

Fiddler's Rag

Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association
Celebrating 38 Years!



February 2012 (Vol. 40, Number 2)

Next Jam: February 5

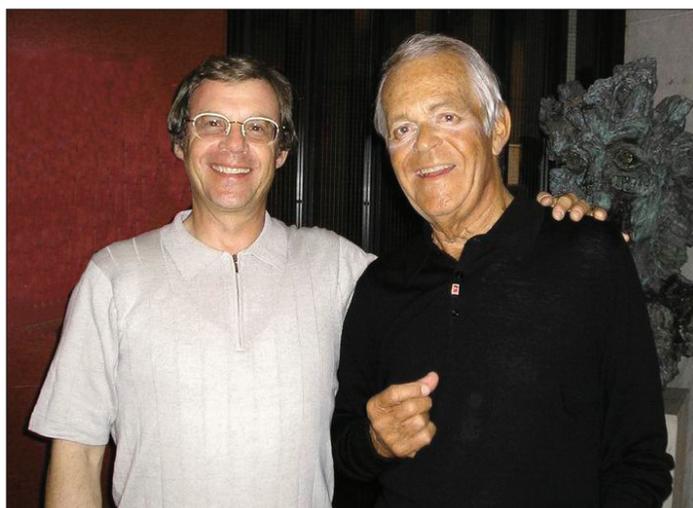
President's Note

By Richard Brooks



Our January jam was mighty successful considering it was on New Year's Day. At one point, nine folks got on stage: Mike Bell, George Bradshaw, John Durbin, Tom Clausen, Paul Barnett, Jean Avram, Art Kee, Dave Barton, Paul Clarke. Their music moved famed dancer Fritz Buell to the dance floor with Marge. John Durbin, Sam Morocco, and I also had a fun time on stage.

February is when we hold our annual general membership meeting to elect or re-elect two of our six trustees. I will also give a brief talk about the state of the association. Members will be voting to reelect current trustee Dave Williams and elect Tom Clausen, a long-time member and former secretary. There are six SCVFA trustees, two of whom are elected each year to three-year terms.



Svend Asmussen turns 96 this month!
See Richard's tribute article on page 2.
(Photo taken in Oslo in 2003.)

We plan to print membership booklets in the spring. Let Pete Showman know if you have updated information or want something omitted.

We are discussing changes in how the Fiddler's Rag is delivered to you. Our plan is to continue to mail it via USPS to those without email addresses and to email it to everyone else. Those with email preferring the mailed version can just let us know.

Please note that reducing the number of printed newsletters would not only save money (it is our largest non-rent expense), but it would be of enormous help to Charlotte, our newsletter publisher, who does the printing, collating, stapling, folding, tabbing, stamping, and mailing of about 200 copies.

On a personal note, I will be given a Lifetime Achievement Award on Saturday, January 28, at the free Bluegrass on Broadway (BOB) festival in Redwood City. The festival runs from January 26-29 and is sponsored by the Northern California Bluegrass Society (www.ncbs.us).

BOB's film documentaries will be shown on Sunday, January 29. SCVFA member Chip Curry will show his film "American Folk Dancing" about Evo Bluestein's elementary school folk dance week program, and Frank Grabowski will show his film "Bluegrass - A Documentary." Frank is a Mountain View High School senior and son of SCVFA member and banjo player Wayne Grabowski.

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The Fiddler's Rag is published monthly by the Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association and is provided to members of the Association. The Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association (SCVFA), founded in 1973 in San Jose, California, is a nonprofit, volunteer-operated organization dedicated to the preservation, teaching, and enjoyment of traditional music. The first membership in a household includes the *Fiddler's Rag*; additional members sharing the newsletter are steeply discounted. To join the SCVFA, sign up at the jam or visit www.fiddlers.org/join.

