



# Crossing Over

*fiddle and dance studies  
from around the north atlantic 3*

Ian  
Russell  
*edited by*  
Anna  
Kearney  
Guigné

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from around the North Atlantic 3

# The Elphinstone Institute

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to study, conserve, and promote the culture of North-East and Northern Scotland.

# Crossing Over

## Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3

Edited by

Ian Russell and Anna Kearney Guigné

The Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen  
*in association with the*  
Department of Folklore, MMaP and the School of Music,  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

2010



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Dedicated to the memory of  
Séamus Creagh (1946–2009)

## Remembrance of Séamus Creagh (1946–2009)

For many people, their first introduction to Séamus Creagh and his music was the wonderful recording that he made with Jackie Daly in 1977, a record that has gone on to become a classic of the genre. Featuring the Sliabh Luachra repertoire and style of playing, it was generally assumed that both musicians came from that particular region in the southwest of Ireland. While this was true in Jackie's case, being a native of Kanturk, County Cork, this was not the case for Séamus. He was born in Killucan, County Westmeath in 1946, where he first started to play music. In 1967, he made a 'weekend' trip to Baltimore in West Cork, and 'never went home'! From then on, Cork became his home, although he did spend some time in London, as well as five years in Newfoundland. On his arrival in Cork, he embraced the indigenous traditions of the instrumental music of Sliabh Luachra, as well as the singing of the Cúil Aodha and Baile Mhúirne areas. His musical partnership with Jackie Daly brought him to the attention of a wider audience in the traditional music world. They became very well known through their stellar performances, both in concerts and sessions, and acquired the status whereby they were generally referred to simply by their first names, 'Séamus and Jackie'.

Although I had known Séamus during his early years in Cork, it was when he returned home from Newfoundland in 1993 that we began to meet and play more frequently together. We both were great admirers of the Sliabh Luachra unaccompanied fiddle tradition, with the twin-fiddle playing of Denis Murphy and Julia Clifford being a particular source of inspiration for us. We played many sessions together, and also performed at concerts and festivals. Among the highlights was our appearance at the Masters of Tradition Festival in Bantry, County Cork, in August 2005. Our performance on that occasion of three slides, 'The Toormore', 'The Gneeveguilla', and 'The Gleanntán Frolics', was subsequently included on the double-CD issued by RTÉ Lyric FM featuring recordings from the festival.

In 2006, we played at the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention (NAFCo) in Aberdeen, an event which gave us the opportunity to meet and play with many other fiddle-players from a variety of traditions. A particularly poignant memory for me is our concert appearance in the Lemon Tree at lunchtime on the Sunday, the last day of the festival. Towards the end of our set, we invited Jerry Holland to play some tunes with us on stage. Sadly, both Séamus and Jerry are now gone from us. Little did I realise that this would be the last time that the three of us would play together. I often think about that occasion.

Séamus was delighted when we were invited to play at NAFCo 2008 in St. John's. For him, not only would we partake in a great event, but it also offered the opportunity to return to Newfoundland, the place where he had lived for five years, and where he had met and married Marie-Annick Desplanques. I have many vivid recollections of our concert appearances, workshops, and many sessions in St. John's two years ago. A special memory is the day we went to Carbonear to play at the

Princess Sheila NaGeira Theatre. Also featured on that concert were Alan Jabbour and Ken Perlman, Greg and Ray Walsh, Brenda Stubbert and Janine Randall, the Baccalieu Fiddlers, Pierre Schryer and Andy Hillhouse. On the journey there by bus, as we travelled through that lovely landscape, Séamus acted as our tour-guide, pointing out the various sights and places.

Throughout the week that we spent in St. John's, it became so obvious to me that Séamus was held in very high regard there, particularly by the musicians. From my conversations with them, as well as purely through observation, I became aware of the huge influence that he had exerted during the years that he lived there. Not only did he teach them tunes, he also instilled in them a great understanding and love of the music. And he achieved all this in his characteristically understated way. While Séamus never sought the limelight, his very presence at a concert or session was truly commanding. At the end of that unforgettable week in August 2008, before returning home to Ireland, we performed at the Newfoundland & Labrador Folk Festival in Bannerman Park, St. John's.



Séamus and myself had spoken on a number of occasions about recording an album together. This would very much feature unaccompanied twin-fiddle performances, something which would allow us to explore the various stylistic features of the Sliabh Luachra idiom. However, this was not to be. Still, I can hear that recording in my heart. The night before Séamus died, I was playing at a concert in Kanturk with his one-time colleague, Jackie Daly. From the stage, we spoke about Séamus, and played various sets of tunes associated with him. Jackie played 'Her Mantle so Green', an air that they had performed together so often. Even though the audience that night was saddened that his passing was imminent, nonetheless they were uplifted to have Séamus there through his music. The early phone-call the following morning brought the sad news.

*Brathaimíd uainn thú, a Shéamuis – Séamus, we miss you.*

Matt Cranitch, Cork, June 2010

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## Crossing over

IAN RUSSELL and ANNA KEARNEY GUIGNÉ

This publication, which is focused on an exploration of the extensive, rich, and varied fiddle and dance traditions surrounding the North Atlantic rim, emerges out of the third North Atlantic Fiddle Convention (NAFCo) and its ancillary conference, held in St. John's, Newfoundland, 3–8 August 2008. To our knowledge, this is the first time an international conference devoted to fiddle and dance has ever been held in Canada. The over-arching theme, 'Crossing Over', was chosen to reflect this geographical shift from NAFCo's usual location in Aberdeen. Given its distinct culture and heritage, St. John's was an ideal place to hold an international fiddle convention. Since the Vikings first set foot in Newfoundland centuries ago, Newfoundland has been a meeting point for both Old World and New World cultures, and continues to be a social and economic gateway along the Atlantic corridor.

The 2008 conference was widely attended and papers were delivered by more than fifty presenters from a variety of disciplines. The exchanges that took place in St. John's were vibrant and intellectually stimulating. This third volume of the NAFCo series consists of a collection of twenty-one essays, in which the authors explore, reflect upon, ponder, and debate the position of both fiddle and dance traditions in the twenty-first century, as well as their interrelatedness from a multitude of perspectives. Underpinning many of these essays are themes relevant to the New World context: merchant explorations, rural entertainment, cultural exchange, assimilation, and appropriation. Discussions also focus around the influence of new media and technologies, revivalism and nationalism, as well as issues of identity-creation, globalization and shifting paradigms of thought. It is no surprise that over half the papers in this edition deal directly with Canadian and/or American fiddle and dance traditions alongside examinations of First Nations musical traditions. Many of these discussions focus on transference of music from one location to another, as well as musical exchanges and adaptation.

Frances Wilkins's research launches this discourse by examining the role of the fiddle at sea and its use by the Shetland Islanders who participated in the Greenland whaling industry and, later, in the South Georgia fishery in the South Atlantic. She offers a rich portrayal of the vibrant musical exchanges that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as reflected in the reference to 'Yakki' tunes, supposedly learnt from Inuit sources, and whaling tunes, which are embedded in the present-day repertoire of Shetland fiddlers. Ellestad further explores New World contacts, looking at the concurrent issues of outmigration and acculturation

linked to the massive Norwegian exodus to America that occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The extended loss of musical talent created a gap in the transference of the local Hardanger fiddle repertoire. Ellestad simultaneously considers the growth of a distinct American-Norwegian Hardanger milieu, and its ramifications back in Norway.

The reliability of old technology and the advantages of new media are also given consideration in this volume. Bradtke outlines the challenges of revitalizing James Madison Carpenter's 1930s collection of cylinder sound recordings of English fiddlers. Working with audio-processing software, she has successfully acquired new information about the fiddlers performance styles.

The introduction of new media, which results in exchange and appropriation of musical ideas, has often been perceived as detrimental to the preservation of a tradition. As Juniper Hill points out in her study of Swedish and Finnish diddling, however, such processes have been going on for centuries and frequently provide new means of expression and creativity. Hill traces three major epochs of Nordic diddling through three centuries. She also considers unpredicted musical changes, the most recent of which include new appropriations for use in Japanese Animé postings to YouTube. Osborne charts the collective efforts of a group of Irish and Newfoundland musicians who, although geographically separated, joined forces to produce a compact disc of Irish and Newfoundland music. She examines the motivations and the outcomes behind this project, with respect to reification of old friendships and identity construction.

Several authors draw upon the use of biography to explore the complex of influences shaping fiddlers' life-contributions, across diverse cultural environments and their accounts make for rich reading. Moloney examines the contents of a private manuscript created by Irish fiddler John 'Boss' Murphy in the 1930s for his children, in the process showing how the repertoire sheds light on local fiddling and acts as a gateway to the social life of Churchtown at that time. Everett considers the legends surrounding Cajun musician, Harry Choates (1922–1951), whose unique blend of Cajun and Western Swing brought him much acclaim, but who struggled with alcoholism and died tragically in a Texas jail under suspicious circumstances. Although Choates might have initially been viewed as an outlaw hero for his deviant behaviour, new interpretations of him, set alongside his cultural background, reposition him as a Cajun folk hero. Quick considers the lives of two major Métis fiddler-composers, Andy DeJarlis and John Arcand, whose music is best known through their extensive recording careers. Researchers interested in examining 'authentic' Métis musical traditions have often dismissed both artists because their recordings are viewed as too commercialized, negatively impacting the Métis fiddle tradition. Quick readily dispels such myths, identifying a number of creative processes and layers of meaning, connected to such aspects as tune titling, repertoire, and performance, bringing both men closer to their Métis heritage. Hillhouse examines the life-contribution of Ontario-native Oliver Schroer (1956–2008), a teacher, composer, performer, and mentor to young fiddlers. Schroer was considered a maverick musician, operating across many musical genres. In his reading of Schroer's career, Hillhouse suggests that through his mentoring to

young fiddlers Schroer offered a 'way of being' for those who had no direct line of tradition.

As many of the essays in this collection illustrate, fiddle and dance traditions are often shaped by a multitude of factors. Lederman presents a detailed ethnographic portrait of the layers of influence shaping the Northern Canada fiddle and dance traditions of the First Nations communities in the Mackenzie Delta, and of the Métis further south, in Great Slave Lake. Lederman notes that the repertoire in these areas is largely shaped by three waves of cultural influence: tunes adapted through contact with Scottish and French Canadian explorers and settlers; an additional set connected to North American square dancing dating from the period of Gold Rush at the turn of the twentieth century; and the recent adaptation of popular country/western songs dating from the 1940s to 1970s. With respect to the present-day influence of commercial country music, Lederman pragmatically observes that traditions constantly evolve over time; as such, this new area is also worthy of study.

