



Fiddler's Rag



Vol. 52, Number 01
Celebrating 51 years

Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association
www.fiddlers.org

January 2024
Next Jam January 7th



VP's Note

By Ray Chen

Happy New Year, everyone!! I hope you had a chance to spend time with family and friends during the holiday season. Hopefully, you even had the chance to make some fun music.

The big SCVFA happening was the Holiday Potluck. That was a decades-old tradition that was interrupted by covid. We got a late start on planning it and owe Pete and Dinah Showman a big thank-you for bringing the pot luck to our attention and for their help in making it happen. No one on the Board has been part of planning any of the prior pot lucks. Given that and the three years off, we were more than a little anxious about how it would turn out.

I think the holiday pot luck was a big success. There was a good turn-out, enough food, and people seemed to enjoy themselves. I think we ran a bit short on drinks but I've made a note of that so we should do better next year.

I want to give a big shout-out to Cheri Palasek who coordinated the planning for some of the prior potlucks. She was unable to help us or attend this year but she gave us tips and passed on her notes as well making sure her husband Bob attended and did his part 😊.

Thank you, Cheri (and Bob)! We missed you this year but hopefully you'll be with us next year!

Cliff Riggs and I are currently on the Board of Trustees. Our terms are expiring and we are standing for re-election at the February jam. You can read about us on page 8.

The other major news is the new SCVFA website is live!! Susan has a writeup on the new website that I encourage you to read. My thanks to everyone who worked on the website but I want to give special thanks to Susan Goodis and Matt Mathis who have worked tirelessly on this project for many months. Thank you, Susan and Matt!!

There are some more changes I want to point out. Last month's newsletter included a video link in addition to sheet music. There's a wealth of amazing video and audio recordings available on the internet now and the electronic format allows us to bring them to you. As newsletter

editor, I want to keep up the tradition of giving people sheet music for tunes but it's nice to bring something special to those who learn by ear or don't play. The electronic format makes that possible so I'm excited to take advantage of it.

If you run across a cool recording on the internet, please drop me a line at [newsletter \[at\] fiddlers.org](mailto:newsletter@fiddlers.org). I'd love to share stuff that other people think is cool. Given our membership, we probably want to focus on old-time and bluegrass but I'm open to other genres.

Second, this is the first SCVFA newsletter in a very long time that isn't 8 pages long. The newsletter used to be 8 pages because we printed it on both sides, folded it up and mailed it. The last page looks like it has room for an address because it does – we wrote your address there. I want to keep the last page the way it is as a nod to tradition but the electronic format gives us the flexibility to deviate from the 8-page length. It works for the print format too, since we now mail the newsletter in an envelope.

However, this will be the last issue of the newsletter that will be printed and mailed. It costs about 20% of our jam income and significant volunteer time so we have decided to switch to email only as well as continuing to post them to the website. We apologize for any inconvenience.

Happy New Year, everyone and keep on playing!!

Future Playouts / Performances

We have numerous opportunities throughout the year.

For more info visit: <https://www.fiddlers.org/open-band>

Jan 14th – Mountain View Farmers Market, 9 – 1 pm

Feb 25th – Oak Ridge Farmers Market, 9 – 1 pm

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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-the-scvfa/.

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Seat 2: Michelle Tan	Seat 4: Danny Clark	Seat 6: Cliff Riggs

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Website: www.fiddlers.org

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The Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association is a non-profit member-supported organization.

Donations to SCVFA are greatly appreciated and will assist in keeping traditional music alive by passing it on to the next generation.

Many local corporations offer matched donations for non-profits. Check with your employer... they may offer this benefit.

You can easily add SCVFA as a 501(c)(3) organization;
our EIN is 51-0196154

Donate as you are able
and traditional music will reap the benefits.

SCVFA wants musicians to know that we are "not just for fiddlers". The image to the right side of the Fiddler's Rag name on page 1 includes a mandolin, a banjo, a guitar and a fiddle, to illustrate the diversity of instruments played at our jams and events.

