

"The Island Fiddler"



The P. E. I. Fiddlers Society
Newsletter

SHARPS AND FLATS (Comment from readers and the editor)

When I suggested a Society Newsletter and volunteered to be its editor (without benefit of any previous experience in this sort of thing) little did I realize just how much work would be involved in getting it off the ground. First on the list was the cover design and here I want to thank Wally Coulson, Summerside, not only for his ideas but also for his excellent design and art work. Second was finding advertisers who were interested in the Society and who would buy advertising space in our Newsletter. We as members can show our appreciation by purchasing our supplies from our advertisers; for without them, the Newsletter would be very costly to the Society. On this note we would like to thank the Heritage Foundation for its generosity in providing a grant to help us in getting started. Also the Provincial Government pitched in with a donation. These funds were used in part to get "The Island Fiddler" off the ground. Thanks for the help. Finally, and this was the hard part for me, trying to decide just what you, as members, would like to have in your Newsletter. When you've read this edition, if you like it, let me know; if you don't like any part or all of it, let me know how you would like it changed - after all its your Newsletter so let's hear from you.

In this section which, for lack of a better title, I've chosen to call "Sharps and Flats" we will publish any letter or opinion you want to pass along to the other members of the Society and also any editorial comment, I, as your editor would like you to consider. Here is mine for this month: -

P.E.I. FIDDLERS EXECUTIVE 1977-1978

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The P.E.I. Fiddlers Society is a Non-profit organization formed in May 1977 and is dedicated to the playing, teaching and perpetuation of traditional old time fiddle music on P.E.I.

Fiddling Contests - My personal opinion, for what its worth, is that this type of event is detrimental to the aims and purposes of our Society. (If some of you are not thoroughly familiar with these I'll publish them in the next edition.) I enjoy playing the fiddle and I'm not about to go out in public to try to prove I'm any better than the next fiddler- prize money notwithstanding!! I also very much enjoy listening to fiddle music and I've yet to listen to a fiddling contest where the best of any fiddlers' ability has been displayed, either in his or her choice of selection, or in its playing. The qualifications and/or the impartiality of judges needs no comment here. If the organizers of these events would advertise and stage a fiddling exhibition or concert, many of us, who shun contests like the plague, would be more than willing to take part. The normally allotted prize money and money otherwise paid for judges could either be divided among all participants or a percentage of it could go to the Society to help to pay for such things as the Annual Meeting and/or this Newsletter. What's your opinion?

REPORTS FROM THE GROUPS

Souris - Kenny Chaisson reports that the Souris Group have had a very successful year. Their concerts in Souris on the 26th of March and Carigan on the 14th of May were very well attended. They now have a teacher in the person of Gerry Zoat with seven new students varying in age from 6 to 21 years. (nice to see the younger people involved) Kenny and the rest of the group are busy getting the buildings and stage built and ready for the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival on 22nd and 23rd of July. This should be a real big event so plan to attend if you possibly can - more on this in the "Coming Events" section.

Charlottetown - Bill MacDonald reports that their group has been very active both in the teaching by Janet Evers and John Clement, and in the weekly practice sessions. This Group played in support of the "Bobby Burns Night" at Confederation Centre and also staged their own concert in the Basilica Recreation Centre on the 9th of April with both the Souris and Summerside Groups lending a hand. They also gave their talented support to the P.E.I. Symphony at their concert at Colonel Gray High School on 28th May.

Summerside - Albert Arsenault reports that despite a late start (February) the Summerside Group enjoyed a very successful year. Practice location changed from the Vocational School to the RCAF Association Quarters on Summer St. The Group wishes to publicly thank both organizations for their generosity. Eighteen new members started taking lessons and are now playing simple fiddle tunes. The more

experienced fiddlers shared the stage with the P.E.I. Symphony conducted by Paul Meimisto on the 27th of May at the Athena High School. We were all rather flattered to be included on a programme with such a prestigious and talented group of musicians. By the time the Newsletter reaches you the Concert planned for the 4th of June will have taken place. We're hoping it meets with the same success achieved by the Souris and Charlottetown Groups' Concerts.

