



Fiddler's Rag

Vol. 42, Number 5
Celebrating 41 years

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

May 2014
Next Jam: May 4

President's Note



Our April jam was fantastic. Over 100 adults and youths enjoyed the perfect weather, and Jack Tuttle's Kids-Jam band and his KidFiddle workshop. Big thanks are owed to Tom Clausen and Dave Barton.

Tom was our jam manager and he brought our PA equipment from the nearby storage locker. Dave led our popular Beginners Circle slow jam.

This month is the start of my seventh year as President. Pete Showman's help enables us to maintain our current level of activities. Please see me about how you can help by spending just one hour a month. We need your help.

Desk Help Fairness

It came to my attention that our tireless desk workers Charlotte Prater and Janet Johnston spent almost the entire day **inside** without a break at the jam. Chris Cochran was thoughtful enough to help for an hour.

We must be more thoughtful. Everyone can afford 15 minutes during their afternoon to let them enjoy the jam and the beautiful weather. Volunteer your time.

Two Workshops at the May Jam

Luke Abbott is teaching our KidFiddle workshop at 2:00 PM and Wes Mitchell is teaching a free cross-tuning workshop at 3:15 PM. Both are in room H-106.

Remembering Lee Birch

I was very saddened to learn about Lee Birch's death on March 25th. Lee played many styles of music and wrote an article in the July 2008 Fiddler's Rag, "Fiddle Music as a Window to the Human Soul." Memories about Lee and his music are shared on page 6.

Share Your Photos

Share your photos and we will include your name if they are used in the Rag. Email them to the editor (currently Pete Showman): [newsletter \[at\] fiddlers.org](mailto:newsletter@fiddlers.org).

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

KidFiddle Workshop

Luke Abbott will teach our May KidFiddle workshop. KidFiddle workshops are for advanced-beginner to intermediate fiddlers 17 and under. Participants should be able at least to play one or two tunes. Tuition is only \$5.



Cross-Tuning Workshop

Wes Mitchell's free cross-tuning fiddle workshop follows Luke Abbott's KidFiddle workshop at 3:15 PM. See p.3.



Performing on June 1: Cowgirl duets, western swing, & bluegrass with Grace and Lisa.

Grace Clark and Lisa Burns delight audiences with their cowgirl harmonies and instrumentals.

Grace plays guitar, 5-string banjo, and Dobro (resonator guitar body with a banjo neck). Lisa Burns plays bass fiddle.

Grace led the Wild Rye and Brushy Peak bluegrass bands (Livermore) and Lisa is in the legendary bluegrass band Sidesaddle & Co.

Both have performed at numerous festivals in several western states. Grace teaches 5-string banjo and vocals. Lisa teaches bass.



In This Issue:

Page

President's Message	1
Workshops and Featured Performer in June ..	1
Photos from the April Jam	2, 3, 5, 8
SCVFA Happenings (member directories, upcoming workshops)	3
Pernambuco – Saving Fine Bow Wood (<i>re-print from the May 2004 Fiddler's Rag</i>).....	4
Pernambuco Update, 2014	5
Remembering Lee Birch	6
Tune: Waltz of the Little Girls	7

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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Since 1982 the Northern California Bluegrass Society has promoted bluegrass and old time music in the San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay areas. This highly active club has nurtured the development of bands and venues. The NCBS hosts the Good Old Fashioned Bluegrass Festival each August, an event that solely features California bands. We sponsor festivals, concerts and jams all over the area. Members receive the Bluegrass By the Bay magazine each quarter. Please join us!

Photos From the April Jam

Thanks to Bill Boiko for sending in these photos.



Two of our young musicians, **Doniella** and **Sarah**, explore their mandolins



Dueling Banjos? Nope, just **Paul Clarke** and **Connie Curry** -- in separate jams

SCVFA Happenings

Pick Up Your Member Directory

We'll have the 2014 Member Directories again at the May jam. Please stop by the Membership desk to get yours, and save the SCVFA some significant money. One booklet is provided to each member household.



These directories are for your personal use, to help you know and contact fellow members, and are not to be used for any commercial, political or religious purpose.

