



Fiddler's Rag

Vol. 41, Number 7
Celebrating 40 years

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

July 2013
Next Jam: July 7



President's Note

Jam manager and trustee Dave Williams contributes his notes here because Janet and I were not at the June jam.

The July 7 jam will be in the award-winning Rose Garden park just down the street from the school. It's a great

community event, so spread the word and invite your friends and neighbors! It's a wonderful place and the rose bushes should be over 4 feet tall this time of year.

It's FREE since we do not pay rent, as we do when it's in the school cafeteria. There will not be a PA system or stage. Arrive early to help reserve some picnic tables in the shade. Bring water, suntan lotion, and a hat.

The August 4 and September 1 jams will also be in the Park. We'll return to the school for the October jam.

Newsletter Photos

If you enjoy seeing photos in the Rag, contribute some. Email them to [newsletter at fiddlers.org](mailto:newsletter@fiddlers.org). You will be acknowledged if they are used.

Publicity Chairperson needed

We need someone to help with publicity. It takes about an hour a month. Tom Clausen resigned from that role because of his new duties as the newly elected President of District 9 of the California State Old-Time Fiddlers Association. Congratulations, Tom!

Request to Perform at Los Altos History Museum

The Los Altos History Museum asked us to perform for their "Fandango Evening in Old California." on July 14 and offered to give us dinner and pay the SCVFA. Unfortunately we could not accept because no one was able to be the leader for this event. If we take turns being leader, we can continue our program. The June Rag has the details about this. Our playout program is a source of revenue and benefits the community.

Hats and T-Shirts

I'm sometimes asked about SCVFA hats and t-shirts. If someone can inquire about vendors, costs, and sizes, then the board can decide what to do.

- Richard Brooks



Notes From Dave Williams

Thanks to some great volunteer assistance from Sam Morocco, Allan French, Jean Avram, Bob Palasek, Warren Campbell and others, we had a very successful jam in June.

Special thanks to Trustee Charlotte Prater for leading the activities at the front desk. Sam and Allan helped at the desk and Bob and Warren did all the heavy lifting of the sound gear.

The turnout was light, but there was plenty of jamming and we kept the stage going for our listening audience. Jean Avram led the beginner's circle and managed to round them up on stage for a couple of songs.

There were some terrific open mic performances. Grace Clark did a couple of sets featuring her distinctive yodeling. Chip Curry, Dave Magram and friends played a great set. Many thanks to all the other fine musicians who kept the music flowing all afternoon. I won't try to name them all since I'll certainly miss some. Everyone's participation is what makes this organization work.

I'll see you in the park for the July 7 jam.

- Dave Williams



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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.

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SCVFA Happenings

July Jam: First of Three in the Park

As noted in Richard's message, the July, August and September jams this year will all be held in the park next to the Municipal Rose Garden, just two blocks from Hoover Middle School. See the map on the outside cover.

Then in **October** we'll return to Hoover School with a *KidFiddle* workshop and a Special Performer to be announced.

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SCVFA Volunteer Opportunities

As you know, we're an all-volunteer organization. Several positions are open. Many don't take much time; even a few hours a year can be a big help.

- **Publicity:** Create flyers, distribute flyers to stores and other venues, contact radio stations, etc. to help publicize SCVFA's activities. 1-2 hours per month.
- **Newsletter:** This involves collecting material, editing, layout, and preparation for printing. ~8-12 hours per month.
- **Playouts (performances):** Sign up to be on our performers list (no obligation), and if you're able, to organize an occasional performance. ~1-2 hours to set up and perform; 4 hours to organize a performance.
- **Help at the Jam:** do a shift at the back desk, help set up and take down the PA, help transport the PA, bring snacks to share, play on stage. ~20 min. to 1 hour.
- **Help Organize Youth Fiddle Contest:** If we're to have a 2013 contest, we need someone to serve as contest chairman. Pete Showman, who was chairman for the first 10 years, will help.

If you can help with any of these, or would like to learn more, contact Richard or any board member listed above.

A Visit to the MIM – the Musical Instrument Museum

Pete Showman

(Photos by Pete Showman except as noted)

Prompted by good reviews from Dave Barton and Allan French (Fiddler's Rag, April 2013), in April Dinah and I made a rather long day trip from Tucson to visit Phoenix's Musical Instrument Museum – commonly known as the MIM.

Included with the ticket purchase is an audio guide that's triggered as you approach most exhibits, so you can proceed at your own pace and in your own order. The clips often include samples of music played on displayed instruments or by featured artists, along with descriptive information.

The museum has more than can easily be seen in one day, so we didn't catch all of it. Here's a sampling of some of what we had time to see.

Near the ticket desk is the Orientation Gallery, which mostly displays guitars and guitar-like instruments. Many are fanciful, and some looked pretty hard to play. For example, I wouldn't want to have to try to keep the 23 strings of this Indian *Chaturangui* (slide guitar) in tune – but the fretboard inlays sure are beautiful. The eight main strings are fretted while



the other 15 resonate as you play – and tune, and tune.

On the whimsical side we liked this “lyre guitar” (France, ca. 1815), which seemed designed to look like a face.

Other guitars included a couple of “harp guitars” with a group of pluckable but non-fretted strings set beside the



Dinah Showman photo

regular guitar strings, a two-necked electric model, one neck with 6 and the other with 12 strings, and a narrow-bodied electric (shaped about like a backpacker guitar) surrounded by a curved bracket shaped like the outline of a regular guitar.

