

Taylor, Bill

One-and-a-two-and-a-three

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STORY BY HENRY BURY, THE INTELLIGENCER

Bill Taylor has a sharp ear for music — especially when it comes to the fiddle.

He has been playing the fiddle by ear for more than a half century.

Yet, he doesn't even know now to read music.

"Everything I hear, I play. I don't rely on music sheets or notes," he said with a gleam in his eyes.

The 65-year-old Taylor has been thrilling audiences throughout Quinte with his fiddle-playing prowess for 54 years. For many of those years, he played in country and western bands throughout the Quinte area.

In his later years, he and other musicians played for residents of nursing homes.

Nowadays, Taylor said he is content playing the fiddle in his Aldersgate apartment and during meeting nights for local fiddle clubs. He also enjoys listening to hundreds of homemade cassettes of his former playing days.

His idol growing up was Don Messer and Taylor has taught himself to play the same style as the former great musician.

"I'd listen to his records over and over again and played what I heard. Don Messer was the best as far as I am concerned," he said. "He had a style and sound all of his own like nobody else and I have tried to copy that style and sound."

Asked whether he has been successful, Taylor chose his reply carefully.

"I can play like him. But I'm not saying I'm as good as him."

Taylor acknowledged there's another good reason why he enjoys playing Don Messer's style.

"I want to keep him alive in my music as long as I'm alive because he was the best fiddle player in my books."

The Madoc native first picked up a fiddle at the age of 11.

His dad, Ed, was an accomplished fiddle player while his mother played both the piano and organ.

"I was born and raised around music," he said. "I consider my musical talent a gift from the Good

Lord."

Taylor's father taught him how to play the fiddle by ear.

"I had a pair of sticks that I made and used to sit by my dad and play my sticks like a fiddle. He made me a fiddle out of a cigar box and then he bought me a tin fiddle to play on. Later, he bought me a half-size fiddle to learn on," he recalled.

He also credits instructor, Don Johnson, now living in Trenton, for helping him hone his skills.

Taylor still remembers the first song he played with his dad — The Bear went over the Mountain.

He also has fond memories of his first band, the Madoc Musicmakers.

"I was 16 years old and it was quite a thrill to be playing in a band and having the audience dance to our songs."

One of his favourite bands was the Doug Mumford Band with whom he played from 1950-62. Mumford is currently the reeve of Tweed.

Music didn't pay the bills, though, and he had find 'real' work.

After finishing Grade 8, Taylor went straight to work serving gas and doing general maintenance for Pigden Motor Sales in Madoc.

He then joined his father in the well drilling business. Taylor apprenticed with him for three years before he decided to open his own business.

Taylor ran his own operation in Madoc from 1965 until he sold it in 1982. After a stint selling cars for Bert Jones in Madoc, he settled on driving school bus and charter buses in Centre Hastings for several years.

Taylor retired four years ago and moved to Belleville.

In retirement, his most onerous task is deciding which of his nine fiddles he should pick up and play.

"I don't even know where I got some of those fiddles. But I enjoy playing every one."

Why a fiddle?

"The fiddle has the sweetest sound of any instrument...people love the fiddle. It has a sound all of its own and I guess you can say they hunger for it."

Taylor also remembers what his dad told him when he first started.

"He told me to play one instrument well and stick with it. I have stuck with it for five decades and I hope to be fiddling for many years to come."