Scottish fiddler-composer, Paul Anderson, considers how it might be possible to characterize the lively North-East fiddle musical style, of which he is a practitioner. He observes that, although individual fiddlers bring their unique touch to the performance of any tune, common identifiable characteristics do stand out. It is the combination of these features which best represent the musical footprint of the North-East fiddle tradition. Herdman offers a third perspective on style and repertoire, connected to the cultural politics surrounding Cape Breton fiddling, emerging from her investigation of the position of 'old-style' fiddle playing in Cape Breton and its relationship to dance traditions. She identifies a 'duality' attached to the image of the Cape Breton fiddlers, one shaped through mediated performances and the other more dynamic, shaped through performance associated with Cape Breton dance. She explores the 'complex narrative' that has emerged resulting from such factors as MacDonald Tartanism, commercial anti-modernism connected to an 'idealized pre-1971' period and Celtic revivalist interests. Herdman's research signals the complexities of sorting out the cultural identities and boundaries alongside traditional associations connected to cultures that have relocated to the New World. The dynamic interconnection between Cape Breton percussive dancing and revivalist Scottish identity-shaping is evident in Mats Melin's research into the revitalization of percussive dance in Scotland. For the revivalists, percussive dance is viewed as having the 'essence' of a form of Scottish dance that had formerly existed. The motivations and political agendas of the interest groups involved are closely tied to the revitalization of Scottish nationalism.

Revivals happen all the time and, as Doherty's research illustrates, the agendas that motivate revivalists are often selective and isolationist. Doherty focuses on the revitalization of the Donegal fiddle style in Ireland during the 1980s. By directing attention to one style, revivalists over-generalized perceptions of the traditional musical landscape, which is far more complex. The reversal of this trend in recent years is aimed at reasserting local musical dialects including the distinct fiddle tradition in her native Inishowen, which is the most northern part of Donegal. Alfonso Franco Vázquez's examination of the Galician fiddle tradition is also a reminder that the folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s was a worldwide phenomenon,

with many strands and confluences. In his rich account of the historical influences shaping Galician music, Franco explores the motivations for the revival of the Galician fiddle tradition. A fascinating history regarding the social role of the blind fiddlers of Galicia unfolds, alongside Galicians' attempts to reconnect with their own musical heritage preserved on recordings and through collections, now providing the basis for a new generation of Galician fiddlers.

From a different perspective, Perlman explores the role of the fiddler within the community setting of Prince Edward Island. Although regularly pressed into service for many kinds of community events and expected to play free of charge, fiddlers were often stereotyped as lazy, drunken, good-for-nothings. Perlman chronicles the historical basis of these negative stereotypes, as well as the kinds of narratives that community members disseminated, which contributed to these images.

Fiddlers and dancers are distinct folk groups, having their own traditions, including competitive events that focus on skill and dexterity during performance. Johnson, who regularly participates in these events in Ontario, considers the dynamic interrelationship between fiddle and dance from within the context of the close-knit Ottawa step dancing community. She explores the kinds of information fiddlers need to know about dancing in order to play well for dancers and what step dancers need to know about fiddling in order to dance well to the music.

Goertzen also explores the notion of competition within the context of Texas fiddling. Fiddle contests, he notes, are built around an accepted core repertoire, through which fiddlers present individual variation techniques. Goertzen explores the balance between the two through a system of mapping of individual performances to highlight different strains of variation. In the process, he succinctly reveals the methods employed by some fiddlers to pay homage to earlier fiddlers who shaped the Texas tradition. Lastly, Dorchak draws upon the hermeneutic notions of 'understanding' and 'agency' to explore the relationships of the communities of Cape Breton fiddlers in Boston with the music they play. For Dorchak, such factors as proximity to the tradition through inheritance or through association provide a means of understanding and contextualizing performance and identity, as well as stylistic competence.

This volume fittingly ends with an offering of two intriguing 'crossover' perspectives related to fiddle and dance traditions. Swedish scholars Eriksson and Nilsson playfully challenge our notions of categorization regarding music and dance, suggesting that we need to push the boundaries of scholarship by more closely examining links between ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology, thereby forging a more inclusive theoretical approach.

Owe Ronström ties together these proceedings with a provocative exploration of the fiddle from its earliest existence in the sixteenth century to its use in the twenty-first century as both an 'object' and as a 'phenomenon'. He suggests that we consider the fiddle within the context of both a mental and physical framework comprised of various 'musical mindscapes' and focused on the actions, thoughts, stories and roles of the participants. Deciphering and decoding these mindscapes and their interrelatedness are considered domains for exploring many issues, among them globalization and the (re)creation of heritage.

## 2

# The fiddle at sea: tradition and innovation among Shetland musicians in the whaling industry

FRANCES WILKINS

### Introduction

Among Shetlanders the fiddle has been the best represented instrument since it was first introduced to the islands by Hanseatic traders from Northern Europe in the early 1700s.<sup>1</sup> By 1809, it was commented by Arthur Edmonstone that in Shetland ‘among the peasantry almost one in ten can play on the violin’, and by 1920 most households on the islands were believed to own a fiddle.<sup>2</sup> Today there are believed to be approximately 340 tunes in the traditional Shetland fiddle repertoire.<sup>3</sup> Until the early twentieth century and the introduction of pianos, melodeons, and pedal organs or harmoniums, the fiddle was the dominant instrument in use among islanders. Due to its portability, it was often taken aboard sailing ships and other vessels for musical entertainment.<sup>4</sup> The necessity of music among whalers was described by David Proctor as follows:

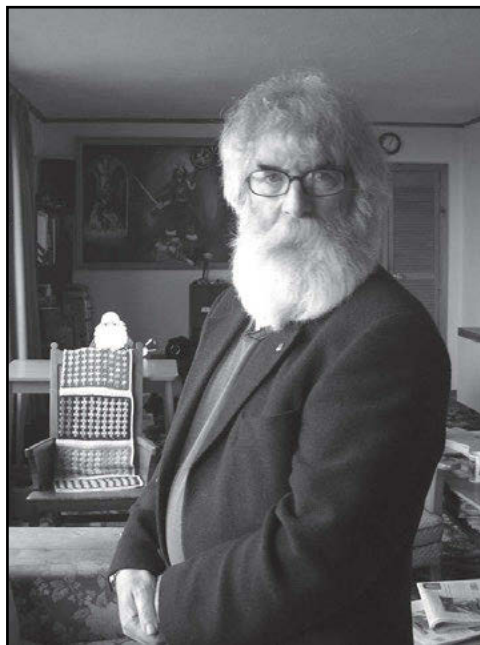
The men who undertook expeditions to Polar regions were perhaps those who needed music most, in order to maintain their morale during the long dark hours of winter when their ships were caught in the ice or they were living in huts, separated by vast distances from their homelands. This was especially true in those periods when wireless communication and aircraft, that might bring relief, did not exist.<sup>5</sup>

The influence of the fiddle was not only confined to crew members working aboard whaling ships, but extended to the indigenous populations in Arctic Alaska, Canada, and Greenland with whom whalers came into contact. Dan Worrall noted that anthropologists and musicologists of the early twentieth century ‘remarked upon the frequent use of fiddles, concertinas, and accordions by Inuit and Aleut people, as well as upon the proportion of European and American dance music that they played’.<sup>6</sup>

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how and to what extent the instrument was used at sea by Shetlanders employed in the whaling industries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>7</sup> In addition to using various written sources, I received help from Angus Johnson at the Shetland Museum and Archives in Lerwick and interviewed two men with extensive knowledge of fiddle music and the Shetland whaling industry. These are Charlie Simpson (see Figure 1), a pianist for the



Shetland fiddlers and long standing member of the Shetland Folklore Society whose father was a whaler, and Mitchel Arthur (see Figure 2), a music enthusiast and ex-whaler who was stationed in South Georgia during the 1950s and 60s. The oral account from Mitchel Arthur was particularly useful as it enabled me to present a first-hand account of the South Georgia whaling industry and the music performed by workers in the industry, while the musical knowledge shared by Charlie Simpson gave me a better understanding of the repertoire associated with the whalers from Shetland.



**Figure 1** Charlie Simpson, Cunningsburgh, Shetland Islands, 16 May 2008.

*Photograph by Frances Wilkins*



**Figure 2** Mitchel Arthur, Firth, Shetland Islands, 15 May 2008.

*Photograph by Frances Wilkins*

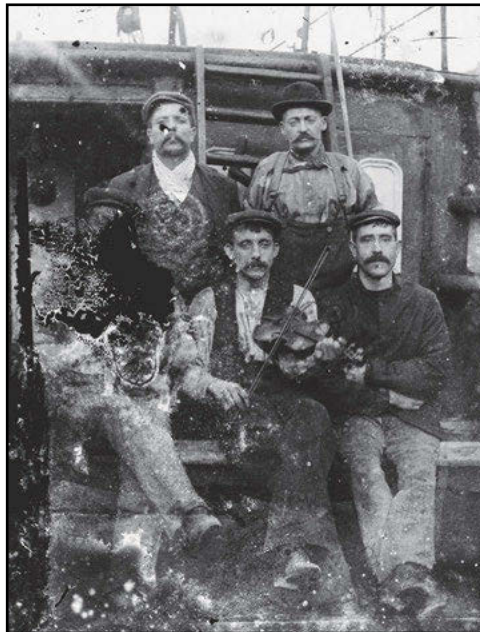
While whaling was not the only nautical occupation where fiddle players were employed (many Shetlanders joined the Merchant and Royal Navies and worked in the herring industry), the whaling industry was particularly conducive to fiddle playing due to the long periods of inactivity associated with the occupation. Rather than use the fiddle for accompanying work, as with the sea shanty, the use of the instrument in this environment appears to have been solely for entertainment purposes. Dan Worrall, in his explorations of the use of concertina at sea, uncovered the following statistics which show the recorded instances of fiddle playing at sea far outnumbering those of other instruments.

