

## Change and stability in Irish-American-Newfoundland fiddle tunes

*Evelyn Osborne*

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Ón gCos go Cluas

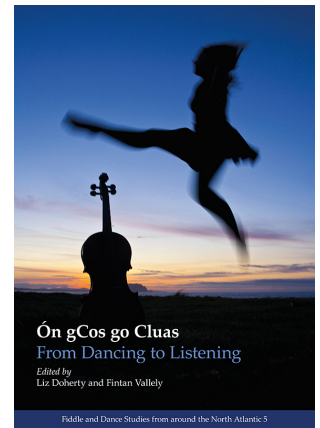
From Dancing to Listening

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 5

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### About the author:

**Evelyn Osborne** completed her PhD in Ethnomusicology at Memorial University of Newfoundland in 2013; she holds a Bachelor of Music (Violin, University of Ottawa) and a MA in Canadian Studies (Carleton). Her research examines the construction of Newfoundland as an Irish musical place through media and the interactions of Irish and Newfoundland musicians since the mid-twentieth century. Osborne is a performer and teacher in St. John's, NL and has given Newfoundland fiddle and dance workshops in Newfoundland, Labrador, Ontario, Singapore, and Australia. Her publications include CD liner notes, academic websites, and journal articles.

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## Change and stability in Irish-American- Newfoundland fiddle tunes

EVELYN OSBORNE

The fiddle music in Newfoundland and Labrador is a confluence of music from Scotland, Britain, Ireland and France, with a wide variety of influences from Canada and the United States. This article considers the impact of one Irish-American vaudeville group from New York on the instrumental music of Newfoundland and Labrador – the McNulty Family, which was part of the thriving New York Irish scene from the 1920s until the 1960s. From 1944 until 1974, their music had a significant presence on the airwaves of Newfoundland through a radio show sponsored by a local clothing store. At this time, the Newfoundland traditional music recording industry was only just emerging and the McNulty's popularity was part of the development of the Irish-Newfoundland music sound and recording repertoire. This study is based on newspaper, discography, archival and ethnographic research in both New York and Newfoundland.<sup>1</sup> It investigates the McNultys' influence on the repertoire of Newfoundland traditional recording artists from the 1950s to today in general, and, related to this, it compares stability and change in two instrumental tunes performed by the group.

### **The McNulty family**

The band was comprised of mother Ann (1887–1970), daughter Eileen (1915–1989), and son Peter (1917–1960). Ann McNulty was born Ann Burke in Kiltieven, Roscommon, Ireland, in 1887. In 1910, at the age of 23 she emigrated to the United States where she married John McNulty (1887–1928), who died in 1928, leaving her with two young children. Resourceful and talented, Ann formed a family band which by the early 1930s had its own radio show, *The Irish Showboat*, and over the years between 1935 and 1951 a stage-show of the same name which sold out fifty-five times at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) Opera Hall.<sup>2</sup> Between 1936 and the late 1950s they recorded 155 titles on Decca, Standard, and Copley with re-issues on Colonial and Coral.<sup>3</sup> Their music ranged from Irish songs which Ann recalled from childhood, through songs learned from older singers in New York, to Irish-American songs, vaudeville tunes, their own compositions, and instrumental music. In their stage shows the McNultys not only sang and danced but performed short skits. Their

recordings focused on music, and these records were exported widely, including to Ireland and Newfoundland.<sup>4</sup>

The group's career was centred on the New York City area, and in the summers they went to Rockaway Beach and the Catskills. There were infrequent tours to Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Isle.<sup>5</sup> All three members danced. Ann 'Ma' McNulty played diatonic button accordion, daughter Eileen McNulty-Grogan sang and son Peter McNulty played fiddle; in 1953 the group toured Newfoundland for two months. Eileen returned to St. John's in 1975 to appear on Ryan's Fancy local CBC television show. Interestingly, when producer Jack Kellum was seeking Eileen for the show he was told that the McNultys were Newfoundlanders.<sup>6</sup> During her visit she was interviewed by folklorist Pat Byrne in which she explained that when they started performing on stage 'everything was rather relaxed'.<sup>7</sup> Gradually, her mother's philosophy on performing became quite formal. Ann sought to distinguish herself from the 'party type' or stereotyped stage Irish performer by wearing evening gowns and formal wear. As a group, however, they crossed boundaries, and Mick Maloney has categorised them as a hybrid group which dabbled in instrumental music, characterisations of Irishness on stage as well as performing nineteenth century, Anglo-Irish songs.<sup>8</sup> The McNultys had a long and successful career and were among the last Irish vaudevillians.