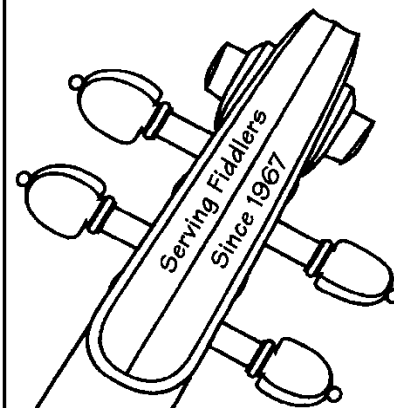


Quote of the Month

"Happy New Year, may we all have a vision now and then of a world where every neighbor is a friend." – "Happy New Year" by ABBA

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SCVFA Happenings

SCVFA Mission Statement

Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association (SCVFA) preserves traditional music genres that feature fiddle and other acoustic instruments. SCVFA takes pride in 'passing it on' to musicians and listeners of all ages and abilities.

Diversity Statement

SCVFA believes that our mission is fundamentally improved by diversity and inclusion. SCVFA is at all times committed to providing an open, safe, and welcoming environment for all our members and guests. We celebrate the varied abilities, ethnicities, sexualities, ages, gender identities, religions and cultural backgrounds of our community, and do not tolerate discrimination based upon these differences.

First Sunday Jam: January 7th 1:00 to 5:00 pm at Hoover Middle School. Suggested donation: \$5.00 – more or less as you are able.

Open Mic: 1-3 pm.

Intermediate Bluegrass Jam: 1:30 – 5:00 pm led by Robert Cornelius.

Slow jam: 1:30-2:30 pm – A great place for beginners or folks who just want to chill. Tunes are available on our [SCVFA website](#).

“AFTERS” will be at Las Cazuelas, 55 Race St., San Jose

3rd Sunday Jam: January 21st, 1-3 pm

Municipal Rose Garden, 1649 Naglee Ave., San Jose

The Great 48 Jam: Jan 4 – 7, Bakersfield Marriott at the Convention Center, Bakersfield, CA. CA Bluegrass Association hotel jam. Jam areas throughout the hotel! <https://californiabluegrass.org/cbaevent/great48/>

Earl Scruggs 100(+3) Birthday All-Star Bluegrass Celebration – Jan 9, [The Freight & Salvage](#), Berkeley

Jake Blount concerts – Jan. 17, 8 pm. [The Freight & Salvage](#), Berkeley. Jan 19, 7 pm. [Kuumbwa Jazz Center](#), Santa Cruz.

Portland Old-Time Music Gathering – Jan 11-14. Portland, OR. Concerts, workshops, sing-alongs and jams with Hubby Jenkins, Foghorn Stringband, Double File, and more! <https://bubbaville.org/gathering/>



The Slow Jam at the December Jam

An Interview with Jake Blount

By Ray Chen

Jake Blount is one of the bright stars of the next generation of old-time musicians and scholars. A two-time Clifftop winner (band and banjo) and winner of the Steve Martin Banjo Prize, Jake is one of the leading figures in the modern movement to explore and highlight the contributions of Black and Native American people to what we call old-time music – an understanding that was almost lost because of the way record companies chose to market music, and therefore who and what the record companies chose to record and distribute.

Jake recently started working on a PhD at Brown University but will be appearing in the Bay Area at [The Freight & Salvage](#) in Berkeley on January 17th and the [Kuumbwa Jazz Center](#) in Santa Cruz on January 19th.

I was able to catch up with Jake this summer when he was teaching fiddle at The Swannanoa Gathering and ask him a few questions:

Q: What instrument do you play?

I play banjo, fiddle, electric guitar, synthesizer and sometimes banjo-ukelele.

Q: Wow. What's your favorite?

Uh, it depends. <laughter> It changes by the day.

Q: So, what drew you to old-time music?

I think it was the community surrounding it. I first got interested in it in college because of its connection to my own specific family history and the black roots of it but I think what actually got me to commit was the “hang”. <laughter>. So, I started coming to stuff like this [music camps and festivals] and that's kind of what got me.

Q: So, hanging out and just having fun hanging out?

Yeah!!

Q: If you don't mind, you mentioned your own family history. Can you go into more detail on that?