## WILKINS *Shetland musicians in the whaling industry*

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Violin/fiddle	1315	Very High
Flute	676	
Guitar	625	High
Banjo	466	
Accordion	331	
Tin whistle	322	Medium
Concertina	262	
Jew's harp	151	
Mandolin	134	Low
Harmonica / Mouth Organ/	121	

**Figure 3** Frequency of occurrence of various musical instruments on board ships during the period 1860–1900, in numbers of ‘hits’ from a digital search.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst this must be treated only as a snapshot view of the period 1860–1900 relying solely on written documentation, it still gives some indication of the extent to which the fiddle was used among seafarers during the nineteenth century. Figure 4 is a photograph of crew members onboard a steamer in the early 1900s. The fiddle player positioned in the centre is Gibby Wood from Muckle Roe in the North Mainland of Shetland.<sup>9</sup>

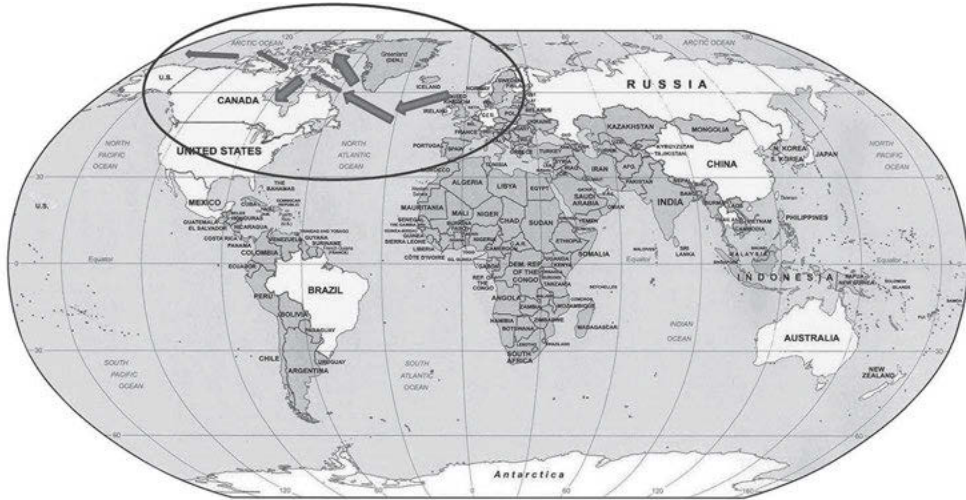


**Figure 4** Crew men on board a steamer, early 1900s. *Shetland Museum Photographic Archives*

### **The Arctic Whaling Industry**

The Arctic whaling industry began in the early 1700s when ships started travelling to the Davis Straits off the Greenland coast in order to hunt down the whales.<sup>10</sup> Leaving

in the spring, a whaling season tended to last between four and five months.<sup>11</sup> Greenland was the centre for the industry in the late 1700s, after which time attention was drawn to areas further west such as Hudson Bay and the Bering Straits.<sup>12</sup> Figure 5 is a map showing the routes taken by ships employed in the industry. In 1851 American whalers introduced the practice of 'wintering'. Vessels became frozen into the ice and the crew members were forced to live off the land. This required them to depend on the Inuit for food and clothing, and trading became established, which resulted in interdependence between indigenous populations and the whalers.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 5** Map showing Arctic whaling routes<sup>14</sup>

The popularity of whaling as an occupation for Shetland men was due to two main factors. The first was that inshore fishing around the coast of Shetland was winding down in the early 1800s and the second the lack of opportunity in fishing forced men to look to the Arctic whaling industry as an alternative means of earning a living.<sup>15</sup> This was made possible because whaling ships from English and Scottish ports had started the practice of hiring extra crew members in Lerwick, the last port of call before they continued their journeys westwards to the whaling grounds.<sup>16</sup> Shetlanders and Orcadians were willing to work for less than mainlanders and were known as excellent seamen. They were welcomed onboard whaling ships as crew members, and, in addition to this, many Shetlanders played the fiddle. Whaling ships were known to complete their crew with a fiddle player so that they could 'while away the hours during times of inactivity'.<sup>17</sup> Evidence of the popularity of fiddle playing in the whaling industry can be found in whale company ledgers such as those of the Lerwick-based Hay and Company, where the purchase of fiddle strings was frequently recorded. Copies of these documents are available for viewing in the Shetland archives in Lerwick.<sup>18</sup> The variety of nationalities working in the whaling industry allowed for vibrant musical interchange between crew members, as Laurence Williamson of Yell described in his article, 'Fiddle Springs', in 1971:

Each Greenland ship used to carry a fiddler, sometimes a Southerner, sometimes a Shetlander, to play to the men while at work to enliven them. And sometimes the fiddlers from several ships would meet and try their skill. And I think I have heard of a Shetland fiddler competing with the Dutch from a buss or ship. No wonder that tunes are so abundant. Several of them are fairy tunes, and are likely very old; many are of Norse origin and many Scotch; and many of them must have been learned from the sources indicated above. There is even a Yaki, i.e. Eskimo tune.<sup>19</sup>

### **‘Yakki’ and ‘Whaling’ Tunes**

The large cross-section of people working in the Greenland whaling industry from England, Scotland, Shetland, Norway, and Denmark, among other places, resulted in a vibrant mixture of tunes learned and played amongst the musicians employed on the whaling ships.<sup>20</sup> Some of these were then transported back to Shetland following a whaling season, often with little or no information on their origins. This process of musical exchange led to the acceptance of two new, albeit small, categories in the Shetland repertoire which were identified by Peter Cooke as ‘Yakki’ tunes (apparently learned from Inuit sources), and ‘whaling’ tunes (learned or composed by musicians aboard whaling ships).<sup>21</sup> While Cooke suggests that ‘Yakki’ tunes have been totally forgotten, two tunes were attributed to this category by the Shetland fiddle teacher and researcher, Tom Anderson. These are ‘Hjogrovoltar’ and ‘Da Greenland Man’s Tune’, the latter originating as a listening tune, possibly with Inuit words to it.<sup>22</sup> ‘Hjogrovoltar’, which takes its name from a croft on the island of Fetlar, has been described as both a ‘Yakki’ and a ‘trowy’ tune. ‘Trowy’ tunes constitute another category in the Shetland repertoire, and are linked together by the various claims that they were learnt from trows. These are small mythical troll-like creatures which were believed to live under the hills and entice fiddlers to entertain them at their parties.<sup>23</sup> According to Charlie Simpson, these ‘Yakki’ tunes were more likely to have been compositions by modest fiddlers aboard whaling ships who were too shy to admit that they had written the tune themselves, as there was no melodic instrumental tradition among the Inuit at that time.<sup>24</sup> Charlie Simpson drew parallels between the ‘Yakki’ and ‘trowy’ tune categories, suggesting that in both cases the composer had been too shy to admit writing the tune themselves, and so invented a story that it had been learnt from one of the two sources.<sup>25</sup>

Whaling tunes had no Inuit associations. Three of the best known of these are the reels, ‘The Merry Boys of Greenland’, ‘Oliver Jack’ and ‘Willafjord’, all of which are firmly established in the Shetland repertoire and known by fiddlers throughout the islands.<sup>26</sup> As its name suggests, ‘The Merry Boys of Greenland’ is one of the few tunes known for certain to have been taken back by Shetland fiddlers from the Arctic whaling. It is also believed to have had words accompanying the tune, although I have been unable to find any reference to what these were.<sup>27</sup> Another version of this tune has been found played in Denmark, as Cooke explains:

'The Merry Boys of Greenland' is another popular reel, described by many Shetlanders as a 'whaling reel' because it was said to have been brought back by the crews of whaling ships in an earlier century. Interestingly its second turning, somewhat similar in its alternating motifs to the opening of 'Da Galley Watch', may well have travelled to the Frisian islands where, on Terschelling island, a tune known as 'Rielen' was noted down by Jaap Kunst, the celebrated Dutch folklorist and father of ethnomusicology. Sunday dancing seems to have been a popular tradition in Terschelling and Kunst made some fascinating early film of Sunday dancing in which this dance is recorded – the dance appears identical to the 'backstep' version of the Shetland reel, which is the most commonly known version in Shetland today. Presumably the Dutch fishermen took more than just herrings back with them from Shetland waters – happy memories of dances on the quaysides and in the huts of the Shetland herring stations.<sup>28</sup>

The tune 'Willafjord' was introduced to Shetland by the father of Bobby Peterson, a fiddler from Tingwall, who learnt it while aboard a whaling ship in the Davis Straits in the early twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> Peterson senior, who was born in 1886, worked aboard whaling ships for a number of years and rose from the ranks of whaler (or deckhand) to ship's captain.<sup>30</sup> He always took his fiddle to sea, and returned from one trip having learned the tune.<sup>31</sup> It became so popular that it is now not only in the Shetland repertoire, but played by fiddlers throughout the British Isles and in Canada. Whereas Peterson senior performed at concerts and weddings whilst in Shetland, he played the fiddle in the mess room when at sea. Apart from the above mentioned tunes, most of the repertoire which emerged from the Arctic whaling is assumed to have been forgotten from what was an entirely oral tradition at that time.<sup>32</sup>

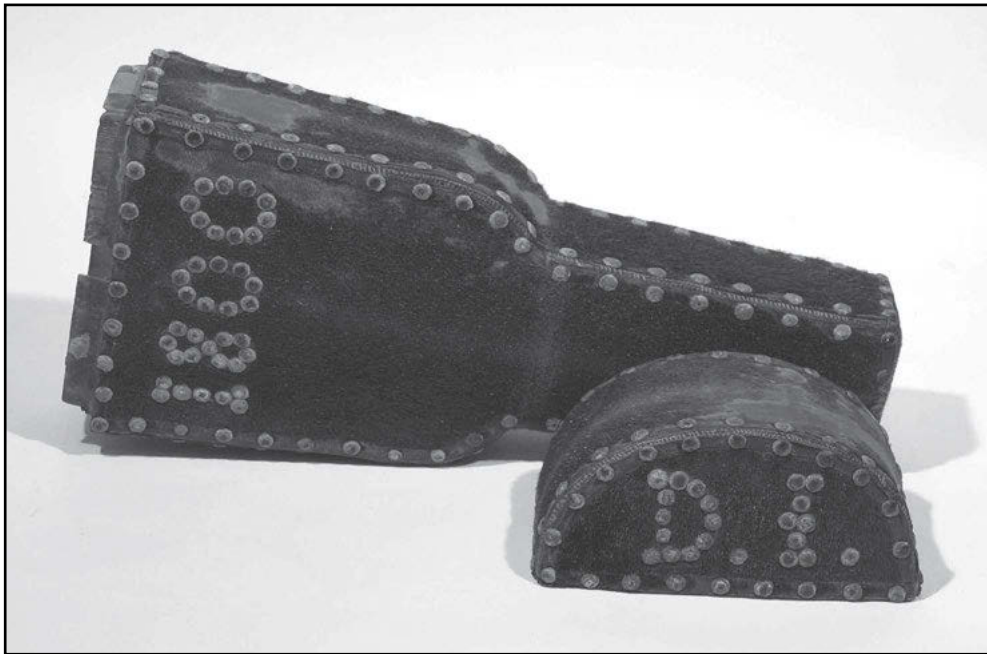
'Da Greenland Man's Tune' is another melody which was brought back from the Greenland whaling days. It was believed by Jamsie Laurenson, a fiddler from the island of Fetlar, to have originated as a listening tune with Inuit, or what he called 'Yakki' words to it.<sup>33</sup> However, Pat Shuldham Shaw, who transcribed the tune during fieldwork in the mid-twentieth century, questioned any origin among the indigenous Arctic population, writing against the transcription, 'Most unusual, I don't think it is a Greenland tune despite the name. I class it as a very old Shetland tune.'<sup>34</sup> 'Hjogravoltar' is another tune which is known both as a trowy tune and as a 'Yakki' tune, noted down by Pat Shuldham Shaw from Jamsie Laurenson of Fetlar, who learnt it from what appear to be three sources, his mother, Willie Isbister, and a whale fisher. The name, however, refers to a croft on Fetlar and has no obvious association with the Greenland whaling.<sup>35</sup>

