



Federation of Australasian
Mandolin Ensembles Inc.

www.fame.asn.au

Plucked Strings

A quarterly newsletter for FAME members

Editor: Marie Schulz marie@conceptual.net.au

December 2014

December 2014

**There's some very interesting
reading in this issue!**

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President's Report

Life is definitely full of unexpected twists and turns!

Earlier this year I received a call out of the blue from a conductor in Adelaide who was in the midst of arranging music in preparation for a concert of popular Italian songs from the early 20th century onwards featuring two local tenors and a symphony orchestra put together with local players specifically for the concert. He was keen to have a



mandolin player who was classically trained to participate in the concert to add a more authentic "Italian sound" to the music and he had arranged music for such a player. But despite an extensive search through Adelaide and

beyond he wasn't able to find any classical mandolin players. So he searched for mandolin orchestras further afield and discovered the website of the Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra which had listed on one of its pages my name and contact details, as Secretary of the MMO, listed on one of its pages.

So he called me to find out whether I knew of any South Australian classical mandolinists but I was unable to help as I knew of no such player based in South Australia. We both thought that was rather unusual as there had been many migrants from central Europe who had settled in Adelaide and especially in Hahndorf. The conductor said he wasn't in a position to pay for anybody to fly to

cont. p2

Adelaide from Melbourne, Sydney or Perth and then put me on the spot by asking if I would consider “doing the gig” for no payment. Knowing that I would need to attend several rehearsals over perhaps a fortnight it took all of about 3/10 of a second of consideration to agree but with the proviso that I would first need to see the mandolin parts to decide whether my skill as a mandolin player was up to the task.

When the mandolin parts finally arrived I was greatly relieved that the music and tempi were probably within my grasp and I confirmed that I would drive to Adelaide and spent time rehearsing with the orchestra to prepare for the concert in mid October. Some time afterwards while I was overseas travelling in Turkey I received another call from the conductor who had written a second part and wanted me recruit a second mandolin player. To my delight I was able to recruit another player from the MMO who was actually much more skilled than me and who gave me some assistance during our preparations for the concert.

It was a great honour to be part of a truly wonderful concert with some really talented orchestral musicians and two great tenors. It was particularly enjoyable for me as I had never had the experience of actually being part of a symphony orchestra and I had never realised how loud it was being in the midst of it all. And we two mandolin players were wedged between the tympani, the second violins, the clarinets, the piccolo and the harp!

Anyway this is a rather long introduction to the issue which particularly intrigued me: why there are no classical mandolin players in South Australia and why there isn't or hasn't been a mandolin orchestra based there. I might be wrong but in my two decades plus as a player with the MMO I've not been aware of any such group in South Australia. I know that it nearly always takes the energy and drive of at least one enthusiast to pull musicians together to form just about any type of musical ensemble but I find it surprising that Adelaide hasn't had such a person. And I suppose that the same applies to Hobart and Darwin although both are quite small and I suspect that Darwin is just too hot anyway!

Some of us on the FAME committee have pondered about what might be done to foster the creation of mandolin orchestras in these three centres but clearly without an energetic enthusiast “on the ground” it would be very difficult. However if FAME's committee were to plan, develop and eventually run FAME Festivals in one or all of these centres this might stimulate the interest needed to spark the formation of local mandolin orchestras. I know from personal experience how much work is needed to successfully plan, develop and run a FAME Festival as do many others but while there are significant obstacles I'm sure it could be done. It just needs sufficient motivation!

FAME's committee has at various times pondered its collective navel and thought about how well FAME was achieving its aims as listed in its Constitution:

1. to promote community involvement in the formation of orchestras of plucked instruments,
2. to encourage such orchestras to achieve the highest musical standards possible,
3. to promote the training of players and conductors, and
4. to encourage musicians to compose and arrange music for mandolin orchestras

Without a doubt, FAME festivals contribute to aims 2 and 3 while the 4th aim is definitely being promoted through the financial support FAME which provides by subsidising musical commissions for FAME Festivals. This is a fairly expensive method and perhaps there are other ways FAME could achieve this with less expense such as supporting a competition for new works with all entered works, irrespective of success or not in the competition subsequently being made available to all of FAME's member ensembles for future performances.

FAME's committee is keen to receive suggestions from its members about other ways FAME could support the four aims listed above and I recommend that all suggestions be passed on to your local FAME representatives who will then present them to the full FAME committee. Just in case you don't know the name of the representative from your own orchestra I've listed them below:

ACT: Lea O'Brien, Ian Bull
 New South Wales: Cath Kench, Martha Babineau
 New Zealand: John Flaming, Theo Salt
 Queensland: Ray Carroll, Murray Green
 Victoria: Joan Harris, Danny Silver
 West Australia: Marie Schulz, Elizabeth Neeson

Please put your thinking caps on and let us know your ideas!

Danny Silver
FAME President 2014

Auckland Mandolinata

The months have flown by for us in the Mandolinata with some of the busiest times we have had. Our regular Winter Series concert season wrapped up nicely in October with everyone working hard to put on a good show for our regulars. Melanie Kam, Joshua Lynn, Stefan Erceg and Gianni Flego formed a quartet to give the audience a taste of something a little different in the form of a traditional (fast!) tarantella, a piece from Taiwan, and the Super Mario and Angry Birds themes!

As well as having several other concerts to work on, we performed for the German Society in Auckland with Robert Schulz' *I'm Hoffbrauhaus* being very well received. A smaller group of us got together and played at Auckland's "Festival Italiano" in Newmarket. This event has become huge, with several streets in one of Auckland's busiest shopping districts closed off to traffic and packed with people. The sounds of the mandolin orchestra (with a little help from some amplification) were perfect and we had great feedback.

Although our year isn't finished with a few more shows to go, we are looking forward to next year and some new challenges such as the Bulgarian *Novo Cetvorno*, a jazz/swing/Dixie arrangement of *Bill Bailey* and Albinoni's *Adagio* among many others to a varied and interesting mix.

Gianni Flego

Sydney Mandolin Orchestra



Nancy's Farewell

Sadly, just recently, our longime member (more than 20 years!), Nancy Booth, passed away. The orchestra, as well as many ex members, joined together in a farewell tribute to honour her memory. Nancy took up mandolin as an adult - to enable her to play with her sister, Catha. They attended FAME camps together in Melbourne and Sydney. Many FAME members will remember Nancy and her sister Catha at the camps, enjoying their afternoon tipples - sherry was their drink of choice!

Nancy originally learnt mandolin from Adrian Hooper and in the late 80s was a member of his Oatley Mandolins. She also played in Coralie Toswill's occasional orchestra, "The Australian Mandolin & String Orchestra" at the Sydney Town Hall. Nancy joined SMO following the camp they hosted in the early 90s. She also played the organ at St Andrew's Church in St Ives, until July this year.

Nancy was a lot of fun and will be missed.

Aiko's Wedding

Members of the orchestra were happy to play the Pachelbel Canon as the beautiful bride, mandolinist Aiko Matsunaga was married to Andrew, at Curzon Hall, an historic house in Marsfield, Sydney. Background music included Japanese and Italian Pieces.

We wish them both much happiness.



Plucking at Putty

"Wombat Retreat" in the Wollemi National Park, Martha's paradise, was graced by some members of the SMO for a musical gathering. Cath Kench, Trish Polley, James Adcock and our lovely conductor, Margery Smith tuned their instruments and, joined by Willy Green from Mandolins in Brisbane and Roberta Condie from MMO, who were both squatting on the property, made music to fill the valley. You could say the

ensemble, to be known hereafter as 'The Putty Pluckers', thrilled the audience of horses, wombats, dogs, birds, wallabies, chooks, Australian wood ducks and assorted players' partners. You don't get a better audience than that! A delicious lunch was enjoyed by all before the final chords were plucked.



