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# Fiddler

Magazine

Fletcher Bright

Maeve Donnelly

How to Make a  
Recording

Overcoming  
Performance Anxiety

Cape Breton's  
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# Fletcher Bright:

## *Playing, Teaching, Giving Back*

By Jim Wood



The fiddle is the most magical of all instruments with its capacity to produce such enchanting tones; possibly only the human voice can match its expressiveness. When someone puts a fiddle under his chin and draws the bow across the strings, anyone within ear shot can immediately intuit the very makeup, the soul, of the person making sound with this little wooden box. To a great extent, the measure of a fiddler's greatness (or any musician, for that matter) is his ability to reveal his innermost workings and interior life so that others may connect with his humanity. By extension, this fiddler also can define his place in the history and cultural heritage of his people with a simple tune. Fletcher Bright embodies these aesthetics with such grace and ease that anyone listening immediately recognizes that he is an individual of great substance, the type of person who has lived his life in a way that has really mattered and made the world a better place.

Now seventy-six years old, his life-long musical journey in many ways is the history of folk fiddling in the Southeast for the last sixty years, and he shows no signs of slowing down now. His nature is to continually search out new tunes and discover better ways to approach the instrument, and his enthusiasm is contagious. His commitment to teaching others what he has learned along the way also speaks volumes about his basic character.

Fletcher Bright studied piano and violin as a child in his native Chattanooga, Tennessee, but his real musical story began at age fourteen when he discovered the music that would later be coined bluegrass. He followed the fiddling of proto-bluegrass artists such as Arthur Smith and Tommy Magness (and to this day his tendency is to keep one foot in the pre-World War II era, old-timey style and feel), but he came under the spell, as did practically every fiddler of his generation, of Benny Martin and Chubby Wise, and this fusion of old time fiddle tunes and bluegrass drive, speed, and intensity are hallmarks of his playing. Caught up in the excitement of Bill Monroe's Big Bang in 1945 when Chubby Wise and Earl Scruggs forever defined bluegrass fiddle and banjo, respectively, Bright and several high school classmates formed the Dismembered Tennesseans, who still perform actively (with a few personnel changes in recent years due to illness and death) after sixty-two years. (Surely this wins the band the title "The Most Durable in the History of Music.")

A few years back Bright also formed the Fletcher Bright Fiddle Band, with his son George Bright on guitar, in order to explore and share his deep and abiding love of fiddle tunes. These ensembles and his solo work as a performer have carried him to such far-flung places as the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and

*...Anyone listening immediately recognizes that Fletcher is an individual of great substance, the type of person who has lived his life in a way that has really mattered and made the world a better place.*

the American Folk Festival in New York City as well as regional festivals and concert halls throughout the Southeast for years (he has even performed his own orchestrations with the Chattanooga Symphony), but his work over the past two decades as an instructor at summer music camps such as the Augusta Heritage Center (Elkins, West Virginia), Nash Camp (Cumberland Furnace, Tennessee), Bluegrass on the Beach (Portland, Oregon), Mark O'Connor's Fiddle Camp (Dickson, Tennessee), the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes (Port Townsend, Washington), and Sore Fingers (Kingham Hill, England) has perhaps reached even wider audiences and has definitely directly touched more lives. In a more intimate and extended situation such as a week-long camp, students and colleagues have come to know Bright as not only an outstanding fiddler (who, as an aside, plays jazz piano more than passingly well) and collector of tunes, but as a genuinely generous man who has never held back from sharing his gifts with others.

His other public life as one of the top commercial real estate developers in the United States has brought him tremendous success in business and financial reward, and he has for decades been a true patron of the arts, supporting various theaters, concert series, festivals, scholarship funds, and organizations such as the International Bluegrass Music Museum and SPBGMA (the Society for the Preservation of Bluegrass Music of America). Astonishingly, his credits, awards, and activities in the world of real estate, in support of general education, and with his church and choir are equally as extensive as his musical life and history (and he is an experienced pilot to boot), but in 2005 he received one of his most distinguished honors with his Governor's Folklife Heritage Award presented by Governor Phil Bredesen. It is the state of Tennessee's highest acknowledgement for achievement in the arts.

A few months ago I spent the afternoon at Bright's beautiful home atop Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, before we played a show together in Chattanooga that evening, and we recorded our conversation about his life of fiddling. Following are a few excerpts.