### **Instruments and Accessories**

Conditions of isolation at the whaling demanded a degree of innovation with regards to the care and protection of the instrument and its accessories. One example can be seen in Figure 6, a photograph of a seal-skin fiddle case made by Donald Jamieson

which is on display at the Shetland Museum in Lerwick. The skin is held in position by brass studs and spells out the date, 1800, and the initials 'D. I.' on the end piece. In former times, it was common to use the letter I to represent the letter J, and this is probably why Donald Jamieson uses it here.<sup>36</sup> Regarding the fiddler himself, it is recorded:

Donald was said to have owed his exceptional talent to a group of old fiddlers from the Flamaster area of Nesting who taught him to play with great skill and proficiency. Stories were told of how he won many wagers while at the Greenland whaling, and on one occasion how a desperate attempt was made by his rivals to poison him by giving him a dram containing a quantity of aquafortis.<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 6** Seal-skin fiddle case made by Donald Jamieson. *Shetland Museum*

In the 1860s the practice of overwintering onboard whaling ships began to the west of the Hudson Bay. This resulted in sustained cultural contact between whalers and indigenous populations, and appears to have contributed to the introduction of bowed instruments to the region.<sup>38</sup> For example, what were known as *Tautiruut*, which were one-stringed instruments used for accompanying Inuit songs, were believed by the ethnographer E. W. Hawkes to have been 'a rude imitation of "fiddles" seen on whaling ships' even though they had strong similarities to the ancient Icelandic *Fidla* and the Shetland *gue*, which were predecessors to the fiddle.<sup>39</sup>

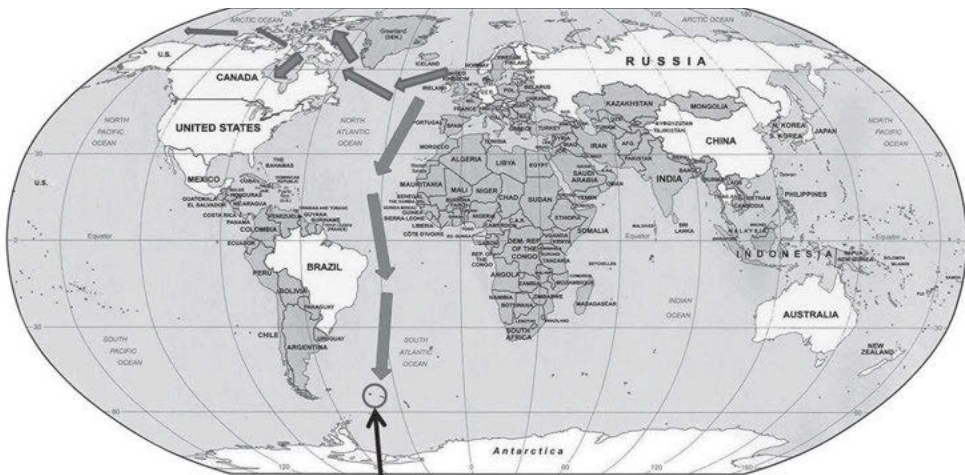
The Arctic whaling industry ended in the early 1900s and was replaced by an era of modern whaling which lasted from 1904 until 1963 when the industry



finally came to an end.<sup>40</sup> During this time the centre of the whaling industry moved from the Arctic to South Georgia, a remote and initially uninhabited island lying 864 miles east-southeast of the Falkland Islands.<sup>41</sup> Christian Salvesen, a Norwegian company based in Scotland, was the main employer and Shetland men looking for work registered with the company at Leith, near Edinburgh, before joining the *Southern Garden* or the *Southern Venturer*. These were large ships responsible for transporting over six hundred men from the British Isles to South Georgia for the start of the season, a journey which lasted six weeks in total.<sup>42</sup>

### **Whaling in South Georgia**

In contrast to the Arctic whaling, it was not when the men were working aboard ships that they played music, but primarily during the journeys to and from South Georgia (see the map in Figure 7).<sup>43</sup> Although there were some jobs given to the whalers onboard, much of their time was spent in recreation.<sup>44</sup> Evidence of the influence of increased communication between Shetland and other parts of the world, coupled with the effect of listening to recorded media and radio, can be seen in the playing styles and different instruments adopted by men aboard the ships. This can especially be seen with the influx of guitars and accordions, and the infiltration of country and western music, and Scottish country dance music.



**Figure 7** Map of South Georgia whaling routes

Although there was some work for the men to do onboard, such as preparing the ship for the coming season, and painting and splicing wires, much of the time was spent in recreation.<sup>45</sup> A number of the crew were able to play a musical instrument, and in an interview for BBC Radio Shetland, Mitchel Arthur commented that almost all people seemed to be able to play music, and that 'it was just splendid, we had many a good tune when we were at the tropics'.<sup>46</sup> Groups were often formed to provide entertainment, and on the *Southern Garden*, a band of four Shetland men known as 'Da Boys,' performed regularly during the 1950s and 1960s. These were Victor Inkster from Burra, who played the accordion, Scotty Christie, also from

Burra, who played guitar, his brother John Christie, who played guitar and sang, and Davy Clarke from Yell, who played the fiddle.<sup>47</sup> Although they were well known on the *Southern Garden*, the band did not perform together when the men were in Shetland.<sup>48</sup> Mitchel Arthur, who spent a few years travelling aboard the *Southern Garden*, explained their music as follows:

MA: John Christie was a marvellous country and western singer, and that was the music. We sang a lot of country and western.

FW: Was it country and western fiddle rather than Shetland fiddle?

MA: No, it was Shetland fiddle mostly. Davy Clarke could do country and western fiddle as well, but he preferred the Shetland music.

FW: Did people dance? What did the band do?

MA: Just play and then the lot o' the crew would sit around and listen. Sometimes it wis [was] just a few of you in the cabin. It was just the boys that played liked to get together and play as they always do.<sup>49</sup>

There was a huge country and western influence at this time, although the musicians still retained an interest in and appreciation for the Shetland fiddle music. Mitchel himself showed great appreciation for the music, and in another interview commented: 'It was just splendid, we had many a good tune.'<sup>50</sup> There was no amplification, and the weather for much of the journey was so good that musicians were able to play on the decks to large audiences.<sup>51</sup>

The atmosphere on the *Southern Venturer* was similarly conducive to the formation of ad hoc bands. One particular group, which played together during 1960–1961 consisted, again, of four Shetlanders. These were Albert Clark from Yell on guitar, Arthur Thomason from Fetlar on accordion, Wilson Couatts from Fetlar on guitar, and Allan Tulloch from Whalsay on fiddle.<sup>52</sup> Allan Tulloch, who experienced his first whaling season at the age of eighteen in 1953, recalled, 'I always had a fiddle with me so, along with other Shetlanders, we had many a good tune.'<sup>53</sup> It is worth noting that the instrumentation of both groups is exactly the same: two guitars, accordion, and fiddle. Conceivably this may reflect what was happening musically in Shetland at that time. The photograph in Figure 8, taken in 1960, appears to represent this band with an additional fiddle player (see overleaf)

Entertainment on the *Southern Venturer* appears to have been a more organised affair than on the *Southern Garden*, and regular ship's concerts were held during the evenings. The format for these was similar to a talent show, with voting cards handed out to a selection of the audience at the beginning who then awarded points to each act. At the end the points were counted and winners announced. In 1961, this was consistently a Shetland duo, John Dalziel on fiddle and Bobby Sinclair on accordion. Jimmy Smith, one of the men on board at the time recalled, 'They were a delight to listen to and played many an encore.'<sup>54</sup> This combination of accordion and fiddle had become very popular at this time, mostly due to the influence of Jimmy



**Figure 8** Entertainers on board the Southern Venturer, c. 1960.

*Shetland Museum Photographic Archives*

Shand.<sup>55</sup> The players too were incorporating a number of Scottish and Irish tunes, many of which have retained popularity in Shetland to the present day. Mitchel Arthur explained this as follows:

MA: Fiddle and accordion music was always the main source of entertainment. It always was. I mean it was live, you could have requests if you wanted to play such-and-such a tune.

FW: What were the favourite tunes?

MA: Well, now. The favourite tunes, dear, dear, dear, dear, there were so many of them. I mean there was all the original tunes that everybody played. 'Merry Boys of Greenland' being one. 'Barren Rocks of Aden', 'Orange and Blue', 'Lovat Scouts', 'Willafjord', 'Jack', 'Brown Coo', 'Mrs. Macleod of Skye' is it? The Irish tunes, quite a few Irish tunes that I don't mind the names of them now. 'The De'il among the Tailors', of course Scots, 'Mason's Apron' very popular, and then for show off, the hornpipes, the 'High Level' especially, 'Banks', 'Trumpet'.<sup>56</sup>

In Mitchel's list of tunes mentioned, it is interesting that the Greenland whaling tunes – 'Merry Boys of Greenland', 'Willafjord', and 'Oliver Jack' – continued to play a prominent role in the instrumental tradition even after the shift to the South Georgia whaling grounds and influx of new musical influences.

### Music in South Georgia

When the whalers eventually reached South Georgia, they were sent to work either on whale catchers or a factory ship.<sup>57</sup> While men on factory ships had some opportunity to play music during their spare time, this was not the case on whale catchers, which were much smaller vessels. Musicians who had been placed on whale catchers usually left their instruments aboard the factory ship.<sup>58</sup> Every few years, men were expected to overwinter in South Georgia and were given the jobs of repairing the station and boats.<sup>59</sup> Music in the wintertime took place at the weekends when people had time off, and parties and entertainment took place. As Mitchel explained:

Music in the wintertime, as I said, you've got this Saturday afternoon and Sunday off, and then you woulda had – you got a tot of rum, and there wis usually a bit of illicit drink and everybody picked up their accordions and fiddles and whatever, and Jimmy Shand would get a good hammering, and Will Star. A lot of good Norwegian musicians too, but it was mostly accordion.<sup>60</sup>

The photograph in Figure 9 shows musicians from Shetland and Norway who at the time were overwintering in Leith Harbour, one of the ports in South Georgia.



