

with each successive measure.

Let's apply a shuffle bow to a common traditional jam session tune, "*Down The Road*". If you're not familiar with this, listen to one of the many versions on YouTube, or even better, find the original Flatt & Scruggs version of this classic traditional tune. For the moment, ignore how we came up with these particular notes for the fiddle break.

Here's the bare-bones melody for the tune as it might be sung:

Down the road 'bout a mile or two lives a lit-tle girl named Pearl-y Blue.

'Bout so high with eyes of brown, Pret-ti-est thing, boys, in this town.

Figure 27: Down The Road - vocal

Here's the most important bit of advice you will ever hear about bluegrass fiddling: *Know the melody before you start to learn or create a fiddle break!* Ralph Stanley used to say to his musicians, "*Play it like you'd sing it.*" Of all the instruments, the violin (and that includes the fiddle) comes closest to being able to imitate the human voice in all its subtle shadings, slides and dynamics. The best players are the ones who can mimic the tones of the human voice. To do that, you need to be able to hear the song in your head, which is why I insist on my students being able to reproduce the melody before they start learning to play it on the fiddle. Now, the student may not have much of a singing voice but they can hum it or whistle it or play it on a kazoo. The point is to internalize the tune before you start trying to reproduce it.



Figure 28: Paul Warren, Bill Harrell (guitar), Kenny Baker, Alice McClain (hidden, on mandolin), Curly Ray Cline, Roy Lee Centers (guitar). Delaware Bluegrass and Old-Time Festival, 1972.

So go listen to the tune, several different versions if you can, and notice the subtleties of the vocals. There are vocal slides into and out of certain notes. Those will be important later.

Learning To Fiddle, Bluegrass Style

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