



Fiddler's Rag

Vol. 43, Number 3
Celebrating 42 years

Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association
www.scvfa.org or www.fiddlers.org

March 2015
Next Jam: Mar. 1



President's Note

We've started our 42nd year! Our annual membership meeting is held every February, as our bylaws require, in order to elect or reelect two of six trustees whose terms expire every year. Fortunately we had a quorum because enough members were willing to stop jamming for a few minutes to come inside to participate in this essential once-a-year election and learn about our current state.

Susan Goodis and Dave Williams were reelected to three year terms. The board reappointed our officers with Pat Tanti as our new editor, and I was reappointed as President for the eighth time. I started May 2008.

Topher Heath once again led his popular "Real Slow Jam" for beginning to advanced beginners who can play chords at a steady rhythm. Good job, Topher!

Blaine Sprouse, a fantastic legendary fiddler of many styles, is our special guest this month. See next column.

No Free Door Admissions in March

There is no free door admission for first-time visitors in March because of our special workshop and concert.

Storage Locker Help for a Full PA System

Do you like performing on stage with a full PA system - 8 mics, two speakers, and two monitors? If people don't volunteer to help at the storage locker, it might be 2 mics, one speaker, and no monitors. There will be a signup sheet at the desk. Loading takes 15-20 minutes and driving to the jam takes only 10 minutes.

Share Your Photos

Share your photos and we will include your name if they are used in the Rag. Email them to our new Rag editor Pat Tanti at newsletter@fiddlers.org.

Donate CDs for our Door Prize

Donate a CD you don't need for our door prize winners.

Amazon Buyers

On the lower left side of our www.fiddlers.org website we have a link to Amazon. If you click on it to go to Amazon, we get a small commission if you make a purchase. It costs you nothing and it really helps us.

- Richard Brooks

Blaine Sprouse Concert and Workshop

We are delighted to have **Blaine Sprouse**, a terrific bluegrass fiddler, give a concert and teach a fiddle workshop. Adult admission to the jam and concert is \$15 (with workshop \$25). If \$15 is more than you can afford, please see me.

Youth admission to the jam and concert is \$5 (with workshop \$15).



The one hour workshop is for intermediate to advanced fiddlers and is limited to 30 attendees on a first-come-first-served basis. There are no advance reservations.

Learn new tunes and fiddling techniques to use in jam sessions; backup techniques; double stops; better tone; rhythmic "drive", and playing in different keys. Time permitting, he will teach old-time Appalachian mountain tunes, and Bill Monroe and Kenny Baker tunes.

Blaine currently performs with the Peter Rowan band, Roland White Band, and James Reames and the Barnstormers. He is a sought-after instructor and teaches workshops throughout the U.S.

He has been on the Grand Ole Opry and played with Bill Monroe, Jimmy Martin, Osborne Brothers, Jim and Jessie, Charlie Louvin, Jerry Douglas, Béla Fleck, Roland White, and many Nashville session musicians.

Visit BlaineSprouseMusic.com to learn more.

- Richard Brooks

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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 ...	Richard J. Brooks	Newsletter Publisher ..	Charlotte Prater
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News Editor	Patrice Tanti	Youth Fiddle Contest	Pete Showman

Trustees

Seat 1: Pete Showman	Seat 3: George Bradshaw	Seat 5: Dave Williams
Seat 2: Élan Alford	Seat 4: Charlotte Prater	Seat 6: Susan Goodis

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Mail: P.O. Box 2666, Cupertino, CA 95015-2666
 Email to Richard Brooks: president at fiddlers.org Phone: (650) 328-3939

Newsletter Submissions & Comments:

Email: newsletter at fiddlers.org

Website: www.scvfa.org or www.fiddlers.org
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Flying with a Musical Instrument by Pete Showman

Some of you may have encountered problems when flying with your instrument(s). I've been lucky so far, and have always been allowed to carry my fiddle on, even though it slightly exceeds airlines' maximum length for carry-ons because of the bow. But apparently some haven't been so lucky. It seems that what's allowed and not allowed has been up to each airline – and worse, up to airline employees' varying understandings of those rules – and perhaps to their moods? After complaints by various musicians and publicity about some problems, Congress passed a law in 2012, the FAA Reauthorization and Reform Act, that specified consistent rules for the FAA to enforce. After considerable delay the FAA has finally adopted rules to implement the Act, effective March 15, 2015.

