

All-State: Preserving Folk Traditions

presented by Sheila Wilcox
reported by Kathryn Buccola and Kristen Moon

Sheila Wilcox, the Virginia Public School Orchestra Director, presented a session to the All State Workshop participants about fiddle contests, fiddle clubs and preserving folk traditions. Wilcox shared a bit of the history and her involvement with fiddling in Minnesota, and the Minnesota State Old Time Fiddle Championship. Historically, fiddling contests drew contestants in with offers of great prizes. Wilcox cited an example of a contest (long ago) where the first prize was a car. The Minnesota State contest is partially funded through grants, and while prizes are offered, but not quite of the same magnitude. Performers have to prepare 5 tunes of different styles, to perform for the various stages of the competition.

Ms. Wilcox also incorporates fiddle tunes in her classroom teaching and shared several techniques and resources. They

include *Cluck Old Hen* the basic version and the advanced version, *Polska* and *Nar som flickorna de fita sig*. Teaching fiddle tunes offers the opportunity to teach students by ear, and also to develop their understanding of different musical roles: melody, accompaniment, back-up. The accompaniment rhythms in the examples Wilcox provided also demonstrated how students can develop and work on various rhythm and bowing challenges. Wilcox also encouraged the participants to teach back up accompaniments, tag endings and kick offs to round out the traditional fiddle music form with many of the fiddle pieces she spoke of.

Many of the fiddle books on hand at the session included multiple options for student parts: melody, advanced melody, basic melody, and back up parts, in addition

to opportunities to improvise accompaniments or harmonies with the chord symbols provided. The flexible scoring allows for differentiation and/or student choice, as several options and combinations are available.

Sheila Wilcox has done much in her community to support string education. She has helped organize the Minnesota State Old Time Fiddle Championships since 2012, chiefly being an organizer, promoter, and grant writer for the organization. Recently she has formed a fiddle club at her school that performs regularly in the community.

Kirsten Moon teaches orchestra at Hastings High School. Kathryn Buccola teaches at Lake Middle School, S. Washington County School District, Woodbury. ‡

Preserving Folk Traditions

by Sheila Wilcox

Here is a list of books that I currently use, or plan to use with my fiddle club. They are listed from easiest to advanced. I don't usually consider purchasing books that do not have companion CD's because so much of fiddling is imitating correct style, rather than reading what's on the page.

Books best for heterogeneous instruction:

Basic Fiddlers Philharmonic by Andrew Dabczynski and Bob Phillips starts kids out with tunes that are simplified and have pitches written inside the note head, as well as a more advanced versions of each tune. Some of the best features are the options for harmony/back-up parts for violins and violas and a bass line for cellists and bassists. The Teacher's Score has a very basic piano part along with very basic chords. A brief history of each tune and lyrics accompany each tune. Illustrations are almost non-existent. It is published by Highland Etling for Violin, Viola, Cello/Bass and Teacher Score. Sadly, only the Teacher Score comes with the CD, which is essential for learning the tunes properly. My fiddle club uses six of the tunes in this book.

Fiddlin' Fingers by Janet Farrar-Royce and Doris Gazda with Jay Ungar and Molly Mason is published by Carl Fischer for Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass, and Teacher's Score. There is no piano part in the Teacher's Score. All books come with a CD. These books' best features are the pages on slides, drones, shuffle bowing, kickoffs and tag endings. I like that lyrics are provided for each tune. My fiddle club uses all 5 tunes in this book.

White Mountain Reel Companion by Janet Farrar-Royce with Dudley Laufman and Jacqueline Laufman is published by Wind in the Timothy Press for Violin, Viola, Cello/Bass. There is no Teacher's Score or piano part, but there are basic chord symbols.

Only the Cello/Bass book comes with a harmony part, which is essentially just a bass line. Each book comes with a CD, which is really well done. My fiddle club enjoys playing 6 tunes from this collection.