Martha Babineau
Cath Kench

COZMO - Capital of Australia Mandolinata



Another eventful quarter for COZMO as we hurtle towards Christmas!

In the July edition of *Plucked Strings* we'd mentioned that we were preparing for a concert at the High Court of Australia coming up on 20 July. Given that it's a pretty high-profile venue and concerts there can attract an audience of hundreds – many locals but also many tourists from interstate and overseas, we were all a little nervous, but on the day, our contribution to the "*Magical Mandolins with Grace*" concert was an unqualified success. Following a beautiful performance by Gracenotes, a popular local a capella trio, we played to an appreciative audience of over 300, sitting in rows of chairs in the huge open foyer, standing along its walls and up the ramps leading to the floors above. In the amazingly good acoustics of the High Court foyer, the audience were able to perfectly hear the haunting notes of Kuwahara's *Song of Japanese Autumn*, the call-and-answer of Corelli's *Fünf Tanzstücke* and Stephen Lalor's vibrant *Australis Suite*, amongst other pieces in our set.

Since then, COZMO has had a number of engagements at festivals and fetes. We played at the 'Turning Wave' Festival of Irish and Australian Music, held annually at Yass in country NSW, about an hour away from Canberra. We had four performances over the weekend of 20 and 21 September, the first three on Saturday in the Liberty Theatre at 10am, on an open-air stage in Banjo Patterson Park in the afternoon, and in an acoustically wonderful church at 10pm, and the fourth back at the open-air stage on Sunday. The different venues (indoors and outdoors) and time slots meant different approaches to each gig and a varied line-up as not all our players could be there for all four performances. The atmosphere in the park was bright and summery, surrounded by market stalls and providing both a mobile and seated audience, but many sat and enjoyed our repertoire.

Every September-October, Canberra stages the by-now nationally famous Floriade festival – a month-long tulip, music, food and wine festival, with performances on each weekend during the month on 'Stage 88'. On 11 October, following an exercise "boot camp" display and preceding an ANU School of Music jazz ensemble, the sounds of COZMO wafted from a giant PA system across the lawns of Commonwealth Park, the audience lazing in the sunshine on the lawns enjoying our mix of Italian, Irish and contemporary pieces.

The following week saw COZMO performing under the huge old trees at St John's Anglican Church Fair in Reid Fete 18 October. St John the Baptist Church is the oldest church in Canberra, and also the oldest building within Canberra's city precinct. Whilst it was very chilly on the fingers playing in the shade, we had a lovely time playing for the fair-goers and sat around in the church hall afterwards enjoying a scones and tea.

Two weeks later on 8 November we were at St Paul's Anglican Church Fee in Manuka. Again another superb Canberra Spring day, and a return performance – having played here the previous year, with two sets followed by a Devonshire tea. For some of us, a visit to the book stall paid off: two bags of music texts!

Artsound, one of Canberra's local community radio stations, kindly invited COZMO to participate in its Open Day coming up on 23 November – the final day of its annual 2-week long fund-raising Radiothon. We'll be playing a 30-minute set which, like all the contributing performances on the day will be broadcast live across the radio waves! Features of the Open Day are continuous live music and a large book, CD and DVD sale – should be great fun!

COZMO's Learning Groups have been working hard preparing for our Annual Summer Concert on 7 December, which we'll hold at the Hellenic Club in the City. They will present arrangements of *Londonderry Air*, Robert Schulz's *Syncope Blues* and a Belgian folk tune *Berceuse des Brumes*. They will then join with COZMO to play the popular tune *Latina Suite – Mambo* (which the Australis Ensemble had played together with the Mandolin- und Gitarrenorchester der Naturfreunde Schweinfurt (Schweinfurt Mandolin Orchestra) on its BDZ Tour in May-June).

Planning for COZMO's program for 2015 is well underway; we anticipate another rewarding year ahead of magic music-making and fun friendships. We wish you all in our FAME family a very happy holiday season and a wonderful year ahead!

– your COZMO colleagues.

Canberra Mandolin Orchestra



CMO rehearsing with the Worldly Goods Choir at Canberra's Belconnen Arts Centre.

A highlight of our year so far was a recent concert in which our plucked strings joined forces with Canberra's outstanding cabaret act Shortis and Simpson and their wonderful 50-voiced Worldly Goods Choir. The sunset concert overlooking Lake Ginninderra in Canberra's north celebrated the nationalities and cultural backgrounds represented by their participants. There was traditional music from Greece, Italy, Finland, Germany, Russia, and France with renditions of Henry Lawson set to music, *Aeroplane Jelly* and more.

The event – promoted as *StringSing* – saw the two groups sharing repertoire and stories, within the extraordinary acoustics of the Belconnen Centre performance hall. Each group performed a number of pieces and then joined together to entertain the audience with some well known and new songs.

Cabaret team John Shortis and Moya Simpson linked the musical performances with specially prepared material that served as a narrative explain the background to the material. John,

who is renowned around Australia as a composer of political satirical songs, wrote a piece specially for mandolin orchestra and voices entitled *String Sing*, in which he “celebrated” Canberra's northern artificial lake. The lyrics included gem verses such as:

When it comes to a beautiful fake lake,
It's you that takes the cake,
Lake Ginninderra,
When it comes to a home a duck and drake make,
It's you that takes the cake,
Lake Ginninderra,
Dive in and swim,
And string and sing,
StringSing!

John is also highly respected in the Australian music world for his work as a freelance songwriter and music director for the ABC radio shows that taught children to sing.

The event attracted an appreciative audience of well over 250 people and was a wonderful opportunity for the CMO to work closely with a professional act such as Shortis and Simpson and their choir.

continued....



Some members of CMO and Canberra's Rondanihan at their recent afternoon get together.

Another highlight of the second half of this year was an afternoon spent with the members of the **Canberra Rondanihan** – a Rondalla group (Filipino plucked ensemble). Each group played a few pieces to the other and then we joined together for some communal music making and generally exchanged musical ideas and experiences. A big thanks to CMO mandolinist Ian Bull (who also plays in and manages the Rondalla) for organising the event.

We are now rehearsing for a performance at a special arts launch to be held at one of Canberra's newest and most prestigious cultural precincts - but more on that in the next edition.

Until then, happy plucking and warm greetings to all our FAME friends around Australia and New Zealand from the Canberra Mandolin Orchestra!

Sam Leone

Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra

The orchestra have just performed a concert at Barwon Park, a Victorian mansion once owned by the Austin family and now managed by the National Heritage Trust. This is the second time we have performed at what has become a popular venue for the MMO due to its excellent acoustics, intimate ambience and wonderful support from the staff. The concerts at Barwon Park have now become an annual event financially benefiting both the MMO and the Trust.

We are now entering the Christmas season, a time for winding down and the inevitable Christmas concert. This year the MMO has been invited to perform at a Christmas celebration event to be held at Port Melbourne on the 27th November. This will include a number of children's choirs and instrumental groups (ukulele and accordion). This is the pen-ultimate performance for the orchestra; our final concert will be our own Christmas one held at the German Tivoli Club on the 7th December. This will bring the number of concerts performed by the Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra to a total of five for the year. This follows on from the fantastic start to 2014 when the MMO hosted the fame festival.