*Jim Wood: On emotional, spiritual, and sociological levels, what do you think about fiddle music, what does it mean to you, and how do you understand its meaning something in our culture and our society (not just Southern culture but in general)?*

*Fletcher Bright: You know I love good music, and I go toward old time music maybe because it's easy enough for me to play (but it really is not that easy if you play it well), but that's not an exclusive with me. I like all kinds of music. I think music can tranquilize you. I think it can improve your brain (and I need all the improvement I can get), but to be able to play the music and enjoy it really does play an important part in my well being. I like to listen to it, and the older I get, the more I like to listen to*

*it. I don't have to play. I used to just have to play all the time. If somebody else was playing it, it didn't suit me as well; I wanted to be right in the middle of it.*

*I initially was captivated by the rhythm, and when I hear something grooving, I just love it.*

*So it was mainly bluegrass rhythm at first?*

*Yes, that's right, and you know before I starting playing bluegrass, I got to be a fairly good boogie-woogie piano player. That had a drive to it.*

*Bill Monroe's bass player was playing boogie-woogie bass lines on things like "Rocky Road Blues."*

*That's right. He would play in two on the vocal parts and would walk with four to the bar on the instrumental sections.*

*So where do you see fiddle music (and in particular, fiddle tunes), the way it fits into bluegrass, Irish music in Ireland, and so on? Where do you see the fiddle as a voice of folk music?*

*It's right in the center of it as far as I'm concerned, and I hate to categorize fiddle music into many boxes. I like to think that I'm maybe a traditional fiddle player, but I don't like to think of it necessarily as bluegrass or old time or Irish. I like to play Irish tunes, for instance. You know I can't play Irish like Liz Carroll, but I can play the notes.*

*Right. You play the tunes your way just like I play the same tunes my way or whatever. You and I are coming from the same school. I grew up around guys like Buddy Spicher and Howdy Forrester and Benny Martin. A Fritz Kreisler waltz and Scottish hornpipe and a break on "Foggy Mountain Special" and playing Bob Wills tunes were just what fiddle players did. Country, you know like the Tommy Jackson stuff. I didn't grow up with those distinctions. I just thought of myself as a fiddle player.*

*That's exactly my view, and I like to think of it that way. I really didn't see it categorized or boxed until I started going to some of these teaching camps where they put people in a room and say "This is bluegrass, and over here, it's old time."*

*So I see you at seventy-six as a very vital musician, constantly learning, constantly expanding your horizons, and I see you as an important person as part of a continuum of (for lack of a better word) culture. How do you see yourself in that continuum?*

*You mention learning new tunes. If I'm not continually expanding*



*"I do feel like [music] is something we need to pass on and give back and share, and I think it's vitally important for us to do that."*

*Interview with Jim Wood*

and learning something new, I get bored — that's part of it. It's continuing to widen a little bit. I wish I could say that I was continuing to play better and better, but that doesn't happen when you get older and your fingers get stiff and you get arthritis. It becomes a challenge. But I do feel like it's something we need to pass on and give back and share, and I think it's vitally important for us to do that. I think that is, as much as anything, what I do. Of course, I am directly involved with this with my teaching.

*In the teaching side of it, it is closer to home. You see the direct impact it can have on the individuals and maybe smaller groups of people. How do you see the impact of fiddling (music in general) in terms of the direction that Western Civilization has gone?*

Wow. You know we don't know where it's going, but we know where the music is, and it's sort of an anchor.

*A kind of touchstone.*

Yes, a reference point that is fairly constant and dependable. You know the music is going to be there. I can always go get the fiddle and play "Soldier's Joy," and I don't know how many people I've taught to play "Soldier's Joy." And it's always going to be done. Every now and then, a new tune gets written, and sometimes it makes it into the mainstream, but it's not very often. It really has to be something pretty good, doesn't it? Otherwise it's only on a CD, and it's forgotten.

*I asked Bright to contribute a few tunes to this article in order to get the flavor of his fiddling. We chose "Sally Goodin" to demonstrate his approach to the most common fiddle tune of all time.*

*(Yes, this is true; thankfully, "Orange Blossom Special" is not at the top of the list.) "The Wise Maid" and "Grasshopper on a Sweet Potato Vine" reflect his interests in Irish and obscure old time tunes, respectively. He has been on a life-long quest to expand his repertory and dig deeper into the tradition, always looking to have fun along the way. Fletcher's tone is big and powerful with tons of drive, due in no small part to his concentration on solid bowing patterns that bring out the inherent strength of any given melody. The following paragraph is his introduction to these tunes.*

One of my strong interests is bowing and the use of old time rhythm carried forward into a bluegrass setting. I have listened to a lot of old time players who utilize threes (three notes per bow stroke). This gives a good syncopated feel and avoids the monotony of an overworked Nashville bow [*author's note: the standard shuffle bow pattern of long-short-short, long-short-short, etc.*].

I use a lot of threes, rarely slur across strings, and am usually in the process of returning to a down-driven bow. Sometimes I leave some of the threes out and simply drive with saw strokes. One of the nice things about threes is that they can be taken out without disturbing the rest of the bowing.

