



Fiddler's Rag

Vol. 39, Number 2

Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association
www.scvfa.org

February 2011

President's Message

by Richard Brooks



The theft of much of our sound equipment just before Christmas marred the start of our new year. After speaking with the State Farm agent and the claims department, it is clear now that only about two thirds of the estimated \$3,500 loss is covered by our insurance policy. Changes

will be made to ensure we have better coverage.

Jim Dinkey and Maria Nadauld were both kind enough to help us out by making a donation. I am pleased that another has expressed the intention of doing the same.

We can thank Dave Williams and Paul Clarke for filing the police report. Dave left the jam to visit some stores to buy a good replacement lock. That's true dedication.

We have great friends at the San Jose Mercury News. Lisa Fernandez interviewed me and wrote a very nice article (1/6/11) about the impact on our January jam. Sharon Noguchi, who wrote that fabulous article last November about our annual Youth Fiddle Contest, told Lisa about our loss.

Many folks were kind enough to email suggestions for new equipment or offer condolences. Others agreed to lend us or donate equipment. At the February and March jams, we plan to borrow equipment to test.

The impact on our time is at least as significant as our monetary loss. While we now have an opportunity to reassess our equipment needs and update our insurance policy, it is a major effort to itemize every item that was stolen, research and document the current market value, and submit all this to the claims department. I'm so grateful that Pete Showman is taking a lead role to help us out. That's more true dedication.

Annual Membership Meeting in February

February is when we hold our annual membership meeting. Every year members elect two trustees to three-year terms. Pete Showman has agreed to run again and Gorden Gibson will run for the first time.

Remember

Our success depends on YOU

Too few people are doing too many things. The current effort of a few folks is unsustainable.

PLEASE HELP! We especially need several officers to help with the association's operation:

- ♪ Newsletter Editor & content contributors
- ♪ Secretary or Treasurer
- ♪ Youth Activity chairperson

Next Jam February 6, 2011

Hoover School Cafeteria

1:00 to 5:00 PM

Annual Membership Meeting:

1. Election of Trustees
2. Vote on Bylaws Revisions

Members will also vote on whether to accept the changes to our bylaws that were recommended and approved by the board in December. If approved, they will be the most important changes to the SCVFA since the bylaws were written in 1975.

The changes were discussed in January's Fiddler's Rag. The bylaws are posted online at www.scvfa.org/bylaws.

(Continued on page 2)

In This Issue:

Page

President's Message	1,2
SCVFA Goes All Acoustic	2
SCVFA Happenings (Annual Meeting, Jan. Trustee Meeting, Replacing PA).....	3
SCVFA Celebrates Flora's 100th Birthday (Paul Clarke).....	4
Bowing with a Mirror (Joe Weed)	5
One Fiddler's Idea Pool (Reid Fisher)	6,7
Example tune: Flowers of Cahirciveen.....	7
Event Calendar.....	8



SCVFA Goes All Acoustic

The huge group pictured above is trying out our new all-acoustic sound system. This January jam was one of our largest stage performances in recent memory.

When you've got banjo players like Jerry and Dennis, well, the sound carries and carries. Our experiment will be short-lived since we'll be using loaner equipment for the next couple of jams.

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. Memberships are \$15 per family per year. To join or extend your membership, send a check for \$15 to the address below, or sign up at the monthly jam.

