

## BRING YOUR FIDDLE & JOIN IN (MAYBE)! – A GUIDE TO SESSION ETIQUETTE

### OLD-TIME JAM SESSION

- Ask ahead – come with musician friends
- Come *prepared* with Old-Time tunes already in your repertoire
- When you arrive, introduce yourself, ask to join, ask about where to sit
- Pay attention! Is there a jam leader\*?
- Always defer to leader if there is one
- Be in tune – Play in tune
- Don't "noodle around" between tunes
- Players usually pick a key, announce the tunes, and play many tunes in a row in that same key (most fiddle tunes are always played in same 'universal' keys but if someone sings a song, it could be in any key, watch if guitarist put on capo)
- LISTEN! Don't play 1st time around (especially if you don't know the tune).
- Don't panic if you can't catch the tune right away. In an Old-Time jam, the tune is played many times around, sometimes ten times or more! If you are trying to learn a new tune as you hear it being played, use "ghosting" technique-listen, use your ears & eyes to grab single notes or phrases with each pass of the tune.
- Wait to be *invited* to start a new tune particularly on your first visit. And then be ready with your favorite tune & play it with confidence!
- "SUBTLE IMPROV"
  - As a fiddler, you should use each repeat of the tune to learn it. BUT you can also join in with "backup" playing if you like. Use your ears & eyes to watch guitar player and learn the chord pattern of the tune.
  - Be tasteful & blend in with the group
  - Once you think you have the chord pattern learned, then try playing single notes, double stops, "chop" rhythms or long notes
  - Take turns, don't step on others' playing

**BLUEGRASS JAMS** follow most of this same etiquette. There will usually be many songs and fewer instrumentals. Improvised solos are usually taken by players (although again, be careful you don't step on someone else's playing). Bluegrassers don't always know the Old-Time tune repertoire, so you'll have to expand your knowledge of their favorite instrumentals as well.

### IRISH SESSION (*seisiún*)

- Check & ask ahead if at all possible – come with musician friends
- Come *prepared* with Irish Trad tunes already in your repertoire
- When you arrive, introduce yourself, ask to join, *do not* sit in "inner circle" of players
- Pay attention! Is there a session leader\*?
- *Always* defer to leader if there is one
- Be in tune – Play in tune
- Don't "noodle around" between tunes
- Players *will not* announce either the tune (or sets of tunes) they are going to play or the keys (most Irish Trad tunes are always played in same 'standard/universal' keys)
- LISTEN! Don't play 1st time around (especially if you don't know the tune). Maybe not even the 2nd time. However, you only get three chances to hear/learn/play a tune in an Irish session. After three times, the leader will stop or (more likely) begin a new tune, connecting two or more tunes into a set. So you are right back where you started, encountering a new tune.
- If you are trying to learn a new tune as you hear it being played, use "ghosting" technique-listen, use your ears & eyes to grab single notes or phrases with each pass of the tune. Irish Trad tunes are notoriously busy so don't expect to have the whole tune figured out in three tries!
- Remember that in Irish Trad, the MELODY is all that counts to a fiddler. Do not play "rhythm chops" or chords or any other accompaniment figures you may think would sound good with a tune you don't already know!
- Irish Trad tunes played in a session atmosphere have NO SOLOS-NO INTROS-NO ENDINGS-NO IMPROV!
- Wait to be *invited* to start a new tune, particularly on your first visit. And then be ready with your favorite tune & play it with confidence!

\* Words of Wisdom: "*Some jams & sessions are Democracies, others Constitutional Monarchies!*"