

Wipl Stix -The Travel Fiddle

by Bob Smakula

Elkins, West Virginia is a great place to live. When the Augusta Heritage Arts Workshop has their concert series in the summer I rarely miss a note.

An especially noteworthy performance started with a fellow coming out on the stage wearing overalls, fake crooked teeth, and acting the part of a stereotype hillbilly with plenty of howdys. Myself and many in the audience were ready to be offended, but to our relief this comedian was so funny and entertaining you could not help but be drawn to the character of Hill Billy Bob. As Hill Billy Bob was a captivating character, his fiddle caught my attention too. From the audience it looked like he was playing a two-inch tube with strings.

It turns out that William Carrington Whipple was playing an instrument of his own invention and creation. The Wipl Stix (known for about one year as Fiddle Stix) was this craftsman's answer to the never-ending problem of transporting an instrument.

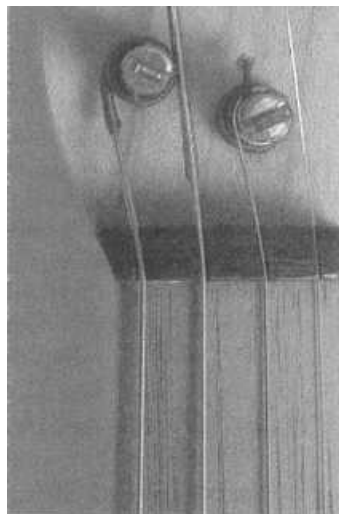
Bill Whipple has been a custom furniture maker for about 15 years. Crafting chairs, tables, and beds in his rural mountain home in Union, West Virginia has enabled him to eke out a living in an enjoyable setting. But during the last few years a theatrical calling has been pulling him out of Monroe County to do street performing in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia.

In order to keep his luggage to a minimum, Bill designed and made practice/travel fiddles. From tuners to tailpiece this instrument is a model of ingenuity. Every element has its place in form and function. The tuners are a modified zither pin-the same type that you would find in an autoharp. After being shortened slightly Bill adds a slot to the top of the pin. The slot allows the player to tune with a penny or a screwdriver. It is very handy not to need the special Autoharp tuning wrench. You can always bum a penny.

The nut of Desert Ironwood has many of



Bill Whipple as Hill Billy Bob endorses Wipl Stix.



The Wipl Stix peghead

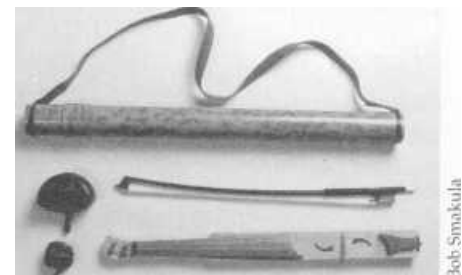
the same properties as ebony, but as a domestic hardwood it doesn't add to the burden of tropical deforestation. The same goes for the hickory fingerboard. Properly rounded and ornamented at the end with a graceful curve, it complements the curves of the ironwood tailpiece. Of course the coup de grace is the pitchpipe endpin. You will never have an excuse for being out of tune.

On the standard models, the bodies are made out of straight maple with either a Sitka or red spruce top. Coming soon will be instruments with premium curly, birdseye, or quilted maple bodies. Though those figured woods would not change the tone, a little eye candy never hurt anyone. Also in the works are enough travel instruments to make up a Wipl band. A guitar, mandolin, and dulcimer are poised to make their appearances this summer.

Probably the most amazing thing about this instrument is that it fits into a 2" x 24" PVC pipe along with the inflatable chinrest, a 1/8 size bow, and a round cake of rosin making it well protected in its own form-fit hardshell case.

Not having the box volume of a traditional

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All this stuff fits into the 2" PVC Case? You Bet!

instrument, the Wipl Stix doesn't compare with the tone of the Cremona, Italy descendants that we all play. But that is not the point. The subdued intimate sound of the Wipl Stix makes it an excellent practice instrument. It is also the thing to play when you don't want to be too loud-a motel room at 1:00 am, or when the baby is sleeping....

A Wipl Stix is almost like playing your favorite fiddle, but more quiet. Bill has designed the instrument to have the same

string length as standard, but the body is slightly shorter than a traditional instrument. The setup is just right with a slightly flat bridge and steel strings. After all, it is not a Violin Stix.

If you get a chance to see Hill Billy Bob (or any other of the characters Bill Whipple has invented), stop and enjoy the music and humor. And don't forget to ask to try out the Wipl Stix, you'll have a lot of fun. Wipl Stix are available directly from Bill Whipple or several instrument dealers in

the U.S. Contact Bill at Rt. 1, Box 169B, Union, WV 24983, USA, Phone: 304-772-3625, [email: wiplbill@hotmail.com](mailto:wiplbill@hotmail.com), or log on to his Web site at www.wiplstix.com.

Bob Smakula is a musician and resident of Randolph Co., WV. He is the proprietor of Smakula Fretted Instruments, specializing in the restoration and sales of vintage stringed instruments.