### **The traditional music recording industry in Newfoundland**

Leach deemed Newfoundland an 'ideal folk region',<sup>9</sup> and Karpeles came to the island seeking the 'singing village'.<sup>10</sup> Newfoundlanders have always had eclectic tastes in musics, including traditional music based in folksong and fiddle-music brought by fishermen and settlers from England, Scotland, Ireland, and France. Being an island on the east coast of North America has meant that various cultural and labour flows affected the overall repertoire. Music historian, Paul Woodford has charted the history of printed music on the island and details the plethora of string orchestras, brass bands, operas, and popular music which came there during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>11</sup> One example of the variety of musics available is evident in the following advertisement for J. F. Chisholm in the 6 February 1864 edition of *The Daybook*, a St. John's daily newspaper:

Moore's Irish Melodies; Handle's [sic] Sacred Oratorio; The Messiah by Vincent Novello; The Golden Harp: Hymns Tunes and Choruses for Sabbath [sic] Schools; Melodian without a Master; and The Hibernia Collection 200 Irish Jiggs, Reels, Hornpipes, Songs, Dances Etcetera For the Violin, Flute, Cornet, Clarionett [sic].<sup>12</sup>

Broadsides from Tin Pan Alley were also popular, and local balladeer Johnny Burke (1851–1930) published several such sheets out of New York.<sup>13</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s folksong collectors Elizabeth Greenleaf and Maud Karpeles both noted the Newfoundlanders' penchant for singing popular music and jazz that they learnt from radio and recordings.<sup>14</sup> It is important to keep in mind that Irish music came to Newfoundland not only from immigrants but also through Irish-American broadsides, tune books, recordings, and musical exchanges with travelling workers.

The recording of folksong and traditional music in Newfoundland and Labrador didn't commence until the middle of the twentieth century. Taft states that the first traditional music recording directed to a Newfoundland audience was Arthur Scammell's 1943 *Squid Jigging Ground*, a private recording made through RCA in Montreal with financial backing of Gerald S. Doyle; Scammell estimated that he sold approximately fifteen to twenty thousand copies of this.<sup>15</sup> Folksong releases have always been popular in Newfoundland; however, the recording market for instrumental music has been variable, with tunes usually occupying only a few tracks on a song-based album. In the mid-1950s a local recording industry started in earnest with the release of the first albums of folksongs and instrumental tunes by folksinger Omar Blondahl (1923–1993) and accordionist Wilf Doyle (1925–2012), in 1955 and 1956 respectively.<sup>16</sup> Doyle's was the first accordion album (in 1956), followed by another in 1958.<sup>17</sup> Blondahl asked him to join in accompaniment on a few songs, and it was this combining of guitar, accordion, and folksongs which Rosenberg credits with starting the 'sound' which was picked up by accordionist Harry Hibbs in the 1960s and became another identifiable Newfoundland feature.<sup>18</sup>

### **The accordion**

Accordions are probably the most prominent instruments for playing dance music in the province, symbolised most dramatically by a 2005 Guinness Book of Records recognition for the 'Largest Accordion Ensemble' with 989 official participants,<sup>19</sup> an event nicknamed locally 'the accordion revolution'. Despite the accordion's popularity, and its displacement of the fiddle as the historical solo dance instrument, the emic term 'fiddler' is still used to refer to a dance musician regardless of the type of instrument.<sup>20</sup> Accordions first became available in Newfoundland in late 1844 or early 1845 and lessons were being offered by 1850.<sup>21</sup> The melodeon (single-row button accordion) was played on the island until recently, the Hohner brand being the most popular, possibly due to the particular 'Hohner sound', but maybe a consequence of availability. The piano accordion has never become very popular in Newfoundland, suggesting that the early accordions too were also of the button type. That is the same general type of diatonic accordion which was used by Ma McNulty who played what Graeme Smith refers to as the 'old' or 'pre-war melodeon' style of Irish.<sup>22</sup> This is in opposition to the 'new' chromatic button accordion which was adopted in Ireland in the mid-twentieth century<sup>23</sup> and has only started being used in Newfoundland in the early twenty-first century starting with musicians who have travelled to Ireland.<sup>24</sup> The so-called 'old' style of melodeon playing has stayed popular with Newfoundlanders.