Officers and Chairs

President Richard J. Brooks
 Vice President OPEN
 Treasurer Janet Johnston
 Membership Pete Showman
 Recording Secretary Dinah Showman
 Newsletter Editor OPEN
 Newsletter Publisher Charlotte Prater
 Webmaster OPEN (Pete Showman, acting)
 Playout Coordinator Paul Clarke
 Youth Activity OPEN
 Youth Fiddle Contest Pete Showman & Sarah Kirton
 Publicity Shared
 Calendar Pete Showman
 Jam MC Evelyn McCuiston

Trustees

Paul Clarke
 Pete Showman
 Charlotte Prater
 Norio Kawato
 Dave Williams
 Steve Joynes

To Contact the SCVFA:

Mail: P.O. Box 2666, Cupertino, CA 95015-2666
 Email: President at scvfa.org Phone: (650) 328-3939

Newsletter Submissions & Comments:

Email: newsletter at scvfa.org
 Copyright 2010, Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association

President's Message, continued from Page 1

Change in Membership Dues

Our membership dues have been \$15 a year for at least a decade. At the March trustees meeting, the board will likely vote to increase the dues (amount is undecided). Renew now or wait to contribute a little more later.

Special Performance Groups

We want to continue our Special Performance series. If you or your group would like to put on a 30 minute concert, please let me know. While there's no payment, the SCVFA will write an article in the Rag with bios. At least one performer must be an SCVFA member.

Helping at the Check-In Desk

Janet, Dinah, and Charlotte spend considerable time at the check-in desk near the door. It isn't fair for them to spend all afternoon indoors. Please volunteer to help them out so they can enjoy the jam and outdoors.

Other Events?

What other events would you like us to have? Would you like another band scramble? What else?

KidFiddle Workshops

The board approved KidFiddle workshops in March and later in the spring. Who do you suggest as teachers?

Email Delivery of the Fiddler's Rag

We haven't forgotten about email delivery of the Rag. But we have to give consideration to: an opt-out or opt-in policy, file format, distribution as an attachment or a hyperlink, who will email it, the required database modifications, how membership cards will be distributed, and how membership expirations will be communicated. So it isn't as simple as some think.

- Richard Brooks

SCVFA Happenings

February Annual Member Meeting

SCVFA members: please take a break from jamming at 3 pm to attend the annual membership meeting. This is your chance to help set SCVFA's direction.

As detailed in January, we have two important items of business this year: the annual **Trustee election** and a membership vote on the **proposed Bylaws revision**.

Trustee election

This year we have two candidates for two open seats:

- Pete Showman (incumbent) for Seat 1,
- Gorden Gibson for Seat 2.

The Trustees will meet after the election to appoint officers for the upcoming fiscal year. See page 2 for a list of SCVFA officers and Trustees.

Bylaws Revision

The Trustees in December voted to adopt a revised set of Bylaws, subject to member approval. The SCVFA Bylaws have not changed since we incorporated in 1975. The text is available at scvfa.org/bylaws.

After the Trustee election, we will provide time for questions about the proposed Bylaws, and will then ask for a vote approving the change. If approved, the new Bylaws will become effective after the meeting.

January Trustee Meeting

The Trustees held a regular meeting on January 16, 2011 and took the following actions:

- Considered options and planned strategies for replacing our stolen sound equipment.
- Discussed insurance claim status and measures to discourage future theft, including a better lock and different locker location. Trustees agreed to continue using the same storage facility.
- Planned contacts for future playouts.
- Made plans for conducting the annual membership meeting and for a Trustee meeting immediately after, to appoint officers for the coming year.
- Authorized a KidFiddle class in March and in a later spring month.
- Made plans for a Silent Auction of donated items at an upcoming jam.
- Began consideration of standing rules as an adjunct to bylaws.
- Agreed to consider a dues increase at the next Trustee meeting, and tentatively set the date for that meeting as Sunday, March 20, 2011.