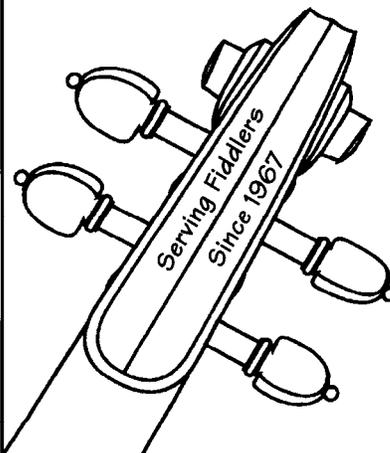
As the FAA Rule notes in the Background section, “while most airlines' current policies regarding musical instruments are consistent with the statute, frontline customer service agents and flight crew may not always be well-versed in those policies and may not communicate those policies accurately and effectively to musicians. By the same token, ... many musicians were not very well informed about airline policies” Thus part of the new rule deals with airlines' requirements to train employees.

This seemed to me to be the key part of the 6-page Rule: “This rule requires that carriers must allow a passenger to carry into the cabin and stow a small musical instrument, such a violin or a guitar, in a suitable baggage compartment, such as the overhead bin or under the seats in accordance with FAA safety regulations ... on a ‘first come, first served’ basis”.

See **Flying**, Page 3

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Flying

Continued from page 2

Note there is no guarantee that space will be available, either because of size limitations (e.g. not all overhead compartments can accommodate a guitar) or because previously-boarded passengers' carry-ons have filled the available space. So if your carry-on instrument is on the larger side, best to check with the airline about *actual* size limits (not the nominal rules about carry-on size, which would seem not to apply), and in any case, arrange to board the aircraft early. But the rule does clarify that no other carry-on baggage has *priority* over musical instruments. So for example once an instrument is safely stowed, the musician can't be required to remove it to make room for other baggage. There are also provisions for larger instruments for which a seat and extra ticket are required. There is a pretty good summary here: www.wqxr.org/#!/story/new-rules-musical-instruments-planes-take-flight.

You can read the official version on the FAA's website: www.dot.gov/airconsumer/air-travel-musical-instruments. The "Final Rule" link on that page takes you to a 6-page PDF that's actually fairly readable.

SCVFA Happenings

March Board Meeting

The March board meeting is scheduled for Sunday, March 15th from 2:00 to 5:00pm.

SCVFA board meetings are generally open to members. If you'd like to attend, contact Richard Brooks: President at fiddlers.org.

Slow Jam Tunes for March

Topher Heath writes:

The slow jam is for beginners who want to participate in a slow paced jam (60-90 BPM). To participate, you should be able to tune your instrument, play chords at a steady pace, and work up melodies/leads.

The song list for March is:

A Boil Them Cabbage Down
G Girl I Left Behind Me
G Irish Washerwoman *NEW
C John Henry
G Kesh Jig, *NEW last month
D Liberty
A Old Joe Clark
D Soldier's Joy
G Worried Man Blues
C Wildwood Flower

Membership Meeting Highlights

The SCVFA held its annual member meeting at the February jam, February 1, 2015.

- The members elected Dave Williams to Trustee Seat 5, for a three-year term.
- The members elected Susan Goodis to Trustee Seat 6, for a three-year term.
- President Richard Brooks reviewed the state of the association:
 - Financially we are OK. Expenses include school rental (our biggest expense), newsletter printing, liability insurance, storage locker rental, and our activity expenses: youth fiddle contest, holiday potluck, supplies, etc. Income comes from door admission charges, membership dues, donations, ad revenue, community performances when we can organize them, and Amazon Associates program revenue.
 - Volunteers are needed to help transport PA equipment and for other tasks as mentioned from time to time in the newsletter.
 - Members are welcome to attend trustee meetings.

Special Trustee Meeting Highlights

The new SCVFA Board of Trustees met immediately after the member meeting on February 1, 2015 to appoint officers for the coming year.

- Richard Brooks was re-appointed President-Trustee.
- The officers and chairs listed on page 2 of the February Fiddler's Rag were re-appointed, with the change to add our new newsletter editor Patrice Tanti.
- It was noted that current vacancies include vice president, publicity chair, and youth activities coordinator.

Dinah Showman, Secretary

Note: if you would like to be added to (or removed from) the Slow Jam mailing list, just send a note to: [topher.heath at xxxxxxxx](mailto:topher.heath@xxxxxxx).



Routing the String's Energy to the Belly *By Roger Siminoff*

Contemporary acoustic string instruments feature two primary bridge systems; movable bridges on instruments such as violins, banjos, and mandolins, and fixed bridges such as those on nylon- and steel-string guitars (that do not have tailpieces).