[www.dismemberedtennesseans.com](http://www.dismemberedtennesseans.com)

*[Jim Wood is a five-time Tennessee Fiddle Champion who performs on fiddle, mandolin, banjo, and guitar with his wife Inge. Their CD "Jim and Inge Wood in Concert: September 24, 2005" was given a rave review in the Fall 2006 issue of Fiddler Magazine. For more information on recordings, concerts, and workshops, please see Jim's website at [www.JimWoodMusic.net](http://www.JimWoodMusic.net).]*

## Discography

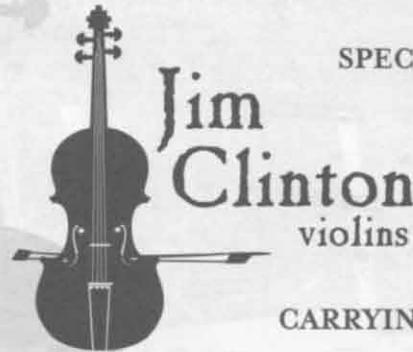
### DVD

- The Dismembered Tennesseans, self-titled

### Recordings

- The Dismembered Tennesseans, *Singing Their Greatest Hits*
- The Dismembered Tennesseans, *Greatest Hits Vol. II: Living Black & White*
- The Dismembered Tennesseans, *We've Never Sounded Better (and that's a shame—after 57 years)*
- The Dismembered Tennesseans, *Theft Proof*
- The Dismembered Tennesseans, *Live at the Laurel, March 31, 2001*
- The Dismembered Tennesseans, *Singing from the Heart through the Nose*
- The Dismembered Tennesseans, *A Two-Disc Compilation of Rare Tracks*
- Fletcher Bright (solo CD), *Fiddle Tunes: They All Sound Alike*
- Fletcher Bright Fiddle Band, self-titled
- Fletcher Bright Fiddle Band, *Last Night's Fun*
- Fletcher Bright Fiddle Band, *Live at the Laurel, January 26, 2002*
- Fletcher Bright Fiddle Band, *Back at the Laurel*

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## Grasshopper on a Sweet Potato Vine

The musical score is written on four staves in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. Vertical 'V' marks are placed above the notes to indicate bowing techniques such as accents or breath marks. The score includes repeat signs at the beginning of the first staff and at the end of the fourth staff. Measure numbers 5, 9, and 14 are indicated at the start of their respective staves.

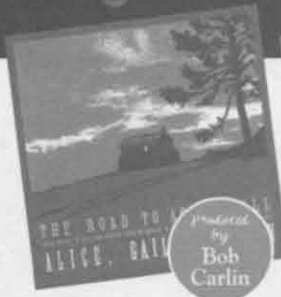
# Sally Goodin'

As played by Fletcher Bright. Drone and use double stops. Single notes are notated for ease in reading.

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 2/4 time signature. It consists of 51 measures across 11 staves. The notation is heavily characterized by double stops, indicated by 'V' above the notes, and drone notes. The piece is divided into two main sections: the first 15 measures and the second 36 measures. The second section begins with the instruction "Georgia Bow through this part" above measure 16. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and repeat signs. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' in a box at the end of measure 45. The piece concludes with a final double stop in measure 51.

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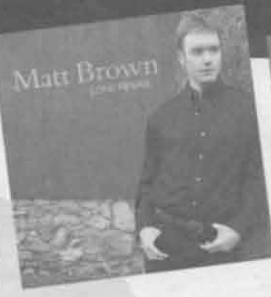


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56

61

Measures 65 -68: drone the 3rd string playing the A note with the 4th finger

65

70

Tag

76

2

# The Wise Maid

## Fiddler Magazine's Music Editor, Jack Tuttle, has a new CD with his daughter Molly



This recording has garnered high praise in the bluegrass community and highlights the shining new light of vocalist, guitarist and banjoist Molly Tuttle, who despite recording this at the tender age of thirteen, is creating a stir among bluegrass aficionados.

Molly is a gifted singer, influenced by the likes of Hazel Dickens, Cousin Emmy and Gillian Welch. Her understated voice is soulful and intense, and reflects a deep understanding of bluegrass and old-time singing. Her guitar and banjo solos are mature and solid, occasionally flashy, but always interesting.

Molly's bluegrass teacher is also her playing partner and father, Jack Tuttle, who has been a fixture in the S.F. Bay Area bluegrass scene for twenty-eight years. His reputation for developing new young talent is only enhanced by this recording, but he also gets a chance to step to the front himself with his skills on fiddle, mandolin, banjo, guitar and vocals. The recording also features John Kael on bass.

The songs on this CD are mostly reinterpretations of older songs, with some interesting twists, all while maintaining the feel of bluegrass (and some old-time) from long ago.

Available at [www.JackTuttle.com](http://www.JackTuttle.com)

*"Father and daughter duos are rare, but Jack and Molly have a marvelous vocal blending with Molly belting out her solos with an authority that belies her age." — B. Hough, CBA on the web*

*"With her crystal-clear voice, crisp falsettos and her apparently instinctive interpretations, The Old Apple Tree is bound to be just the first of many CDs to come." — Dennis Brunnenmeyer: KVMR Radio*

Check out Jack and Molly and the Tuttle Kids on YouTube!