The Octobasse

Behind the orientation gallery is a room featuring one of the most spectacular instruments we saw, an “octobasse.” This is like a stand-up bass on steroids; at 12 feet 3 inches tall it's almost twice the size of a standard bass. Its three strings are tuned C0 (16.3 Hz), G1 and C1. (The lowest note on a regular bass is E1, about 41 Hz.) Most people can't hear notes below about 20 Hz, so they'd only hear overtones of the lowest notes. It's so tall that the player stands on a step to bow it, and levers near the neck (see inset) are used to press the strings. You can see and hear it in action at www.tinyurl.com/OctobasseAtMIM.



Dinah Showman photo ; inset from violinstudent.com

Pete dwarfed by the MIM's Octobasse Replica

Only three were made; this instrument is a replica of one made in France around 1850. Berlioz was a fan and wrote pieces calling for it, but for some reason (!) it never caught on.

A bit of trivia we learned later: The sound of the MIM's instrument was recorded at the museum for use in the recent movie *The Hunger Games*.

The Ground Floor Galleries

The **Experience Gallery** has instruments you can try, probably aimed primarily at the young set. When we were there they were mostly percussion instruments, and being young at heart, we gave some of the gongs a try.



Dinah tries a tuned set of gongs ...



... and their big brother.

The **Mechanical Music Gallery** has a host of self-playing instruments that goes well beyond the familiar player piano.

One of the most impressive is the Apollonia Dance Organ, made in Antwerp in 1926 for use in dance halls. Operated by compressed air, it includes an organ, two accordions, two saxophones and a drum set. You can see and hear it in action at www.youtube.com/watch?v=MF1tnXpn-bA.

An instrument closer to home for us fiddlers is the Violono Virtuoso, a machine that plays a regular violin. According to the descriptive plaque, “The violin is fingered by a special type of electromagnetically driven levers and bowed by small motorized self-rosining wheels. Vibrato is created by moving the tailpiece back and forth. All four strings can be played simultaneously, allowing the violin to play four-part harmony.” They were made from 1905 to 1930 and were “popular in cafes, bars and ice cream parlors.” Quite a gadget, but not very portable. The photo below shows the rosined wheels; a few of the levers that press the strings are to the left.



The Violono Virtuoso’s “bowing” wheels

There’s also an **Artist’s Gallery** with exhibits covering many performers such as Django Reinhardt and Hezekiah “Stuff” Smith. At most of them you can hear examples of the artists’ music on your audio guide.

Among the mementos are some oddities, such as this violin used by Joshua Bell as a child. It illustrates why you should never back a car over a violin – even if it’s in a case.



The Geographic Exhibits

The second floor of the museum comprises ten rooms, each displaying instruments from a different part of the world. We only had time to cover Europe and about half of the U.S. / Canada exhibits, and then quick-marched through the rest just to get a feeling for what we were missing.

Many of the exhibits include short videos showing some of the instruments being played, such as this one about Swedish instruments, including the nyckelharpe (keyed fiddle) shown in the top-most photo to the right.



The displays for each country or region are necessarily limited, usually to a dozen or so instruments and other displays on a 10 or 15-foot segment of wall. Here are a few I found interesting:

- A funky German fiddle (geige) from the mid 19th century.
- A French accordion from around 1880, apparently for those who felt it needed more volume for people in the cheap seats above.
- A strange picture that I didn't see described. It could be titled "What the well-dressed fiddler might wear," maybe at Carnival, or on Halloween? Note the spiral bow hair.



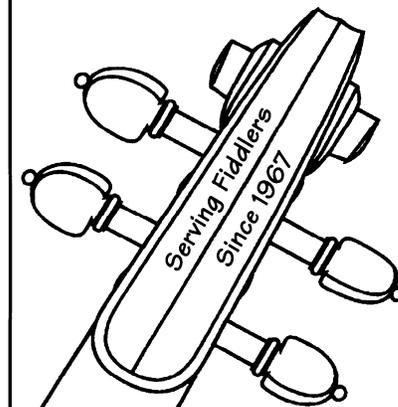
All in all we enjoyed our visit, and hope to return before long to see some of what we missed. Their website (www.mim.org) also has quite a bit of information about their exhibits. Check it out.

You can see the photos in color at www.scvfa.org/newsletter/articles/

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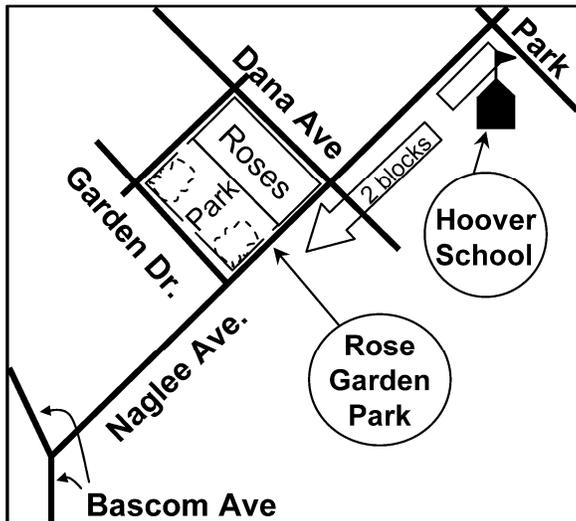
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**Rose Garden Park
 July, August &
 September**

**Next Jam: Sunday July 7 at 1 pm
 Rose Garden Park (see map)
 Look for us under the trees!**



Damaged or Missing Issue? Call us,
 or email to: newsletter at scvfa.org

Key: A

♩ = 90-100

Chinquapin Hunting*

(from a Bruce Molsky / Tatiana Hargreaves performance) *Traditional; transcribed & arr. Pete Showman*

*A chinquapin is a chestnut.

Transcribed 6/2/2013 by Pete Showman, from a performance by Bruce Molsky and Tatiana Hargreaves at www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYS7xyNW8Mc. They also play it an octave lower.

You can download the sheet music and hear a slowed-down MIDI rendition at www.showman.org/Tunes/.