**Figure 9** Musicians from Shetland and Norway overwintering in Leith Harbour, South Georgia. *Shetland Museum Photographic Archives*

## **Conclusion**

The Arctic and South Georgia whaling industry is only one small area where fiddles were used onboard ships from the Shetland Islands. Other places where this occurred are in the Royal and Merchant navies, in the Hudson's Bay Company, and to some extent in the fishing industry. Even today, fiddlers are popular additions to a ship's crew, and can be found on tall ships, in the merchant navy, and aboard cruise ships as valued entertainers. Not only has fiddle music provided entertainment for crew members onboard the ships, but the musical interchange which resulted in the meeting of fiddlers from different geographical regions contributed to the integration of new tunes into the Shetland repertoire. Although there is evidence that Shetland whalers introduced fiddles to the arctic regions, there has been little research conducted into the music which Shetlanders left behind in their wake. Whereas Craig Mishler extensively researched the Athapascan fiddle tradition and its roots in the Hudson's Bay Company, and Anne Lederman has published on the Métis fiddle tradition, the direct impact of Shetlanders in Canada and Alaska would be an area which would benefit from future research. When we consider the South Georgia whaling industry, the changes in Shetland musical society are noticeably reflected on board ships, particularly with the addition of the accordion and guitar, and the influence of different musical genres such as country and western and Scottish country dance music.

## **Appendix: Interviews**

Mitchel Arthur, interview on memories of whaling by Frances Wilkins, 15 May 2008, Firth, Delting, Shetland Islands, tape recording.

Charlie Simpson, interview on Shetland whaling and fiddle music with Frances Wilkins, 16 May 2008, Cunningsburgh, Shetland Islands, tape recording.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Peter Cooke, *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles*, ed. by John Blacking, *Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Edmonstone quoted in Peter Cooke, 'Notes and Comments: The Fiddle in Shetland Society' (London: Royal Musical Association, 1976), p. 69; also in Tom Anderson, *Talk on Shetland Music* (London: National Sound Archives, 1950), audio recording.

<sup>3</sup> Charlie Simpson, interview on Shetland whaling and fiddle music by Frances Wilkins, 16 May 2008, Cunningsburgh, Shetland Islands, tape recording (Elphinstone Institute Archives, not yet catalogued).

<sup>4</sup> 'Shetland Music from 1700 to 1920', *Shetland – Music* (2004–2006) [www.shetland-music.com/about\\_our\\_music/history\\_and\\_traditions/shetland\\_music\\_from\\_1700\\_to\\_1920](http://www.shetland-music.com/about_our_music/history_and_traditions/shetland_music_from_1700_to_1920) [accessed 25 June 2008].

<sup>5</sup> David Proctor, *Music of the Sea* (London: HMSO, 1992), p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Dan M. Worrall, 'Concertinas at Sea: A History of a Nautical Icor', *angloconcertina.org* (2008) [http://www.angloconcertina.org/concertina\\_at\\_sea.html](http://www.angloconcertina.org/concertina_at_sea.html), p. 2 [accessed 20 June 2008].

<sup>7</sup> This paper is a continuation of previous research which I conducted in 2002–2004, which resulted in the presentation of the conference paper, 'The Fiddle Music of the Shetland Islands', at the 'Soul of the Fiddle Conference' at SOAS, University of London, in April 2004



and another paper on the same topic at the London Fiddle Conference at SOAS, University of London, in 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Worrall gathered these statistics as follows: 'by querying Google's digital books for the name of each instrument and the word 'ship', in books written in the time period in which concertinas were most common (1860–1900). These results were taken in January 2008 and can be found in Worrall, 'Concertinas at Sea', p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> This photograph is courtesy of the Shetland Museum Photographic archives.

<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Harley Eber, *When the Whalers Were up North: Inuit Memories from the Eastern Arctic* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon Jackson, *The British Whaling Trade* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1978), p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, 1978, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Eber, 1989, p. xii, pp. 11–12.

<sup>14</sup> This map was downloaded from the following website: [www.nlar.net/International/overviewOct03.htm](http://www.nlar.net/International/overviewOct03.htm) [accessed 12 June 2008]. The arrows were added later by the author.

<sup>15</sup> Charlie Simpson, 'Three Centuries of Fiddling', *Shetland – Music* (2004–2006) [www.shetland-music.com/about\\_our\\_music/three\\_centuries\\_of\\_fiddling/three\\_centuries\\_of\\_fiddling](http://www.shetland-music.com/about_our_music/three_centuries_of_fiddling/three_centuries_of_fiddling) [accessed 25 June 2008].

<sup>16</sup> Simpson, interview, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Alex R. Buchan, *The Peterhead Whaling Trade* (Peterhead: Buchan Field Club, 1993), pp. 54, 64; Bobby Peterson, 'Willafjord'/ 'Oliver Jack', interviewed by Tom Anderson and Peter Cooke, TA 104A-10, Lerwick, Shetland Archives, 1970.

<sup>18</sup> There are many examples of whaling ledgers which refer to the purchase of fiddle strings in the Shetland Archives in Lerwick. One example, from the ship, *Venable*, refers to the purchase of '45s' worth of 'fiddle strings' in 1816, volume D.31/6/5. A ledger from another vessel, the *Alibi*, refers to the purchase of a violin in 1853, volume D.31/6/22.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Cooke, 1976, p. 71. L. G. Johnson, 'Lawrence Williamson of Mid Yell, Lerwick', 1971, p. 125, quoted in Cooke, 1976, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Simpson, interview, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Cooke, 1986, p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> This is explained in Tom Anderson and Pam Swing, *Haand Me Doon Da Fiddle*. 2nd edn (Stirling: Department of Continuing Education, University of Stirling, 1981), p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Simpson, 'Three Centuries of Fiddling'.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Simpson, interview, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Chris Stout interviewed in John Purser, 'Hunting Whale and Seal', *Scotland's Music*, Episode 32, 19 August 2007 (Glasgow: BBC Radio Scotland, 2007), [www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/music/scotlandsmusic/pdfs/scotlandsmusic\\_32.pdf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/music/scotlandsmusic/pdfs/scotlandsmusic_32.pdf) [accessed 30 January 2009].

<sup>28</sup> Cooke, 1986, p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Cooke, 1986, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Simpson, interview, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> This is explained by Tom Anderson in Anderson and Swing, 1981, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Read from Shuldham Shaw manuscripts owned by Charlie Simpson during interview, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



<sup>36</sup> This explanation is given with the fiddle case, which is on display at the Shetland Museum, Lerwick, Shetland Islands (2008).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> E. Y. Arima and Magnus Inarsson, 'Whence and Where The "Eskimo Fiddle"?' *Folk*, 18 (1976), 23–40 (pp. 35–37); Worrall, 2008, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Arima and Inarsson, 1976, pp. 29–33.

<sup>40</sup> The events leading to the end of the Arctic whaling are described more fully in the following: Redgrave, this is the only name given to the sailor – no first name, 'Journal of a Whaling Voyage from Dundee to Davis Strait, 1894', *The Polar Record*, 10 (1960), 126–37 (p. 126); Eber, 1989, p. 104; John R Bockstoce, *Whales, Ice and Men: The History of the Whaling in the Western Arctic* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1986), p. 338; dates given by Jackson, 1978, p. 155.

<sup>41</sup> Wikipedia contributors, 'South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 20 February 2009, 00:13 UTC, [en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=South\\_Georgia\\_and\\_the\\_South\\_Sandwich\\_Islands&oldid=271956100](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=South_Georgia_and_the_South_Sandwich_Islands&oldid=271956100) [accessed 26 February 2009]. All information taken from Wikipedia has been verified and I am confident of its accuracy.

<sup>42</sup> More on the Shetland whaling industry based in the Shetland Islands is discussed in Simpson, interview, 2008; discussed in Mitchel Arthur, interview on memories of whaling by Frances Wilkins, 15 May 2008, tape recording.

<sup>43</sup> This map was downloaded from the following website: [www.nlar.net/Internation/overviewOct03.htm](http://www.nlar.net/Internation/overviewOct03.htm) [accessed 12 June 2008]. The arrows were added later by the author.

<sup>44</sup> Arthur, interview, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> A half-hour interview can be heard between Mitchel Arthur and Mary Blanche, where he speaks in detail about his time at the South Georgia whaling, in Mary Blanche, 'Mitchel Arthur', in *In About Da Night* (Scotland: BBC Radio Shetland, 2003). This can be accessed in the Shetland Archives, Shetland Museum, Lerwick, BBCRS/1/9/184.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur, interview, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Blanche, 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur, interview, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Discussed in Gilbert A. Fraser, *Shetland Whalers Remember* (Shetland: Gilbert A. Fraser, 2001), p. 65.

<sup>53</sup> Quotation from Fraser, 2001, p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> From a longer piece in Fraser, 2001, p. 223.

<sup>55</sup> Arthur, interview, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Arthur, interview, 2008; Simpson, interview, 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Explained in Simpson, interview, 2008, and Arthur, interview, 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur, interview, 2008.

## Emigrant Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres, Norway: their legacies at home and abroad

LAURA ELLESTAD

Between 1840 and 1956, approximately sixty Hardanger fiddle players emigrated to North America from the mountain valley district called Valdres, in South-Central Norway. Many left Norway with the hope of starting a better life for their families; some stayed only a number of years, later returning to their home country; some left for America intending to save up a large sum of money to bring back to Norway, but for various reasons did not return.

Two of the earliest documented Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres are Knut P. Ringestad (c. 1700–1790/1728–1810), from Vestre Slidre, and Torstein Knutsson Røyne (1765–1830), from Hegge in Øystre Slidre. According to tradition, Knut P. Ringestad was the first fiddle player to travel from Valdres to the Hardanger district (the birthplace of the Hardanger fiddle, and thereby the origin of the name of the instrument) and learn some of their fiddle tunes.<sup>1</sup> He then brought this music home to Valdres and added colours and characteristics from the already existing local folk music; thus began the development of a Hardanger fiddle tradition unique to the Valdres district.

In the century that followed – until the first Hardanger fiddler left Valdres for America in about 1840 – several of the most influential musicians in the history of the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres lived and continued to refine and develop the music. Jørn Nilsson Hilme (1778–1854) and Lars Mikkjelson Krøsshau (1785–1830) were two of the most important fiddlers during this period; Jørn Hilme is said to have had the greatest influence on the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres of any of Valdres's fiddlers, in that he rebuilt and composed a great number of tunes, and he developed a unique and very characteristic bow technique (*ristetak*, or several fast triplets played in succession) which to this day is identified with him and with the Valdres tradition. Lars M. Krøsshau, or 'Krøsshaugen', as he was often called, also left a strong mark on Valdres music; his expertise is said to have been in playing the old *lydarlåttar* ('listening tunes'), and he was also said to have been Jørn Hilme's equal in terms of ability. Knut Nordland (1794–1877), Arne Steinsrud (1799-?), Knut J. Ringestad (1815–1854), and the sons of both Jørn Hilme and Lars M. Krøsshau were

also important fiddlers during this period. There are others of equal significance, but it is not essential to name them all here.<sup>2</sup>

By the time Ola Strand left his farm in Volbu, Øystre Slidre, for the USA in the 1840s, a great deal of growth had occurred in the repertoire and style of the Hardanger fiddle music from Valdres, and in the century between 1840 and 1940, the Hardanger fiddle and its music had blossomed, not only in Valdres, but, generally speaking, in all of the Hardanger fiddle districts. Many more influential fiddlers lived during this time, and, in Valdres, a significant number of them chose to leave Valdres, either for a number of years or for good, to make their way to North America.