### **Identification of the McNultys with Newfoundland**

The McNulty Family became extremely popular in Newfoundland largely due to a businessman named J. M. Devine. In 1921, Devine moved to New York but by 1932, he had moved back to St. John's where he opened a clothing store.<sup>25</sup> Beginning around 1944 he sponsored a radio show which continued for thirty years and featured McNulty Family music. In a 1950 letter to Ann McNulty, Devine impressed upon her how popular her group was with Newfoundlanders, stating that 'dealers [...] are besieged with orders for McNulty records' due to his radio shows. The McNultys did make quite an impression on

Newfoundlanders, in great part due to their presence on radio but also because in 1950 they recorded Devine's poem 'When I Mowed Pat Murphy's Meadow' as a song. Through personal letters we know that Ann was 'delighted' with the poem, calling it a 'typical McNulty number'.<sup>26</sup> The McNultys also recorded another Newfoundland song 'The Star of Logy Bay' which they learned during their tour.<sup>27</sup> In 1953, the group toured Newfoundland for two months, a tour which brought them all over the island and ultimately onto Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. While their wider audiences may not have known these songs were from Newfoundland, Newfoundlanders did know, and that fact contributed to their sense of familiarity with the group, including their sense that, perhaps, the McNultys were actually Newfoundlanders.

### **The McNultys and the Newfoundland recorded repertoire**

The McNulty Family had a major influence on the general recording repertoire of Newfoundland and Labradorians. Although the focus here is on instrumental tunes, I did complete an analysis of the presence of the McNulty Family's general repertoire in Newfoundland recordings; Ted McGraw covered the same ground with his personal record collection.<sup>28</sup> I have extended his work by utilising the Discography of Newfoundland which holds several thousand entries.<sup>29</sup> I focused on the recordings available from the Big 6 which were advertised a few days before the McNultys opened their first show in St. John's in April, 1953;<sup>30</sup> there were a hundred titles in the advertisement. Through a discography search in 2010, I found that fifty have been re-recorded 298 times by over 84 different Newfoundland musicians. Considering that at the time of research there were fewer than three thousand entries in the discography from all musical genres, this represents a significant percentage of all indexed repertoire. Out of the remaining 55 songs in the McNulty repertoire only twelve were re-recorded, these including the local song 'The Star of Logy Bay' and a localised Irish tune 'Mussels in the Corner'. It is clear that the recordings available at the Big 6 made a large impact on the subsequent recording repertoire of Newfoundland musicians. In comparison, according to the holdings of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA), very few of the McNulty selections were found in oral tradition. In October 2011, almost 58 years after the McNulty tour, local Newfoundland band Shanneyganock released a McNulty tribute album and commented how ubiquitous their repertoire has become in the province.<sup>31</sup> The following sections will discuss and analyse two different instrumental tunes recorded by the McNultys, 'Mussels in the Corner' and 'Rollicking Skipper B'.

### **The influence of the McNulty family's tunes**

The McNulty Family recorded only twelve sets of instrumental tunes during their career; despite the small number, many of them became a part of the Newfoundland repertoire as Ann's accordion playing was well-appreciated on the Island. The earliest tune recorded by the McNultys was 'The Rollicking Skipper' (27 May 1937), followed by 'Slipping the Jig' in August of the same year; more tunes were recorded in 1941 and 1942. With the onset of World War II the group stopped recording until December 1947 when they recorded two more tune sets. In 1950 they recorded 'The Stack of Wheat' also known as 'Ann Carawath',

and ‘Fair Roscommon Polka’ with Copley sometime after 1952, the latter being the only tune they may have recorded after their trip to Newfoundland. On the list of McNulty records from the Big 6 on 24 April 1953, there are four tunes listed which I have not found in the discographies: ‘Miss McLoud’s [*sic*] Reel’ / ‘Philip O’Beirne’s Delight’, and ‘Tell Her I Am’ / ‘Richard Brennan’s Favourite’.<sup>32</sup> Of the total of sixteen tracks, representing twenty-six tunes, including ‘Haste to the Wedding’ and ‘The Half Door’ I am aware of at least seventeen Newfoundland variants. It is hard to say if all of these were learnt directly from the McNulty records as they are such well-known tunes. According to McGraw the McNultys learnt ‘Haste to the Wedding’ word for word from a 1915 Irish school songster.<sup>33</sup> While ‘Haste to the Wedding’ is a song on the McNulty recordings, it is commonly played as a tune in Newfoundland and appears in many instrumental collections dating back to at least 1767.<sup>34</sup> In Taft’s 1975 *Discography of Newfoundland and Labrador 1904–1972* there are ten instances of ‘Haste to the Wedding’ recorded by Newfoundland performers, mainly fiddlers and accordionists.<sup>35</sup>