Orchestras like ours within the "mandolin fraternity", as that phrase suggests, are more than just clubs. Our common interest of making music and loving the experience binds us all together. Many of us have been involved with mandolin ensembles for many years; some longer than we may wish to recall. This means of course that there eventually comes a time when we no longer have the energy, although the desire, to continue playing. Joan Roberts, a much loved and respected player of first mandolin has decided to retire from the Melbourne Mandolin Orchestra. Joan started with the MMO in March 1997 and over the next 17 plus years worked very hard within the orchestra becoming a committee member and later president. Joan was also instrumental in setting up the training orchestra and along with Abram Iourgaev moulded many a promising musician. Joan will be sorely missed as a player but of course as a member of our family she is always welcome at the MMO. The Christmas concert on the 7th December will be dedicated to Joan.

We are all looking forward to catching up with everyone at the Sydney FAME festival, so see you there.

Ray Kerslake

Plektra



Plektra's calendar has not been busy due to other tour and performance commitments for some of our group. But we've been rehearsing regularly, consolidating Stephen Lalor's newer pieces and also working on an arrangement of the theme from the Game of Thrones by our guitarist Darryl Rule. On Sunday, October 19th, we had our first concert since the May/June Germany tour.

Our performance was a house concert in Terrey Hills, a semi-rural district within the greater Sydney area. We had hoped for fine weather and were not disappointed enjoying a glorious spring day. Forty six guests were seated in our host's living room and we utilised a small modular stage to improve the line of sight for our audience. Our opening piece, the Game of Thrones theme, received a great response, as did Stephen's arrangement of the Canciello Trio which followed. We also performed Tangata De Agosto movements 1 and 2 featuring Darryl on guitar. Our program then moved onto some of Stephen's better known World Music pieces, including Kolo Kolo and Hitch Hike to Galway which featured Fiona Ziegler on violin as well as Stephen's fantastic solos.

To finish off an enjoyable performance for us and to add to the experience for our audience we enjoyed some wines especially selected for the occasion. We also had a small exhibition of paintings by Jane Alexander, an emerging Sydney artist. This all made for a very pleasant gathering after the concert and a good opportunity to sell some of our CDs.

In other news for Plektra:

- We now have our CD available on Amazon.com.
- Our CD was reviewed by Robert Margo in the Classical Mandolin Society of America, August Journal 2014. (see *page 17*)
- And Mandolin Café has included a reference to our CD on their most recent [News page](#).

Alex Burger

WAMO



It's always a surprise to see another year coming to a close (although I knew it would!) and to start to reflect on the past 12 months.

In trying to address the lack of enthusiasm for promoting and selling tickets to more than one concert per year, WAMO has experimented with the idea of 'theme nights' at our regular rehearsal venue and has met with some success. This comprises preparing a 20 minute bracket of music around a particular theme (eg Spanish night) and presenting this to the regular club members who go each Saturday night to dance the night away. It provides not only the club members with a little bit of entertainment (often with a special guest as well, in keeping with the theme), it also allows WAMO members to meet socially and perform in a less than formal manner.

Our two theme nights this year have proved to be well liked and have resulted in larger than usual audience sizes. As there is no cost for the venue, we can make financial gain at little risk. Judging by our recent 'Australian Bush Life' theme, this is set to continue. The evening included some bush dance music from the band, some emu sausages and crocodile steaks from the menu, live recitations of Banjo Paterson poems by our guest bush poet Dennis Wills and a program of music - Sandgroper Serenade, A Dark History, The Oath of Bad Brown Bill from the Orchestra - all of which was enjoyed hugely by the good size audience.

Accordingly WAMO is preparing to host three 'theme nights' in 2015.

Our next year's calendar will begin with another trip to a country centre in March - Mukenbudin, about 4 hours drive north east of Perth. This will mean an overnight stay and it is hoped the entire population (around 400) will turn up - well at least those who are not harvesting or shearing. And we have approached a well known Perth singer Sarah Macliver to be our guest for our end of year concert in November. These 5 performances overall, will ensure we have a well balanced year with time for Orchestra members to make their holiday plans so as not to clash with our performance dates. (I wish!!). There will be representation at the Sydney 2015 FAME Festival from WAMO players and hopefully a large number of the Youth Orchestra.

In recent talks with some of the parents of our Youth Orchestra members we may see the transition of some of them into WAMO in the new year. This will present challenges in all areas of organisation in order to keep alive the two ensembles without too much disruption. I will keep you posted as to the outcome.

A small ensemble of WAMO players (8 in all) is to perform live for a ballet concert on December 6th. Two of the pieces are instrumental and the third is to accompany the young dancers. A good venue in the Octagon Theatre at UWA and something which is becoming a regular event.

Just one final eat-fest to go on December 10th for our end of year wind-up. Free meal for Orchestra members who will none-the-less have to provide their own entertainment.

Till the next issue. Seasons Greetings from WAMO to all other mandolin enthusiasts.

Robert Schulz
Music Director

Keith Harris has published an article about Robert entitled 'Ein großer Pionier der Zupfmusik in Australien' in the November 2014 issue of *Concertino* magazine. If you'd like to read it (in German, unless I can get Keith to send us a translation) please email me.

There is also a portrait of Benny Ludemann, who celebrates his 50th year as Conductor of Estrellita Mandolin Orchestra.

Marie Schulz

Mandolins in Brisbane

THE second half of 2014 has heralded a brave new era for Mandolins in Brisbane. Our players have tried their hands at some great musical pieces over the last year and there have been some brilliant concerts to boot.

MIB also introduced its players to school groups at least twice since the last update, performing a concert as part of school music and Italian cultural celebrations as well as teaching young players to have a go at the mandolin themselves. Needless to say, the playing days were a huge success and thanks to the time volunteered, helped a whole new generation of music lovers to enjoy and even have a go at the mandolin.

MIB players gave a number of great concerts in the second half of the year featuring some fantastic Australian composers which were extremely well received.

A security threat thwarted our planned concert at Queensland Parliament ahead of the G20 Leaders Summit but it was moved to a new location and, without fuss, the Queensland Mandolin Ensemble rose to the challenge.

This year MIB awarded its inaugural composition prize to Mark Matuschka for his piece Mando No 12. The group received a number of compositions from interested participants for a cash prize and the honour of having their work played in concert. We hope to see this exciting new feature of our annual program continue in 2015.

Meanwhile, the very talented Joel Woods (also our fabulous conductor) and Marissa Carroll (who leads the QME as principal mandolinist) continue to do some fantastic things together. This year their duo Plettro Mano performed in Melbourne, to great acclaim. They will delight audiences in Queensland later this month with a planned concert at Maleny, on the Sunshine Coast, on November 30th.

Brooke Baskin

NEW FROM SCHULZWERKE

Hot off the press two new works for Mandolin Orchestra.

'Lament, Breathless, A short Journey' (Catalogue number MO 079) is a set of three contrasting movements for M1, M2, M1a, G, BG. Total running time about 10 minutes. The first as the name suggests, slow and solemn. The second movement leaves no-one with much time to draw breath. Insistent movement with dotted quavers semi-quaver rhythms. The third movement starts and goes to somewhere else although there is a thematic connection between beginning and end.

'Concertino for Guitar and Orchestra' (Catalogue number MO 080) was written for a younger soloist in mind. Scored for Solo Guitar, M1, M2, M1a, G, BG, a work for an advanced student to perform in order to gain confidence in this role. It has three movements, the first sub-titled Dialogue where the soloist 'talks' together with the Orchestra. The second movement uses some very exposed tremolo passages and the third, a quasi 'bolero' type movement with some strong clear use of octave passages. Total running time is approximately 14 minutes.