Yeah. I found that the banjo was a black instrument and came to this country through the Caribbean and that its first big site of growth in the continental United States was in the Chesapeake Bay region which is where my ancestors have been for hundreds of years. So, I was kind of like, “Oh, this is probably the music they were playing, back in the day.”

Q: Do you play with people regularly? I mean, obviously you tour and stuff but ...

Less than I used to for fun. Jamming I do less often. But

I'm playing gigs all the time. Too much of the time! <laughter>

Q: Have you danced? Contra, squares or anything like that?

Yes, many times.

Q: So, I'm wondering - how has that influenced your playing? Has it?

Yes. Probably. I think it lets me know what they want. You kind of have to play differently if you're playing for a dance versus playing a concert set and I think having been a dancer is really important to knowing how to play a dance well. When I lived in DC, I played contra dances all the time. That was a big part of money for me at that time in my life. <laughter> So I used to do it all the time. It's less so now.

Q: Do you find that influence creeping into how you play when you're not playing for dances? Has it influenced how you play?

I think so, yeah. I don't think there are strongly different musical personalities between “dance me” and “jamming me”. I think I just put more effort into playing things correctly if I'm playing for a dance - can't mess up that many times.

Q: Right. So, what are you working on these days?

I'm working on a new record and preparing to go to grad school.

Q: Grad school in what?

Musicology and ethno-musicology.

Q: Awesome! Congratulations!

Thank you.

Q: Do you have any advice or words of wisdom to pass on to aspiring old-time musicians?

Um... have fun! People take it way too seriously. <laughter> Have a good time! Yes, the music is important. The history is beautiful. The tradition is significant. Protect it. Hold it dear. But have fun!

Also, you're not here to try to become a clone of a dead person. Your perspective also counts. You're also an active participant in the tradition. Have a good time! It sounds like it did because all those old people we learn from were having a good a time.

Q: Thank you very much!

Yeah, of course!

December Jam / Potluck Pictures

By Leslie Wu and Ray Chen



NOTICE

This is the last issue of the newsletter that will be printed and sent by US Mail.

Future issues will be sent only via email as well as posted on the website www.fiddlers.org

If you're not getting email from SCVFA, please send your email address to *membership [at] fiddlers.org*

New Website!!!

By Susan Goodis

Members of the website committee have been working together with New Skye Hosting on Phase 1 & 2 updates of the SCVFA website.

We are pleased to announce that the new website is live!!!! The new site has some new features.

A membership plug-in has been added to the site. The Member login will allow members to manage their own personal information and membership. This will also streamline the membership process and make the membership secretary job simpler and easier.

Every member has an account on the new website. You can log into your account using the email address you gave SCVFA. Once you log in, you can manage your member information.

The first time you log in, you'll need to use the "Lost Password" link to have the system send you an email that will let you set your password.

The new website will also let you renew or join SCVFA directly. No more emailing or mailing forms! You can do everything on the website although checks sent by mail and payment in person using cash or checks will also be accepted. If you pay by check, your membership will not be recorded until your check is received.

To renew your membership, please wait until you receive the automated email sent 30 days before your membership expiration date. You will also receive email reminders 14 and 7 days before your membership expiration date. These emails will include a link to log in to your dashboard and renew your membership. Unfortunately, the automated renewal process does not understand grace periods so the current two-month grace period will go away. You will be able to log in to the website for some time though after your membership expires.

The Board of Trustees decided to take advantage of the website work to simplify the membership structure.

Instead of individual and family-member memberships, there are now three membership tiers. All memberships include everyone in the primary member's household (at no additional charge) where a household is a family or group of people that have the same official US mail address. All primary members have to be 18 years or older to comply with California law.

The usual / standard membership tier is "Supporting Member" which is \$20 per year. There is a \$50 per year "Gold Supporter" tier for those who want to contribute more to help SCVFA keep traditional music going.

"Passing It On" is a tier for households with young adults. The yearly cost is \$10 per year for households where the primary member is under 30 years old.

Young people need to pick up the music if we want to keep traditional music alive. Offering a discounted membership is one way SCVFA can encourage that.