The McNulty set, ‘Garryowen’ / ‘Three Little Drummers’, is an interesting case, as the second tune is known in Newfoundland as ‘The Shimmey’ with a slight variation in the high strain. ‘Garryowen’ is also a common tune, but neither is recorded often; ‘Garryowen’ has been noted in Kelly Russell’s tune books.<sup>36</sup> Several recent Newfoundland recordings of ‘Garryowen’ are actually of an Irish republican song called ‘Sean South of Garryowen’ made popular by the Wolfe Tones rather than the instrumental tune. The ‘Shimmy’ has only been recorded twice but is known by many instrumentalists. ‘Chasing the Chicken’ and ‘Maid on the Green’ are also tunes known in Newfoundland under other names; the first is clearly ‘Geese in the Bog’ which has been recorded at least ten times and is very commonly played. ‘Maid on the Green’ could be a variant of ‘Auntie Mary’ also known as ‘Chasing Charlie’ or ‘Cock of the North’; ‘Stack of Barley’ is a common tune known as ‘Stack of Wheat’, ‘Kielrow’ was noted in Kelly Russell’s second collection as part of Allan Hillier’s repertoire, and Hillier of Griquet, GNP, also knew ‘Rollicking Skipper B’, ‘Stack of Barley’, ‘Mussels in the Corner’, and ‘Haste to the Wedding’.<sup>37</sup> All of these tunes are common in the transnational instrumental repertoire, but it is possible that Hillier learnt them from McNulty Family recordings or radio.

The ‘Fair Roscommon Polka’ is the only instrumental tune which could have been recorded after their tour in Newfoundland (see Figure 1, tune 1). It is a variant of the polka known locally in Newfoundland as ‘Paddy’s Jig’, and though not an exact copy, it is conceivable Ann may have learned this from Wilf Doyle or another musician. It is also possible that it passed into Newfoundland playing from their recordings later or that the two were independent of each other. I present here two versions, the McNulty version from the 1950s and the ‘Snotty Var’ version from 1997. Snotty Var was a collection of musicians in St. John’s who attended sessions and were active in the traditional music scene in the late 1990s. This version is representative of what is played in St. John’s in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The high part, or second strain, has almost identical intervallic outlines. The primary difference between the two variants is the penultimate measure’s approach to the cadence. In the first turn, they are also quite close except for sixteenth-note-runs in bars 2 and 6 in the McNulty score. The McNultys play this piece at approximately

125 beats per minute (bpm) while Snotty Var plays it considerably faster at about 160bpm. I include this example here to show that although the McNultys had a big influence on Newfoundland musicians in general, Newfoundland fiddlers may have also influenced their repertoire.

The figure displays a musical score for two tunes: 'Fair Roscommon Polka' and 'Paddy's Jig'. It is organized into three systems, each with two staves. The top staff of each system is for the McNulty Family (mid-1950s) and the bottom staff is for Snotty Var (1997). Both are in 2/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first system covers measures 1-5. The second system starts at measure 6 and includes a repeat sign. The third system starts at measure 11 and also includes a repeat sign. The notation shows rhythmic differences between the two versions, particularly in the eighth-note patterns.

Figure 1 'Fair Roscommon Polka' / 'Paddy's Jig'.

