



Joyce Andersen

After nearly 60 years of rock & roll, we have accepted the guitar as a Prodigal Son who has returned home. Whatever battles happened back then have been forgotten; about whether it was allowable or acceptable to plug in the guitar and turn it from an acoustic instrument into the raging electric beast that has since ruled supreme over the rock world. But what about the violin? Why hasn't it gone on a similar transformational journey?

We have all seen and heard classical violinists— we know that sound. And we have heard American and Celtic traditional fiddlers— those sounds are also a familiar part of our musical world. Fiddle solos and string sections are everywhere in music. But where is the Jimi Hendrix of the fiddle, who has taken it on electronic acid trips? Is it impossible? Impractical? Most of us have heard plugged-in violins in country, celtic and rock bands, but they have been just louder versions of the acoustic, and they have never been center stage as the primary sound of a compelling artist.

Enter singer-fiddler-songwriter and neo-traditional-electro-acoustic fiddle troubadour Joyce Andersen, a New England musician with Viking blood, 20 years of studio and sideman credits in country, rock, celtic, bluegrass, jazz, folk, & swing bands. “Necessity is quite a mother,” she says, whimsically referring to her recent journey to the center of the stage and an all-new solo violin concert show and solo CD. Now the mother of two young boys, she has mothballed her band, put away the guitar, composed and arranged a whole new repertoire of music, and forged a new career as a solo artist, using just her voice, her violin, viola, a Norwegian Hardanger fiddle, and some foot percussion.

Yes, she plays some airs and traditional fiddle tunes. You'll sometimes hear some Bach as she enters the room, and she is a Jedi master of the ancient art of singing and playing violin at the same time, in unison and harmony, and with opposing and colliding rhythms. These skills started swirling together like a tornado forming when she started 2 years ago, on the dark 3rd floor of her old Victorian house in Maine, playing into the night

on the far side of the big building when her family was asleep. She started experimenting with a foot drum and a small tambourine, and took belly dance lessons and learned to shake a coin skirt. She invented some new ways of strumming and plucking her violins and borrowed from classical guitarists.

And then Prometheus brought her fire. New technologies in amplifying acoustic instruments, combined with an airplane cockpit of rockstar gear now lets her weave the alchemy of rock & roll guitar into her tapestry of violin sounds. Suddenly it's no longer a woman playing violin. There is a jazz bass player, there is a frailing banjo rhythm, now there is the thundering crunch of some Steppenwolf guitar and the screaming wail of endless solos of hair-raising Hendrix covers, complete with distorted wah-wah and wild psychedelic energy. She sings electronic vocal duets with the devil and with Jimi's ghost, she dances amid collages of hypnotic electronic rhythm landscapes, she builds loops and beds while she is singing, and launches into Irish jigs, 80's rock classics, gospel anthems, old-time mountain ballads, all the while literally dancing with all four limbs, somehow controlling the chaos. Above it all is her voice, singing and urging and passionately inviting and soothing and reigning over the musical mayhem.

Joyce Andersen has created a new troubadour persona and a sound that is all her own, and it is built from skill, experience and daring. It's not John Henry battling the machine, it's John Henry operating one. It is a synergy of human and machine, like a race car driver screeching around a track or a hip-hop DJ dancing, working turntables with both hands. The human is in charge— which is exactly what we want our 21st century fusions of art and technology to be. Not the machine enslaving or trivializing the humans, but the humans using and pushing the machines to make art that makes us feel things, just like we have made art since we drew on cave walls.

