

Improvisation Fiddle Workshop Notes

Things to Keep In Mind:

- Have Fun.
- Listen for the chord changes.
- **Learn the melody!**
- Get comfortable with your instrument.
- Get used to being uncomfortable and living on the edge.
- You can't play it wrong.
- Practice Improvising.

What Is Improvising?

Types of improvisation: Jazz, Fiddle and Old Time vs. Texas Style vs. Scottish and Irish

- Jazz – Follow The Chords.
- Fiddling – Follow the Melody.

Ways we can Improvise

- Rhythms (push or pull the melody, syncopation, stretch or compress notes.)
- Notes (subdivide or combine notes, neighboring tones, chord tones)
- Bowings (change the rhythmic feel by altering the bowings.)
 - o Keep the down bow on the down beat
 - o Fiddling is Dance music (don't lose the rhythm of the tune!)

What is important when improvising in fiddling styles? (melody!)

How do we get at the heart of the melody?

- Strip out any notes that you can while leaving the song still being recognizable as the song.
- Create Context by listening to as many different versions of the song as you can and leave what they have in common.
- Look at the melody that people would sing (if there is a singing version of the melody.)

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Tune origins and names in different traditions

- Many fiddle tunes have become ubiquitous, and exist under many different names, styles, and traditions.
- Do your research, and try to find the oldest version of the melody you can, and listen to how the tune has evolved over time.
- Tunes don't have words – instrumental
- Songs have words – intended to be sung.
- Some tunes started as songs, and others started as pure tunes. Some have existed as both for so long that we don't know which came first.
- Basic melody – What defines the song or tune.

Practice Improvising

- Learn the Melody using the methods above (Simplify, Sing, and create context)
- Learn licks that fit into this tune by “borrowing” licks from other versions of the tune that you listen to.
- Practice playing around with the melody slowly on your own. Try different licks that you have learned. And, try creating some new licks. Take your time, and if you like it, work it out.
- Work your licks up to speed.
- Go to a jam and try your new tunes and licks out. Go ahead and live dangerously. It's better to take a risk and fail than to play it safe.
- When in doubt (or lost) return to the melody.
- Play off of the licks that the other musicians add to the tune.
- This is where new licks are created and inspiration lives.

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Comments on Chords:

- Most songs only use chords 1, 4, 5.
- If Additional chords are added, 6m is the next most common.
- If you have to take a solo and don't know the melody, revert to following the chord changes.

Soldier's Joy Chords (Simple):

D/// D/// D/// A///

D/// D/// D/A/ D/// repeat

D/// A/// D/// A///

D/// A/// D/A/ D/// repeat

Miss McLeod's Reel Chords (Simple):

G/// G/// G/// D///

G/// G/// G/D/ G/// repeat

G/// G/// G/// D///

G/// G/// C/// D/// repeat

NOTE: Miss McLeod's Reel often starts on the second part as listed here.