### 'Rollicking Skipper B'

This was recorded by the McNultys on 27 May 1937 with Decca Records in New York City. It was included in the Big 6's 1953 stock list of available recordings in Newfoundland and Labrador. It has since been re-recorded in Newfoundland at least thirteen times by as many different artists and is a common tune played by fiddlers, but it wasn't recorded by a Newfoundland musician until 1956. Accordionist Wilf Doyle (1925–2012) recorded it on his first album as a dance tune. The tune, however, was misnamed as 'Slipping the Jig' which was also recorded by the McNulty Family. The following section examines, 'Rollicking Skipper B' as recorded by the McNultys and compares it with various Newfoundland recordings up to the early twenty-first century. I selected four of these versions to examine in this article. They are recordings from the McNulty Family (2001), Wilf Doyle (1956), Newfoundland rock band Rawlins Cross (*Celtic Instrumentals*, 1997), and folk band Shanneyganock (2004).<sup>38</sup> The McNulty recording includes two different tunes with an unusual set structure proceeding from 'Rollicking Skipper' to another tune called 'Ships in Full Sail' and back to 'Rollicking Skipper'. This structure was not upheld in Newfoundland recordings with the exception of Frank Maher's 2005 version.<sup>39</sup> Maher's adherence is not as unexpected as one might think with a difference of sixty-eight years in recording dates. Maher is a McNulty fan who attended all of the 1953 concerts in St. John's and learnt directly from the original recordings. As Maher's version is an exact note for note replica of the McNulty recording I have not reproduced a transcript of it here.

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McNulty Family 1936

Wilf Doyle 1956

Rawlins Cross 1997

Shanneyganock 2004

5

11

15

Figure 2 'Rollicking Skipper B'.



In the versions examined, the McNultys are the only ones to recap back to a full rendition of 'Rollicking Skipper' before the end. Rawlins Cross (1997) pairs 'Rollicking' with 'The Shimmy' and Shanneyganock (2004) combines it with 'Pussy Cat Got Up in the Plum Tree' as recorded by Wilf Doyle on *More Dance Favourites* (1962). Although there are significant differences in tempo (McNultys 140bpm; Rawlins Cross and Shanneyganock 160bpm; Wilf Doyle 180bpm), the form within the tune is consistent with the exception of Doyle who recorded it as a dance accompaniment for the Lancers. He plays the tune thirteen times ending with a single A turn. Each of the other groups, including the McNultys, have paired it with another tune and play 'Rollicking' three times before proceeding to another tune.

The ensemble arrangements vary between the groups. The McNultys use accordion, fiddle, piano and on the very last turn they add the sound of Eileen's step dancing which is used sparingly as a percussion technique in the McNulty recordings. She only 'steps out' every few turns of the tune amounting to a total of sixteen to thirty-two bars. Doyle has recreated this element in many of his tunes demonstrating his admiration of the McNultys, substituting a wood-block or similar for the tap shoes' metallic click – and he uses it more frequently. This unique rhythmic element was only used by Doyle and Hibbs.<sup>40</sup> Both of the later groups, Rawlins Cross and Shanneyganock, use a band, including bass, guitar, and drum set along with accordion. Rawlins Cross also adds a bodhrán introduction and layers a tin whistle, instead of a step dance sound, on the last turn of 'Rollicking'.

Tunes tend to change slightly over time through variations introduced by individual musicians. Sometimes this happens when a tune is remembered or learned inaccurately, when variations are deliberately introduced to provide a personal mark, or to reduce repetitive monotony. The versions of 'Rollicking' presented here are surprisingly consistent through the decades. The McNulty and Doyle versions are almost identical except for a few extra passing notes in bars 6, 10, and 12. Considering the small amount of variation, coupled with Doyle's respect for the McNultys, it is almost certain that he learnt this version from their 78. Forty-eight years later Shanneyganock recorded a version of 'Rollicking Skipper' that mirrors Doyle's version in the use of quarter note in bars 5 and 10 rather than step wise passing notes. There is slightly more variation in this version but not much, with only a change of interval in bar 2 and a slight variation in the high strain when accordion player Mark Hiscock drops down to an A on the middle repetition of BDD in bar 14. The majority of note variations, which are still slight, occur in the 1997 Rawlins Cross version. Rawlins Cross is known as a band willing to experiment with music and blends of Irish, Scottish, Newfoundland music and American-Canadian rock-pop. Thus Rawlins Cross's decision to introduce variations into such a long standing stable tune is not surprising; however they keep the identifiable motifs of the tune intact and primarily play with passing notes in bar 3. The high strain is kept consistent with other versions.

The McNulty and Newfoundland versions differ in their general 'feel'. The McNulty 'Rollicking' has more of a swing to it with heavy and weak beats with a particular lean on the downbeat of the phrases which would make me, as a dancer, want to stomp my foot harder on those first beats. The Wilf Doyle version is consistent with the aesthetic I found in my research with Newfoundland dance fiddlers. In Newfoundland dance music there are often no significantly heavier or weaker beats within a tune measure. Each beat is equal to

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the others so it gives less of a swing and more of a steady pace. At Doyle's tempo one might say a steady sprint! Even though Shanneyganock and Rawlins Cross's versions are slower than Doyle's they have retained this straight-ahead feel to the music. This is an example of adaption to local aesthetics, slight but noticeable.