Two May Workshops

At 2:00 **Luke Abbott** will lead our second and final Spring **KidFiddle** workshop. Afterwards the students will perform on stage as usual. Registration will be on site, for \$5, but it helps us to know in advance who will be attending: email Mary Kennedy at [kidfiddle \[at\] fiddlers.org](mailto:kidfiddle@fiddlers.org).



Then at about 3:15, member **Wes Mitchell** will lead a workshop on cross-tuning fiddles. See the April issue for Wes's article on cross-tuning, and there's more information from Wes in the box to the right.

May Cross-Tuning Workshop

Wes Mitchell's fiddle cross-tuning workshop will start at about 3:15 at the May jam. See his article in last month's issue. Wes sent us a few workshop details:

Welcome to the Cross-Tuning workshop! Here is some information about what to expect:

1. You're actually going to be changing the pitch on a couple of strings, by a whole tone. There is always a chance a string may break, so it might be a good idea to bring some spares. We'll be tuning the A and E strings down to G and D.

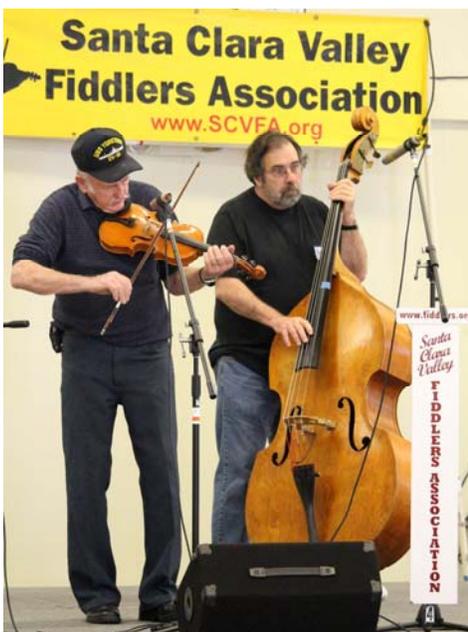
2. I encourage learning by ear. I try to learn that way myself, and it does get easier as you practice the skill. Feel free to bring a recording device for sound. Please no videos, though; you really don't want pictures of me polluting your phone.

3. The internet really has some great resources for learning (and a lot of, well, not-so-great ****). The slippery-hill website has a ton of source recordings for several popular fiddle tune collections: slippery-hill.com/. Marcus Martin's version of Booth is at slippery-hill.com/M-K/AEAE/Booth.mp3.

Finally, here's a really nice video of Art Stamper, Hiram's son, at Clifftop playing Chinqapin Hunting: www.tinyurl.com/ChinquapinHunting-ArtStamper.

Photos from the April Jam

Bill Boiko photo



Left: **Warren Campbell** and Trustee **Dave Williams** on stage. Right: **Jack Tuttle** teaches our April KidFiddle workshop, then (below) backs up his kids' bluegrass jam-band as they perform.



Riccard Brooks photo



Riccard Brooks photo

Pernambuco—Saving Fine Bow Wood

Review by Dinah Showman

(reprinted from the May 2004 *Fiddler's Rag*)

The alliance of musical and environmental interests may seem a bit unlikely, but it is happening today in Brazil. Brazil is the home of the pernambuco (otherwise known as pau-brasil) tree, the source of wood for the finest bows for stringed instruments, and is one of few places the tree grows well. The rain forest habitat for the tree has become imperiled over many years through cutting for fine woods and leveling for development. Now a group of bow makers has become interested in helping to preserve the pernambuco and encourage new plantings.

Russ Rymer writes about this effort in the April 2004 issue of *Smithsonian Magazine* ("Saving the Music Tree"). The author, an amateur cellist, became interested when he heard from bow makers that the shortage of the wood was threatening their livelihood. He notes in the article that "fine bows are among the last few non-ornamental items in Western life produced by hand by an individual, not out of nostalgia but because that remains the best and fastest way to produce them." The estimated 200 bow makers worldwide, though not using a large volume of wood, don't want to exacerbate the shortage and would like to keep the tree off the endangered species list, which would bring about restrictions in usage.

The use of pernambuco for bows, he writes, came about seemingly by chance, as an early bow maker in France is said to have scavenged slats from packing crates along the wharves to sample different types of wood that might be suitable. Pernambuco turned out to have the right properties of strength, flexibility and ability to hold the curve set into the bow and is considered by most to be the best

material for bow-making.

