



M
WINTER 2014

PLAY ME SOMETHING



QUICK & DEVILISH

STORY BY DALE SMITH
PHOTO BY NICHOLAS BENNER



Folklorist HOWARD MARSHALL's new book covers
Missouri's historic old-time fiddling tradition.



WHEN IT COMES TO MUSIC,

Howard Marshall's girl-next-door has always been old-time fiddling. In his new book, *Play Me Something Quick and Devilish: Old-time Fiddlers in Missouri* (University of Missouri Press, 2012), it's clear the professor emeritus of art history and archaeology is still crazy about her.

Fiddlers have been in every generation of Marshall's family since at least 1830, when his family settled in Randolph County, Mo., and old-time fiddling was common in his hometown of Moberly. The styles he heard were either rough-and-tumble (think "Orange Blossom Special") or smooth and graceful (think "Tennessee Waltz"). Marshall, BA '70, always favored the latter.

But as a teenager, jazz turned Marshall's head, and he flirted with the music of trumpeter Louis

found himself in a small audience just a few feet away from fiddler Kenny Baker, who performed with Bill Monroe. "Baker was such a smooth and articulate musician who played complicated horn-pipes and waltzes with careful double stops and good intonation. That overwhelmed me. I said, 'Whatever that is, I've gotta do that!'" It dawned on him that Baker was putting Marshall's youth on playback. "Something about that brand of fiddling got into the deep chambers of my soul and has always been there," he says.

NO MORE FIDDLING AROUND

Marshall has spent the past 40 years living out that emotion not only through his own fiddling but also through his scholarship on the art form and other traditional culture. His academic career included a stint at the Library of Congress American Folklife Center before joining MU's faculty in 1982. *Play Me Something Quick and Devilish* is his second book since retiring in 2000.

The book chronicles Missouri's heritage of traditional fiddling, starting in French villages such as Ste. Genevieve during the 1700s when the land still belonged to a succession of kings

→ The smooth and articulate style of fiddler Kenny Baker, shown at right with Don Reno, inspired Howard Marshall to play old-time music on the fiddle. As a scholar of the form, Marshall sought out fiddler Lloyd Lalumondier, 89, far right, to learn about the art through his storytelling.



Armstrong, clarinetist Benny Goodman and guitarist Wes Montgomery. After joining the U.S. Marine Corps in 1963, he landed in San Diego during the early days of the folk revival. Roots music called to him, and in his spare time, he performed bluegrass music on guitar in coffee houses. "That was even before the word 'hippie' was coined," Marshall jokes.

While in graduate school at Indiana University-Bloomington in the 1970s, Marshall attended several music festivals, where he heard too much rough-style fiddling for his taste. But one day he

called Louis. From there, it covers Missouri fiddling across time and place as well as social and ethnic communities. Although Marshall knows the fiddle literature, much of the book comes out of his oral-history interviews with players. Such content seldom appears in standard histories, he says. "But if we are to learn all we can, we need to seek out bearers of the tradition who might be older people, like Lloyd Lalumondier of Ste. Genevieve, who is 89. When he talks about his grandfather playing the fiddle, he's talking about a time maybe as far back as the Civil War. Not many

KENNY BAKER: HOWARD MARSHALL; LLOYD LALUMONDIER: PLAY ME SOMETHING QUICK AND DEVILISH

musicologists would think you could learn much by doing that. But I became interested in music because I'm interested in people. I like old people and their stories."

DEBUNKING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FIDDLEING

Play Me Something is full of surprises. For instance, Missouri fiddling, with its distinct regional styles, is an amalgam created not only by the Scotch and Irish immigrants but also by African-Americans, Germans and American Indians.

Marshall offers readers a new gloss on the word "traditional" itself in a section on Missouri fiddlers' most famous polka, the "Jenny Lind Polka." Lind, aka The Swedish Nightingale, was the best-known opera singer of the 19th century. In 1850, famed circus impresario P.T. Barnum orchestrated Lind's two-year tour of the United States that brought the songstress as far west as St. Louis. Stoked by Barnum's relentless promotion, the popular mania for Lind's performances makes the Three Tenors look like a flash in the pan. The mass merchandising included Jenny Lind flour, jewelry, dolls, gloves, bonnets, dishes, cigars and even curvaceous Jenny Lind piano legs.

that old-time fiddle tunes often come from composers and commercial sheet music."

The idea that upper-crust parlor music could move into folk tradition might seem counterintuitive — but only until reading Marshall's chapter on musical literacy among Missouri fiddlers. By the late 1800s, he says, just about every prosperous Missouri railroad town had a high-tradition music teacher, often a German-speaking immigrant. "Those amazing teachers brought a musical literacy to us and added a wonderful layer over the old rough-and-ready folk music of the Civil War days." So, although Marshall's grandfather Wiley Marshall learned from his father to play square-dance music by ear, he took lessons in the 1890s and became a well-rounded musician. "He played light classical music with an orchestra in the town park under the gazebo on Sunday afternoons. And for 50 years he also played hymns with my grandmother playing the piano in a little church." If fiddling square-dance tunes, hymns and classical music seem mutually exclusive to us now, it wasn't always that way, Marshall says. The wall-building between genres picked up steam after World War II.

† Fiddles are portable. The Corps of Discovery, far left, included fiddlers Pierre Cruzatte and George Gibson. The tradition of fiddling goes way back in Marshall's family and includes his grandfather Wiley Marshall, center, ca. 1900. Popular music entered fiddling tradition when a polka, still in the fiddling repertoire, was named for famous singer Jenny Lind, below. She is pictured on a "cigarette card," enclosed in packages of Wills cigarettes during the late 1800s.



And there was the polka itself, arranged by Allen Dodworth. He likely heard polka music in Bohemia in 1840 when it was a new form, then arranged one of the tunes and brought it home to the U.S. Lind remained in popular memory, and a century later in Missouri, old-time fiddlers were still playing two of her eponymous polka's five sections as part of standard repertoire. "The process of sanding down the edges of the original 'Jenny Lind Polka' resulted in a tune that today is usually mistaken as a reel (hoedown) for square dancing," Marshall writes. But it "... reminds us

GET READY TO PLAY

In this age of the quick musical fix from iTunes or YouTube, Marshall hopes readers will come away from *Play Me Something Quick* with a sense of the importance of homemade music. "When I do programs, older people often say, 'My grandmother or grandfather used to play the fiddle or piano.' All kinds of music are important to us. If people would open their ears and hearts to all the music that's out there, whether rap or rock 'n' roll or fiddling, we'd be happier people. It's all music." **M**