Contact: rschulz@conceptual.net.au

www.robertschulz.net



UPDATE



Now that the Key Personnel are in place - Conductor Werner Ruecker, Leader Stephen Lalor and most of the Section Leaders (might get in as a Stop Press!), we can work to finalise the Music!

We know we will be playing a new composition by Stephen Lalor, a piece by Michelle Nelson (being written for MMO) and a new piece by Margery Smith (conductor of SMO), which we hope will feature clarinet or saxophone; the rest....?? Nearly there!

Dunmore Lang College has had a refurbishment this year, so our accommodation will be even better than we originally thought! Macquarie Centre, too, has had a major 'make-over' and now has even more opportunities for some 'retail therapy' (some free time has been built into the timetable!), as well as the cinema and ice-rink (for our non-players and WAYMO).

We've lined up some interesting workshops to help improve our playing technique, including one to help with our posture and general physical wellbeing.

Our Theme night is set - Dinner and 'Activities'!! A surprise, but it will be fun! - we promise!

There will be an outing - optional, but we think you'll want to sign up for it!

We have two In-House concerts planned (we'll call for EOI's closer to the time), and of course, there will be time for 'jamming' and catching up with old friends, as well as for making new ones.

For those who haven't yet sent in their Registration Form and Deposit - please consider...

- Once you have paid your deposit - that's almost 1/3 of the cost - if you then want to pay the balance in 2 installments (or even 3!), we'd be happy to oblige!
- The earlier you book airfares (generally speaking!) the cheaper they are!
- If you have ever been on the organising committee for a FAME camp, you know how frustrating it is not knowing how many people will come!! Please think of us!

Registration Forms are attached - please get them in, **with** your deposit, and plan to spend a great week with your Australasian Mandolin family, in July 2015, in Sydney.

We look forward to seeing you there,

The 2015 Sydney FAME Organising Committee.



2015 Sydney FAME Mandolin Festival

5th – 12th July 2015

Dunmore Lang College, Macquarie University
Herring Rd, North Ryde NSW 2113



Federation of
Australasian
Mandolin
Ensembles

REGISTRATION FORM

Please complete and send by email to – thesydneymandolinorchestra@hotmail.com

Or print, complete and send to – PO Box 522, Northbridge 2063

(One form for each player)

PERSONAL INFORMATION (Please PRINT)

Player:

Family Name: Mr/Mrs/Ms _____ Given Name: _____

Financial Member of FAME (Y / N) _____ (non-FAME members have a \$10 surcharge)

Family or Friends accompanying Name _____
(ie non-players) Name _____

Contact Address: _____
State _____ Country _____ Postcode _____

Contact Phone: _____ Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Emergency Contact Details:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Relationship to you: _____

Your Orchestra (if applicable): _____ Instrument(s): _____

Preferred position in FAME Orchestra (Please tick or write Y & indicate skill level –

(1) Beginner (2) Intermediate (3) Advanced)

Mand 1 ___() Mand 2 ___() Mdlr ___() M'cello ___() Guit ___() Bass ___() Percussion ___()

Other (specify) _____

If you are a Double Bass player from Interstate / Overseas, do you need an instrument provided for you?

(Y / N) _____

Special Dietary Requirements: _____

Medical Conditions, Serious Allergies &/or Special Needs: _____

REGISTRATION FEE: (Non-Refundable) Per Person; Due 15th February 2015 *.

Resident player	@ \$ 300	\$ _____
Resident non-player	@ \$ 150	\$ _____
Player (non-resident)	@ \$ 300	\$ _____
Fee (\$10) for non-members of FAME (players only)		\$ _____
	Total	\$ _____

Registrations are ONLY accepted on receipt of this Non Refundable Registration Fee or the Full Fee (Deposit & Accommodation Fee, on page 2).

***NOTE – An EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION FEE (non-refundable) of \$250, is available, For Players only, until 31st May, 2014.**

After that date the Full Registration Fee is applicable & is due by 15th February 2015.

YOUTH FAME SUBSIDY

This is available to encourage young people to participate in FAME Festivals. A subsidy of up to \$200 may be available.

Requirements – You must register as a full-time playing member of the Festival Orchestra. This means you must attend all day and evening rehearsals and participate in the Festival Concert.

You must be an Australian or New Zealand Resident.

You must be less than 26 years of age.

General Information

Membership of a mandolin orchestra is NOT a requirement. The Youth Subsidy is not paid to the applicant, but paid by FAME to the Festival Management Committee. The FMC will advise the applicant, upon approval, the amount of the grant, which will then be deducted from the balance of money owing.

I wish to apply for the FAME Youth Subsidy (Y / N) _____ Date of Birth _____

ACCOMMODATION FEES (This is in ADDITION to the REGISTRATION FEE)

There are a limited number of twin rooms (motel style) with ensuites, some single rooms with ensuites, some single rooms where 2 rooms share a bathroom and then single rooms (student accommodation). These will be allocated on a first registered / first allocated basis.

1. Full board and Accommodation	@ \$ 650 per player / non-player	x _____	\$ _____
2. Lunch & Dinner, NO Accom	@ \$ 200 per person		\$ _____
3. Lunch only, NO Accom	@ \$ 100 per person		\$ _____

Full Cost (Registration + Accommodation) is \$ 950 per player / \$ 800 non-player.

Full cost of the Festival (Registration plus Accommodation Fee) is due 1st May 2015.

Payments made after 1st May 2015 will incur a \$50 late fee. \$ _____

Total \$ _____

BANKING DETAILS For Electronic Fund Transfer

If you transfer funds electronically, it is VERY important that you include your FULL NAME as a reference. If you do it through your own bank, you must ask the teller to include this reference.

You may also pay by cheque when you send your **Registration Form** by conventional mail, to –

The Sydney Mandolin Orchestra, PO Box 522, Northbridge NSW 2063

Deposit (in Australian Dollars): St George Bank

Account Name: Sydney FAME 2015

BSB: 112 - 879 Account Number: 448237292

INDEMNITY & PERMISSION

By sending this form (even if unsigned) to the 2015 Sydney FAME Mandolin Festival Organising Committee, I acknowledge and agree that the organisers of the 2015 Sydney FAME Mandolin Festival and associated volunteers will not be liable for the injury to any person or for loss or damage to any property arising from any act or omission by the organisers of the said Festival and associated volunteers or any other person whether arising under the law of contract tort or otherwise, and indemnify the organisers of the 2015 Sydney FAME Mandolin Festival in relation to any such injury, loss or damage.

Signed: _____ Printed Name: _____

I give full consent for all audio and video recording and for photographs that may be taken of the rehearsals, FAME concert and the normal social activity of the Festival for whatever use is deemed appropriate by the organisers.

(Y / N) _____ Signed: _____

MANDOLINS VICTORIA

In mid 2014 a group of concerned Victorian musicians convened a 'think-tank' to discuss what can be done to revitalise the mandolin scene in our state.

The past decade has, as with many 'traditional' activities, witnessed a marked decline in the numbers of new players joining our orchestras. Of particular concern is the almost non-existent number of young players showing interest in becoming regular members, or even learning the mandolin. Ensembles that once comfortably had 30+ regular members are now struggling to maintain their numbers above 20. Indeed, without some dedicated, long-time zupf-musicians sharing their time amongst the different groups those numbers would look even worse. Also, our concert audiences have diminished in line with this trend.

Clearly something needs to be done to stimulate new interest.

Enter '**Mandolins Victoria**'; a realization of an idea first mooted way back in 1991 by the 'Committee of Players' in Victoria who drafted the 1991 FAME Constitution. Even then people sensed that a State-based entity would likely prove more effective locally than a national entity. Unfortunately the idea wasn't followed through at that time but is now finally coming to fruition.

