

Amplifying your fiddle

(Please note – this was written in 2015. It may require updating!)

On-board amplification for your fiddle makes moving about within the band a lot easier as you're not tied to a fixed standing microphone. It also means that whoever is managing the sound can do a better job of making you sound good, and there is less chance of other sounds making their way onto "your" microphone. Sorting it all out can be a bit of a minefield.

There are two main technologies available:

- microphones, which work by "collecting" the sound waves emanating from your fiddle, much as your ear does. They can be attached to the fiddle in various ways - clipped on the chinrest or the tailpiece so the microphone points (usually) towards the bridge, or supported by a device that suspends the microphone over the fiddle (FiddlePro).
- pickups, which work by collecting the physical vibrations from the bridge or body of the fiddle. They can be attached in a variety of ways: clipped onto the f-hole (Autolycus), bluetacked (or similar) onto the belly, installed in the bridge (Fishman, also Shadow) or held on by a kind of elastic band (called The Band).

There are various pro's and con's that you should think through with your own inclinations in mind:

Microphones: Pro's:

- generally higher quality of sound

Cons:

- potential for feedback if positioned near a speaker
- potential for picking up unwanted sound (eg your voice) - though this depends on how directional the microphone is, how sensitive it is and what it's pointing at. Some can even pick up the fiddler's breathing, if it's pointed towards him/her, others face down onto the f-hole and are far less likely to pick up my voice by accident.

Pickups: pro's:

- will only pick up the sound of your instrument

Cons:

- sensitive to high frequencies, so it's much more difficult to tweak the sound away from shrill and towards pleasant.
- highly sensitive to placement on the instrument - a 1mm shift of position can make a radical change in sound quality.
- mostly they work better if you plug it into a small piece of electronics known as "DI box" and then into the mixer.
- Some are mounted into the bridge (eg Fishman, Shadow) and may require some carpentry on the bridge to produce a fit.

Whichever type of technology you tend towards, do also consider the way it is attached to your fiddle. Will you want it to be permanently attached, or removable? How easily removable - what will suit you?

Also be aware that both microphones and pickups usually require some kind of pre-amplification before the mixer/amplifier can take the signal. Some have it built in (eg some kind of battery pack, either worn or attached in some way, or integral to the design) and some use power from the mixer to boost the signal. This is known as "phantom power" - most but not all mixers have this on offer. Some don't have it at all so you would need to buy a separate power box.

After all this, I expect your head is reeling. There is no one "right" answer; a lot will depend on your budget.

I use the FiddlePro, having tried some pickup-style devices, and I am personally really happy with it. The microphone is a good quality one selected for fiddle frequencies, is highly directional (so it only hears the fiddle) and the device is particularly easy to put in place and remove. It isn't universally liked - here is a slightly older review of a number of fiddle-amplification systems, which places the FiddlePro at the bottom of the pile:

www.fiddleforum.com/fiddleforum/index.php?topic=23238.0

Look at the end of the web page for links to further discussions.

Here are some sites to look at:

for The Band:

www.musiciansfriend.com/orchestral-strings/headway-the-band-violin-pickup-system

for FiddlePro

www.riml.biz/

for Fishman:

<http://www.fishman.com/products/view/v-200-classic-series-professional-violin-pickup>

(The Fishman 200 series has a more stable attachment mechanism than the 100)

for Fiddle Mic

www.bartlettaudio.com/products/fiddle-mic

for Shadow:

us.shadow-electronics.com/products/violin

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