Fiddlers Philharmonic and *Fiddlers Philharmonic Encore* by Andrew Dabczynski and Bob Phillips are published by Alfred for Violin, Viola, Cello/Bass and Teacher Score. Sadly, only the Teacher Score comes with the CD, which is essential for learning the tunes properly. It is the sequel to the *Basic Fiddlers Philharmonic* book. Again some of the best features are the options for harmony/back-up parts for violins and violas and a bass line for cellists and bassists. In these books the violin parts are written in the traditional keys for these tunes, but the parts that are harmonized are written in keys friendly to violists and cellists. Most tunes do not come with any lyrics. The Teacher's Score has a very basic piano part along with very basic chords. My fiddle club knows 5 tunes from these two books.

Fiddle and Song: A Sequenced Guide to American Fiddling by Crystal Plohman Wiegman, Renata Bratt and Bob Phillips published by Alfred is an excellent book for orchestral settings. The tunes all have the lyrics, ideas for kickoffs, a harmony part, an advanced break, tag endings, and back up parts. The CD is included in all the parts.

American Fiddle Method by Brian Wicklund and published by MelBay has fairly easy tunes. The cellists are forced to play all tunes in the traditional violin keys, making for extensions by the time they play *Cripple Creek!*

Irish Tunes for Young @ Heart compiled, arranged and published by Scott Walker. These books come in volume 1 and 2 for Violin, Viola, and Cello. Each book contains a demonstration CD. Tunes

are in traditional fiddle keys for all books, meaning that at times the cello and viola parts play down the octave and other times cello and viola parts require shifting.

Books best for homogeneous instruction.

AltStrings Fiddle Method by Caroline McCaskey and self published. This book was designed to follow the Suzuki Method in skill acquisition. Tunes in the cello and viola books are in cello and viola friendly keys.

Children's Graded Fiddle Solos Volume 1, Children's Fiddling Method Volume 2, published by Mel Bay and compiled by Carol Ann Wheeler. To my knowledge they are only published for violin. These books have a basic tune and variations for more difficult techniques. Everything is very clear, and tune history is explained. Her *Collection of Fiddle Tunes for Shows, Contests, and Parking Lot Jamming!* is for the more advanced fiddler. Some of her books contain a few tunes with a violin 2 harmony part. There is no accompaniment book, but all tunes have chord symbols.

The Fiddle Club (from the creators of Barrage Dean Marshall and John Crozman) *Introductory* and *Volumes 1-3* are published by Swath Publishing and MelBay. To my knowledge they are only published for violin. These books contain many Canadian Tunes, and usually feature a second violin part and sometimes even a third violin part. I like the tunes found here so much that I have re-written some of the second violin parts for viola. The left hand of the piano part can be easily played by a cellist or bassist. The chords are not just basic I, IV and V chords, so the piano part has tabs for the guitar. I am not entirely sure if these books are all still in print. Sadly, the CD's, which are really well done, do not all come

bundled with the books.

Advanced Fiddling: Solos, Instruction and Technique, and *The Craig Duncan Master Fiddle Solo Collection* both by Craig Duncan and published by MelBay are great performance length arrangements of the most popular contest tunes. I like that he categorizes them into categories of Waltz, Breakdown, Polka, Rag, etc. Sometime it is difficult to find out what type of tune is considered a Tune of Choice for contests.

O'Connor Violin Method by Mark O'Connor comes in *Volumes I-IV*. Each volume contains 2 or 3 nice written out harmony parts, and each book comes with a CD. Perhaps the most valuable element for me was the history of each tune along with relevant photos or drawings. Mark also has his some of his own compositions in these books.

Championship Contest Fiddling transcribed and edited by Nate Olson and published by MelBay contains transcriptions of actual Weiser Champion performances. These arrangements are pretty tricky and the guitar chords are non-traditional.

Fiddle Facebook pages:

Minnesota State Old Time Fiddle Championships
Minnesota State Fiddlers Association
Fiddle Contests in the United States
National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest & Festival
Old Time Open Jams

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