

Fiddler's ShopTalk

By Roy Johnstone

Where did the time go since my last column? Well we're into the heat and humidity of the summer so I thought I'd cover a few key points for summer playing. But first, I'm happy to say I seem to be rid of those pesky carpet beetles that were eating my bow hair.

Summer brings a lot of challenges for your instrument and the bow. Because the glue used to hold the instrument together is a hide glue it will soften and sometimes let go with changes in temperature and humidity. Make sure you never leave your instrument in a closed car or in the trunk on a hot or cold day. These extremes in temperature can do serious damage to your violin. High humidity can also cause problems, making the instrument fingerboard slippery and more challenging to play. I have a soft cotton cloth to wipe mine off. Also, keep your instrument out of the rain and direct sunlight. The heat of the sun will lower string tension and make the instrument out of tune and any precipitation can loosen the glue joints and also make it more difficult to play. Sometimes you have to let an employer know that under no circumstances do you want to play in direct sun or in a wet area. They should provide a shaded and covered area. One in which the sun, rain and mist do not directly fall on you.

Summer humidity can cause a build up of rosin on your strings. So check them on a regular basis and wipe the strings with a damp cloth to remove excess rosin. If you find your instrument is sounding scratchy and bowing takes more effort check to see you don't have a rosin build up. I try and use as little rosin as possible to get a good clear sound. If you put too much rosin on the bow it will gum up and get sticky and also contribute to a scratchy sound. Always remember to loosen your bow after each bout of playing. The summer heat and humidity can affect bow hair tension so keep a close eye to make sure you're slacking off the tension or with time your bow will lose the camber.

Playing in the summer is challenging on the fiddler as well. Drink plenty of fluids, and if you're playing a lot make sure you warm up before each performance. Excessive playing can lead to serious injury such as carpal tunnel problems as well as shoulder and arm injuries. Stay relaxed and try to play with as little physical effort as possible.

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

Roy Johnstone @ 2006