### 'Maggie in the Woods' as 'Mussels in the Corner'

The image displays a musical score for the tune 'Maggie in the Woods' as 'Mussels in the Corner'. The score is written in 2/4 time and features a key signature of two sharps (D major). It is presented in four systems, each with four staves. The first system includes the following recordings:

- McNulty Family 1941
- Wilf Doyle 1956
- Island to Island 2003
- Melvin Combden Fogo Island, 2007

The score is divided into three measures, with measure numbers 6, 11, and 16 indicated at the beginning of their respective systems. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, with repeat signs at the end of the first and second systems.

Figure 3 'Maggie in the Woods' as 'Mussels in the Corner'.

In the 1930s the McNulty Family recorded the 'I've Got a Bonnet Trimmed with Blue' and 'Maggie in the Woods' set which is another interesting case. 'Bonnet' is certainly a common tune played around the island and has been re-recorded at least three times with

perhaps, the most memorable being a chin music version by Nellie Musseau.<sup>41</sup> ‘Maggie in the Woods’ is a version of the extremely common polka known in Newfoundland as ‘Mussels in the Corner’ which has been recorded in Newfoundland at least sixty-one times. ‘Mussels in the Corner’ has become exceedingly popular in the past few decades and was the tune used for the previously mentioned ‘Accordion Revolution’. The significant changes the tune has undergone suggests that, either it was part of the local tradition to begin with, or it was naturalised quickly into the repertoire and subjected to local variation. I present four different variants of ‘Mussels in the Corner’, all transcribed in D major. Wilf Doyle’s recording is from his 1956 album and was originally performed in G major as was Melville Combden’s 2007 performance, while the McNulty’s recorded it in B originally. Only the 2003 *Island to Island* recording was in D.<sup>42</sup>

Doyle’s variant is the fastest at *c.* 170bpm. As a dance musician, his version is also the longest with six repetitions of the tune ending on the high section. The McNultys are the slowest at *c.* 40bpm, next is Combden at 145bpm and then the *Island to Island* recording at 150bpm. The McNultys and *Island to Island* both play the tune three times through with repeats of both strains and both versions start on the low turn first. Doyle is the only one who starts on the high turn, in the same manner that I learned the tune from as a child from fiddler Christina Smith. However, Doyle’s form is AA B rather than AA BB. Combden, an accordion player from Fogo Island, is the least consistent in the repetition of form and is the only player to include a third strain. His performance was also the least formal – as I recorded it myself in a fieldwork interview setting. When I asked about his form he explained that:

I got no set pattern. I might play one part twice and then the other part once and then play the first part twice, once, and the other part twice; but if you’re playing with someone you sort of want to know, because [...] I might be going for one part and you’ll be going for the other part.<sup>43</sup>

This is an important point made by Combden and one I’ve experience with other solo dance players in Newfoundland. The other recordings are all played ensemble, and logistically a set pattern must be followed for performance or recording. A solo dance musician needs only to keep a beat for the dancer’s feet rather than adhere to a fixed pattern of melodic repetition. The instrumentation is quite varied. The McNultys use accordion, fiddle, and piano. Tap dancing enters on the second repeat of the tune. Doyle has a full band with accordion, bass, woodblock, and snare. The *Island to Island* set uses only fiddle and accordion with guitar accompaniment. Combden’s version is solo accordion. There are far more variations and differences between versions of ‘Mussels in the Corner’ than found in ‘Rollicking Skipper’. The 2/4 polka form, known as single jig in Newfoundland, allows for more experimentation without disturbing the identifying motifs. The low strain has two possible introductions. The first, played by the McNultys and *Island to Island* drops down and back up a perfect fourth, D-A-D-E while the second popularised by Wilf Doyle, uses only F#, E and D. I have heard various combinations of this including the most popular F#-F#-E-D, followed

by Combden's F#-D-D-E, and Doyle's slightly embellished F#-G-F#-E-D. All of these are common introductions in Newfoundland.