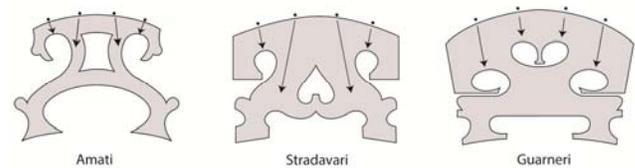
In movable bridge systems, the soundboard ("belly" in the case of the violin) is driven by the lateral energy of the string(s). When the strings are brought up to pitch, they exert a downward force on the bridge that in turn exerts a pressure on the belly that is equal to the force of the belly pushing back up on the bridge, and a stasis or null point is reached. At this point, the belly is "loaded" and ready for the slightest response from the strings. When the strings are excited, their sideways motion initiates an interaction between the effort of the strings pushing down on the belly and the belly pushing up on the bridge, and this exchange causes a pumping motion of the belly which results in the creation of compression and rarefaction inside the body; the final effect of which is the sound we hear. Note that I referred to a sideways motion of the strings, not an up and down motion as one might think. The continuous effort of the bow against the strings is a sideways action to which the strings respond in kind. The up and down motion of the belly is the result of the interaction between the down pressure of the bridge and the upward resistance of the belly. (There is much to be said here about the function of the sound post, but that is a separate topic.)

On fixed-bridge non-tailpiece instruments, the soundboards are driven by the longitudinal or lengthwise energy of the string. In these systems, when the strings are brought up to pitch, the tension of the strings causes the bridge to twist forward which in turn applies a twisting load to the soundboard. (While this system is worthy of a great deal of discussion, like the sound post, it does not lend itself to the purpose of this article.)

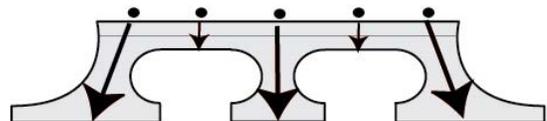
Managing the interaction between each string and the belly is critically important to ensure good string-to-string balance of tone, sustain, and amplitude. The connecting link between the strings and the belly is the bridge, and the shape, size, and design of the bridge plays a vital role in defining how the energy from each string is transmitted to the belly.

Prior to the work of Nicolo Amati (1596-1684),

violin- and viol-family instruments featured a wide array of bridge designs with artistically ornate attributes. In retrospect, the designs of these bridges suggest that their contribution was to be more decorative than functional.

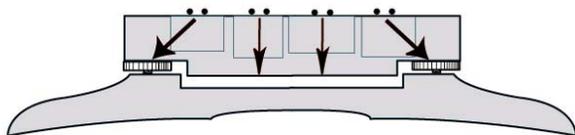


The famed violin luthiers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century recognized the importance of the bridge as a major component of the violin's acoustical system. To this end they sought to improve the violin's balance and timbre by attempting to prevent the energy from any string from having a direct access to the belly. Amati was the first to take a major departure from the more elaborate bridges of the time, but his bridges were frail and were designed with the *E* and *G* strings sitting over arches (no direct route to the belly) with the *A* and *D* strings having a somewhat circuitous but more direct route to the belly. Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737) laid the groundwork for what has become the conventional violin bridge when he produced a more consistently-structured and sturdier bridge. However, like Amati's design, the outer two strings were over arches in the bridge, and the center two strings, while not directly over feet, had a more direct access path to the feet than the outer pair. Advancing the work of Stradivari, was the effort of Giuseppe Guarneri (1698-1744), in which the energy path of all four strings is interrupted by either the bridge's heart or kidneys and all energy is modulated through the waist of the bridge. In Guarneri's design, no string had a direct energy path to the violin's belly, and this design has endured to today with only the slightest changes made by various luthiers.



Violinists have an advantage over their mandolin- and banjo-playing counterparts. Turning to the traditional three-footed banjo bridge, it is designed so three strings sit directly over feet and two strings sit over an arch or span in the bridge. You might even

see some similarities to Amati's work. In this design, the three strings over feet have a very different access to the banjo's head than do the second and fourth strings that sit over arches. And, as a result, the first, third, and fifth strings produce a different timbre than the two strings over arches. The key issues in play here are the flexibility of the bridge, and the proximity and routing of the strings' energy to the head.

