

## Fiddler's ShopTalk

By Roy Johnstone

Playing in tune is a challenge on the fiddle and one that every fiddler struggles with at times. Most fiddle tunes are in keys G, D, A or relative minors of Em and Bm that are fairly easy to finger in that the spacing of the notes falls in places where the hand is a little more comfortable. [many of th Celtic fiddle tunes are in Dorian mode which we'll take up next issue] It is important to learn scales so you are familiar with where the notes lie on the fingerboard.

As you will probably recall from school music classes the basic structure for the major scales is two four note cells (a tetrachord) of tone tone semi-tone separated by a full tone. If this sounds complicated it isn't. It's just the sequence of notes starting on the first note, the "tonic " and then the following seven notes of the scale leading to the tonic, an octave above the starting note. For example let's start with the key of C, which is played on only the white keys on the piano (no sharps or flats). The C major scale is CDEFGABC. The notes increase in pitch (the frequency of the sound) as you move along the scale. C tone followed by a full tone to D followed by a full tone to E followed by a semi tone or half tone to F is the first tetra chord which is separated by a full tone before beginning the next tetra chord which would be G followed by a full tone to A followed by a full tone to B and then a half tone to C. Although this might sound complicated at first it really is just describing the difference between the pitches of the notes and on the violin this translates into differences of finger placement.

Figuring out where exactly to place one's fingers is a bit of a challenge, especially in the beginning. It's really important to have your fiddle tuned in perfect fifths and you need to be able to hear when the instrument is perfectly in tune. Using a tuner will help to let you know when each string is in tune.

Once the instrument is in tune you can start to play your scales. If we start with the G scale we can use the open string for our tonic note. Then the pattern for our fingers becomes tone tone semi tone on the G string and tone tone semi tone on the D string. This means that the fingers fall in the same places on the G string as they do on the D string. A full tone interval is approximately twice as big as a semi tone interval. Finger placement charts can be purchased in the beginning if you have trouble hearing where the fingers should be placed.

When practicing scales, practice as if each note was important, play slowly and get the note sounding clearly and in tune. Always make sure your hand is relaxed and that your fingers curve gently over the fingerboard. Remember to sit with your spine erect, your left arm relaxed with most of the weight of the fiddle being balanced by the weight of your head on the chin rest. Playing scales can really improve your playing greatly and as you work into new tunes in keys such as F, Bb, Eb, it's good to practice the scale of the tune first to get comfortable with the finger placement. Playing with a metronome is a good idea as well, so that you get your tempos even.

Till next time keep the bow rosined and the fiddle in tune!!!

Roy Johnstone @ 2005