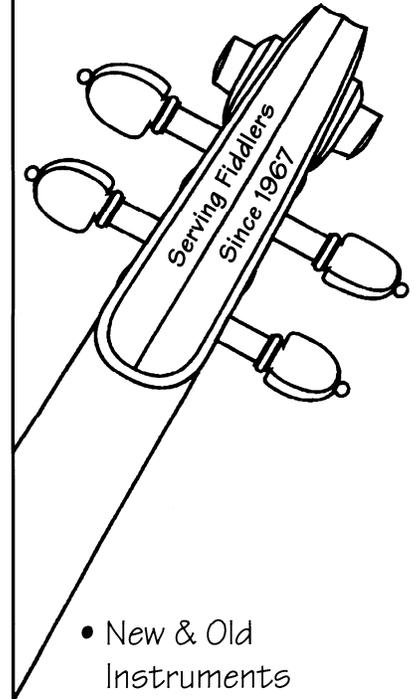
The article notes that bow makers came together with conservationists in a meeting in 2001 to discuss how they could help in the effort to keep the trees from becoming further endangered. A conservation initiative, IPCI, grew out of this meeting, and efforts have begun to save existing plantings of the trees and encourage new plantings and continued cultivation. Through improved agriculture, research, and working with government authorities and farmers in Brazil they hope to ensure preservation of the tree. The tree's little-understood cultivation needs and the many years before the wood becomes usable make this a long-term project.

Contributions from bow makers from around the world will help fund studies to inventory the trees and determine their taxonomy. The group is working with the cacao research center in Brazil to determine if the trees could be planted in cacao habitats that would provide needed shade during the trees' early years. It is hoped that these and educational efforts will make the preservation and management of the trees desirable and economically viable.

Though it covers the disparate topics of bow making history, bow construction and materials, ecology, plant conservation and economics, the narrative is woven together in an interesting way. See the article for much information on the history of bow making and more details about the conservation efforts. [This back issue is no longer available in 2014, but the text of the full article can be viewed at www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/saving-the-music-tree-101375575/]

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Pernambuco Update, 2014

Pete Showman

Since the original article (page 4), a key change has occurred. In 2007, pernambuco joined ivory as a material prohibited from international trade, by being added to a list maintained by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in response to a proposal from Brazil.

Being listed in CITES's "Appendix II" can potentially prohibit international trade in the species in *any* form. That would have made it difficult, if not impossible, for musicians to travel the world with pernambuco bows.

Fortunately, perhaps in response to protests from musicians, an amendment was added at the last minute to exempt finished products such as bows. But it still includes the raw stock from which bows are made, which can limit makers to using only pernambuco already on hand in their own countries – or to using other woods, or trying new materials such as carbon fiber. (Some suggest that as carbon-fiber bows get better, they will take the pressure off pernambuco,

helping its long-term recovery. But bow-making is far from the major reason for the loss of Pernambuco forest. Loss of habitat for farming and suburbs is.

Meanwhile the alliance between environmentalists and bow-makers continues. The International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative (IPCI, www.ipci-usa.org) is continuing its work to "ensure the future of stringed instrument music," by studying pernambuco trees, and by restoring the species "as a fundamental part of the Brazilian landscape." The replanting program is ongoing, including sharing land with cacao plants, which benefit from the pernambuco's shade. But no-one yet knows whether 30-year-old plantation trees will produce wood suitable for making bows. The best, hardest wood is believed to come from old trees whose growth rate was limited by nearby trees and poor soil.

You can learn more about Pernambuco and the CITES action from an article by violin maker Albertus Bekker: www.bekkerviolins.com/node/113.

Entertainment at the April Jam



Richard Brooks photo

A large group played early in the afternoon. L-R: **Wayne Grabowski, Kerry Maxwell, Jessica Evans, Marc Theeuwes, Peter Forrest, Beverly Tracey, Virgil Stanford and Steve Tracey.** Looks like every one of our mics was in use!



