

## Fiddler's ShopTalk

By Roy Johnstone

Last issue we covered some aspects to help you play in tune . I went over some of the major scales and the relationships between the scale notes and where you place your fingers on the fingerboard. A major part of playing in tune is getting your hearing sense coordinated with your neuro-musculo skeletal system ; the pathways that carry signals to and from your brain to the muscles that ultimately move your fingers. It has been discovered that short periods of concentrated rote repetition are a very good way to “tune” up this relationship. That’s why many musicians spend time playing scales but to make the best use of this time you should limit yourself to aprox. 10 minutes of focused exercise at a time.

For example, let’s take the pentatonic scale of C. This scale will give you all the notes for quite a few tunes , including the Scottish air Auld Lang Syne. In the key of C the notes are CDEGA. Penta means five and therefore the name penta-tonic for this five note scale. You can see from the notes in the scale that it’s the same notes as the C major diatonic scale except we leave out the F note and the B note . These are called the subdominant and the leading notes but the names don’t really matter if you know where to place your fingers. and you get your ear familiar with how the notes sound in the scale.

To play the C scale on the fiddle we start on the low C note , third finger on the G string ( two and 1/2 tones up from the open G ), then open D, then E, first finger( one full tone up), then G, third finger (a tone and 1/2 up from E) , then open A, then the octave C, second finger (one and 1/2 tones up from the open A). Try the next octave up and so on.

The pentatonic scale often has a oriental sound to it and many Chinese and Japanese tunes use this scale but there’s also more familiar tunes such as Old Lang Syne and Land of the Silver Birch, which is a beautiful Canadian folk tune. If you have access to a piano you can play pentatonic tunes by playing only on the black keys and as you will see you can switch the starting notes. On the fiddle you can try starting on any notes in the scale. When first starting to learn this scale practice in ten minute intervals, Sing the notes along while you play. This will help to develop your inner ear, Later, try to make up interesting tunes with this scale and see if you can find other familiar tunes that only need the five notes. Play slowly and get the notes sounding clearly and in tune and use a metronome to keep your timing even.

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

Roy Johnstone @ 2005