Replacing the Stolen PA Equipment

Pete Showman

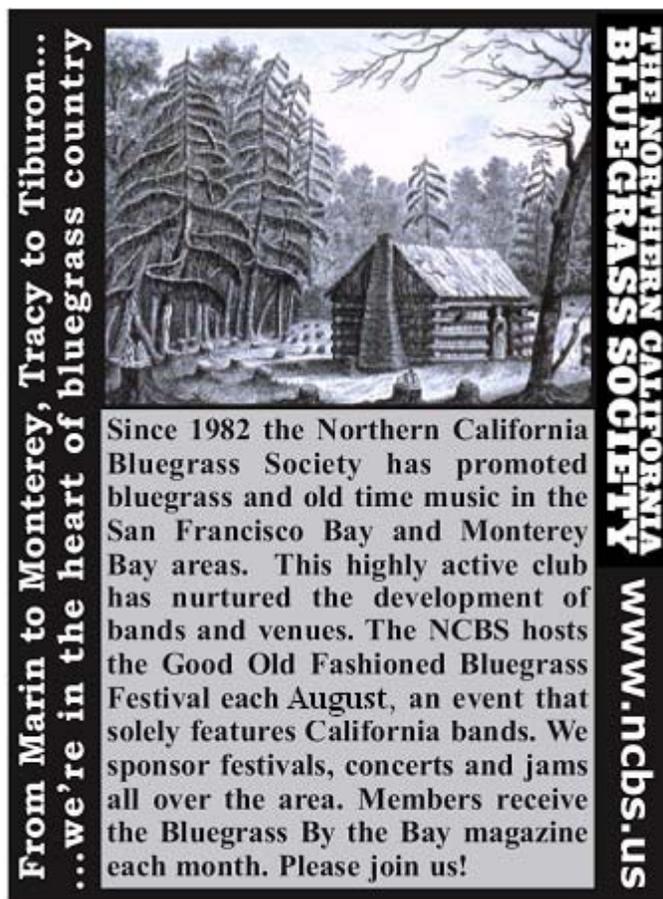
Once we finish our report to the insurance company, the next step is to decide what to buy to replace our system.

In recent years our system has had eight microphones on six stands (two stands have a vocal mic above and an instrument mic below), a mixer to combine the mics' signals, a separate amplifier (and graphic EQ), and two main and two monitor speakers.

We are now missing the mics, mixer and three of the speakers, so at least those need to be replaced. We are also considering whether to make any other changes at the same time – for example to the microphone types and configuration, more-compact packaging for the new mixer and our amplifier, and lighter speakers.

Please contact me if you have suggestions or experience you think might help our evaluation, at (408) 255-0297.

In February we will try a pair of borrowed mics with wider pickup patterns, to see whether that might work with the various groups who play on stage. (Fewer mics would mean easier setup, especially if we could arrange them so musicians could hear each other without monitors. But we think that's unlikely to work for us.)



**From Marin to Monterey, Tracy to Tiburon...
...we're in the heart of bluegrass country**

**THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
BLUEGRASS SOCIETY**

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 month. Please join us!

WWW.NCBS.US

SCVFA Celebrates Flora's 100th Birthday by Paul Clarke

On December 11, 2010, the SCVFA celebrated Flora Lavy's 100th birthday party. This resident of the Quail Lodge, a large retirement community in Antioch, wanted "barn dance" music for her celebration. Searching for barn dance music the staff apparently found only bands based East of the Rockies – but they figured out that all such bands had fiddlers! The Quail Lodge activity coordinator found our website by searching for fiddling.

- Pete Showman provided his consistently solid old-time fiddling on traditional tunes, and a harmony on Ingers Brudvals.

Our set list is on the SCVFA website at: scvfa.org/playouts/playouts/20101211-setlist.html

The Quail Lodge staff was most gracious and generous, and invited us to join in the buffet served about half way through the party. Our audience had a good time, and we had a great time.

I've been organizing these playouts for over five years now, and have maintained a record of our activities on our website starting in early 2006. The playouts are part of our mission to serve the community. In addition, they generate much-needed revenue.

A list of our currently scheduled upcoming gigs is on www.scvfa.org/performances.shtml.

After an event has occurred I record it on our past performances page at www.scvfa.org/playouts/past_events.html.

Please visit these links to learn more about what we have been doing. If you are interested in participating in one of our playouts, please contact me as indicated on the performances webpage.