Officers and Chairs

President-Trustee	Richard J. Brooks
Vice President	OPEN
Treasurer	Janet Johnston
Membership	Pete Showman
Recording Secretary	Dinah Showman
Newsletter Editor	Mary Larsen
Newsletter Publisher	Charlotte Prater
Webmaster	(Pete Showman, acting)
Playout Coordinator	Paul Clarke
Youth Activity	OPEN (P. Showman & R. Brooks, act.)
Youth Fiddle Contest	OPEN
Publicity	Shared
Trustees	
	Seat 1: Pete Showman Seat 2: Gorden Gibson
	Seat 3: Paul Clarke Seat 4: Charlotte Prater
	Seat 5: Dave Williams Seat 6: Steve Joynes

Newsletter banner art by Hilary Cole

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 Email: newsletter at fiddlers.org
Website: www.scvfa.org or www.fiddlers.org

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Svend Asmussen: Phenomenal Jazz Fiddler

By Richard J. Brooks

[In honor of Svend Asmussen's 96th birthday on February 28 (born in 1916), we are including selected highlights (with some edits) from Richard Brooks' article first published in the Spring 2005 issue of Fiddler Magazine. Svend lives in a suburb of Copenhagen with his wife Ellen.]

Svend Asmussen, the world-renowned jazz violinist, is by all measures a most remarkable person. This spry eighty-eight year old is still performing! He has been in the music and entertainment business for over seventy years and has recorded over thirty albums.

Svend was arrested by the Nazis in 1943, and only a stroke of luck saved his life. As a result, the world has benefited from his artistry as a versatile entertainer and artist: a jazz violinist and singer, a band leader and arranger, a film actor, and an artist (paintings and drawings). His movies are still shown regularly on Danish television. There is even a winding street named after him on the isle of Bornholm in Denmark. Its name is the Danish equivalent of "Asmussen Swing."

Asmussen has played jazz violin with such jazz greats as Fats Waller, the Mills Brothers, Josephine Baker, Edith Piaf, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Joe Venuti, Stéphane Grappelli, Stuff Smith, Bucky Pizzarelli, John Lewis, Kenny Drew, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, Lionel Hampton, Toots Thielemans, Alice Babs, and Ulrik Neumann.

On April 17 and 18, 2002, I was honored to interview him at his home in Copenhagen, Denmark. He shared many personal and musical experiences with me, and I left with an even greater appreciation for one of the greatest talents I have ever met.

Svend (pronounced "Sven," the "d" is silent) Asmussen's jazz violin style is truly unique and instantly recognizable. Stéphane Grappelli called him the "master of the odd interval" because his musical phrasings are based on horn players, not string players.

Svend began his professional career in 1933, and his first recordings date back to 1934. His musical life turned upside down when he heard jazz violinist Stuff Smith, who later became a close personal friend. "He's still my man," Svend said.

Svend is a multi-instrumentalist. In 1964, he recorded an LP *Scandinavian Folk Songs Sung and Swung* with famous Swedish singer Alice Babs. On it, he was the male choir (with overdubs) and played violins, bass, guitar, mandolin, piano, vibraphone, flute, and percussion. It sounded like an orchestra. It was awarded the best European album of the year.

(Continued on page 4.)

This photo of SCVFA members Howard and Jeanette Jackson was taken from a video filmed at the last jam at John Muir Middle School on May 6, 2001. It includes well-known SCVFA members Joy Birdsley, Bill Massey, Jim Moss, Barbara Ann Barnett, Ken Jones, Art Kee, John Lytle, Norio Kawato, and Richard Brooks. It is available on DVD for a donation of \$15. (Please see page 5 for a tune written by Dave Barton in honor of Howard and Jeannette's 50th anniversary.)



SCVFA Happenings

February Annual Member Meeting

The annual SCVFA membership meeting will take place starting at 3:00 during the February jam. We hope you'll take a break from jamming for a few minutes to vote in the Trustee election, hear a brief "state of the association" from Richard Brooks, and let us know what you think about the association and our activities.

The two Trustee candidates are Dave Williams and Tom Clausen. You can read their candidate statements in the January issue of the *Fiddler's Rag*.

After the membership meeting there will be a short Trustee meeting to appoint officers for the next year. If you can help out as an SCVFA volunteer we'd love to hear from you!

Member Roster Update

We plan to print revised member-roster booklets soon. If any of your information has changed (phone numbers, email addresses, instruments, etc.), please let us know – preferably before we print the booklet. A draft of the roster will be available at the membership desk at the February jam. If you're not sure everything is correct, stop by and have a look.

KidFiddle Workshop in March

The Trustees authorized another KidFiddle workshop to be held at the March 4 jam. We're delighted that Jack Tuttle will be the instructor. Jack teaches fiddle, mandolin, guitar, banjo, and bass at Gryphon in Palo Alto; see www.jacktuttle.com.

