



Fiddler's Rag



Vol. 48, Number 2
Celebrating 46 years

Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association
www.fiddlers.org

Feb 2020
Next Jam: Feb 2



President's Note

Do you know what is special about the First Sunday in February? I'm not talking about the Super Bowl. February 2nd is the Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association Annual Membership Meeting and election. We need a quorum (10% of members in good standing, dues paid up) to proceed with elections. The Annual Meeting will be held during the jam at 2:30 pm, 30 minutes earlier than previous years. Not yet a member? Join SCVFA prior to the start of the Annual Membership meeting and you will be eligible to vote. Thanks for being part of the process.

February 2nd is also the day of a half marathon in San Jose, which loops all the way around Hoover Middle School. This event starts at 8:00am and is supposed to be over before the jam starts. If any streets are still closed, just give them a few minutes.

Pete Hicks led our first anchored Bluegrass Circle at the jam in January. Judging from the size of the circle and the quality of the music, it was a huge success. As a bonus, Pete was joined by bandmate Billy Pitrone. When the group reached a max, it split into two groups, with Pete anchoring one jam and Billy the other. Pete Hicks, joined by Pete Showman, Art Kee and Mike Bell, took a short break from jamming to play some wonderful music on stage for the open mic. We look forward to Pete Hicks's return in February.

Thanks to Michael Robinson for leading the Tune Exchange in January and sharing some Shetland traditional music. Tune Exchange is the workshop where SCVFA members share the music they love. Tunes are taught by ear as is the folk tradition. Thanks Jean Avram for leading the January slow jam where newer musicians have a safe place to learn at a comfortable tempo.

Join us immediately following the jam at Chipotle for good food and better conversation. Put down your instruments and get to know one another at "Afters". You'll be glad you did. **975 The Alameda, San Jose.**

Do you love SCVFA? Let others in on the secret. We have bumper stickers which can be purchased at the jam. Just ask me. SCVFA logo t-shirts, sweatshirts, & hoodies are some of the options for wearable art which promote us wherever you go. Contact me for ordering details. *President [at] fiddlers.org*

Volunteers are what keeps SCVFA going and it's fun! This is a great way to connect with more musicians and support our organization. A great jam doesn't just happen. It takes a village. Let's all do our part.

--- Susan

Share any performance opportunities at *performances [at] fiddlers.org*, and let us know if you would like to be included as a potential performer

Our annual **Membership Meeting** will be held at the February jam at 2:30 pm. See page 5 of the January Fiddler's Rag for the Trustee candidates' statements. The two new candidates will be replacing current trustees Pete Showman and Élan Alford for respectively seat 1 and seat 2.

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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, sign up at the jam or see www.fiddlers.org/join.

Officers and Chairs

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| President-Trustee | Susan Goodis | News Editor | Patrice Tanti |
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| Membership Secretary | Pete Showman | Webmaster | Pete Showman |

Trustees

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Seat 1: Pete Showman | Seat 3: Sam Schillace | Seat 5: Peter Forrest |
| Seat 2: Élan Alford | Seat 4: Dave Thomas | Seat 6: Cindy Dinga |

To Contact the SCVFA:

Mail: P.O. Box 2666, Cupertino, CA 95015-2666
 Email to Susan Goodis: *president [at] fiddlers.org*
Newsletter Submissions & Comments: *newsletter [at] fiddlers.org*
Address changes: *membership [at] fiddlers.org*
 Website: www.fiddlers.org
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The Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association is a non-profit member-supported organization.

Donations to SCVFA are greatly appreciated and will assist in keeping traditional music alive by passing it on to the next generation.

Many local corporations offer matched donations for non-profits. Check with your employer... they may offer this benefit. You can easily add SCVFA as a 501(c)(3) organization; our EIN is 51-0196154

Donate as you are able and traditional music will reap the benefits.

SCVFA wants musicians to know that we are “not just for fiddlers”. The image to the right side of the Fiddler's Rag name on page 1 includes a mandolin, a banjo, a guitar and a fiddle, to illustrate the diversity of instruments played at our jams and events.