Richard Brooks

Flora Celebrating her 100th

The event took the entire Saturday afternoon. They wanted musicians to play for two hours and the travel time was 1.5 hours each way. (To compensate us for the extra time and driving SCVFA received more than our usual payment.) We carpoled to the facility, with Pete Showman and me as the drivers. Fortunately, I was able to enlist a very capable group of musicians:

- George Bradshaw provided solid guitar backup;
- Richard Brooks, our president, played some tasty bluegrass and swing style fiddle solos;
- Lee Clarke was rowdy as usual, inciting audience and staff to dance;
- Gorden Gibson played his arrangement of Simple Gifts on classical guitar;
- Sarah Kirton played Ingers Brudvals, a beautiful Swedish waltz;
- Tom Mitchell used his fine backwoods voice to good effect on four songs;



Richard Brooks

Gorden Gibson



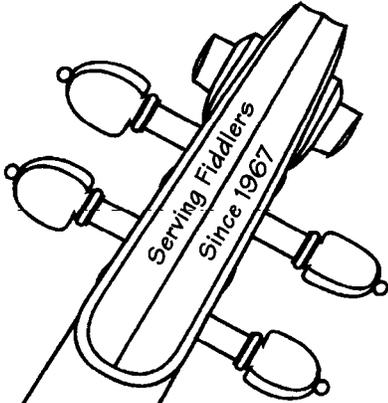
Lee Clarke

L to R: Sarah, Pete, Gorden, George, Richard, and Paul (Tom hidden)

KAMIMOTO

STRING INSTRUMENTS

“Fiddles
for
Every Style...”



- New & Old Instruments
- Repairs & Restorations
- One-hour bow rehairing (by appt.)
- Rentals: Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass

Hours: Mon-Sat 10:00 - 5:30

[408] 298-8168
www.kamimotostrings.com

609 North Fourth Street
San Jose, CA 95112

[800] 892-3199

Fax: [408] 298-8198



Bowing with a Mirror

Joe Weed

Back Home Again

I'm back home in California after fun gig travels to Colorado last month. Flying home after the gigs, I reflected that this trip was considerably more humane than the way I used to travel with my bands in the 70's and 80's. I will remember crossing the beautiful state of Nevada eight times in the spring and summer of 1976, usually in a parade of old, patched-together vans stuffed to the ceilings with gear, instruments, clothes, and sleeping bags. One time in the early 80's, we drove to Jackson Hole, Wyoming for a several-week gig at a ski resort. When we finally arrived after an all-nighter, it was 30 below zero. Unpacking the cars and setting up our gear was a real finger-busting adventure. The next morning neither car would start, as the batteries had frozen. We began keeping our car batteries in our rooms, carrying them out to the cars as needed.

On my recent Colorado trip, the agent had arranged plane tickets and a rental car with four-wheel drive, and had even spaced out the gigs so that we had time between to re-group and be fresh for the next. How things have changed in the last thirty years for (at least) one gigging musician! But one thing that has stayed the same is the importance of regular practice, whether you're on the road or at home.

Practice tips

I have long believed that the greater challenge to good fiddle playing is in the right arm and hand, rather than in the left. It's true that good intonation, an important part of any fiddle music, demands coordination and fine motor control in the left hand. But intonation generally improves with regular practice, and the dynamics

of hitting the right spot on the fingerboard to produce good pitch are fairly basic.

In contrast, the bowing arm and hand have to operate in a variety of positions, maintaining an even and delicate pressure with the bow while moving from the tip to the frog over a length of about 25 inches of horsehair. Keeping that bow placed at the same spot on the string and maintaining a consistent right angle to the string over the length of the bow is daunting for many fiddlers.

These demands present many challenges to fiddlers, especially when they want to play with the fast, light feel that hoedowns, jigs and reels demand. SCVFA member and former newsletter editor Chip Curry and I talked recently about bowing practice techniques. We agreed that using a mirror while working on bowing techniques can be really helpful.