'Mandolins Victoria' – has been used on some previous occasions to organise Victoria-based get-togethers. Whilst these "get-togethers" were well patronised by players from other states, M.V. Mark II will focus its energy on growing the mandolin movement within the state of Victoria. Particular emphasis will be placed on promoting mandolin playing, education, workshops and ensemble participation.

In September 2014 the conductors of the three Victorian orchestras, Werner Ruecker, Basil Hawkins and Joan Harris, presented a joint submission to the committees of their groups in which they outlined a 10-point proposal. This proposal was formulated by the think-tank and is re-printed below for your perusal.

'Mandolins Victoria' Proposal

1. To initiate a bipartisan commitment extending the existing 'Mandolins Victoria' entity to become an all-inclusive incorporated body representing mandolin ensembles in Victoria. It would promote all mandolin ensemble playing in Victoria and provide an organised, centralised facility for reviving and growing the mandolin scene within Victoria.
2. To build, develop and support a database of Victorian mandolin and classical guitar teachers. Teachers on this database would support and promote mandolin ensembles to their students. A structured educational approach using frameworks such as the ANZCA mandolin or AMEB classical guitar syllabus would be highly encouraged for teachers on this database to use.
3. To create a professional, business standard website that will become the central public access point and promote all mandolin based ensembles, teachers, workshops, community based concerts and professional concerts. It would include a page promoting the benefits of music education and opportunities for ensemble based playing.
4. To hold, at least once a year, a concert featuring the combined orchestras of Mandolins Victoria. This concert would be a fundraising event to help contribute to the yearly running expenses of Mandolins Victoria.
5. To seek funding from FAME, Arts Victoria, affiliated ensembles, councils, corporate/philanthropic organisations, to support the development of Mandolins Victoria.

6. To coordinate all FAME Festivals held in the state of Victoria with the help of affiliated ensembles.
7. To develop a small chamber ensemble of Zupf music players to visit primary, secondary, TAFE and university institutions running concerts and participative workshops aimed at encouraging students to learn a plucked instrument. This chamber ensemble would be the vehicle to deliver educational programs to schools about the mandolin.
8. With the support of M.V. and the database of teachers, a fully planned and structured children's program, and youth ensemble should be developed. Initially these programs would run during school holidays with the goal of developing young players who can participate in future FAME festivals, and who may also become regular orchestra players. Such programs would be paid for by parents, costed to appeal to family budgets, and in association with M.V. (and, possibly other organisations mentioned previously), promoted through AMUSE, teacher networks, flyers at mandolin orchestra concerts, the website, FAME, music shops & educational institutions etc.
9. To develop and support training ensembles aimed at older people wishing to become involved in the Zupf music scene. These ensembles would run as training ensembles for all affiliated orchestras. The promotion of these ensembles would occur on the Mandolins Victoria website, flyers at concerts, community based symphony orchestra concerts, German club – Windsor, music shops etc.
10. To encourage and promote the acceptance of the mandolin as a serious instrument at all levels of education. M.V. should encourage the development, and use, of mandolin education programs to facilitate growing the mandolin scene within the state of Victoria

The presentations were received positively by the committees of MMO, Concordia, and Mandolins D'amour and gained favourable responses to the invitation to join together in this common goal. The exercise of making the presentations revealed a strong sense of shared interest.

It needs to be emphasised however that the proposal does not mean, or imply, amalgamation of the existing orchestras. The opposite effect is intended; without attracting new participants and re-invigorating our scene the established Victorian orchestras will continue their decline. Having our orchestras 'join together in a common goal' is a mission of bipartisan co-operation intended to benefit us all.

In recent weeks we have had Mandolins Victoria incorporated and have secured the web address mandolinsvictoria.com at which a suitable website shall be built as funding becomes available.

The aim of this initiative is to reach out to all mandolin players in Victoria and attract interested players from other genres of music. We hope to create a focus for devotees of the mandolin in the same way that the Classical Guitar Society of Victoria (CGSV) has done so successfully in recent years for guitarists.

The members of the "think tank" are :

Michelle Nelson, Joan Harris, Werner Ruecker, Basil Hawkins, Juliette Maxwell, Michelle Wright and Darryl Barron.

We look forward to being able to work with all interested musicians to revitalise and grow the mandolin scene within Victoria, knowing that not only will it benefit musicians in that state but will ultimately help sustain the wider Australasian zupf-music culture.

***Yours in music,
the founding members of Mandolins Victoria***

My Mandolin Journey

Seeing the request for Plucked Strings articles, I thought I might put together a small article on my journey to playing mandolin. It is a journey that started two years ago, just before I retired.

First some music history. I learned piano for about 10 months when I was about 9. A combination of struggling to practise and moving towns soon put an end to that.

About 18 months later, my new primary school decided start a school choir. We were all lined up and as each of us got to the piano, were asked to sing the first line of God Save the Queen. Well I got to the "G" in "God" and was told, "out". My ear has not improved.

I joined in a Warwick City Brass Band (Qld) recruitment drive with 80 other teens and preteens in 1969. We were taught just enough to start playing and were in. I was one of only ten recruits to stick it out. Through a case of mistaken identity, my appointed instrument was trombone (they didn't know about my ear). I continued with the band until I was 15.

After leaving university I messed about with guitar here and there, but never to any consequence or capability. I maintained a familiarity with simple written music.

In 1994, to provide enough substance to start a church band, I offered to learn bass guitar. I bought an instrument and a teach yourself book and was off. The beauty of bass guitar is that it can be played with others with only a very rudimentary ability, long root notes were a good start. I had a few lessons with a couple of different teachers, but in my view they were hopeless and I soon gave them away. They had no plan, no "curriculum" for teaching the instrument and it was all directionless. I didn't know enough to know what I needed to learn. As I gradually learned more about the instrument I slowly increased my ability. My bass playing is still pretty rudimentary and my ear is still terrible, but I can pretty much play anything that comes along in contemporary church music to an acceptable congregational level, through a combination of basic patterns, rhythms, reading and some minor improvisation. I now play bass in a bushband too, lots of firsts and fifths.

But a bass guitar is too big to easily take away on holidays and so forth, and not so good for some quiet melody picking - not for me anyway. Also as I was about to retire, I thought it would be good for the brain to learn another instrument. So I thought I would like a small stringed instrument. Lo and behold, next Christmas there was a mandolin for me under the Christmas tree. I didn't do much with it until a friend called me up the following September and said he was going to a mandolin learning group at COZMO and was keen for me to come along and check it out. I did, and decided to stick it out for the rest of the term. Come the new year I found myself promoted to Cozmo's playing group and am still there, and so is Lindsay. I think I have made reasonable progress in that time, certainly to a level that is satisfying to me, though I'm certainly no virtuoso.

My approach to progressing is this. Firstly, I could read music, though slowly and only bass clef for the past 20 years. Secondly, I guess playing a different instrument in the church and bush bands helped with a level of context and expectation. Though neither have the timing challenges that I face in Cozmo. There is of course only one secret, as you will all know. It is practice. I aim to do some practice every day, though sometimes it may only be for 10 minutes, and some days I don't get to do any at all. I also target what I want to learn and think this is the real key. As I am playing in the mandolin 1 section there are quite a lot of high notes to be learned, a challenge both for reading, position and playing. I didn't try to do it all at once.

Continued.....

