



Junior Hoedownner

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Teacher Tips

Is It Me or the Fiddle?

"... a student handed me her fiddle. "Here," she said. "I've been trying to play double strings and it sounds awful! It screeches so much I can't stand it. Will you play some double strings and tell me if it's me or the fiddle?"

I asked her to play a bit. She had been working on "Red River Valley," key of G, using a drone string. She did sound somewhat screechy though not horribly. I could see that she was not allowing herself enough bow for the longer notes. This can lead to screeching. Sometimes beginners will try to gain more time on a bow by "stepping on the brakes" -- pressing down too hard in order to slow the bow down. Slowing the bow down without adding undue pressure works fine for gaining time. Or if you find you're running short of bow, play two bow strokes instead of one to gain the time then work on the longer bow for a practice exercise.

"I took her fiddle and bow from her and played "Red River Valley," double strings. It sounded fine. Elaine breathed a sigh of relief, glad that there was nothing wrong with her fiddle or bow -- then asked, "How'd you do it?" "Well, for one thing I slowed the bow down evenly -- gave myself enough length to play the long notes. Also,

when I played on the G and D strings, I added a little pressure to the bow strokes -- not a lot -- just a little." She took the fiddle back, tried that and sounded fine. When she played on the A and E strings -- she screeched. "Why did that happen?" "You added too much pressure." I gave her the exercise of playing long bow strokes on two strings, E and A. A and D. D and G. She found that each set required a slight change in bow pressure in order to get a good sound. This is due to the thickness of the strings. The heavier the string the more pressure is needed. I must emphasize though -- that it only requires a slight change in bow pressure, not so much as to cause screeching. She is going to work on that this week at home.

In order to get a good bow tone our bow hand becomes very sensitive to the feel of the bow and strings which it is playing. It takes many hours of practice to be able to change the bow pressure slightly this way or that without thinking about it in order to get a good tone.

"On the other hand sometimes it is good to ask, "Is it me or is it the fiddle?" Strings crusted with rosin, a bridge that is set wrong, a bow that needs to be cleaned or rehaired can cause screeching as well. So you might as well ask."

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Bev Conrad, used by permission. Bev can be contacted at www.fiddlerwoman.com.

District 8 Scholarships

District 8 announces that members living in Dist. 8 need to get their applications in for scholarships to the Scholarship Committee - to Ray Cunningham.

Tune of the Month

This tune was borrowed from the WOTFA Newsletter. Stuart Williams writes -- Kneecracker is a tune with character. It's not one of those dreamy, pretty little things, but a waltz meant for a quick spinning step. In fact, that's how Sadie Gates remembers it from back in North Dakota. The dancers spun so close together that it seemed as though their knees were a-knockin' together. Sadie (b-1910) grew up in North Dakota, a third generation Norwegian/American Fiddler. As a young girl she started seconding her grandfather at the 20 local dances on fiddle, pump organ and guitar and eventually took over the lead fiddle work. Quite the performer at WOTFA fiddle shows, dressed up in her classy cow-girl outfits; she put a lot of bounce and oomph into the bow, making for very danceable beat.

Kneecracker

waltz

from Sadie Gates
late of Auburn, WA

The musical score for 'Kneecracker' is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. It consists of six staves of music. The first staff begins with a G chord. The second staff includes a first ending (marked '1.') and a second ending (marked '2. G'). The third staff begins with a G chord. The fourth staff includes a D chord and a G chord. The fifth staff begins with a G chord. The sixth staff includes a D chord and a G chord. The piece concludes with a double bar line.