If you don't have a readily visible mirror in your practice room, go get one and mount it on your wall or door, so that you can stand in the room and bow freely and completely, while seeing your reflection in the mirror. Say "cheese" if you must, and then practice bowing slowly and purposefully, all the way from the tip of the bow to the frog. Watch how well you maintain the bow's right angle to the string over the length of the bow. It's a good idea to play simple open strings at first, so you don't lose your focus on your bowing. Next, graduate to single long notes. Scales are great, because as you work on controlling your bow, you can also give your left hand a simple workout. I'll provide more bowing practice tips in my next column.

Joe Weed records acoustic music at his Highland Studios near Los Gatos, California. He has released six albums of his own, produced many projects for independent artists and labels, and does sound tracks for film, TV and museums. Reach Joe at joe@highlandpublishing.com, by calling (408) 353-3353, or by visiting joeweel.com.

One Fiddler's Idea Pool

by Reid Fisher

The SCVFA jams and music festivals are a great chance to hear different folks, different styles, and to try out lots of ideas. At recent jams Richard Brooks and Chip Curry impressed me with how they've given back to the fiddling community, and asked if I might have something to contribute. Shoot, how can you pass that up? There's no way I'm on the level of some of the other folks who have written here, so in the spirit of sharing, not teaching, here are some things that have helped me as I learn to fiddle. I'm definitely not there yet!

Listening and Not Playing - Notice how Paul Shelasky often doesn't play at all, rather than muddying up the sound? Splitting breaks with someone else is fun, and spreads around the involvement on a tune. Support the singer or person taking a break. Volume and speed aren't everything.

Leaving Holes - Milt (The Judge) Hinton, the famous jazz bassist, said anyone can learn a lot of words from the dictionary, it's the ones you choose to use that matter. Use sustained notes and holes to give yourself some time to think about what's next. If the listener's ear really wants to hear something in that hole, the ear will supply it.

Rhythmic Interest - "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing" is right. The reason swing from Johnny Gimble and Mark O'Connor sounds so good is the rhythmic core sounds rock solid and inevitable, yet has a spice to it. We fiddlers are lucky 'cause we can play sustained notes and slurs. Flatpick slaves tend to get trapped into coming up with nonstop 16th notes. Leave holes in rhythmically interesting places (at least that's what I tell myself when those fast Monroe tunes come up). Check out some funk and Latin jazz. Locally, go hear Chris Cain (guitar) and Clifford Coulter (keyboard) in the R&B/funk band Blue Monday for some killer backup.

Bowing - Here's a fun example of how just changing the bowing to add slurs can add rhythmic spice without changing a single note: a tune from Cole's 1000 Fiddle Tunes titled Flowers of Cahirciveen (See page 7). Play it with just plain up-and-down bowing, and then see what happens when you introduce slurs, especially slurs that link between groups of 2 and 4 eighth notes. It becomes easier to play, and much more interesting. Using a few slurs emphasizes some notes and de-emphasizes others – those are the notes

you could leave out entirely, both making the tune easier to play, and adding interesting holes.

Be Fresh - Rather than freak out about getting Chubby Wise's solo down exactly, consider the possibility that he actually wished he could play it like someone else but couldn't. If you like a break or lick, play your own impressionistic version of it. Hey, I'm not copying Tommy Jackson, I'm paying homage to him...

By the Numbers - Lots of folks say they just play by ear, and that they don't know any theory. Not so; they've just come up with their own internal version of theory, but they can't communicate it to anybody! It's incredibly helpful to think of the notes in a scale in any key as numbered from 1 to 8. For County & Western music, where most tunes consist of "three chords and the truth," this nugget makes key changes and improvisation much easier. The three most common chords in any key will be built off the 1, 4, and 5 notes in that scale. Fiddlers make it easy to cheat: pick a note/key (say C) and the 4 is directly across from the C on the next lower string (F note) and the 5 is directly across from the C on the next higher string (G note). If you learned a tune in G and the singer wants to move up to B flat, no worries: your most common chords will be built off E flat and F – as in the tune on page 7.

