

150 Hot Tunes for Fiddle and Mandolin
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Steve Parker Music

This ambitious project includes an amazing amount of information in various formats. Categories of tunes include American, international, and classical. Subcategories of American tunes include Appalachian, Midwestern, Cajun, French Canadian, ragtime, and a special section of Ed Haley's tunes. International tunes include Mexican, Italian, Venezuelan, and Swedish selections, among others. There are four classical tunes, too.

Tunes are indexed by category in the beginning of the book. In the back of the book is an extensive discography, a short bibliography of other tune books, and a list of websites. There's a short section called "About the Transcriptions," which I think should be read before anything else in the book. There's also an appendix with mandolin information and tablature for the classical tunes. The book is liberally garnished with photos of older and younger musicians as well as illustrations by the author. Anyone wanting to see California musicians Tom Sauber and Greg and Jere Canote through the decades won't be disappointed, as there are numerous photos of them throughout the book.

The author wisely cautions that the transcriptions are "accurate within reason." He tells us that people learning these tunes "must listen to the recordings in the discography." This is such important information that I think it should be placed in the beginning of the book, headed with a caveat in large print to "Read this before going any further." Why? Because as valuable as transcriptions have been (and continue to be) in preserving tunes for musicians to learn and pass on in turn, all of us growing up in a literate culture have been trained, often without knowing it, to assign a sometimes unwarranted validity to anything printed on a page. Instead of using written tunes as an aid to memory, or as a step to learning them from a live performer or teacher, it is easy for us to fool ourselves into thinking that this is *the* way the tune goes. Still, it's very important to record music in this way. Before there was a method of passing music around through easy travel, mass media, electronics, etc., if you weren't fortunate enough to live with or near someone else who played, you learned from written music. If we're on the downward slope of the petrochemical age, as some believe, it's still very important to keep a written record of our music.

But writing a tune down freezes it. Traditional music is alive as long as it passes from ear to hand to ear, always evolving into something else—a fact that sparks lots of lively debate on the old-time community. If we learn tunes from a printed page we must be careful not to freeze them, thinking, "This is how the tune goes." Rather, we have to remember that it's the way one person played it once, filtered through the ears of another person who wrote it down.

That said, I'm really looking forward to playing these tunes—especially the ones in the international section. It's a real treat to have tunes from around the world so immediately available.

Some words about the design of the book. The book is conveniently spiral-bound, so you don't have to wrestle to keep it open to your chosen tune. The tunes themselves are easy to read, measures well spaced, with enough room between staves so that chords, repeats, first and second endings, and measure numbers are easy to see. Sources are identified right below the tunes' names.

The CD, in mp3 format, contains all 150 tunes. They were recorded from the transcriptions, in synthesized form, which ensures that they follow the written tunes exactly, note-for-note. There are detailed instructions on how to play and save the tunes on your computer. The fact that you have to listen to a pretty unpleasant rendition of the tunes has another advantage; you will be quickly motivated to turn to the discography, or even better, to find live humans to learn from and play with.

Stephen Parker has done a heroic job in putting out this book. Transcribing the tunes was only the beginning. He had to put them into a music notation program, do a bibliography, a discography, record the CD, design the book, index everything, choose pictures, do the layout, get people to copy edit and proofread, and he's made every effort to make both book and CD user-friendly. All this from an old-time musician who would probably rather be playing the banjo. Give him your vote of thanks by ordering his book.

HILARY DIRLAM

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