”, evolving into the “violin”. 2.) the “viola da amba”, held between the knees. This 2nd style eventually fell off. Today, we have the violin, played in classical music and the fiddle, played in traditional music; both are the same instrument.

How to play the Fiddle by Ear

There are two ways to learn to play fiddle tunes:

1. Call and Response
2. Succession.

In the call and response method, you listen to small chunks of the tune slowly, and try to play it back. (I prefer this method.)

In the succession method, you listen to the tune a bunch of times and jump in when you can; and hang on....as in a “jam” situation.

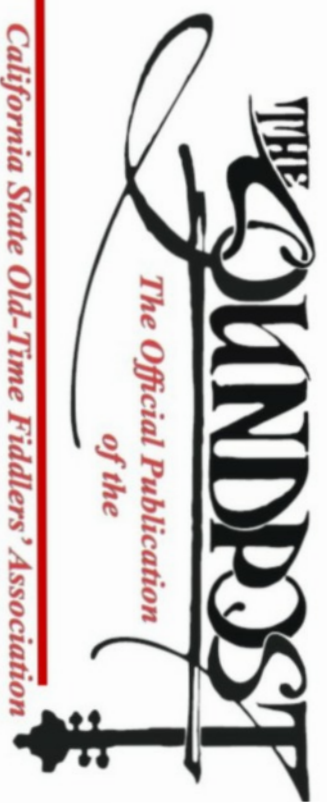
Tips to learning by ear:

1. Know the scales and arpeggios for every key; especially the typical traditional fiddle keys, which are C, G, A, and D. This tells you where your fingers will be placed. Arpeggios are the 1, 3, 5 and 1 notes in each scale.
2. Know the intervals in each key - i.e., 3rd, 5th, Octave.
3. Listen a bunch of times, to the tune you want to learn. Internalize it. Sing it in your head and out loud till you memorize the melody.
4. Listen, then start playing the tune very slowly in small sections, one chunk at a time. Memorize each section before going on to the next section. Play it several times till you have it perfect. Connect each learned section to the next section. Slowly, and with repetition, is the key. Use the Amazing Slow Downer App to help with this. Hear and translate what you hear to the instrument.
5. Set your metronome at a slow speed and play each part perfectly, before speeding up the tempo to a faster speed.
6. Know how the tune is organized. Most bluegrass fiddle tunes are organized into sections A and B, and they repeat the A section two times, then the B section two times. (There are always exceptions.) There is always repetition in the phrasing, so if you learn a small section of the A part you may find the same phrase repeats in another section of the tune, which helps, because when you get to it, you already learned it.
7. Get to know your instrument. Bond with it. Plunk the strings, Bow the strings. Get comfortable with playing the scales, arpeggios and intervals so that you know where your fingers need to be placed on the fingerboard to get the pitch of each note. To ensure the pitch is correct, check it with your electronic tuner. Know when fingerings are higher or lower in pitch. Trial and Error is essential to learning to play by ear. There are no frets on the fiddle/violin, so If you place your fingers in the wrong place and get the wrong note, just move them up or down a half step to find the correct pitch. Hitting the wrong notes will teach you to hit the right ones. Make sure your pitch is perfect.
8. If you find a particular section more difficult, isolate it and practice it until you get it right. Practice the difficult parts more than the parts you already know.
9. Remember to break the tune up into small chunks and repeat them over and over, connecting them together till you know the entire tune. Repeat several times.
10. Play the entire memorized tune in several different settings for different audiences. This will help you to know it so thoroughly that interruptions will not throw you off. Remember, it takes time and patience. Repeat and Repeat.

If you get the tune memorized up to speed and it still does not sound great, connect with a good fiddle teacher and they will be able to help you find what you are missing in tone, bowing, phrasing, pitch, etc. Private lessons usually cost between \$70-\$100/per hour. Seeking advice from professionals usually pays off to help you become the fiddle player you want to become. Good Luck!

Editors Note:

Pat Cronin of Dist. 8 has volunteered to do a column each quarter for the newsletter. So we hope you will enjoy this new section.



Aug-Sept-Oct 2023

CSOTFA Districts