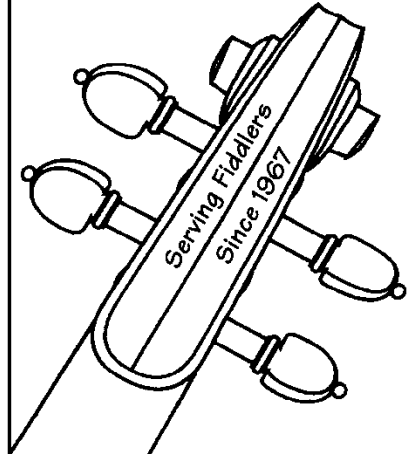


Quote of the Month

“I think music in itself is healing. It's an explosive expression of humanity. It's something we are all touched by. No matter what culture we're from, everyone loves music.” — Billy Joel

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SCVFA Happenings

SCVFA Slow Jam current tune list

www.fiddlers.org/learning/#slowjam

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Angeline The Baker (D) | Red-Haired Boy (A) |
| Arkansas Traveler (D) | Red Wing (G) |
| Barlow Knife (G) | Shoo Fly (D) |
| Girl I Left Behind Me (G) | Soldier's Joy (D) |
| Jaybird (D) | Squirrel Hunters (A) |
| June Apple (A) | St. Anne's Reel (D) |
| Liberty (D) | Swallowtail Jig (E) |
| Mississippi Sawyer (D) | Whiskey Before Breakfast (D) |
| Over The Waterfall (D) | Wildwood Flower (C) |

Thank you all for participating in the slow jam. The slow jam is for beginners who want to participate in a slow-paced jam (60-90 BPM).

Mark Your Calendar - Upcoming Events

2/2 1:00 – 5:00pm **Music Jam and Open Mike** at Hoover School and a special event: special bluegrass circle with Pete Hicks.

SCVFA Presents

Music Jam and Open Mike 2020

Sunday February 2, 2020
1:00 – 5:00 PM at Hoover School

Special Event: *Bluegrass Circle* with Pete Hicks

For information check the SCVFA website
www.fiddlers.org
or contact
president [at] fiddlers.org

BLUEGRASS

URGENT NEED:

Fiddlers Rag Newsletter Publisher

Once a month print a pdf file of the newsletter provided by the Editor and collate 3 dozen copies. Stuff into envelopes and mail 2 dozen copies. Bring 1 dozen to the SCVFA jam.

Contact: *President [at] Fiddlers.org*

SCVFA Board Meeting Highlights Wednesday, January 22, 2020

As of December 28, 2019, there were 122 member households comprising 179 individual members.

The hourly rental rate for the Hoover School facility has been reduced due to our being a non-profit organization, saving us \$85 a month at least through June.

We are in need of someone to take over publishing and mailing the hard copies of the newsletter (17 for members plus a few extra for distribution).

The bluegrass jam led by Pete Hicks in January was a success. A new sign will indicate "Intermediate/Advanced" bluegrass in order to encourage participation by more accomplished players.

Board members will do their part to ensure that other jam circles, at all levels, continue during the jam.

A committee was formed to look into alternative locations for the jam in the hopes of finding a facility that would work better during cold and rainy days.

The board will be rewriting SCVFA's mission statement to make it more concise.

The annual meeting will take place at 2:30 pm during the February 2 jam, and the next board meeting will be on March 18th.