P.S. Thanks for coming to our get acquainted party the 23rd of April. We enjoyed meeting all of you.

TIPS FROM TEACHER by John Gauthier

From my experience there is little an experienced fiddler can do on his own to improve his fingering other than practice - practice-practice. Bowing, on the other hand (no pun intended) is an entirely different matter. Most, if not all, fiddlers, (and by fiddlers I mean those who have had no formal violin instruction) bow instinctively, in other words they concentrate on the fingering while the bow hand seems to function automatically. Therefore it would take a conscious effort on the part of the individual to alter his or her bowing style. I'm not suggesting you change your individual style but you can, with a little practice, improve and expand it. Here's what I would like you to try for starters: - Take this number "The Great Western Clog" - page 117 in "One Thousand Fiddle Tunes" also known as Millicent's Favourite" in Kerr's Collection, also known as "The Sweep's Hornpipe" in O'Neil's Collection, also known as the "Royal Belfast in others. The first two parts of this piece are straightforward and may be played with comparative ease. The third part however is made up almost entirely of triplets. First play the triplets legato or slur by using one stroke of the bow for each triplet. Now that you've learned the fingering, try bowing each note in the triplet separately using the upper third of the bow. Note the difference in the sound produced. Fine - now that you have the fingers and bow coordinated try the same thing, only this time use extremely short bow strokes, about 10 to 13 inches up from the "frog", so that with practice the bow literally bounces on each note. There now - you have begun to master the technique of Staccato bowing. Good Luck.

FROM THE RECORD

There are fiddling records and there are FIDDLING records. In the latter category I must state that the very best single LP record I've ever listened to (many, many times too) is the recent one by the Cape Breton Symphony. The fiddling, as usual, is up to its normal standard; but what makes this record unique in my opinion, is

the flowlessly superb accompaniment. The rythem and chording are musically precise with the ~~with the~~ balance between the fiddles and accompaniment at the exact volume to make for fine listening. I'd include here the details for ordering the record from your dealer but I've just loaned my copy - no problem though, just ask for the record by the Cape Breton Symphony. Buy it - try it, you're sure to like it !

WHAT'S COMING UP

- July 2nd - Island Fiddlers participation in a Canada Folk Day Festival at West River Recording Studios (outdoors). Details on date and timing to follow from Neil MacCannell.
- Mid July - We've been requested to take part in the Summerside Lobster Carnival - no details available as yet.
- July 22nd
and 23rd - Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival - Big outdoor dance on the evening of the 22nd. Grounds are open on Friday evening for trailers and campers. This is one event that shouldn't be missed. See you there.
- July 28th
and 29th - Acadian Frolic at Cape Bald, N.B. A number of the Summerside fiddlers and accompanists are planning to take part under the name of "The Bows and Strings of Prince County". It should be a fun day. If any of you would like to come along, give us a call and we'll make it a convoy.
- Aug. 5th - Caledonia Day, Selkirk Park, Eldon, P.E.I.

THE CORNER MARKET - In this section members may advertise to buy or sell anything musical. No charge or ads placed by members. Commercial rates will apply to others.

PROFILE OF A FIDDLER

Joseph Chaisson, whose picture appears on the cover was born in Bear River (near Souris) in 1912. The son of a well known local fiddler, Joe showed an interest in the fiddle at an early age but Joe's father tried in every way to discourage Joe from becoming a fiddler for reasons best known to himself. "The only time I touched the fiddle as a youngster" says Joe "was when my father went in to Souris and I knew he'd be gone for a while". Joe says he started fiddling at "around twenty when my uncle bought me a fiddle and a couple of bows and a lot of strings from Boston". He picked it up very quickly and was soon playing for weddings and pie socials "that sometimes went on until 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning, that's without accompaniment too, just sitting alone in a corner".

