

Hi MUD Members,

I thought it might be useful to add another thought or two to Margaret's positive and encouraging ideas about which tunes to join in on. Great manifestos of the ages usually wind up with numerous interpretations, and although our working manifesto is fairly clear, I would tend to assume that the author means "... play in a manner that tastefully contributes to the tune, and that does not ruffle feathers of other members ..." (I suppose this will be subject to interpretation as well).

I appreciate that I was afforded the opportunity to join MUD over a year ago, and though I had played violin in string quartets and other groups, and knew a bunch of fiddle tunes as well, I could hardly play any of the tunes in the band's repertoire ... especially at that blazing speed. It is now much more fun to be able to keep up with about half the tunes ... and some without the sheet music. Here are some ways to "fit in", and "learn as you go", from my own experience:

1. Learn how the basic tune goes at home, from the notes ... play it through as much as you can without mistakes. Then, during a practice or performance (to me, there is hardly any difference), shift over to your "right brain" ... feel the music, listen to the band, notice standard runs, chords, phrases and timings. Hear how the band plays a group of notes, then try playing the group of notes when it comes around again ... without looking at each individual note.
2. Try keeping up with the band, even if you don't play the right notes ... as you continue to play with the band, you will play more and more phrases (without thinking of the individual notes). If you get a lot of notes wrong, but still want to "keep up", try playing softer or using a mute ... this way you can practice without ruffling feathers.
3. Another way to contribute and learn is to try playing one note out of every measure ... try to hear which notes sound appropriate.
4. Another way to play if you are not up to speed, is to play chords, or a good-sounding note from a chord. At some point you may notice that many tunes are made up of similar runs or phrases that repeat themselves in each chord associated with the tune (Grasshopper for example).
5. In summary, you need to learn all the notes, and play them with good timing, loudness and intonation. But you also need to learn the tune as a whole, which includes the feel, the speed, and the energy. If I am not up-to-speed on a tune, I sometimes play the "whole tune", with missing or incorrect notes (the mute helps), other times I try playing as many notes or phrases that I can. Eventually everything comes together and falls in place. Take a rest, put your right brain to work.

In addition to some home practice, I have found it a valuable and necessary learning experience to jump in and play, one way or the other ... it's even easier to correct intonation when others around you are playing the "right" note.

*Steve Hudak*