Initially I concentrated on the basics of first position and reading speed. Anything outside of that I just left out. Once that was reliable, I worked only on tricky phrases in first position, including timing issues. That is something that I will keep needing to do as new challenges arise, but it seems to get easier. Then came tremolo. Anything else I couldn't yet do still just got left out. Once tremolo was sorted to an acceptable level, it was time to learn the high notes. That took quite some time, but I'm pretty much there now in terms of reading and positioning, but I still need to look at the fretboard when playing. So my current practice focus is high notes without looking. I know I also need to work more on timing as a whole, but that will have to come later. And I have a list of other areas I need to improve and no doubt things I don't even know about, but each in its good time. I am also aware of not establishing bad habits, so I need to give some thought to posture and technique too as I go along.

In the midst of this I went to the 2014 Fame Festival in Melbourne. This was a highlight for me and great fun. I was positioned in the M2s towards the back among friendly people who seemed to be at about the same playing level as me. This was very encouraging and there was a lot of mutual help. I really appreciated discussions with and comments from Lloyd from NZ during practice. I couldn't play everything, but I achieved a lot more than I expected. I highly recommend attending one of these.

Generally regular goal-oriented practice seems to be working for me and I continue to make gradual progress. I've just got to remember to be patient and to "reward" myself from time to time with easier tunes that I enjoy playing.

Trevor Smallwood

R E V I E W

“Plektra Mandolin Ensemble”

www.facebook.com/PlektraMandolin

Of the various mandolin cultures in the world, Australia's is arguably closest to that in the United States. Plektra, a seven-member ensemble, is the brainchild of Stephen Lalor, one of the leading lights of the mandolin scene down under (CMSA members who attended the recent convention in Minneapolis no doubt have fond memories of Plektra's outstanding performances there). All of the music on the CD is arranged or composed by Lalor. The playing is highly polished with (very) tight ensemble and beautiful sound throughout. Lalor's music is immediately appealing -- harmonically straightforward, highly melodic and rhythmic with a strong Russian influence (such as the first and third movements of the “Brisbane Suite,” a highlight of the CD). Many mandolinists talk a world music game, but Lalor (and Plektra) walk the walk and play for keeps.



Reviewed by Robert Margo, Classical Mandolin Society of America, August Journal 2014.

We don't just play 'em, we make 'em.



The West Australian Mandolin Orchestra (WAMO) plays at least 5 concerts a year. We have wonderful musicians meeting each Wednesday night at the Rhein Donau club and practising from 7.30 to 9.30 pm, with only a break of eight minutes. And then, some of us head to the bar after and stay till late.

All along we knew that Harry Baker our Bass player is a fantastic Luthier. Look what he just made!
BORIS.

Boris was inspired by a "guitar" Harry's father brought to Australia from Holland along with twenty-four other instruments in one of two large trunks, the other holding books and music.

Below is a photo of Harry's parents showing the twin neck guitar hanging on the wall behind them.

This particular guitar was what was known as Schrammel or Contra guitar.

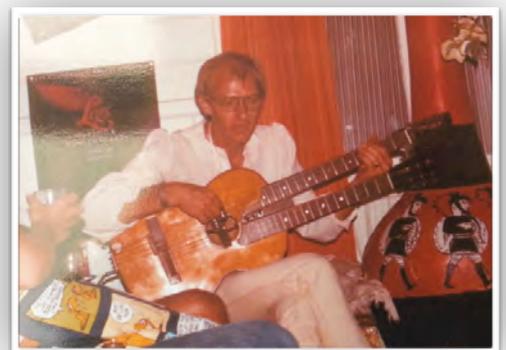
They were made and used in Vienna throughout 1800s and beyond, to play folk music in a quartet setting of 2 violins and a clarinet or concertina. One neck was regular guitar and the second neck had six extra strings descending chromatically from bottom E. The action was very high with no frets so the extra strings were plucked as drones or they just rung due to sympathetic vibrations caused by the playing of the regular neck.



Harry has been with WAMO since the first rehearsal! After a few years three members of the guitar section, John Wheatley, Terry Iverson and our Harry Baker formed a Trio to perform popular music. They ran some country dances, played at fairs and wrinkly homes. Three guitars were a bit of overkill so Terry learnt the banjo and Harry played the mandolin and mostly bass. The bass initially consisted of a tea chest bass which was fun but unsatisfactory. Seeking a more accurate and melodic instrument Harry pestered Scott Wise to convert the old

(late 1800's) Schrammel guitar to have four regular bass strings with a fretted fingerboard.

Harry played this hybrid guitar for some years and even took it to a FAME camp in Geelong. The Vintage body eventually started to come apart and because tonally it was a "pig" Harry used the necks to make a twin neck solid body electric instrument. The Trio had by this time deteriorated to playing amplified country rock. After the demise of the Trio in the mid Nineties the components were gradually cannibalised to keep other instruments performing.



Continued.....

And now for Boris!



There was an actor called Boris Karloff known to Harry, who portrayed various monsters throughout his career in early movies. You must agree this instrument is a bit of a monster. And it seems one might feel a bit of a “Pratt” playing it, which happens to be Karloff’s real name.

The Schrammel Guitar used ladder bracing across the top designed for early steel strings. It had very poor response. The basses Harry made after the Schrammel’s demise were wide bellied Martin X brace tops. Heavy strings and braces gave a warm tone with reasonable volume although, it took at least two to equal a double bass.

When Robert Schulz, WAMO’s music director purchased a Spanish Esteve nylon strung bass for Katrina Fyfe, one of our Bass players, who has taken a break recently, Harry noticed that for a relatively small bass this instrument had a warm tone and great projection.

When Harry stuck his head in the sound hole (cos he does such things) he found the bracing was slightly longer than a normal classical guitar but otherwise the same dimensions and fan design. Ergo; this design would respond to the weight of the standard nylon guitar strings as well as bass, each enhancing the other. So out of the Bogs of Mandurah (where Harry now lives) began the resurrection of the “TWIN NECK.” Harry just happened to have an oversized set of Rosewood back and sides, and a suitable Western Red Cedar Top. The Mahogany necks came from the casing of a salvaged 100 year old wood frame piano as did the spruce for the bracing. Using the Esteve bass as a template it took about 4 months for Harry to build, between doing other jobs. Boris is at least as good as the Esteve bass with each neck helping the other (which can be a problem during the rests) and “At this young age it is the worst it’s ever going to sound!” says Harry.

When I say “We” make ‘em. It is true! Here is Bryan Meyer, one of our guitarists with a guitar he recently made under the tutelage of Harry Baker.

If you would like the story of what inspired Bryan to make his own guitar, write to Plucked Strings and perhaps an article of Bryan’s “Guitar making Journey” will be revealed.

Patsy Loh

Just by chance, there is an article about the Contra Guitar in the November 2014 issue of *Concertino* magazine. If you’re interested in reading it (in German) please email and I’ll send a copy.

Marie Schulz



Which Finger: Instalment 15

Why O Why?

I first became aware of fingering (the strategy of which finger can best stop a given note) as a subject one should actively think about, when I took violin lessons for a while as a teenager. The music for the examination system then in Australia was published in special books containing the choice of acceptable pieces and advice on how to tackle them. I remember candidates being encouraged to think about "the important matter of fingering". It took me a long time, though, before I realized there was more to the subject than merely deciding whether to play something in the 3rd position or the 1st position, or even on the G or the D string. But even the idea that there are choices to be made by the player, and that everything is not pre-ordained, was an eye-opener.