This is a test of sorts, as we had very low attendance at the workshops last spring. If you know young fiddlers, please encourage them to give it a try.

KidFiddle workshops are aimed at intermediate-level fiddlers 17 and under. They last about an hour, usually beginning at 2 pm at the jam, and ending with the students performing on stage. Tuition is only \$5, with signups at the jam on the day of the workshop.

Surplus PA Equipment

Now that we have our new PA system up and running, we plan to sell a few older items. These include our Yamaha EMX650 6-channel powered playout mixer, a pair of steel speaker stands and a single Peavey 115H speaker (300W, 15"). Watch for details in March and April – and let Richard or Pete know if you might be interested in any of the items.

— Pete Showman



*Fiddlers 17 and under: **Mark your calendars!** On March 4, Jack Tuttle will lead a **KidFiddle Workshop** beginning at 2 pm. Cost is only \$5. Tell all your fiddling friends — this is a great opportunity to learn from a master instructor! Jack and his sons Sullivan and Michael will also be doing a **mini-concert** after the workshop!*

Trustee Meeting, January 2012

Trustees met on January 15, 2012, and took the following actions:

- Officially appointed Mary Larsen as editor of the *Fiddler's Rag*.
- Thanked Steve Joynes for his service as a trustee.
- Discussed the February jam's membership meeting and election.
- Asked Pete to prepare a membership roster in spring 2012.
- Agreed to a July 1 playout for the Costumers Guild during the Rose Garden Park jam.
- Agreed to a pro-bono playout for students at Cadwalader Elementary School (San Jose).
- Made plans to sell our unneeded equipment at the April jam or on Craig's List.
- Authorized payment for a KidFiddle workshop for the March or April jam.
- Agreed to continue our Featured Performer program.
- Discussed the SCVFA of the future.
- Discussed the plan to implement electronic delivery of the *Fiddler's Rag*.
- Set March 18 as the next trustee meeting date.

— Dinah Showman, Secretary

(Svend Asmussen... Continued from page 2.)

The Consummate Entertainer

Svend is a consummate entertainer and is not satisfied with just being a fiddler and band leader. His rapport with the audience is legendary and humor pervaded his shows. Svend said, “They pay just to watch. If they don’t have a good time, you can’t expect them to come next time.” His on-stage antics would have the audience all shaking hands with their neighbors.

In one skit, Svend practices his tennis using his fiddle as the racket. Svend swings his fiddle and the audience hears the pre-recorded sound of a tennis ball being hit. After several hits, we hear the loud sound of glass breaking everywhere. The joke is a huge success as it was performed at Glassalen, the glass hall, in Tivoli.

When asked where he gets his ideas, Svend said, “I had a lot of thinking about ideas, inspiration from different fields, from other kinds of music, like the idea of the audience hearing our thoughts. I think of how to dream up funny situations based on music, so musicians always would find it interesting, and people who were not musical had something to laugh at at the same time.”

The Swe-Danes Era — Fame and Fortune (almost)

Svend came closest to fame and fortune with his group the Swe-Danes, consisting of one Swede (Alice Babs) and two Danes (Svend and Ulrik Neumann). “We had a colossal success, especially in Sweden. We were on the edge of fame and fortune with the Swe-Danes — not because I’m a jazz fiddler, but because we were entertainers.” The Swe-Danes were a huge phenomenon traveling throughout the U.S. and Europe from 1959 to 1961 appearing on the Ed Sullivan show several times. They played the Palladium in London, the Olympia in Paris, and the Coconut Grove in Los Angeles.

World War II and the Nazi Invasion of Denmark

World War II was responsible for some of the darkest hours of Svend’s life. In 1940, the Nazis invaded Norway and Denmark and terrorized civilians by the public hanging of men and women who opposed the Nazi occupation. In Germany, they burned as many American jazz records as they could.

On August 29, 1943, Svend was arrested by the Nazis. He was neither a politician nor a “freedom fighter,” but just a famous entertainer. He was never given a hearing, nor was he ever told why he was arrested. Svend spent time in a Copenhagen prison, and was shipped to Berlin where he spent three months in isolation in a bug-infested cell. “Everything was taken away from you — your watch, everything — no reading material. That was a terrible psychological strain.” From his third floor cell, Svend could hear the guards running down the stairs for cover whenever the British troops bombed Berlin. The prisoners remained locked in their cells and were terrorized by hearing other prisoners being shot.