Jessica Ollmann
Recording Secretary

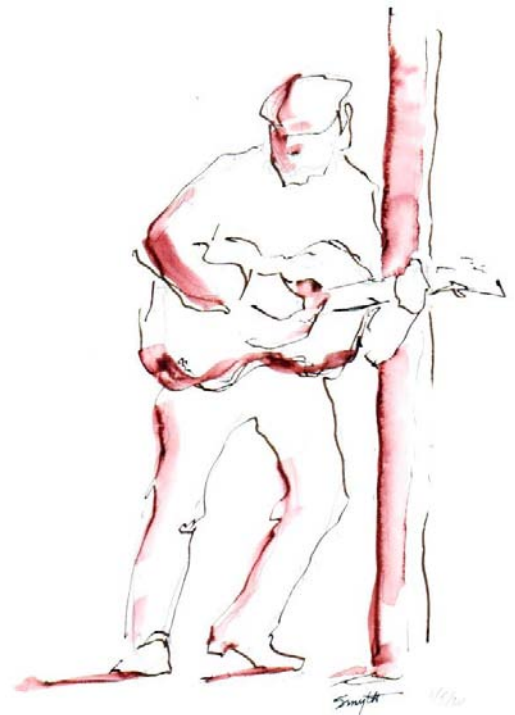
January Jam Photos



Large Bluegrass Jam group with Pete Hicks (photo: Susan Goodis)



Bluegrass Jam group on stage (photo: Pete Showman)



Sketch by Jim Smyth

January Jam Photos



Anne Raphael, Jane Burroughs, Michael Robinson and Vicki Parrish performing at the Tune Exchange led by Michael Robinson (photo Pete Showman)



Sketch by Jim Smyth



Sketch by Jim Smyth



The Slow Jam (photo: Susan Goodis)

Hicks' Licks: The Quest for Tone: Getting "That Sound" By Pete Hicks

How does one get a good sound out of a fiddle? I will try to answer this question with a little help from my friends.

First of all, you need a good instrument and a good bow. Violins vary greatly in tone, and the bow needs to match the violin. Try playing the same phrase on the same violin with three or four different bows. They each have a different sound. I have two very fine bows and sometimes change bows to vary my tone. If you go fiddle shopping, bring along an expert friend to help you pick one out. Keep your strings clean, check the bow hair, and get that rosin off the fiddle top. Make sure your sound post and bridge are in the correct location, and that the tailpiece is in the right place. When playing, make your notes clearly with your left hand. As Doug Holloway from Carolina Special says, "Press firmly and precisely." Make a nice pure note, and always be listening for pitch accuracy. Note selection is another factor. The B on the A string has a brighter sound than the B on the D string (3rd position). Try playing Leather Britches in third position and you will see what I mean.

Bowing Bowing is probably the biggest factor in good tone. You can vary tone immensely with the bow. Light pressure on the bow gives a light, airy tone, especially when playing near the tip of the bow. A bit more pressure makes the tone darker. Too much pressure on the bow makes the tone harsh and scratchy. I adjust bow pressure by adding or taking away weight from my index finger of my right hand.

Bluegrassers tend to favor the darker side of the tone spectrum. Bowing patterns give different tone as well. You can play a fiddle tune with saw strokes (back and forth) or the single shuffle or the Georgia Bow. Each pattern gives the tune something else. Longbow patterns can be used to play many notes per stroke, giving a smooth, legato tone. Kenny Baker does some wonderful longbow work, as does Vassar Clements. Kickoffs are usually begun near the frog to produce that percussive introduction, and the melody is played with the middle or upper part of the bow. The bow is usually in a position of balance with the instrument. With good clear bowing, you can combine single note lines with double stops for wonderful effect. Accuracy is critical; make sure the bow is touching the string or strings you want at the right moment. I sometimes think of the bow as a train on a railroad track. Give it a little push and it glides along almost by itself.

Vibrato Bluegrass fiddle does not need much vibrato. The bluegrass fiddler follows the singer, and most bluegrass singers don't use much vibrato. It can be nice on the tails of

longer notes, but don't overuse it. I have been working on kicking my vibrato habit. If you do use it, here is a nice rule of thumb. Hit the first part of the note with no vibrato, and then let the vibrato finish the note.