Much of my present thinking on fingering arose by working with amateur plucked string ensembles. Almost every player of the mandolin (a plucked string, horizontally-held instrument) scrupulously follows an arbitrary and extremely normative system originally enunciated a few hundred years ago for the violin (a bowed-string instrument held under the chin, and bearing utterly no similarity with the mandolin) and which hasn't changed much since then. I noticed that there was a lot of regularity about which notes sounded bad, and began to trace a consistent and predictable pattern. Contrary to what some people seem to believe, the pattern has nothing to do with how fast or how high the notes are. This Instalment will discuss just a few of these many regularities. Some of them have to do with the left hand, some with the right, and some with both. Like many such matters, **Case no. 1** sounds so trivial as to be improbable.

The experiment:

If you play in a group, see if you can enlist your friends' aid for the following experiment: First, make it clear to the players that they only get one chance, and compensating after an initial mistake means falsifying the result. The experiment does require an element of surprise, and it also involves everybody doing something at the same time, so ask them to practise the game first by clapping their hands on "**one!**", only once, when you count out loud "one - two - three - four - **one!**" When you feel everybody understands the basic rules, change the handclap to making a single down-stroke on the A string. It's important that they shouldn't practise this fairly simple task; the aim of the experiment is to ascertain if they can do it accurately without any special preparation and a couple of false starts. After all, when they perform, they also only get one chance at getting it right.

Chances are, more than one or two people will strike a string other than the A string. If this is the case - and I assure you I often conduct the experiment and am seldom surprised - I think it's worth looking for the cause, and finding a solution.

There seem to be a number of possible causes, so in no particular order:

- i. Do you really think everybody in your group knows for sure which string is the A string? I wish I thought that - I used to...
- ii. Increase the challenge a little. Say "play the open **2nd** string", and see what happens.
- iii. As with hitting a baseball, golf ball or tennis ball, the preparation preceding the stroke determines the accuracy. Every sports coach knows this, but many mandolin teachers don't seem to have noticed. How did you say you prepare a stroke on a particular string?

The solutions seem obvious:

- Learn the standard basic terms, like the names of the notes and the numbers of the strings, for example. This is a really good idea, I think. It makes conversations a lot more meaningful.
- Don't take any technical matter at all for granted. There are good ways and not-so-good ways to do even things which seem easy. Good mandolin players, like good sportspeople, make hard things look easy. Try to get sensible information. (See for example [The Mandolin Game](#), Game C.)

Case no. 2 is also typical of numerous things which are overlooked for the very reason that they seem so unlikely:

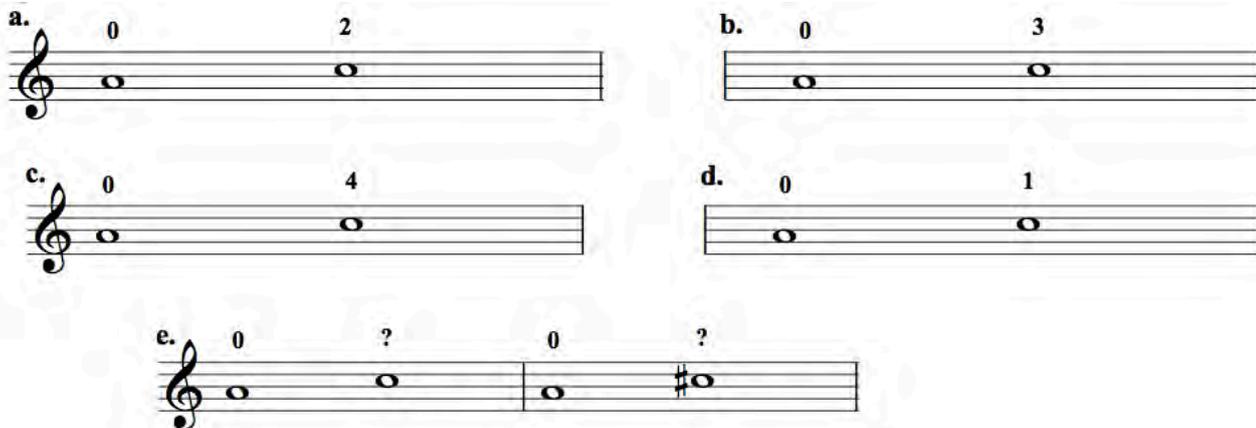
I maintain that, statistically, a stopped (fingered) note immediately after an open string is very often not good. Its "not-goodness" can take any conceivable form: it can be unclear, simply wrong (like F instead of F#), a combination of both, or something else - just not the way the player really intends it to be. It seems that players mentally put such events into the category of regrettable accidents that happen sometimes, but are an inevitable fact of life one has to live with. As a teacher and ensemble leader, I disagree vehemently.

Please try the situations in Figure 1. If you then still think my imagined observations are pedantic nonsense, then the world is as it should be and it's just my deluded problem. If there's some truth in what I say though, perhaps it's worth doing something about it.

Suggestions for how to proceed:

- It goes without saying that one should try each situation very slowly, observantly and honestly. Anything else would of course be self-deception.
- Please apply the following procedures in turn to each situation:
 - First stroke each note with a down-stroke.
 - After you've tried this for a few minutes, compare the results with alternate down and up-strokes.
 - Finally, sound the first note with a down-stroke and the next by a hammer-on.

Fig. 1



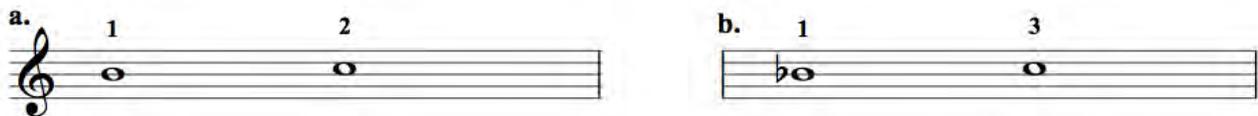
Considerations:

- i. In situations a - d, among other things you can examine if all fingers are equally effective. If properly trained, they should all be equally useful.
- ii. In situation e (two measures), try different fingers at each question mark to see if that variable makes a difference. It shouldn't.
- iii. If the order of notes in each situation is reversed - first a fingered note and then an open string - does that make a difference?
- iv. If you agree with my assertion (Case no. 2) that the fingered note after an open string is in fact disproportionately unreliable, please see if you agree with my possible

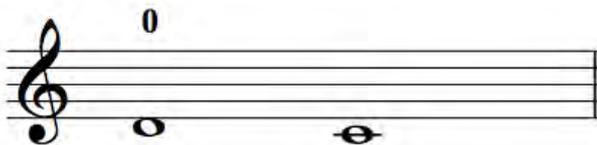
Explanation:

Playing an open string principally involves only the right (plectrum) hand. Playing a closed (fingered) note though demands many things of the left hand as well, every one of which must be done successfully. The details are treated exhaustively in [The Mandolin Game](#) (especially Games P and Q) but in a generalized sense, perhaps the most obvious different factor is that stopping a note requires a much higher level of force than an open string, which requires none whatever, at least from the stopping hand.

Compare situations a and b in Figure 2 with the corresponding examples (a and b) in Figure 1.

Fig. 2

Many people find the results of Figure 2, where both notes are stopped, meaning there is no big change of pressure requirements, dramatically better than in Figure 1, which involves a big change of state, from negligible pressure requirement for an open string to a lot more for the fingered note. As I said, there is more to it than what is discussed here. My object here is mainly to point out that there really is a technical issue in this context, and that the matter really should be addressed in teaching. [The Mandolin Game](#) does this. Figure 3 illustrates a rather special instance of the phenomenon.