The people who most influenced Joe's fiddling style were first his father and second, Angus Chisholm. Joe claims that Angus Chisholm was "the best he'd ever listened to". For many years Joe was too busy with business and family matters to have time for playing, but, unlike his father, Joe gave every encouragement to his sons and daughters to play. Some of whom are exceptionally fine fiddlers in their own right - Peter and Kenny, to name only two. In conclusion Joe expressed the opinion that the Society was the best thing that ever happened to Island fiddlers and feels that without it, old-time fiddling would have soon disappeared from the Island. When asked if he now had the chance to change anything in his fiddling career, he replied by saying "Looking back on it, I'd have liked to learn to play by note."

EDITOR'S NOTE - The above is a condensation of a taped interview with Joe when Ivan Day and I visited Joe and some members of his family in March. Keep up the good music, Joe.

NOTES FROM THE FIDDLE BUILDERS By Neil MacCannell

FITTING OF BRIDGES

(a) When choosing a bridge, choose one of hard maple, test by letting drop from about nine inches to a hard surface and if it has a good clear sound, bounces several times or maybe turns over, it should be a good responsive bridge.

(b) The feet on a new bridge must be shaped to fit the top of the instrument. This is best accomplished by placing a piece of garnet paper on the top of the violin between the notches in the "F" holes and by continuously rubbing the bridge back and a distance of about three-eighths inch. By so doing you will have the feet of the bridge conform to the top of the violin.

(c) Height. The bridge should be high enough on a full sized violin to give the following clearances at the fingerboard.
E string $1/8$ ", A string $5/32$ ", D string $5/32$ ", and G String $3/16$ ".

(d) The bridge must be taken down to a medium thickness (all from the side nearest the fingerboard) The final top thickness should be $1/16$ ".

(e) On a violin bridge the proper string spacing (centre of string to centre of string) should be $7/16$ ". The grooves to receive the strings should be made one-half the depth of the string with a small round file to avoid string breakage and chatter.

(f) The bridge should be placed to centre on the inner notches of the "F" holes. This should give you a string length of $12 \frac{7}{8}$ " from where the string leaves the nut to where it touches the bridge.

SOMETHING OLD - SOMETHING NEW

IN THIS SECTION WE WILL TRY TO INCLUDE AT LEAST ONE ORIGINAL COMPOSITION BY AN ISLAND FIDDLER. THE FIRST IS COMPOSED BY ERVAN SONIER, WHO OPERATES A BARBERSHOP ON WATER ST. SUMMERSIDE. WE CALL IT:-

THE MUG AND BRUSH HORNPIPE

by ERVAN SONIER

The musical notation is written on four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 2/4 time signature. The melody starts with a series of eighth notes, followed by a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' and a slur. The second staff continues the melody, featuring a double bar line with a '2' above it, indicating a second ending. Below this staff are the markings 'D.C.' (Da Capo) and 'D.S.' (Da Segno). The third and fourth staves complete the piece with further melodic development and a final double bar line.

THE SOURCE OF THIS TUNE IS UNKNOWN. IT IS A FAVORITE OF BOTH FIDDLERS AND STEP DANCERS IN THIS AREA. MANY FIDDLERS FROM THE OTHER GROUPS HAVE ASKED FOR THE MUSIC. WE CALL IT "THE HERRIN' GIGUE". HERE IT IS:-

THE HERRIN' GIGUE

ARR. BY J. GAUTHIER

The musical score is written on four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a time signature of 2/4. The melody is characterized by a series of eighth-note patterns, often beamed together in groups of four. The second staff continues the melody and includes a repeat sign at the end. The third and fourth staves provide a rhythmic accompaniment, consisting of steady eighth-note patterns. The piece concludes with a final double bar line and repeat dots.

Record Price for a Violin

Neil MacCannell

Recently at an auction sale in London, England, the record for the highest sum ever paid for a musical instrument was shattered when the "Gillott" by Joseph Guarneri Del Gesu 1734, realized 126,500 pounds, \$258,060.00 Canadian.

This is more than likely another fine instrument which has gotten into the hands of a collector to be hoarded and shut away so that musical artists are deprived of its use. I suppose some will argue that collectors render a great service by preserving fine old instruments which would otherwise deteriorate and eventually be lost if left in playing circulation the whole time.

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