This is a greatly abbreviated description of the early history of the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres, but I hope that it will serve to introduce some of the main concerns this paper will address. A provocative question arises when the historical development of the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres and the onset of Norwegian emigration to North America are taken into account simultaneously: namely, what kind of influence did the emigration of Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres to North America have on the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres? And, in the same way, what kind of influence did these emigrant fiddlers have on the Hardanger fiddle milieu in North America?

The Norwegian emigration period dates roughly from 1825 to 1930. Hardanger fiddlers from all of the so-called 'Hardanger fiddle districts' emigrated from Norway to North America in great numbers throughout this period. I have chosen to focus on emigration from Valdres in order to narrow the investigation of this widespread phenomenon, and also because, as a Hardanger fiddle player, I have focused mainly on the music tradition from Valdres.<sup>3</sup>

Before examining in greater detail the emigration of Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres, I will begin with a brief discussion of the history of the Hardanger fiddle, as well as introducing some of the circumstances surrounding the phenomenon of emigration and the cultural significance of the Hardanger fiddle in Norway. In order to gain a clear understanding of the impact of the migration of Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres to North America, it is important that the reader be introduced to these contextual concerns.

Portraits of five emigrant fiddlers from Valdres will then serve to illuminate many of these background concerns and will provide examples of various ways fiddlers and fiddle music from Valdres made the journey to North America.

### **Origins and the traditional role of the Hardanger fiddle**

The Hardanger fiddle is a uniquely Norwegian instrument. It belongs to the violin family, but it has several special features which distinguish it from the violin. The most recognizable of these features are the instrument's elaborate decoration (including ink 'rosing' on the front, back, and sides of the instrument; mother-of-pearl and bone inlay; and a carved lion's or dragon's head in place of the usual violin scroll), a flattened bridge (which allows the fiddler to play more easily on two strings

at once), and a set of sympathetic understrings (on modern Hardanger fiddles there are usually four or five of these).

The Jåstad fiddle, dated 1651, is the oldest known Hardanger fiddle. It was probably made by Ole Jonsen Jaastad (1621–1694), a sheriff from Ullensvang in Hardanger.<sup>4</sup> But the earliest fiddle makers to make a significant impact on the development of the instrument – the music too – were Isak (1663–1759) and Trond Botnen (1713–1772), father and son from Kvam in Hardanger. Trond's work was prolific; he is said to have produced around 1000 fiddles in his lifetime, many of which were sold at markets in Lærdal and Kongsberg. Farmers and fiddlers would come from various districts to these markets to buy, sell and exchange goods, as well as exchanging tunes and competing with each other on the fiddle, and it is largely in this way that instruments and music spread from Hardanger to other parts of the country.

Hardanger fiddlers played a crucial role in traditional Norwegian rural societies. During wedding ceremonies, which would often take place over several days, a Hardanger fiddler was hired to welcome and entertain guests, to lead the wedding procession to and from the church, and, among other things, to wake the bride, groom, and guests after the first night of celebrations. Fiddlers also played at christenings, burials, and during holidays and seasonal celebrations. Perhaps most importantly, Hardanger fiddle music was a fixture at local gatherings and parties, and neighbours would often visit a fiddler's home to listen to him play.

### **Norwegian migration to North America**

According to historical records, the first Norwegian emigrants left for America on the sloop *Restauration* on 4 July 1825.<sup>5</sup> There were fifty-two persons on board, and several of them were Quaker sympathizers; most likely they were compelled to emigrate because of religious restrictions enforced by the Norwegian state church. Reasons for emigrating were many and diverse; some of the most common were poverty, economic depression, restrictive social and religious barriers, and curiosity. Of all the nationalities to emigrate to North America, Norwegians emigrated at a rate topped only by Ireland;<sup>6</sup> during the first century of Norwegian emigration, about 800,000 Norwegians emigrated to America.<sup>7</sup>

The pace of Norwegian emigration did not pick up until around 1840. Awareness of the possibilities available in the New World gradually reached the rural valleys with the arrival of news and letters from America, and 'in the first periods of migration, and to a lesser extent also during the later periods, the majority of Norwegian emigrants came from the inner rural districts of Norway, including Hallingdal, Valdres, Telemark, Numedal, and Setesdal'.<sup>8</sup>

The inland valley districts named above are all 'Hardanger fiddle districts'; this term designates the mountain and valley districts west of Gudbrandsdalen and the districts in Vestlandet south of Nordfjord. Hallingdal, Numedal, Setesdal, Telemark, Valdres, and Vestlandet (including Hardanger, Voss, Indre Sogn, and Sunnfjord) are all included in this designation.

Norwegian migration to North America can be divided into five 'waves', between which significant economic or political events caused a marked decline in the rate of migration. Each period has distinct features which characterize the settlement and activities of its emigrants in America.

During the first wave of emigration, which began in 1825 with the voyage of the *Restauration* and ended at the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, Norwegian emigrants settled mainly in homogeneous groups in Illinois and eastern Wisconsin. The promise of free land which came with the Homestead Act of 1862 marked the beginning of the second wave of emigration; the Panic of 1873, a widespread economic crisis, caused a decline in emigration and is regarded as the end of the second wave. During this period, Norwegian migration expanded into Iowa and Minnesota, largely due to the development of the railway.

In these early years, Norwegian settlers maintained many of the traditions they had brought with them from Norway. Norwegian settlements at this time were isolated, and emigrants from the same rural area often travelled and settled together; these conditions would have easily allowed for the continuation of traditional Norwegian rural culture. Early emigrant Hardanger fiddle players remained an important part of these societies and in many ways retained their traditional roles. They played at weddings and other celebrations, gave concerts, played for dancers, and played on board passenger ships during the long journey across the Atlantic.

A third wave of emigration began in the 1870s and saw many Norwegian emigrants settle in Minnesota and North and South Dakota. Emigration to Canada had become more common, and several thousand Norwegians homesteaded during this period on the Canadian prairies. At this time a great number of Norwegians also established homes in metropolitan areas such as Chicago and Minneapolis. Norwegian emigration was at its peak; in 1883, a record 28,000 emigrated.<sup>9</sup>

Economic recession in the 1890s caused another decline in emigration, and the fourth wave began at the turn of the century, only to be curtailed by the outbreak of the First World War. Norwegian migration had by this point reached Montana, Idaho, and the coastal states of Washington and Oregon, as well as Western Canada.

The period between the First and Second World Wars is regarded as the fifth and final wave of emigration. The rate of Norwegian migration to the USA significantly diminished during these years, largely due to the passing of the National Origins Act in 1924, which limited emigration to a yearly quota. Conversely, Norwegian emigration to Canada increased during this period, reaching its climax in 1927, when 5,103 Norwegian settlers entered the country.<sup>10</sup>

### **Instability and survival of the Hardanger fiddle tradition during the migration period**

Just as a manifold of new impulses and developments in both Norway and North America led to variable rates, causes, and destinations for emigration over the course of the Norwegian migration period, the Hardanger fiddle tradition simultaneously experienced a period of instability and change. In fact, several elements which contributed to both the instability and the survival of the Hardanger fiddle tradition

throughout this period are one and the same as certain factors which motivated the emigration of Norwegians to North America.

Up until the early- to mid-1800s, the Hardanger fiddle retained its traditional role in rural Norwegian societies. At this point, a Pietistic or Lay religious movement, led by Hans Nielsen Hauge, spread into the rural districts. Followers of this movement determined that the Hardanger fiddle and its music were sinful, and they strongly opposed fiddle playing, to the extent that many fiddlers stopped playing altogether, some were shunned by friends and neighbours, and a great number of instruments were destroyed. In some districts, such as upper Numedal, the effect of the Pietists' opposition to the Hardanger fiddle was so profound that the local Hardanger fiddle tradition essentially died out.<sup>11</sup> The Pietists' stance arose from the indirect association Hardanger fiddle music often had with drinking and other 'immoral' behaviour; thus, the Hardanger fiddle came to be known as the 'devil's instrument'.<sup>12</sup>

During the nineteenth century, local Hardanger fiddle traditions were also 'threatened' by the development and improvement of railways and roads. Norway's inland valley districts had fostered distinct Hardanger fiddle traditions which had clear regional ties, largely because communication and transportation between neighbouring valley districts was limited by the severity of the landscape. As roads were improved and the railroad expanded its reach, inhabitants of these valleys could more easily travel to other districts. The effects of this increased mobility on local Hardanger fiddle traditions were multifaceted: musical impulses from neighbouring districts, from urban centres, and from other European countries could more easily penetrate the once isolated valleys, and these impulses contributed to both the development and the instability of local Hardanger fiddle traditions. *Runddans*, *turdans*, and *gammaldans* music, which had originated in continental Europe, gained popularity in this way; the Polish *masurka* arrived in Norway around 1800, the *vals* came from Vienna in the 1820s, and, some years later, the *polka* and *reinlender* also appeared, all threatening to take the place of the older dances, *springar*, *gangar*, and *halling*. Hardanger fiddlers had to adapt to the demand for these newer dance forms, and many learned a repertoire of *runddans* music in addition to the traditional *springar*, *gangar*, and *halling* tunes.

Emigration was another consequence of increased mobility which had significant repercussions for the stability of the Hardanger fiddle tradition. Thanks to the improvements in transportation infrastructure, by the time the news of America had reached the inland valleys, those who were compelled to emigrate could more easily reach the port cities of Oslo, Bergen, and Stavanger. Emigration was in turn spurred on by a long period of economic depression; a large tenant farmer class had developed due to a combination of population growth and land shortage, and these people were particularly susceptible to America's promise of free land and prosperity, especially because of the difficult financial circumstances in Norway.

Many Hardanger fiddlers were quite poor, and many were tenant farmers. With their livelihood threatened by the gradual decline of traditional rural customs,

and with the prospect of land ownership bleak, it is no wonder that a great number left Norway for North America. But just what effect did the emigration of Hardanger fiddlers have on the stability of the Hardanger fiddle tradition? This is a question with only speculative answers. Without doubt, the fact that Hardanger fiddlers emigrated to North America in large numbers made an impact on the progress of the tradition.

