

Fiddling's fine as a family affair

Northern Hills brings together local musicians

LEANNE DOHY
NEIGHBOURS

The sound of many fiddles together, says young musician Claire Kelly, is joyful and full — and so much more fun than just one alone.

"It's a more vibrant sound," says Claire, nine years old and a devoted member of the Northern Hills Fiddlers. "It's louder, and it feels neat."

The Northern Hills Fiddlers, formed two years ago, brings together violin students of all ages for the ensemble experience — something that is one of the basic tenets of the Suzuki method of music instruction. Director and founder Catherine Rose started the group to provide her own violin students a chance to play with others.

"They don't have a string program in the Calgary public school system below the high school level," Rose says. "There were so many of my students who wanted to play as a group, we started getting together in the lower level of my home."

The group grew quickly, and now meets in the community room of the Real

Canadian Superstore in Coventry Hills. Every Friday night, fiddlers aged eight to adults, get together to make music, each playing at his or her own individual level. Including the adults provides them with a hard-to-find ensemble opportunity, too — and lets parents and children learn together.

"I always encourage parents to rent a violin for at least the first few months when their child is taking lessons," Rose says. "That way, the parents gain an appreciation for how hard it is, instead of just being armchair critics, and the kids love it. They can tell their parents what to do!"

Besides, that, too, is part of the Suzuki method.

"In Japan, Suzuki would teach the mothers for two or three months before he would teach the children," she says. "Obviously, most moms don't have time for that these days, but it's still a great family thing to do together."

Rose, who studied violin at the University of Arizona for nine years, loves to play alongside her own two daughters, ages 29 and 10. She says it offers an alternative for families who aren't into sports or the competitive tack of some music programs.

"It's one of the things that first struck me when I saw the Suzuki method — that the children played with great joy, co-operating with each other rather than competing," Rose says.

The difference between fiddle and violin, Rose explains, is in the hand position.

Fiddle music is played primarily with the hand in "first position," close to the scroll of the instrument, while "violin" music uses the entire length of the fingerboard.

"All the music we do in the group is in first or second position, so that everyone can play," she says. "We do a lot of Celtic music because it's just fun."

It's also generally uptempo — although, with a group largely made up of beginners, even uptempo gears down a bit.

"We all start out together, and people play what they're comfortable with," Rose says. "We'll play *The Devil's Dream*, a really famous fiddle piece that gets faster and faster, and by the end we just have three players left, going madly."

There are no entrance auditions, and the group is open to anyone who has had some formal training.

"I do ask that people are enrolled in lessons, because I can't stop the whole group to teach one person how to play," she says.

The group performs together as well. They'll go wherever they're invited, without charging money, often to care centres and schools.

That's the part Claire Kelly most enjoys. "It's nice to make people smile," she says. "I like performing, because it makes you feel important. You give something."

The Northern Hills Fiddlers website is at www.northernhillsfiddlers.org.



Grant Black, Calgary Herald

Catherine Rose is the director of the Northern Hills Fiddlers.

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE... WITH THE SOUND OF FIDDLES

How Catherine Rose created an outlet for her violin students, including Claire Kelly, 9. See page N7.