Richard Brooks photo

Later, regulars from the Fandango Monday-night jam played some old-time standards. L-R: **Mike Bell, Patti Bossert, Susan Goodis, Larry Joba and Bert Raphael.**

Remembering Lee Birch

April 22, 1948 ~ March 25, 2014

There are some people I have known who I wish I had met much earlier in my life. Lee Birch was one of those people. I'm not sure where and when I first met Lee, but it was likely sometime between five and eight years ago, either at a Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers jam or at a Good Old Fashioned Bluegrass Festival at Bolado Park in Tres Piños. I feel, sadly, that I was just getting to know him well when he left us.

My knowledge of Lee's early life is sketchy, but I remember his mentioning that he had been in the Merchant Marine, traveled extensively in the Balkans and North Africa, and married in Mexico and lived there for an extended period of time. He seems to have been practically fearless in his travels.

Lee had many opinions, and was generous with them. His point of view was often hard for me to understand, to the extent that sometimes I wasn't sure whether I agreed or disagreed with him. No matter, really; he could agree to disagree and then say "here's a tune you may like," and start playing his fiddle.

He was instrumental in starting a collection of early Californio music, which I recently learned about, but it was his superb fiddling that distinguishes him most in my imagination. I think he was the greatest fiddler that I have had the privilege of knowing personally. He played bluegrass, old time, Californio, Mexican, swing, Gypsy jazz, and probably other styles that I was never fortunate enough to hear, all with utmost authority.

Knowing Lee has caused me to push beyond my comfort zone in musical styles. I'm most comfortable with old time American music, but because of my acquaintance with Lee I feel like trying new things. Yes, trying new things is surely the best way to honor Lee's memory. Thank you Lee, for being the kind of person who I will remember for the rest of my life, and for the time you were kind enough to spend with me.

Paul Clarke, April 17, 2014

Chip Curry, who played a lot of music with Lee, has shared this message with us, which he sent to Lee shortly before his death:

Thinking of you, Lee. Remembering our great times at San Diego State Folk Festival – we were young, first hearing those old timers sing their hearts out, showing us the purpose of music. And we took it and did it justice.

I remember one first evening at Lark Camp, hanging out up at Camp One. Your music was the first I heard



Richard Brooks photo

Obituary for Stephen Lee Birch

from www.skylawnmemorialpark.com/obituaries/Stephen-Birch/#!/Obituary

Niños, cuando yo muera, no llores sobre mi tumba
Cántame un lindo son, ay mama, cántame
La Sandunga
No me llores no, no me llores no, porque si lloras
me muero
En cambio si tu me cantas yo siempre vivo y nunca
muero

Niños, when I die don't cry over my grave
Sing me a beautiful song, sing me La Sandunga
Don't cry for me, don't cry for me, because
if you cry I'll die
If instead you sing to me, I'll live forever
and never die

...from la canción "La Martiniana" (Oaxaca)

He will be deeply missed by his family and friends.

that incredible week. You somehow transcended the melodies. I have always said, Lee Birch is not fiddling, he is the train conductor taking us on a train ride through Mexico yesterday, Eastern Europe 100 years ago.

The music will survive both of us. You have given it momentum, joy and truth. And the world is a better place for it.

All thoughts with you Lee, with much love,

Chip

Waltz of the Little Girls

Key: D

♩ = 45

Valse des Petites Jeunes Filles

Traditional Belgian (or French?) waltz

Arr. Pete Showman

Fine (to repeat)

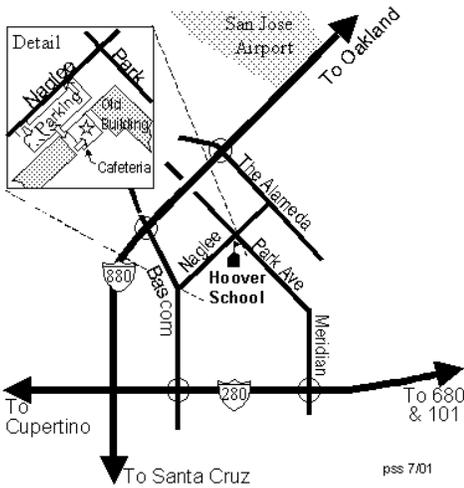
Arr. and typeset in ABC by Pete Showman 1/2006; r2 4/30/2013

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Cupertino, CA 95015-2666

**Next Jam: Sunday May 4, 1-5 pm
at Hoover Middle School**

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**



Tom Clausen, Bob Palasek and John Durbin entertain at the April Jam

Richard Brooks photo