

# The Origin of Ashokan Farewell

Ashokan is the name of a camp in New York's Catskill Mountains where I and my wife, Molly Mason, run music and dance programs for adults each summer. The name is said to be a local American Indian word meaning a place to fish. In 1982, shortly after camp had closed for the season, I was feeling melancholy. I missed the music and dancing and especially the people and the special way of life that had evolved at camp. Picking up my fiddle, I began to compose a lament. By the time the piece had come together, I was in tears. It went unnamed until Molly suggested **Ashokan Farewell**.

In 1983, our band, Fiddle Fever (Russ Barenberg, Matt Glaser, Evan Stover, Molly and I) recorded **Ashokan Farewell** on our album, *Waltz of the Wind*. Ken Burns heard it and got in touch with me about using it as the theme for his documentary, *The Civil War*. I am grateful to Ken for perceiving the special qualities of **Ashokan Farewell** and using it so effectively. At the time, I had no idea that millions of Americans would be so deeply moved by watching *The Civil War*. It brought us closer to our past and to each other and has forever changed the way we'll view our history. It has also reacquainted many Americans with our rich musical heritage.

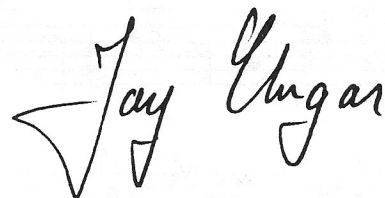
## How I play it

This special edition of **Ashokan Farewell** was designed to help violinists emulate my playing of the piece as heard in *The Civil War* series on PBS. Though I rarely play it exactly the same way twice, this arrangement captures my typical bowing and ornaments. My playing style, for a tune like this, is most influenced by the great Scottish and Irish players of airs and laments--including flute players and pipers, as well as fiddlers.

Here are some particulars that you might find helpful. My slides generally begin less than a 1/2 step below. My grace notes from below are usually "smeared" a bit into something that sounds almost like a slide. (I think of this as "squeezing up to the note.") For grace notes from above, I generally strike the fingerboard with a quick percussive movement.

The first statement of the melody (bars 1 through 32) is unaccompanied and can be played with more rhythmic freedom. The tenutos are held a bit longer than the written note values but not as long as a fermata. The third time through, the violin accompanies the piano with smooth double stops (bars 65 to 80), then plays in unison (bars 81 to 96), delicately following the pianists phrasing so as to sound almost like one instrument. The fourth and last time through the melody, the violin plays with renewed intensity and feeling.

My last bit of advice is to learn the notes and then let the feeling and emotion within the tune overcome you and take you beyond all the details into true musical pleasure and enjoyment.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jay Ungar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, stylized initial "J".

To order recordings of **Ashokan Farewell**, please call:  
The Public Radio Music Source  
1-800-40-MUSIC

For information about **Jay Ungar's Ashokan Music and Dance Camp** write to:  
Fiddle & Dance, RD 1 Box 489 W. Hurley N.Y. 12491.