At the same time that the rise of Pietism, the popularity of *runddans* music, and widespread emigration contributed to the instability of the Hardanger fiddle tradition during the Norwegian migration period, several other factors bolstered its survival. Perhaps the most important of these was the cultural movement known as Romantic Nationalism, which took place between 1840 and 1867. Inspired by the German National Romantic Movement, and motivated by Norway's desire to assert a national identity after having been governed by both Denmark and Sweden, Norwegian Romantic Nationalism awoke new interest and respect for folk traditions and culture. Hardanger fiddle music and its accompanying dance traditions came to be called 'national music' and 'national dance', and the Hardanger fiddle was recognized as Norway's 'national instrument'. Folk music collectors, many of them scholars with an interest in preserving the Norwegian folk music traditions, travelled to many of the rural districts and transcribed Hardanger fiddle tunes. Important cultural figures such as composer Edvard Grieg and violinist Ole Bull also worked to preserve and bring recognition to Norwegian folk music, and it was Ole Bull who initiated the first formal Hardanger fiddle concert with fiddler Torgeir Augundson, better known as 'Myllarguten', one of the most important fiddlers from the Telemark district. This concert took place on 15 January 1849 in Kristiania, and it was soon followed by many more solo Hardanger fiddle concerts in the cities.<sup>13</sup>

The interest of scholars in Romantic Nationalism waned after 1860, but around 1890 the ideals of the movement were revived during a Neo-Romantic period. Hardanger fiddlers continued to give concert performances throughout the course of these fluctuations; concert touring became a new and often lucrative source of income for fiddlers. A great number of 'concert pieces' for Hardanger fiddle, often containing sections in which the fiddle mimicked bird calls and other natural sounds, were made or developed from older tunes by concert fiddlers from all of the Hardanger fiddle districts.

Romantic Nationalism's interest in Norwegian folk music most likely also had some influence on the creation of the *kappleik*, a judged folk music competition. The first *kappleik* to focus on Hardanger fiddle music was held in Bø, Telemark in 1888; in 1896, Vestmannalaget organized the first of many *kappleikar* (plural) in Bergen, and several of the best fiddlers from districts in western Norway competed. The *kappleik* system allowed both fiddlers and spectators to gain a deeper awareness of the cultural value and complexity of Hardanger fiddle music by providing a grassroots venue for the appreciation and cultivation of the tradition. The tradition of holding both local and national *kappleikar* has survived in Norway to the present day and remains an important fixture in the folk music milieu.

## ELLESTAD *Emigrant Hardanger Fiddlers*

Around the same time as the establishment of the *kappleik*, local fiddlers' associations began to appear. A national fiddlers' association, called *Landslaget for Spelemenn*, was formed in 1923, and it served, among other things, to organize the annual national *kappleik*, and to connect the network of local associations and individual fiddlers which constituted its membership.

Though greatly affected by cultural, economic and political change, Hardanger fiddle music managed to survive in Norway, largely with thanks to the efforts of enthusiasts who dedicated time and resources to preserving and fostering the tradition. Its role and cultural significance had shifted dramatically, and it was no longer possible to return the tradition to its original place in rural culture. But, to turn our focus once again to Norwegian migration, what happened to the Hardanger fiddle tradition which was brought with Norwegian emigrants to North America, and was it able to survive?

Many of the same factors which threatened or reinforced the continuation of the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Norway were also at work in North America. For instance, the newer types of music and dance were equally popular among Norwegian emigrants, and, perhaps, more so because of their more frequent interaction with other cultures. Emigrant Hardanger fiddlers learned repertoires of these new tunes both in Norway and in North America, and they also traded tunes with musicians of other nationalities (in this way, a unique Norwegian-American fiddle tradition developed, most often played on the ordinary fiddle).

Many emigrants were followers of the Lay religious movement, as the movement's break with traditional Norwegian society and the State church became a strong motivator for emigration. Therefore, emigrant fiddlers were not freed from the influence of the movement's followers and their powerful opposition to the Hardanger fiddle.

The spirit of Norwegian Romantic Nationalism influenced the survival of Hardanger fiddle music in America, too. Many of the same fiddlers who toured Norway playing concerts during this period also tried their luck in America, and written records show that there was great success to be had by holding concerts in the 'Norwegian colonies' in the American Midwest. In some cases, thousands showed up to listen to the likes of Lars Fykerud (Telemark), Ola Mosafinn (Voss), and Olav Moe (Valdres) play. Concerts such as these would often consist of a mixture of traditional Hardanger fiddle tunes and the concert pieces mentioned earlier. The appeal of these performances to Norwegian emigrants must have been enormous: the opportunity to relive sounds and stories from their homeland, and, for some of the audience members, from their home district, would have been of great interest to any emigrant who longed for a taste of far-off Norway. Coupled with the interest in folk traditions awakened by Romantic Nationalism and Neo-Romanticism, it is no surprise that these concerts had such success.

In line with similar developments in the Hardanger fiddle milieu in Norway, emigrant Hardanger fiddlers began to organize *kappleikar* of their own at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first American *kappleik* was held just



two years before the establishment of an American national Hardanger fiddlers' association, the *Hardanger Violinists Forbundet af Amerika*, which was formed in 1914 at Ellsworth, Wisconsin. The 1912 *kappleik* was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of 'Telelaget i Amerika', a *bygdelag*, or organization centred on an association with a particular region in Norway, in this case Telemark.

A number of factors which were unique to the conditions of life in North America also had an impact on the survival of the emigrant Hardanger fiddle tradition. One such factor was the great distance that now separated fiddlers. The effects of this physical distance were particularly consequential during the latter half of the Norwegian migration period, when Norwegian emigrants were spread over a much larger area of the continent, and when the compulsion to integrate into American society was much stronger, resulting in the gradual disintegration of homogeneous Norwegian settlements. It thus became increasingly difficult for fiddlers to gather together; meetings between fiddlers provided an occasion to exchange and discuss music, and would also have been an important opportunity for mutual support. A lack of such interaction probably made it more difficult for many fiddlers to maintain a satisfactory level of musical development and personal engagement with the music, both of which are important elements for the cultivation of a musical tradition.

The compulsion to integrate into American society also played a significant role in de-stabilizing the emigrant Hardanger fiddle tradition. As mentioned, this impulse became increasingly powerful during the last decades of the Norwegian migration period, and it was particularly strong during the years preceding and during both the First and Second World Wars. In many cases, Norwegian emigrants were eager to adopt American customs and participate in an American culture; for a time, the Hardanger fiddle and its music and dance was regarded by some as 'un-American', and a great number of first- and second-generation Norwegian emigrants focused their attention elsewhere. This in turn had the effect that an increasingly dwindling number of emigrants were able to dance traditional *bydgedans*, the local versions of *springar*, *gangar*, and *halling* which accompanied Hardanger fiddle music. With fewer and fewer dancers to play for, Hardanger fiddlers in North America lost a large part of their cultural significance.

### **Valdres to North America**

Of all the rural Norwegian districts to see a portion of their inhabitants depart for the New World, the highest rate of emigration occurred in the Valdres district.<sup>14</sup> Although no exact figures exist, it has been estimated that about 12,000 left Valdres for North America between 1865 and 1905;<sup>15</sup> in 1900, the total population of the Valdres district was 17,000.<sup>16</sup> The rate of emigration from Valdres was high for a number of reasons. First, the natural landscape, a combination of medium-altitude mountains and long fjords, provides only a very small amount of arable land, and as the local population expanded during the 1800s, many already small farms were

divided and subdivided to make room for the next generation and their families, until the plots were not large enough to sustain the inhabitants.

In addition to this, the climate in Valdres made for short, often cool and wet growing seasons. Crop failures were not uncommon, and farmers had particularly bad luck due to poor weather for several seasons during the first half of the nineteenth century. As a result, many were severely malnourished, often to the point of starvation.

Partly due to the shortage of farmland, a large *husmann* or tenant farmer class arose during this period; these farmers were allowed to inhabit a modest home and to cultivate a small tract of land in exchange for helping their landlords with various other types of farm work. For a tenant farmer, land ownership in his home district was a distant hope, and the opportunities for inexpensive or free land in North America were incredible in comparison.

Many of the Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres who emigrated to North America were *husmenn*, compelled to emigrate at least partly due to this abundance of farmland. The individual circumstances and personal background of each fiddler also had much to say for why and how he made the journey into the New World. In order to illustrate this point, we will now take a closer look at five of Valdres's most important emigrant Hardanger fiddlers.

### **Arne Steinsrud (1799–?)**

Arne Steinsrud was one of the greatest fiddlers from Sør-Aurdal *kommune*, the southernmost municipality in Valdres. Sør-Aurdal and Etnedal have fostered the fewest Hardanger fiddlers of the six *kommuner* in Valdres, and this project has to date registered six emigrant fiddlers from Sør-Aurdal.

Steinsrud emigrated to America in 1852 at age 53.<sup>17</sup> He and his wife and nine of their children were thus a part of the first wave of Norwegian emigration. Steinsrud had bought the farm nordre Steinsrud in Begnadalen in 1824, but he had to sell it in 1851; it was said that he had 'played himself from house and grounds'.<sup>18</sup> Steinsrud was a master fiddler, and, in addition to his skill as a player, he was greatly inventive with the music. Much like his contemporary, Jørn Hilme, he elaborated the forms of many older tunes, and it is also said that he made a number of new ones, possibly including *Hengslelåtten*, a series of three *lydarlåtтар* which tell the story of the tragic drowning of a wedding party in a lake at Valdreshengslet. Many other tunes are referred to as *Steinsrudlåtten* because of the characteristic mark Arne Steinsrud left on them.

Steinsrud had several students, including Ellev Tollevsrud, Ola Lindelia, Amund Rustebakke, Ola Prestbråten, Anders Spangrud, and Ola Skreddarstugu. Of these, Amund Rustebakke and Ola Prestbråten also emigrated to America. Those who stayed behind in Valdres were able to pass on pieces of Steinsrud's playing tradition, but other pieces of the tradition have been lost. No records of students in America have been found, and it is likely that many tunes died with Arne Steinsrud in the Midwest.

In America, Arne Steinsrud and his family first settled in Springdale, Wisconsin, and later stayed for a time in the Valdres settlement called Blue Mounds. They established a permanent home in Vermont Township, Wisconsin. Steinsrud continued to play in America, and he soon became well known as a fiddler, playing often for weddings and parties. On one such occasion, one of his daughters died on the dance floor. After this, Steinsrud stopped playing, and reportedly 'smashed his violin'.<sup>19</sup>

### **Bendik i Nøen (1827–1882)**

Bendik i Nøen was from Nord-Aurdal *kommune*, a municipality from which only three Hardanger fiddlers emigrated.<sup>20</sup> His proper name was Bendik Toresson Gausåk; he was given the nickname 'Bendik i Nøen' (Bendik in Destitution) because of the poverty which followed him his whole life. He was born out of wedlock and grew up with his mother in a small, crude hut south of Svanheld in Svenesbygda. He was fascinated by fiddle music from early boyhood, so much so that he carved himself a makeshift instrument which he played when he accompanied his mother as she worked.

Later, he travelled often to Aurdal, a town about 15 kilometres south of his home, and played for the many officials and other members of the upper-class who populated the town at that time. His playing was warmly welcomed and praised in Aurdal, and he was frequently rewarded with money and food.