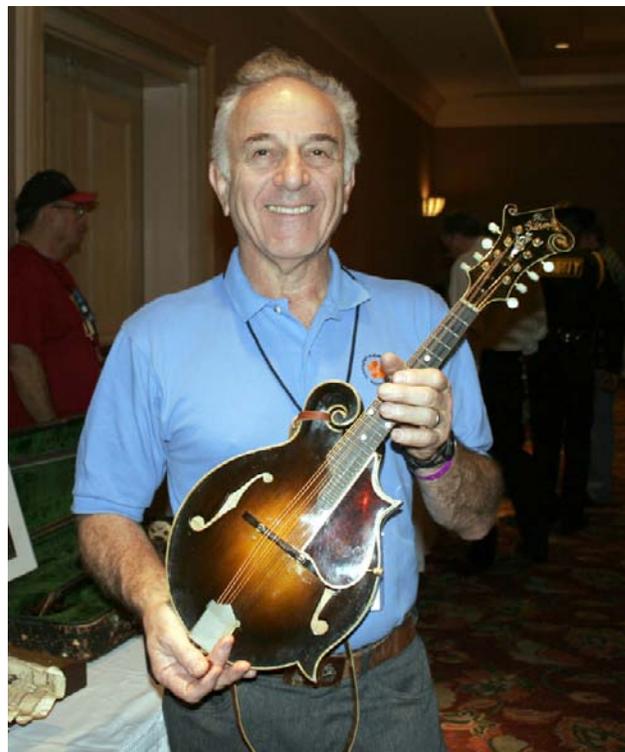


The mandolin players have a more complex problem. In the traditional mandolin bridge, the two outer courses of strings sit over the bridges posts with rather direct access to the soundboard, while the two center courses sit over the bridge's saddle, some distance from the posts.

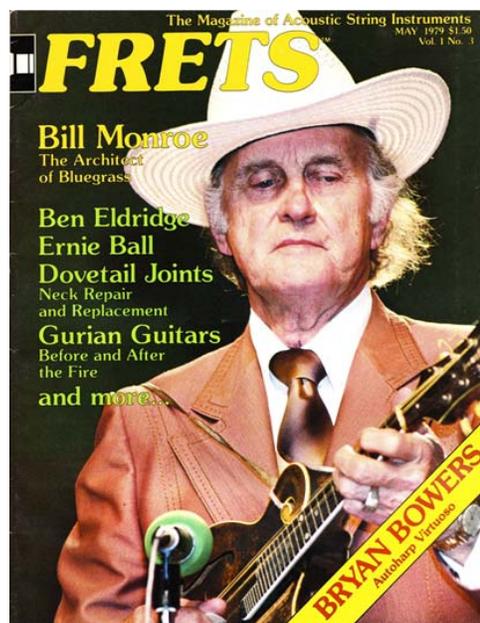
Over the years, I've developed numerous banjo and mandolin bridge designs that echoed the focus of Stradivari and Guarneri in which all strings would have either a direct route to the soundboard ("head" in the case of the banjo) or a non direct route. While many of these designs proved to be quite successful, they were a departure from what musicians perceived to be a conventional bridge, and were questionable as a commercial opportunity. During the past four years, we turned our attention to the strings with a focus of creating sets of carefully engineered strings with compensated down pressures for each string depending on where they sit on the bridge. These "Straight Up Strings" were announced in June of 2014 and feature unusual core-to-wrap wire combinations whose gauges were the result of calibrating the down pressures of the strings at a given string-break angle (the angle the strings make as they pass over the bridge). The results have been astounding, and while I don't mind taking some of the credit, my gratitude goes to Amati, Stradivari, and Guarneri who paved the way for this kind of thinking 350 years ago.

If you are interested in learning more about the various modes of string vibrations, I prepared a quick video for readers of BanjoHangout (a popular banjo-related chat site) several months ago, and you can find it here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7AwyUDQL_Q



Roger Siminoff was the founder of Pickin' and Frets magazines and has written 11 books and more than 500 articles on instrument construction set-up, tap tuning, and musical acoustics. For more on Roger Siminoff, Siminoff Banjo and Mandolin Parts, or Straight Up Strings, visit his web site at: www.siminoff.net.





Walker Creek Music Camp

By Dave Williams

Walker Creek Music Camp holds two fun sessions each year with registration now open for the Spring Camp, which will be held April 9-12. Walker Creek Ranch is located in the beautiful rolling hills of Marin County. The camp offers morning core classes and a wide array of afternoon elective classes in acoustic instruments, vocals, theory, dance, jams, barn dances, staff and student concerts, an open mic, and lots of jamming.

