

1a. Swallowtail Jig

basic setting

Track 1a - 76 bpm

traditional Irish jig

Fiddle tunes in most older and many contemporary collections are noted in the basic, bare-bones version seen on this page - with no chords, bowings, accents, tempo or dynamics markings. This creates a mystery that must be solved. How do we interpret what's there? What does 'style' mean? Where do we find it? What sort of rhythms are we to play? It helps to consider every tune **setting** (24) like the one above or the more annotated examples here a jumping-off point rather than an end result. Fiddlers add an overlay of left hand-ornaments and variations and right hand licks and rhythms to each "starter" tune, dressing it up in their own regional or adopted style. The rhythm, pulse, or **groove** (10) of a tune are what drive it, with melody changing constantly in pursuit of rhythm. Think of what you see above as a template or matrix of the tune, needing to be dressed up in style. Changing tone coloration (note bendings and left hand ornaments) is fun - the musical equivalent of candy or soda pop - but the real challenge for a fiddler is in making those ornaments *serve* the rhythm, making a tune bounce and run with the beat. That's what drives a tune and really gets the dancers' dander up!

The following page shows a fully stylized Irish **setting** of *Swallowtail Jig*. Other tunes in this collection detail only a few **style markers** per tune, but this first lesson is highly ornamented to show everything possible.

Most fiddling is done in first position (a good thing at 104-120 beats per minute), with the focus on *rhythmic variations* which recast the melody slightly differently each time through a tune. We pick and choose ornaments to fit that 32-bar round of the tune, swapping them back and forth to move the rhythm around, drumming new rhythms on the tune. Remember that *all* ornaments create rhythm, so timing is more important than anything else in fiddling. It's best to master techniques a few at a time, working them into tunes already in your repertoire and getting them up to speed in context.

Use the CD tracks as practice aids to help you stay in rhythm as you learn new techniques.