Reading Music Helps - Musical notation really is the most efficient way to convey the writer's intent with respect to notes and rhythm. It's not essential, but it is a huge help, and beats the heck out of tablature. It's why they invented it!

Other Genres - The sheer level of musicianship in other traditions puts a lot of bluegrass and old-time to shame, especially on the rhythmic front. While it's important to respect the distinctions between traditions, check out the killer horns and keyboards of Tower of Power, Poncho Sanchez, or Hank Jones' left hand playing jazz piano for backup ideas.

Tone And Intonation - Classical players have pretty much figured out how to get good tone; no sense throwing away a few hundred years of hard-won technique. It's worth it to strive for the tone of Johnny Gimble, Mark O'Connor, Bobby Hicks, and Stephane Grappelli. The hardest part in starting fiddle is the left hand, then you find out the most

elusive skills are really in the bow hand. It pays to keep your fiddle set up like a classical one; flattening your bridge just makes it harder to play cleanly. Try out different brands of strings to see what makes your fiddle sound best, and clean the rosin off the strings. You don't need to change strings anywhere near as often as some folks do (especially fretted instrument players), but they eventually do go bad and you'll find that the harmonics aren't in tune. Don't forget to rehair your bow every so often – you'll be amazed each time at how much you improved overnight!

Check Your Playing - Strike a deal with another fiddler to be as honest with each other as you can stand about what needs work in each other's playing; hearing a tape of your own playing is excruciating but sure highlights what needs work.

Attack - John Muir (not that one, the *VW Idiot's Manual* one) said that a VW needs to be driven with "verve and elan," not ploddingly. Same with an instrument; you may get a smooth sound, but one that's lackluster if there's no spirit in there. Not to be confused with volume.

Register - Sally Van Meter pointed out to me once (ouch) that a fiddle played in the same register (high or low) as the vocals gets in the way. If the voice is high, play low. Play fills rather than an accompaniment. If the vocal line is climbing, try a descending line or rhythmic counterpoint.

Groove - Top 40 hits are hits because they find a unique killer groove that takes advantage of some aspect of the tune. If the backup, breaks, and dynamics are the same from tune to tune, pretty soon the pizza joint's empty.

Take Advantage of the Situation - Maybe the jam mix that particular night just isn't prime time, but it helps to think of how a true master would contribute to the event: not by showing off but by trying to play with as consistently high musicianship as possible, and lifting the sound of the group as a whole. Hey, we're all there to have fun and learn a little bit, otherwise we'd be in Nashville already!

Looking forward to the next jam!

Contact information for Reid Fisher is available in the printed SCVFA member roster.

Flowers of Cahirciveen

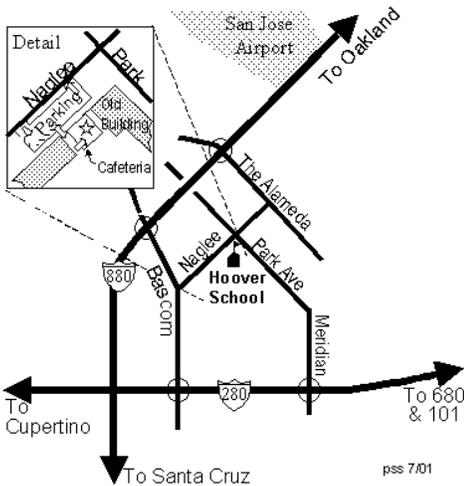
Irish Traditional

Possible alternate bowings by Reid Fisher. ABC transcription by Pete Showman 1/23/2011

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

Next Jam: Sunday Feb. 6, 1-5 pm,
Hoover Middle School.
 Open Mike: 1:30. Ann. Member Meeting: 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