The Body and Mind The fiddle reflects what is happening inside the fiddler. If you are nervous, the fiddle shows it. Excitement and tension are also reflected. So, it is good to be physically relaxed, or "loose". Exercises and warm-ups can help. I usually go hide and play the most difficult fiddle tune I know before a show. Some others use breathing exercises, yoga, or stretching. Mentally, it is good to get oneself out of the way and become part of the song. One must be paying attention to the sound of the fiddle, and how it is fitting with the band. I like to visualize the scene of the song. I think of the mountains while playing "Home in the Mountains", or mayhem while playing "Pretty Polly". Luke Abbot thinks of the fiddle as another voice more than as an instrument, trying to reproduce the feeling of singing. Doug Holloway reminds us to let ourselves go. Move your hips when you bend those blue notes. Feel it! When you are feeling the music, good tone is something that just seems to happen. That is because you have become the music and all you need to do is let it come out. Our tune this month is called "Struttin' Rooster". I learned this from Mike Fagin of the Cumberland Highlanders. He learned it from "an old boy in Eastern Kentucky 25 years ago."

Many thanks to Doug Holloway and Luke Abbot for their helpful ideas. See page 7 for written music.



Pete Hicks will be leading a bluegrass jam-group again at our February jam. Pete wrote a series of columns for the Fiddler's Rag between 2007 and 2010 about playing bluegrass fiddle. Following last month's re-run from October 2007, this column first ran in the November 2007 Fiddler's Rag. More to come!

Pete performs with *Bean Creek*, a smooth, solid traditional bluegrass band. With his rough-hewn fiddle strokes, honky-tonk voice and edgy mandolin he conjures up a great old time spirit.

View the music for Pete's lesson on page 7, and listen to it by typing the URL below into your internet browser. Thanks to Pete Showman for typesetting the music and creating the MIDI file.

www.fiddlers.org/Tunes/StruttinRooster.mid

Struttin' Rooster

(Eastern Kentucky)

From the playing of Michael Fagin
Arr.: Pete Hicks. Typeset: Pete Showman

Pattern: AABB

$\text{♩} = \sim 115$

Melody

Pickup

A D

1 2

3 4 5

* A

1. D 2. D

6 7 8a 8b

B D D&A

9 10 11 12

Harmonics:†
A&E strings
D&A

Harmonics:† A D A (unison) D

13 14 15 16

10/24/07 pss

* Measure 7 could also be played like measure 14.

** Here's an alternative for measure 16 (or 8b), starting with a triplet instead:

16 (alt)

† *Second harmonics* sound one octave above the string they're played on, vibrating at twice the open-string frequency. They're played by bowing while lightly touching the mid-point of the string(s). The mid-point is (approximately) the point you would finger to play the same note normally. If you press the string to the fingerboard there, only the part between finger and bridge vibrates. But if you just touch it lightly, the other half (between your finger and the nut) also vibrates, making a different sound. To finger these you can move your hand up to 4th position and use your pinkie—or just stretch a bit from 3rd position.

You can also play higher harmonics. The *third harmonic* is made by touching a string 1/3 of the way along its length. It will vibrate in 3 segments, at 3 times the open-string frequency, sounding an octave-and-a-fifth higher. It may be harder to get a good sound, but the third harmonic is actually easier to finger. Touch lightly where you would play the note that's a fifth above the open string. For example on the D string, the 4th finger normally plays the A that's a unison with the A string. A harmonic played by touching it lightly there would also play an A—but an octave higher: the first note of measure 13.

- Pete Showman

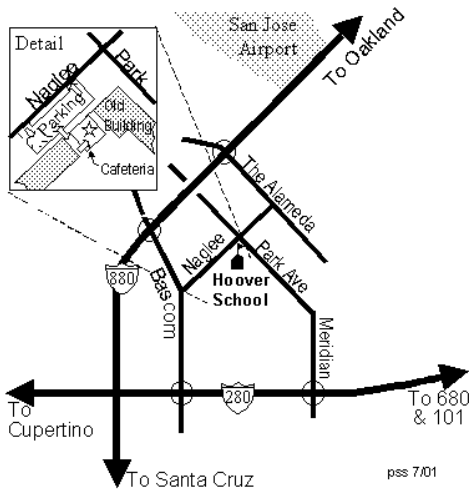
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**Next Jam: Sunday February 2nd,
1-5 pm at Hoover Middle School**

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.

**Damaged or Missing Issue? Call us,
or email to: [newsletter \[at\] scvfa.org](mailto:newsletter@scvfa.org)**



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