

## Fiddler's Shop Talk \*

By Roy Johnstone

The fiddle is not an easy instrument to learn but with practice and a degree of ability everybody can make music on it. It's easier if you learn a few basic principles when you're starting out rather than trying to correct things later, but it's never too late. Here's a few I've gleaned over the years playing and talking with other fiddlers.

Respect your instrument and take the best care of it you can . Make sure it's the appropriate size for you and that it's comfortable to hold and play. Have the fiddle set up properly: factors such as neck size , string spacing, bridge height, and the use of shoulder and chin rests all affect the playability. A well looked after instrument will give you a better sound and will provide more enjoyment. More on the specifics of setting up the instrument in later columns.

When playing you should try and sit with the spine erect and try to play with as little muscular tension as possible. No tension allows for smooth movement of the bowing arm and the left hand fingers. Play slowly when learning tunes and when warming up, this will help reduce tension. More about the details of bowing and fingering in upcoming talks.

Learning tunes by ear and by reading both have advantages and you should try to do both. A note representation of a tune is only a guide and it can never give you the real sounding of the tune but it will give you another way of looking at and hearing a tune. This is helpful in learning the keys in which tunes are played and in seeing the outline of the melody of the tune. Also, the notated music will help with understanding scales and keys and harmonies and chording accompaniment. However, tunes learned by ear will be better remembered than those learned from the music.

Learn to identify your own weaknesses and then develop an approach to your practice that corrects or improves these. A few minutes of focused practice can be much more beneficial than an hour of just mindless playing. Get into a routine of practicing so much per day, even if it's only 15 minutes. That's much better than practicing for hours only once per week. Have fun, play with other musicians, enjoy the experience of playing and practicing!! . Listen closely to all the different sounds you can make on the fiddle . What an amazing instrument !!

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

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