

## Fiddle Shop Talk for the Fall

The Sunday afternoon sessions at the Old Triangle alehouse are going very well with many players “from away” joining in and saying how pleased they are that a regular session is being held. The first hour is a slow session and the second half is by ear and at regular tempo. These will continue every Sunday except Dec 26. The Irish set dancers are often in attendance as well so come out and join in the music or kick up your heels in an jig or polka.

Heading into the fall is a good time to reevaluate your fiddle playing and to plan out some activities that will help you move towards playing better. Self evaluation of your playing is a bit difficult at first but with some practice it will be very rewarding since it allows you to direct your own learning process. For example, consider your bowing, Can you play jigs smoothly with a strong rhythm? The drive and power of the jig comes from the bow arm and getting the lift in your playing will make a big difference in your sound. Practice playing the 6/8 rhythm of a jig paying attention to the first eight note of each triplet. Playing with as little muscular tension is key and transfer the accent gently through your bow hand. I find that most of the pressure is coming thru my index finger to the bow.

For any of the dance styles you can identify an area to work on. Strathspeys, the strong cuts for instance, the hornpipes, a lighter lift to the playing, airs, longer bows with more expression . Each player will have her own areas to work on . Don't choose too many or that will be self defeating. Choose a few areas and work on them daily for a few months and I'm sure you will see improvements.

Some players just concentrate on learning new tunes but this can be problematic if that's all you do. Often the tunes are not appropriate to your level of playing and you end up frustrated or worse: with a physical ailment from the stress . Having a good teacher to guide you can help ( check out the list of fiddlers willing to teach in the PEI fiddler's newsletter) and I know of a few good books. Two that are more traditional are Matt Cranitch's The Irish Fiddle Book and Traditional Scottish fiddling , a players guide . Tools for Musicianship by Matt Glazer is more oriented towards jazz and blues but any musician will find it useful . It covers rhythm, advanced ear training, harmony and melodic development and composition( three CD's included).

Perhaps this is one area where classical music has its' advantages. The program of learning is structured to take you through a series of exercises and tunes that help to evolve your playing sequentially. If you know of some good books that take a developmental approach to traditional music please e-mail me and I will mention them in the next shoptalk.

Enjoy and till next time keep your bow rosined and the fiddle in tune.

Roy Johnstone

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