The new website is the product of a lot of work by SCVFA members. We want to thank Zakkai Melamed, Ann Whitesell, Beverly Tracey, Pete Showman, Matt Mathis, and Susan Goodis for their help and support.

Let's keep traditional music alive!

Music is life... That's why our hearts have beats.



A bluegrass circle at the December jam

Keys: D Major / D mixolydian
♩ = 90

Waiting For Nancy

Anon.

Adapted from the version at abcnotation.com, which came from Musica Viva - <http://www.musicaviva.com>
("the Internet center for free sheet music downloads.") via trillian.mit.edu. Re-arr. Pete Showman; rev 1: 8/22/12



Pictures from the video of John Hartford playing "Foggy Mountain Landscape" on stage at the 1998 Kentucky Folk Festival

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPRZtBw3Zoc> - this is John Hartford on banjo performing his original tune "Foggy Mountain Landscape" at the 1998 Kentucky Folk Festival. There is a structure to the tune but much of it seems improvised. You can find at least three different versions of John playing this on YouTube and they're all somewhat different and all wonderful. As you can see on the video, John uses Scruggs-style tuners for this tune and messes with them and the regular tuners a *lot*. John was backed by Mike Compton on mandolin, Chris Sharp on guitar, and Mike Schatz on bass. This tune is also on Chris Sharp's first album with Gene Libbea on bass instead of Mike Schatz and was recorded in one take with no edits - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_Z0QKTeIC0 I think it's funny and cool that John had this band of world-class musicians, all of whom would go on to win awards like Grammys or IBMA Player of the Year, and they're just playing basic backup and trying to stay out of his way. I think I like the album version best but they're all great.

Happy listening!! - Ray

Board of Trustees - Candidate Statements



Cliff Riggs

Hello fellow fiddlers and music enthusiasts,

My musical journey began in an unconventional way – in my late 30s with no prior musical background. It all started with a simple step: purchasing a resonator banjo from a local music shop. Initially drawn to the vibrant world of bluegrass, my musical direction took a turn when an old-time musician's rendition of "Big Sciota" captivated me. This encounter steered me towards the rich and soulful realm of open-back banjo and old-time music.

My first deep dive into this community was at the Mt. Airy Fiddlers Convention, a venture I undertook solo. There, I was fortunate to meet a group from Chapel Hill who welcomed me and my son into their fold, nurturing my growing passion for old-time music. These experiences, and the communal spirit I found at events like Clifftop, where a search for familiar license plates led to new connections, have solidified my love for this genre. It's the camaraderie under the trees, the shared tunes, and the magical 'click' of a harmonious jam that truly resonate with me.

My relocation to California during COVID didn't dampen my enthusiasm. Each summer, I still journey back East, immersing myself in the music and community that feel like home. Joining fiddlers.org has been a continuation of this musical adventure, allowing me to play and share the joys of old-time music with others in the area.

My vision for fiddlers.org is rooted in the communal and inclusive spirit of old-time music. I am passionate about introducing new players to this wonderful world, nurturing their love for the music and the community that surrounds it. I believe in the power of simple tunes to bring joy and connection to every home we reach.

Music has been more than just a hobby for me; it's a way of connecting with family, friends, and strangers who soon become friends. It has taught me the importance of listening – not just to the music but to the people and stories around me. As a member of the board of trustees, I aspire to foster an environment where music is accessible, community is cherished, and every jam session feels like coming home. Together, let's make fiddlers.org a beacon for old-time music lovers and a welcoming space for newcomers to discover the joy of this timeless tradition.

Ray Chen

Hi everyone. I started playing old-time music in my 20's when I was in graduate school in Atlanta, GA. A fellow grad student introduced me to contra dancing. I danced for a few years and found I loved the music so much that I wanted to play as well as dance. I'd played classical violin for fun as a kid so I dug out my old violin and started to fiddle.

