

fancy yourself fiddling?



Starting Out on Fiddle2.

By Sean Kenan, 2008.



Photo above: Kevin Burke's bow hold.

The Bow

Q. How much do I tighten the bow?

Enough to allow a pencil to be passed between the hair and stick. Make sure you release the pressure after playing. Avoid touching the hair as this will cause 'dead' spots while bowing due to grease from the fingers.

Q. How much rosin should I use?

A new bow will require a good load. Try fifty rubbings down and up the whole bow length. For short practice sessions ten rubs should do.

Q. How often should I get the bow re-haired?

Kevin Burke is a professional player and he changes his strings every two months and gets his bow re-haired every six to nine months. Most fiddlers would get away with a re-hair every one or two years, sometimes for longer periods.



Photo above: Avoid playing with a crooked bow. Draw the bow in a parallel line between the bridge and fingerboard.

Q. How do I hold the fiddle?

Most players these days use a device called a shoulder rest. These fittings are quite a recent invention and have only been available commercially for about 70 years. The famous classical violinist Yehudi Menuhin detested shoulder rests even though there is one brand for sale bearing his name. Kevin Burke prefers a small cushion attached with an elastic band. Other players hold the fiddle in the original manner, the instrument resting directly on their shoulder. The main thing is to try to 'balance' the instrument lightly on the shoulder rather than clamping the fiddle tightly between the chin and shoulder.



Photo above: Left hand finger exercise. Try holding down the four fingers approximately in the above shape. This will develop strength and finger independence.

Q. How do I bow the string?

Start off with long slow bows on open strings. Aim for smooth long strokes with a minimum of scratching. Gently stroke the string to get it 'spinning' and play very lightly with a smooth continuous tone all the way from one end of the bow to the other. You will need to support a lot of the bow's weight as you near the lower half or you will scratch. Aim for 30 seconds per bow stroke.

Sean Kenan teaches fiddle in Melbourne at the Fancy Yourself Fiddling music school and produces the monthly newsletter, Fiddle News. Tune downloads, quotes and Fiddle News archives are available online at www.seanken.com