I am going to be working with Morgan Cochneuer in a relatively new class at camp in Jug Band performance. This class will study music of the original jug bands of the 20s such as the Memphis Jug Band, Mississippi Sheiks, Gus Cannon, etc. as well as the revival bands of the 60s like the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, and more current bands. It's open to all instruments (fiddlers, fiddlers, did I mention fiddlers), including percussionists, harmonicas, jug of course, washtub bass, also singers and kazoo players. Players of any skill level who wish to participate in the jug band experience are welcome in this fun class. Students will get a crash course in blowing a jug, also playing washboard (and other "found" rhythm instruments), washtub bass, and building an assortment of homemade instruments. The goal is to learn and jam on many songs from the jug band tradition and perform some of them at the student concert and open mic.

Morgan holds a BA in music, plays in several bands, and for many years has been teaching fiddle, guitar, mandolin, banjo, bass, jug, piano, and percussion. He's been fascinated with jug band music ever since hearing the Todalo Shakers, and has performed with jug band gurus such as Jim Kweskin, Dan Hicks, Maria Muldaur, Devine's Jug Band, and more. His own jug band, the Skiffle Symphony, often featured mandolin icon Kenny Hall. This is probably the most fun class we offer, and students of all ages are encouraged to participate.

More information on all the classes, the rest of the schedule, the site, rates and registration details, etc can be found on the camp website: www.walkercreekmusiccamp.org/ or by calling director Ingrid Noyes at 415-663-1342.

Rag New Editor Introduction

By Patrice Tanti

Twenty years ago, I relocated from France into the Bay Area with my wife Nina and our two children Lia and Max. We brought a number of instruments with us, including a piano, a flute and two guitars but no fiddle (or violin as I called it at the time). I joined the SCVFA soon after picking up fiddling in 2012. So today, it is a real privilege to join the SCVFA team.

I will pass on the ups and downs of the struggling adult fiddle beginner with which I am sure some of you can relate, but each time I join a beginner circle, crash into one of Topher's slow jam sessions, or simply listen to musicians on stage and in the school yard, I feel energized to practice some more.

In this context, the Fiddler's Rag has been a companion on my journey, and I thank Pete Showman for his amazing work behind the scenes and his kind editing tutorial and support. Besides providing a wealth of information on past and future events, vivid pictures, articles and tunes, the Rag, thanks to Charlotte Prater's dutiful publishing, arrives each month in our mailbox right in time to remind us about the upcoming monthly gathering at Hoover.

My wish is to help deliver this important source of information so please, continue to share articles, tips and pictures.

See you at the next jam, and keep on fiddling!



Photo: Pete Showman

Patrice (Pat) Tanti at the February 2015 Slow Jam

You can reach Pat at newsletter at fiddlers.org or newsletter at scvfa.org. Please email articles and/or pictures by the 15th of each month for publication the following month.

Photos from the February 2015 Jam



Photo: Janet Johnston

L-R, Dave Magram, Bob Smith, Jennifer Kitchen, John Kornhauser and Richard Brooks



Photo: Pete Showman

Dave Williams



Photo: Richard Brooks

Jena Rauti and Gary Breitbard



Photo: Susan Goodis

Left: **Gavin** from Modesto, a first timer who gave an awesome performance. He got the attention of many musicians with his simultaneous singing and fiddling.



Photo: Susan Goodis

Matt Small, Amy Morton and baby **Joylu** (February picture re-run with name correction)



Photo: Susan Goodis

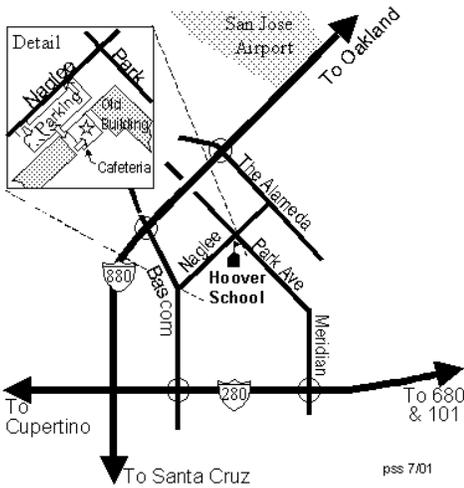
The Intermediate Repertoire Group led by **Gary & Jena**. Others in the photo are -- back left and clockwise around - **Cindy, John, Patti, Liz, Rachel, Élan,** and **Jean**.

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

**Next Jam: Sunday Mar. 1, 1-5 pm
at Hoover Middle School
Workshop at 2 pm and concert at 3 pm**

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



Annual Membership meeting at the February jam, **Richard Brooks** (on stage) addresses the assembly of trustees, officers and members.

Photo: Patrice Tanti