Graduating, the demands of real life and a family made me put the fiddle down but I took it up again twenty years ago, fell in love with Round Peak (North Carolina) music, and then the fiddling of Tommy Jarrell, and focused on trying to learn it. That led me to taking workshops from musicians who were strongly influenced by Round Peak and going to Old-Time Week at the Swannanoa Gathering in North Carolina. My family started going with me and the yearly trips to Old-Time Week quickly became a family tradition.

The demands of a high-tech career and family kept me from getting involved in the local music scene until recently but I kept studying and working on my fiddling and eventually, as my family found "their" instruments, we and a fiddling friend wound up starting a band. We play for local contra dances, the occasional concert set, and try to have fun.

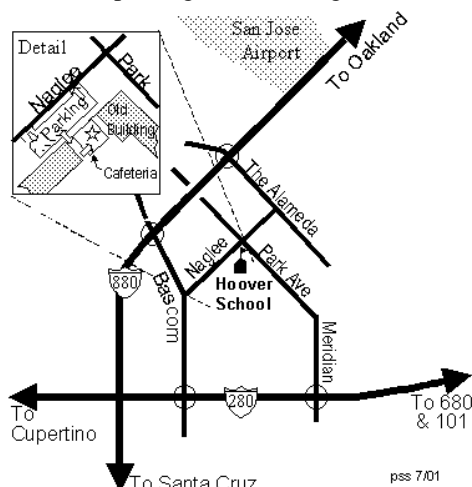
I didn't plan it out this way but it seems that I went on a journey, my family came along with me, and we now have our own musical tradition like the old-time families in the mountains that I've learned about over the years. I fell in love with Southern Old-Time music because it makes you want to dance but I also find myself drawn to the music by the complexity, depth, and beauty of the music as well as the way that the music builds community.

I'm currently retired because of medical disability so I now have time. Energy is the challenge – I'm still recovering from two years of cancer treatment that ended almost three years ago. While I don't have enough energy to return to work, I want to spend some of the energy I do have to help SCVFA keep traditional music going.



SCVFA
P.O.Box 2666
Cupertino, CA 95015-2666

SCVFA Jam usually on the first Sunday of each month.
 Location: Hoover Middle School, 1474 Naglee Ave.,
 San Jose. The school is at the corner of Naglee and Park.
 Cafeteria parking is on the Naglee side.



Next Jam:
Sunday January 7th
1-5 pm at Hoover Middle School

Damaged or Missing Issue? Call us,
or email to: *newsletter [at] fiddlers.org*

This is the LAST issue that will be printed
 and sent via US mail.

Check your email or go to www.fiddlers.org
 for future issues!!!

If you're not getting email from SCVFA,
 please contact *membership [at] fiddlers.org*

Volunteer REALLY Needed for Treasurer Position!!

Responsibilities and time commitments include:

- Approximately 8 hours per month
- Attend (zoom) Board Meetings every other month (2 hours)
- 4 government form filings / year
- Excel experience helpful
- Detail-oriented personality helpful
- No prior experience necessary - Dinah Showman will train and mentor you as needed!

Dinah has been our Treasurer for years and she thinks it's time for her to step away. SCVFA is LEGALLY REQUIRED to have a Treasurer. Please contact Susan at president [at] fiddlers.org or Ray at vp [at] fiddlers.org if you think you might be interested or know someone who might be interested. Help keep SCVFA and traditional music going by volunteering! We really need someone to step up, folks. Please help!

Bluegrass Jamming Guidelines

- The leader chooses the next soloist and when to end. For songs, that's the person who sings the verses. For instrumentals, it's the person who kicks it off.
- Use signals to offer, accept, and pass on solos and to end the tune. Signals are body-language only!
- Pick tunes that people know or are easy to learn (easy key, standard chord progressions, simple lyrics).
- Don't use sheet music or an electronic device.
- The soloist is always right – if the soloist changes tempo or starts late, follow them anyway.
- Support the soloist. Give them room to be heard and to improvise by:
 - Playing quietly with basic, unsyncopated rhythm.
 - Sing harmony on verses only when asked.
 - Don't sing during instrumental solos – let the instrumentalist play solo.
- Listen to the music and watch for signals. The more advanced the jam, the more this matters.
- When in doubt, ask questions (but don't argue with the answers).