



# FIDDLE

## Top Fiddle Tunes and Jam Session Etiquette

by Cristina Seaborn

Do you want to get started learning fiddle tunes, but aren't sure which tunes to learn? A little web research reveals that the top ten recorded fiddle tunes on albums are: *Soldier's Joy*, *Salt Creek*, *Sally Gooden*, *Blackberry Blossom*, *Mississippi Sawyer*, *Red Haired Boy*, *Bile them Cabbage Down*, *Cripple Creek*, *Old Joe Clark* and *Bill Cheatham*.

According to *Fiddler Magazine's* worldwide survey in 1995, the most popular fiddle tunes were:

1. *Soldier's Joy*
2. *St. Anne's Reel*
3. (tied) *Old Joe Clark*, *Ragtime Annie*
4. *Arkansas Traveler*
5. *Ashokan Farewell*
6. (tied) *Cripple Creek*, *Liberty*, *Westphalia Waltz*
7. *Redwing*
8. (tied) *Fisher's Hornpipe*, *Mississippi Sawyer*, *Whiskey Before Breakfast*
9. (tied) *Faded Love*, *Golden Slippers*
10. *Tennessee Waltz*
11. (tied) *Devil's Dream*, *Over the Waterfall*, *Turkey in the Straw*
12. (tied) *Bill Cheatham*, *Boil Them Cabbage Down*, *Blackberry Blossom*, *Flowers of Edinburg*
13. (tied) *Angeline the Baker*, *Midnight on the Water*
14. (tied) *Boys of Bluehill*, *Eighth of January*, *Flop-Eared Mule*, *Sally Goodin'*
15. (tied) *Chinese Breakdown*, *Over the Waves*, *Sailor's Hornpipe*
16. (tied) *Down Yonder*, *Girl I Left Behind Me*, *Irish Washerwoman*, *Kitchen Girl*, *Leather Britches*, *Wildwood Flower*
17. (tied) *Billy in the Lowground*, *Cindy*, *Cotton-Eyed Joe*, *Forked Deer*, *Harvest Home*, *Joys of Quebec*, *Kentucky Waltz*, *Sally Ann*, *Salt Creek*, *Year of the Jubilo*
18. (tied) *Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine*,

*Bonaparte's Retreat*, *Buffalo Gals*, *Darling Nellie Gray*, *June Apple*, *Miss McLeod's*, *Orange Blossom Special*, *Rock the Cradle Joe*, *Snow Deer*, *Staten Island Hornpipe*, *Temperance Reel*, *Under the Double Eagle*

Information from website with great fiddle resources: <http://mmcconeghy.com/RIMUSIC/tunes.htm>

### Jam Session Etiquette

So now you've learned some fiddle tunes and are ready for the fun of a jam session. Here are some pointers to get you started:

- 1) *Tune your instrument!!!* Use an electronic tuner.
- 2) *Choose a jam session* that fits your ability and style. Take the time to listen and watch first to see if it is an open jam. At a bluegrass festival the band might be rehearsing to get on stage.
- 3) *Sit in a circle.* The circle moves clockwise. Each player, regardless of musical ability, gets a turn to play the tune or solo (also called a break). If you want to pass your turn, look to the next person. Make eye contact in plenty of time so the beat is not lost. If you are a beginner, you can sit outside the circle and play quietly until you feel ready to join the jam circle. Ask for private lesson help and practice outside of the jam circle. In other words, the jam circle is not a place to practice.
- 4) *Pick your own tune and tempo.* On your turn, pick a song or tune you know well. Announce the name and the key. The person starting the tune ends it by lifting their leg in the air. (Because it's often too loud to hear

verbal directions.) If someone is not familiar with the tune, teach the chord progression. Sheet music is okay, but most tunes are played by memory.

- 5) *Common breaches of jam etiquette.* Failure to communicate with the musicians—the person who chose the tune is the leader of that tune. If the jam is obviously not going to go around the circle and there is only one obvious soloist, call that person's name. You can also say, "Fiddle players take this break." or "Banjo pickers, it's your turn." or "How about harmonica?" Always communicate in plenty of time so the beat is not lost.
- 7) *Jam Busters.* Choosing a tune that nobody knows at a speed nobody can play. Playing too loudly over the singer or soloist.

Always listen for the melody, lyrics, chord progression, and solos. Enjoy other people's playing with a smile and words of encouragement, applause, hoots and hollers. "You go girl!"

*Cristina Seaborn is a violinist and fiddler with over thirty years of experience. She holds a Bachelor of Music Degree in jazz violin performance from Berklee College of Music in Boston, and a Masters in Conducting for Orchestra from St. Cloud State University. She has produced an instructional video for fiddling through Mel Bay entitled Anyone Can Play Country Fiddle, CDs entitled Inside the Heart of a Musician and Spirit Wind, and many arrangements for string orchestra of fiddle music, jazz, Celtic, Scandinavian, Cajun and original. Her pointers on Jam Session Etiquette were used at the 2008 ASTA National Conference jam session. [www.seabornstrings.com](http://www.seabornstrings.com). ♪*