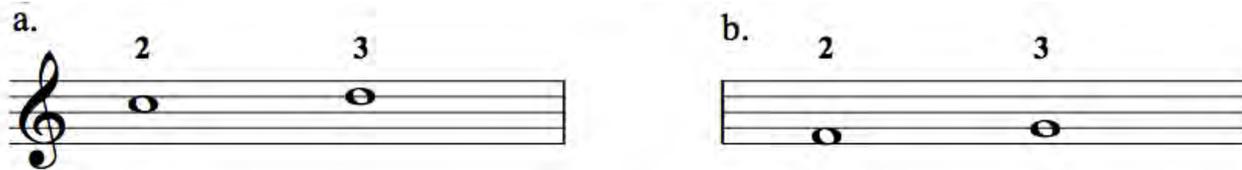
Fig. 3

If this situation happens very often - as of course it does - that very fact makes it special. I recall even many years ago describing the note C on the G-string as the most difficult note on the mandolin. In saying this, I intended the provocative claim to arouse interest and hopefully get people to take care. On the one hand, it's obviously not difficult, in the obvious sense that running a marathon or solving a complicated mathematical problem is difficult. On the other hand though, it was (and still is!) difficult, however, inasmuch as the note C often sounds awful. It takes special care to make it sound good, and I think that makes it "difficult" - not to be taken for granted.

Discussion:

- i. I do think that the sound is musically most convincing if the D preceding the C is the open string, and not the note stopped at the 7th fret on the 4th string.
- ii. That means that the C fulfils the general condition of Case no. 2 - a stopped note following an open string - with the attendant problems described above.
- iii. Not only that though, it also involves a change of string, really itself a special subject (see [TMG](#) - Game F).
- iv. The problem is made worse if the player tries to play the C with the pinkie - as ALL mandolin books prescribe. (The pinkie should of course be as reliable as its three companions, but...)
- v. So please take care!

Case no. 3 touches on an issue which frequently occurs in this series: the very basis of traditional fingering theory. I, my students and an increasing number of well-informed plucked string musicians, regard the situation shown in Figure 4 with dismay:

Fig. 4

Forgive me for asking a not-really-innocent question.

The question: Would you need the indicated finger numbers to help your fingering decision?

Answer: Most probably not. The fingering indication is to play the notes in the so-called 1st position, which is what would most readily suggest itself to most mandolin players anyway. If asked, many players could even name this position. Far fewer would recognize the 2nd **finger pattern** though, characterized by a whole step between the 2nd and 3rd fingers (please think about this statement).

My simple observation is that it seldom works - meaning that both notes are clean, in tune and connected. As with the other cases discussed so far, most mandolinists overlook this fact. After all, it's what the experts always (sorry, I know of awfully few exceptions!) prescribe, so why question it? It must be right, and therefore nothing can go wrong...

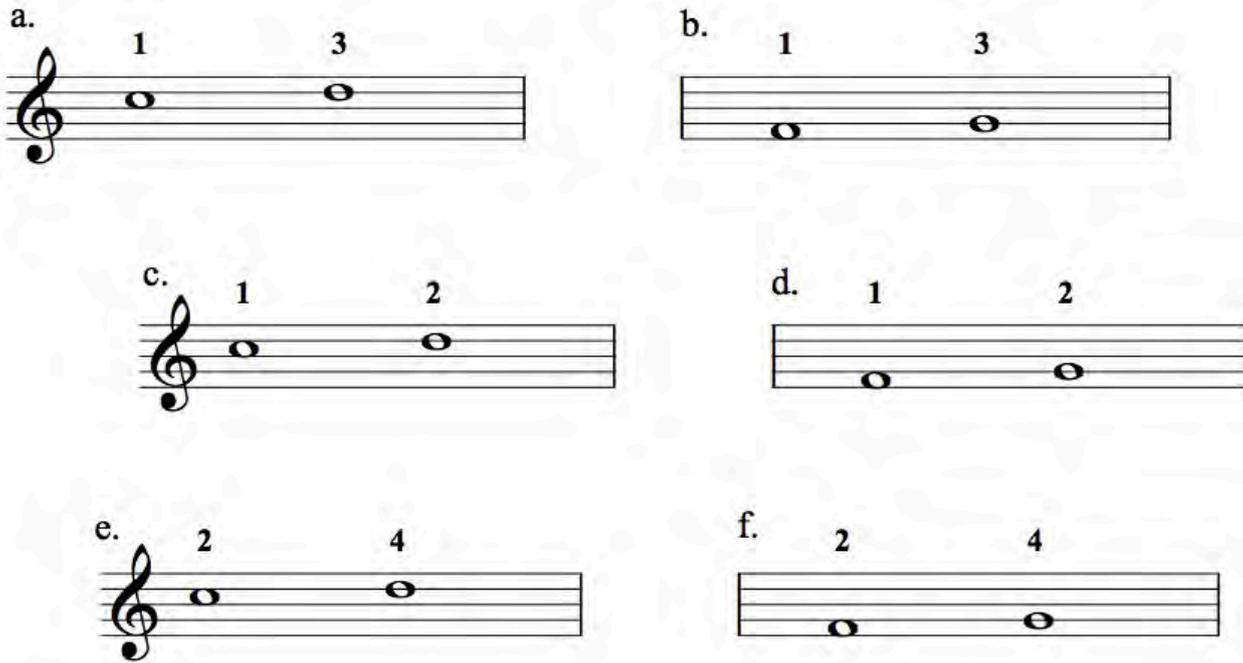
Please try it yourself. Remember that even most of these experts generally agree that the F-finger should continue stopping until after G has been sounded, and very many hands are either too small or not trained to do this. This principle is no different from on the guitar, lute or even bowed-string instruments. And please don't get me wrong: I know as well as anybody else that there are exceptions where one or even more of the parameters cleanness, in-tuneness and smoothness do work. They usually involve among others:

- i. people who practice a lot,
- ii. people with long fingers and, perhaps to a slightly lesser extent,
- iii. violin players.

Please try Figure 4, slowly, carefully and observantly, for a minute or so. If you don't observe these conditions, you will simply be falsifying your impressions and kidding yourself.

By way of comparison, try then the fingerings indicated in

Fig. 5



For what it's worth, I make three predictions:

- i. If you are conscientious, after a few minutes, any of the fingerings in Figure 5 will work better than Figure 4. (Practising helps – gee!)
- ii. At first, you will prefer c and d over the other possibilities. If you persevere longer, however, this preference might well change.
- iii. If you are first and foremost a good guitarist, have for some reason now started playing the mandolin, and use the fingering in Figure 4 only because somebody has told you that's what mandolin players do, a number of things will happen:
 - You will instantly prefer the fingerings 1-3 and 2-4 in Figure 5, which will seem as refreshing to you as the first draught of cool and clear water after hours of wandering through a hot and dry desert.
 - You will be able easily to use the fingering in Figure 4 c and d, but you won't want to anymore, because you now can't see any reason for it, when 1-3 or 2-4, among other possibilities, are simply physically easier.
 - You will perhaps wonder why anybody at all thinks Figure 4 is a good idea. Please don't be uncharitable though; there are historical reasons behind it, even if they are really not very rational and convincing.

The list of predictable and readily avoidable weaknesses goes on and on. They are most noticeable not with star professionals, who from a young age practice hours a day. Such people go to the trouble to make even inefficient things work - at least until arthritis or RSI or back pain put paid to their industriousness. I think the people who are currently poorly served by the expert opinion leaders are the serious amateurs, people who really want to play well but don't have as much time to practise, and rely on getting sound advice. I am convinced that there are sensible and practical solutions to many problems. But the solutions certainly won't become common knowledge as long as the problems themselves are not even recognised. The spouses of alcoholics don't have a monopoly on "denial"; it's much more rampant among mandolin teachers.

Keith Harris, Marburg.