The high strain is the most consistent with all four variants playing the same notes in bars 9/13 with only the McNultys adding a dotted rhythm. Bars 10/14 show that if Newfoundland musicians did learn this from the McNultys they have since developed their own stable variation. The final two bars also show local standardisation amongst the non-McNulty versions. The low strain contains the most variation. Beyond the opening bar and bar 7, Doyle's version is similar to the McNulty's and Combden's follows Doyle. However, Doyle simplifies bar 4 to two quarter notes while Combden follows the McNulty version. The *Island to Island* version uses patterns that almost sound like accompaniment or improvisation on the motifs. This is not surprising as both Wells and Carrigan are willing to experiment with tunes to provide new and interesting variations. In my opinion they are part of a group of musicians who are at the forefront of continuing the transition of Newfoundland music from functional, participatory, dance music to presentational-high fidelity music in the manner theorised by Thomas Turino. According to Turino, there is little arranged accompaniment in participatory music but accompanying figures and harmonies become more prevalent as the music is arranged for listeners rather than dancers or other participants.<sup>44</sup> Combden explained that the third strain is new and has only been introduced in the past few years but he liked it and 'latched on to it'.<sup>45</sup> I first learned this third turn from Colin Carrigan in 2001 and have heard it many times since.<sup>46</sup> In a passing conversation with an English musician in 2010 they admitted that they have started pairing 'Donkey Riding' and 'Maggie in the Woods' in the previous ten years at their home sessions. This strain does sound similar to 'Donkey Riding' at points. It is an interesting timeline comparison for the introduction of the strain in St. John's, Fogo Island, and the United Kingdom. I have no theories as to why musicians both in Newfoundland and the UK might have started adding this third strain around the same time period other than a potential influential recording of which I am unaware. One possible source could be Great Big Sea's 2000 recording *Road Rage* which made the song 'Donkey Riding' quite popular in Canada and perhaps the UK.

## **Conclusions**

So how does a detailed tune comparison and analysis help us better understand the larger picture of a musical tradition? For one, it shows us that there is a range of change and stability within a tradition; some tunes stay remarkably stable while others are subject to more change within the parameters of acceptable interpretation. Active musicians are like magpies: they pick up appealing tunes from a variety of sources including radio, recordings, printed materials, and other musicians. In this case the stock of McNulty records imported by J. M. Devine to the Big 6 was clearly one common source of tunes. Although I do not subscribe to the notion that music learned from recordings inherently becomes static and uncreative, it would seem that in this case the availability of 'Rollicking Skipper B' on LP has encouraged a more stable version than that of 'Mussels in the Corner'.

'Mussels in the Corner' was not on the Devine's stock list in 1953 and shows significant variation in the melodic structure, beat patterns and form. Therefore, I assert that 'Mussels in the Corner' was already in the tradition and has developed a variety of local

variations independent of the McNultys. On the other hand, ‘Rollicking Skipper B’ was offered to Newfoundlanders through Devine’s stock and has stayed extremely consistent over a period of sixty years. I contend that due to J. M. Devine’s preference for their music, the McNulty family has had a major influence on the Newfoundland recording industry and instrumental tradition. Unlike other popular musicians who toured or distributed records within the province, the McNulty Family had a continuing and consistent presence in the Newfoundland soundscape which reached beyond their own performing career. At the same time that Newfoundlanders adopted the Irish-American McNulty repertoire they also adapted it to their own style of playing.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Pat Byrne, “‘Stage Irish’ in Britain’s Oldest Colony: Introductory Remarks Towards an Analysis of the Influence of the McNulty Family on Newfoundland Music’, *Canadian Folklore*, 1, no. 13 (1991), 62; Declan Coyne, *The Lilted Sons of Country Folk: A Dip into the Irish Music in Mid and South Roscommon; the Personalities and Events, Past and Present*, vol. 1 (Roscommon, Ireland: Dhá Lón Promotions, 2000), p. 97; Patricia Grogan, ‘The McNulty Family Collection’, in *AIA-051: The McNulty Family Collection*, [unprocessed] (New York City: Archives of Irish America, New York University, 2010a/b).

<sup>3</sup> T. McGraw, email to author – McNulty Family in Newfoundland, New York State, 13 April 2010a, pp. 173–777.

<sup>4</sup> Mick Moloney, ‘Irish Ethnic Recordings and the Irish-American Imagination’, in *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1982), p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Declan Coyne, (2000), p. 97; Brendan Dolan, ‘Music in the Catskills: The Irish Catskills and Traditional Music’, as part of MA, Irish Studies, New York University, 2009, p. 14–15; Patricia Grogan, ‘The McNulty Family Collection’, in *AIA-051: The McNulty Family Collection*, [unprocessed] (New York City: Archives of Irish America, New York University, 2010a/b).