In December, he was released just as mysteriously as he was arrested — without explanation. Svend learned that two weeks after his release, the whole German prison building was bombed and almost everyone in it was killed.

Musicians’ Union Prevents U.S. Engagements

A major reason that Svend is not better known in the U.S. and internationally is because of the policies of Mr. James Petrillo, former President of the U.S. Musicians’ Union. Benny Goodman was impressed with Svend’s recordings, and in 1948 he asked Svend if he would consider coming to the U.S. to play with him. Svend agreed.

However, union policies enforced by Mr. Petrillo required foreigners to live in the U.S. for one year before joining the musicians’ union, which was required before he could play with Goodman. In Svend’s words, “That means you had to spend a year in America without playing or making any money. During Goodman’s visit to Copenhagen in 1950, he spent an evening speaking to Mr. Petrillo in New York trying unsuccessfully to convince him to make an exception to his policy for Svend. Instead, Svend spent the time entertaining the wealthy on cruise ships, where he ate the best foods in all his international travels.

Svend Asmussen Today [2005]

At eighty-eight, Svend is still playing music. His *Still Fiddling* CD, recorded in 1999, was released on Svend’s eighty-sixth birthday: February 28, 2002. In Svend’s own words: “One of the tunes was sung to me by Edith Piaf when we worked together in Oslo in 1947. Fifty years later it popped up when I heard David Grisman’s 20th Anniversary CD. ‘My Yiddisha Momma’ turned out to be a little masterpiece on our recording.”

Svend Asmussen lives and breathes music. His remarkable career has spanned almost the entire history of jazz music and leaves us with a wonderful legacy of over seventy years of recorded music. He plans to continue performing for his favorite audiences — listening audiences in small jazz clubs.

Happy Birthday, Svend!

[The original article from which this excerpt is taken will soon be available on the SCVFA website at www.scvfa.org/newsletter/.]



Golden Anniversary Rag

Celebrating Howard and Jeanette Jackson's 50 years of marriage. (Pattern: AABBCCAA)

By David M. Barton © 1999. Typeset in ABC by Pete Showman 1/20/12.

A

6 1 C D7 G7

10 2 F C G7 C

Fine

14 **B** Am C Am C Dm7 C

18 1 Am C Am C D7 G7

22 2 Dm7 Am G7 C C7

C

26 F Dm7 Gm7 F

30 F Dm7 G7 C7

34 F Dm7 Gm7 F

38 B \flat Dm7 C7 Gm7 F F \sharp 7 G7

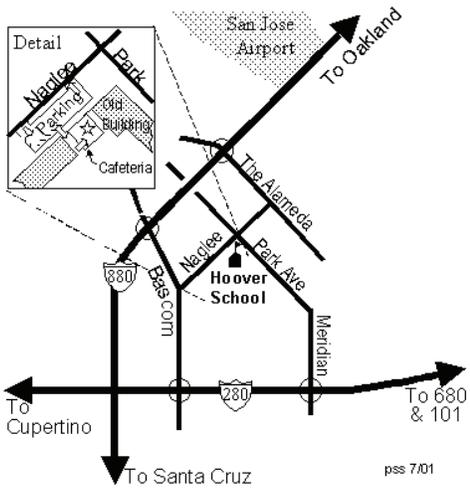
D.S. al Fine

Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association
P.O. Box 2666
Cupertino, CA 95015-2666

SCVFA Jam on the first Sunday of each month.
Location: Hoover Middle School, 1635 Park Ave.,
San Jose. The school is at the corner of Naglee and
Park. Cafeteria parking is on the Naglee side.

Next Jam: Sunday, February 5, 1-5 pm
Hoover Middle School

Damaged or Missing Issue? Call us,
or email to: newsletter at scvfa.org



*Performing on-stage at the January 1 SCVFA jam, left to right:
Mike Bell, George Bradshaw, John Durbin, Tom Clausen, Jean Avram, Dave Barton, Paul Clarke.*

Please join us at our next jam, February 5!

Photo: Richard Brooks