

## How tunes get chosen in a session

*The Otter's Holt (Reel in B Minor by Martin 'Junior' Crehan)  
& Michael Creamer's (Reel in D)*

The last section explored basics of variation. This section will cover several aspects of playing in sessions.

For many people, the process of how tunes are chosen at a session is a source of mystery. In case you always wondered, here is just one possible scenario:

*A few musicians are sitting in a session. One guy plays a couple bars of "The Otter's Holt," the guy next to him nods, and now the first tune is chosen. The flute player across the circle leans in and says, "How about this one?" and plays a few bars of "Michael Creamer's." Done.*

*Someone tells a joke, a few beers are sipped, and the guy who came up with "The Otter's Holt" picks up his fiddle. The flute player asks for a tuning note. Everyone tunes. The fiddle player winks at the flute player and starts in on the tune, and soon everyone is playing together.*

*Near the end of the third time through the tune, everyone looks over to Otter's Holt guy. He's not looking up, so they all play that first tune once again. Near the end of this fourth time through, Otter's Holt guy looks up—everyone knows it's time to go on to "Michael Creamer's!"*

*They make the change, and the bartender yells "lovely!" They play the second tune maybe five or even six times through. And then, because everyone is tuned into one other, they all just sort of feel when it should end. There's a great long, last note. The box player says, "That was a mighty version of 'The Otter's Holt,'" and the fiddle player says, "Is that what it's called?"*

Every night is a new scenario. The trick is to focus on what's going on that night. Know who's leading sets. Talk to your fellow players. Propose a few tunes of your own if it feels right to do so. Figure out where the night is going (socially and musically), and do your part to help it go there.

Backers: While tunes are being chosen in a session, be a part of the deliberations (instead of noodling on your instrument). Figure out the keys for the tunes as they are being discussed. And be alert for changes between tunes, so you'll be in the right key when everyone makes the switch into a new tune. Join in on conversation between tunes and enjoy being a dynamic part of the session!

Note that there are tunes that change keys between the A and B parts. "The Otter's Holt" is an example of such a tune: the first part is in B Minor, and the second part is in D Major. "The Wheels of the World" (page 35) and "Two Mile Loop" (page 65) also change keys from the first to second parts.

If a key-change within a tune trips you up in a session, make note of it so you'll maintain your balance for the next time around.