

Is a Fiddle the Same as a Violin?

(Story words: country, dancing, nylon)

Many people wonder whether a fiddle is the same as or different from a violin. In most respects the violin and fiddle are the same. The instruments have the same exact shape and the same number of strings. Both instruments are played with a bow, and both can be plucked or strummed too. Violin and fiddle bows are made of horse hair. It may take as many as 160 strands of hair to make a single bow.

Violinists play classical music or jazz, whereas a fiddler plays folk and country music. Irish folk music often includes fiddling. Fiddlers play music made for square dancing and other dancing. Fiddlers also play Cajun, bluegrass, and other music which makes you want to tap your toes to a beat.

With both instruments, it is the strings that vibrate and create the sound. The strings of a violin are most often catgut (which is made from sheep intestines) or nylon.

Many fiddlers prefer steel strings for their fiddles. One reason is that steel strings keep in tune. Thus, you will see a fiddler pick up his fiddle and start playing without needing to tune his instrument first. In contrast, a classical violinist always tunes the strings before starting to play. Another reason is that steel strings have a brighter, sharper sound, and fiddlers like to make music that has a strong beat.

Some players say that violins and fiddles are not different instruments. They become different instruments based on the music the owner selects to play.