<sup>6</sup> J. Kellum, research interview by telephone with the author, 13 October 2010; Osborne, ‘The Most (Imagined) Irish Place in the World?’, pp. 176–177.

<sup>7</sup> E. McNulty-Grogan, interview with Pat Byrne, St. John’s, NL, 5 June 1975.

<sup>8</sup> Mick Moloney, (1982), pp. 93–94.

<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth Greenleaf and Grace Yarrow Mansfield, *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, with foreword by Neil V. Rosenberg and Anna Kearney Guigné (St. John’s, NL: Folklore and Language Publications, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1933, 2004), p. xxvi.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Lovelace, ‘Unnatural Selection: Maud Karpeles’s Newfoundland Field Diaries’, in *Folksong: Tradition, Revival and Re-Creation*, ed. by Ian Russell and David Atkinson (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2004), p. 292.

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Woodford, *We Love the Place, O Lord: A History of the Written Musical Tradition of Newfoundland and Labrador to 1949* (St. John's, NL: Creative Publishers, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Reference to nineteenth-century newspaper advertisements were found on the website *Atlantic Canada Newspaper Survey*, see Canadian Heritage, 'Atlantic Canada Newspaper Survey', *Virtual Museum of Canada* (2002), <http://daryl.chin.gc.ca:8000/SEARCH/BASIS/acns/user/www/SF> [accessed 23 August 2011]; *Daybook*, 'Advertisement for J. F. Chisholm' (St. John's, Newfoundland, 6 February 1864).

<sup>13</sup> Philip Hiscock, 'The Bard of Prescott Street', *Downhomer*, 10, no. 4 (1997), 23–24; Michael Taft, 'The Bard of Prescott Street Meets Tin Pan Alley: The Vanity Press Sheet Music Publications of John Burke', *Newfoundland Studies*, 6, no. 1 (1990), 56–73.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Hiscock, 'The Mass Media in the Folk Culture of Newfoundland', *Culture and Tradition*, 8 (1984), 20–38; Maud Karpeles, *Folk Songs from Newfoundland* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 18; Lovelace, 'Unnatural Selection: Maud Karpeles's Newfoundland Field Diaries', in *Folksong: Tradition, Revival and Re-Creation*, ed. by Russell and Atkinson, p. 292; Jeffrey Webb, 'The Invention of Radio Broadcasting in Newfoundland and the Maritime Province, 1922–1939' (unpublished PhD, University of New Brunswick, 1994), p. 335.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Taft, *A Regional Discography of Newfoundland and Labrador 1904–1972*, vol. 1, Bibliographical and Special Series (St. John's, NL: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, 1975), p. xii.

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<sup>17</sup> Wilf Doyle, *Wilf Doyle and his Orchestra Play the Quadrilles and a Selection of Favorite Newfoundland Old Time Music*, St. John's, NL, Rodeo, RLP-49, LP, 1958.

<sup>18</sup> Neil Rosenberg, 'Omar Blondahl's Contribution to the Newfoundland Folksong Canon', in *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, 19 (1991), 20–27 (p. 24).

<sup>19</sup> It was broken in 2011 in Slovenia with 1,137 accordion players ('Largest Accordion Ensemble', in *Guinness World Records* (London: Guinness World Records, 2013), <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/1000/largest-accordion-ensemble> [accessed 25 August 2013]; Kelley Anne Best, 'A Performance Ethnography of the 2005 Beaches Accordion Festival Eastport, Newfoundland', research paper (MA Ethnomusicology, St. John's, NL: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2006), p. 1; CBC, 'Accordion Fans Button Down a Record', in *CBC News*, 6 August 2005, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/accordion-fans-button-down-a-record-1.542875> [accessed August 21, 2011].

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<sup>23</sup> Graeme Smith, (1997), pp. 437–438.

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<sup>25</sup> Pat Byrne, (1991), p. 61.

<sup>26</sup> A. McNulty, personal letter to J. M. Devine, New York City, 14 October 1949.

<sup>27</sup> E. McNulty-Grogan, interview with Pat Byrne (St. John's, NL, 5 June 1975).

<sup>28</sup> Ted McGraw, 'The McNulty Family', *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 4, no. 4 (2010b), 451–473.

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