February 2011 Calendar

☞ **Be sure to verify performers, times & dates before driving to an event, especially near holidays.** ☜

Weekly & Biweekly Events

- 2/1+ **Irish Slow Session**, Stephen's Green Pub, 223 Castro St., MV. Tues. 7:30-9pm. www.sfpipersclub.org. (Pub info only: 650-964-9151) +2/8, 15, 22.
- 2/1+ **Bluegrass at Sam's BBQ**, 1110 S. Bascom Ave., Campbell, 6-9pm. www.samsbbq.com or (408) 297-9151. Bands every Tues. & Wed. +2/3, 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23.
- 2/2+ **Peninsula Banjo Band** Weds. 7pm. Cabrito's Mexican Bistro, 685 E. El Camino Real, SV. Info: (408) 993-BAND, www.peninsulabanjoband.org. +2/9, 16, 23.
- 2/2+ **Bluegrass Jam at Fandango Pizza**, 3163 Middlefield Rd, P. A., Wed. 7:30-9. www.fandangopizza.com +2/9, 16, 23.
- 2/3+ **South Bay Folks Acoustic Open Mike**, Mission City Coffee Roasting Co., 2221 The Alameda, Santa Clara; 7-10 every Thu. www.SouthBayFolks.org; +2/10, 17, 24
- 2/4+ **Bluegrass and Country at Mission Pizza** in Fremont, 7-10. Info: (510) 651-6858, www.missionpizza.com. Most Fri. & Sat. +2/5, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26.
- 2/6+ **Irish Session, O'Flaherty's** Irish Pub, 25 N. San Pedro St., San Jose, Sun. 5-8pm. No children. Pub: (408) 947-8007. Moderated session . +2/13, 20, 27.
- 2/7+ **Old-Time Jam at Fandango** Pizza (see above); Mondays 7-9+. showman.org/jams/oti +2/14, 21, /28.

- 2/6 **SCVFA Jam & Open Mike**: Hoover School (see map), 1st Sundays, 1-5pm. www.scvfa.org; Richard Brooks. \$6 members / \$8 non-members; kids free.
- 2/11-20 **NCBS San Francisco Bluegrass & Old-Time Festival**: many venues and dates. Info: www.sfbluegrass.org.
- 2/20 **Sunnyvale Bluegrass Jam**, 3rd Sundays 1-5: Heritage Park Building, Sunnyvale Community Center (550 E. Remington). \$5. Info: <http://tinyurl.com/CABluegrassJams>
- 2/24-27 **CBA President's Day Music Camp**, Petaluma. Registration started in Sept. Info: www.cbamusiccamp.org
- 2/27 **CSOTFA Dist. 9 Jam**: 19806 Wisteria Ave., Castro Valley, 1:30 - 5pm, 4th Sun. www.csotfa9.org, (510) 278-0271.
- 2/27 **Santa Cruz Bluegrass & Old Time Jam**, 4th Sun. 1-5: Oceanview Park, Santa Cruz. Info: tinyurl.com/SCjam [groups.google.com/group/santacruzjam]

Coming Up

- 3/18-19 **Calif. State Fiddle Contest**, Oroville. www.csotfa.net (*not .org*).
- 4/14-17 **Julian Family Fiddle Camp**, Julian, CA. Classes and concerts. www.fiddlefamilycamp.com.
- 5/26-30 30th **Strawberry Memorial Day Music Festival**, Sonora. www.strawberrymusic.com.
- 6/20-25 Teen Celtic Music Camp: Mon-Sat, Boulder Creek. www.communitymusicsschool.org.
- 7/3-10 Festival of American **Fiddle Tunes, Port Townsend**, WA (week of July 4th). (360) 385-3102; www.centrum.org.

Monthly and Special Events

Got events? Email us at [calendar at scvfa.org](mailto:calendar@scvfa.org). More at NCBS: www.scbs.org and at South Bay Folks: www.SouthBayFolks.org