Bendik i Nøen was one of the best students of Jørn Hilme; he also played and competed often with Jørn Hilme's sons. Nøen therefore played *hilmespel* (the Jørn Hilme tradition), but he added a rich personal creativity and expression to the music, thereby forming a distinct tradition of his own. He composed tunes too, and one of them, 'Sylkjegulen hass Bendik i Nøen', became well known not only in Valdres, but also in various forms in other Hardanger fiddle districts. His most important student was Ulrik i Jensestogun; Ulrik passed on the tradition he had learned from Bendik i Nøen to fiddler Ola Fystro, and in addition, some of Ulrik's repertoire was transcribed by Swede Einar Övergaard between 1892 and 1896.

Nøen married early and settled with his family on a tenant farm near Gausåker. Providing for the family proved difficult, and he and his wife depended on the help of friends and neighbours in order to get by. Poverty was likely one of the major reasons Bendik i Nøen and his family emigrated; another probable influence was the severed connection from many friends he experienced as a result of the effects of the Pietist movement in Valdres.

In approximately 1870, during the second wave of Norwegian emigration, Bendik i Nøen emigrated with his family to Lansing, Iowa. He took a job there working for a farmer, and in 1876, he left for Rushford, Minnesota. Before he left, he gave his best fiddle, a Trond Botnen fiddle called 'Børka', to the farmer's 8-year-old son. Jøger O. Quale, a Hardanger fiddle enthusiast who emigrated to St Paul, Minnesota from Vestre Slidre, Valdres in 1907, located and purchased the fiddle in the 1930s (in 1958, Quale presented it to the Valdres Folk Museum, along with

two other instruments which had once belonged to great Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres, and which had later been brought to America).

Little is known about Bendik i Nøen's life in America. A letter from Quale refers to one occasion when Nøen played at a wedding, and it is possible he played at others. No documentation has revealed any students in America. It is difficult to know what circumstances caused him to give away his best instrument, and it is uncertain whether he continued playing after this. Nøen lost contact with his family at some point, and some records suggest that he started another family in America.

### **Knut Sjøheim (1849–1908)**

Knut Sjøheim emigrated to America in approximately 1870, at that point a young man just over twenty years old.<sup>21</sup> He had already been recognized as one of Valdres's greatest fiddlers, and several tunes had been named after him in honour of the special mark he had left on them.

Sjøheimen (as he was often called) was the illegitimate son of a *husmann's* daughter from Sjøheim, in Røn in Vestre Slidre *kommune*. He grew up to be an unusually small and frail man and was never suited for farm work. Instead, he spent most of his days playing the fiddle, and while he was still in Norway, he travelled often, both east and west of the Valdres valley, to play and learn tunes. He had no one master teacher, but had learned a little from his uncles and from Trond and Ola Hilme, two of Jørn Hilme's sons. He played *hilmespel*, made unique by the combination of power and refinement in his playing.

Upon arriving in America, he spent his first few years in Manitowoc, Wisconsin; in the years that followed, he and his family lived in Door County, Wisconsin; Fisher, Minnesota; Bemidji, Minnesota; Yorkton, Saskatchewan; and finally in Arlington, Washington. Though he occasionally took other work, it was on the proceeds of fiddling that Sjøheimen lived. One story has it that Sjøheimen sat on a haystack and played for a threshing crew during the harvest and was paid the same wage as the workers.

Sjøheimen also played at local and private gatherings, including parties held by the Sons of Norway organization, and he occasionally gave concerts in the city. Records indicate that he met and played with many other Hardanger fiddlers: Eivind D. Aakhus, a fiddler who had emigrated from Setesdal, and Sam Sorenson, a second-generation Norwegian immigrant, learned many tunes from Sjøheimen, and some of these tunes have been preserved, both by being transcribed and by being passed on to visiting Norwegian fiddlers who brought the music back to Norway. Sjøheimen's son Bennet learned the fiddle from his father, but his interest in playing was more casual.

According to another story, Sjøheimen once played for Ole Bull during one of Bull's trips to America. After hearing him play, Ole Bull gave Sjøheimen \$100 and said that he was one of the best players he had heard. Lars Fykerud, a great fiddler from Telemark who was exceedingly harsh in his judgment of other fiddlers' playing, said, after returning from a concert tour in America, 'I haven't met more

than one Norwegian fiddler I would take my hat off for. That was a Valdres man over in the North-West [USA] called Knut Sjøheim. He *could play – u hui!*<sup>22</sup>

The following comment aptly illustrates the significance of Sjøheimen's musicianship and the loss that Valdres experienced when he left for America:

That Sjøheimen was a master fiddler one can perceive in the tunes which are still considered to be after him. There aren't as many as there likely were, as he was so young when he left, but the ones we have distinguish themselves completely in favour and power from other normal dance tunes.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear, however, that his activities as a fiddler in America made a significant impact on the American Hardanger fiddle milieu, both by fulfilling a more traditional fiddler's role in the new Norwegian-American society, and by participating in and helping to develop a network of emigrant Hardanger fiddlers.

### **Trond Eltun (1823–1899)**

Trond Eltun was one of the best fiddlers from Valdres's northernmost *kommune*, Vang.<sup>24</sup> He had learned to play from several great fiddlers, including Ola i Hamris-Brøto, Knut Nordland, Andris Skogstad, Ola Søyne, and the itinerant fiddler Karl Palm. In 1859, he bought the farm søre Øye and began to work as a farmer; though skilful in his work, he was plagued by a heavy debt, and even when he supplemented his income by working as a mail carrier, he was unable to pay off what he owed. It is probable that he was influenced by news of the profitable concert tours undertaken by other Hardanger fiddlers in America. Eltun decided to try his luck with the same, and left for the USA in 1875 with his son Johannes.

While still in Norway, Eltun had held concerts in Lillehammer and Oslo, and he had played for Ole Bull and the composer and folk music collector L. M. Lindeman, among others.<sup>25</sup> When he arrived in America, he began by performing in concert halls in the Midwestern cities; later, he also held concerts in country schoolhouses, close to where emigrants from Valdres and other Norwegians lived. Eltun gave concerts throughout the upper Midwest, including the states of Minnesota, the Dakotas, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Though he did earn a lot of money from his performances, a combination of bad luck and a lack of business skills had the result that he was never able to save up enough to bring back to Valdres. Bad luck struck after a concert in Walcott, North Dakota, when he was robbed of \$500.

Eltun played *lydarlåttar* masterfully, and his playing style was warm, friendly, and fine. He could also mimic birdcalls with great skill. In Norway, he had taught tunes to his son Johan-Henrik Eltun på Kvam, as well as Ola Strand på Søyne, several fiddlers in the neighbouring valley of Årdal, including Sjur I. Eldegard, and to the great fiddler Ola Mosafinn from Voss.

Eltun was never to return to Valdres; instead, he spent the rest of his life travelling the Midwest playing concerts. During his travels, he often stayed with

friends and relatives, as he never had a permanent home in America. He died during a concert tour in Minnesota at the age of 76, when he choked on a piece of meat.

This project has registered fourteen emigrant Hardanger fiddlers from Vang *kommune*; Eltun made his journey to America during the third wave of migration, and through his dedication to his vocation as concert fiddler, achieved a great deal for the promotion and appreciation of Norwegian folk music on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **Ola Reishagen (1884–1943)**

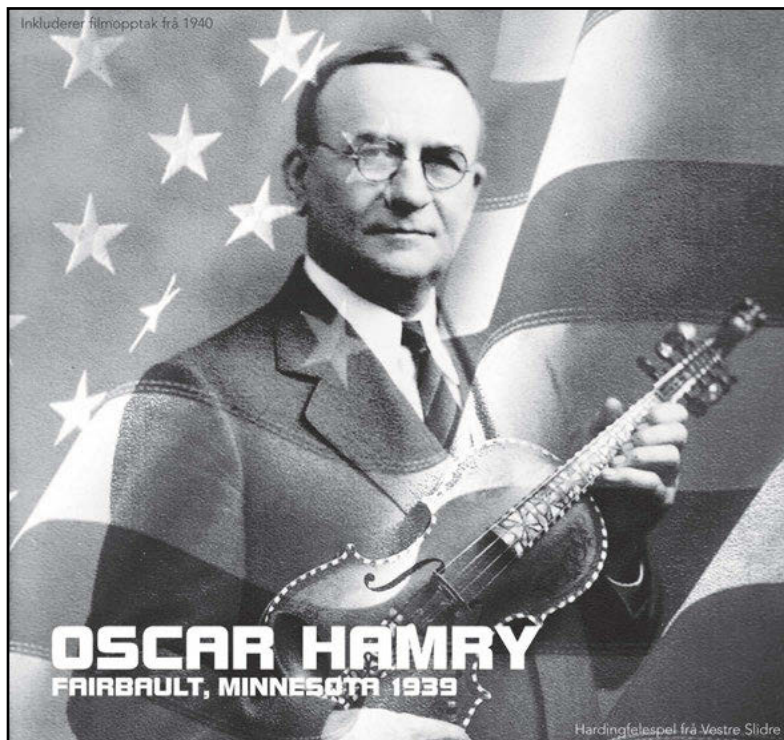
Ola Reishagen was better known by the name Oscar Hamry in America. He was gifted as both a fiddler and a fiddle maker, and at least one of his instruments can be found in Valdres today.<sup>26</sup> Reishagen was raised on the Hambro farm, on Midtre Hande in Vestre Slidre *kommune*. Like Vang, many Hardanger fiddlers had emigrated from Vestre Slidre (this project knows of fourteen); of these, Reishagen was one of the later emigrants, as he left Valdres in 1910, during the fourth wave of emigration.

In Valdres, Reishagen had been taught by Ola Neste and Ivar Ringestad. When he arrived in America, he settled first in St Paul, Minnesota, and later lived in Northfield and then in Faribault, Minnesota. He was one of the only emigrant Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres to participate in an American *kappleik*, and he participated in several; the first *kappleik* he competed in was held in Fargo, North Dakota in 1929, and he was awarded first prize for his playing.

In addition to participating in *kappleikar*, Reishagen also met and exchanged tunes with the brothers Eilev, Harald and Gunnleik Smedal, who had emigrated to the Midwest from Telemark. He also spent a good deal of time with Jøger O. Quale, and in 1940, Quale took the initiative to make a recording of Reishagen. Quale managed to record between twenty and thirty tunes during their first session; he had intended to record Reishagen's entire repertoire, but Reishagen died shortly after the first recording was made. The result, which is a collection of tunes from both Valdres and Telemark, is one of the only recordings made of an emigrant Hardanger fiddler from Valdres.

Reishagen had given concerts in America with mixed success; however, he was very often asked to play for meetings of 'Valdres Samband', a *bygdelag* uniting emigrants from Valdres and their descendents. It is said that he played true *slidrespel*, a style of playing local to Vestre Slidre *kommune*; his playing also disclosed the unmistakable influence of Jørn Hilme. It is clear from Quale's recordings that Reishagen was a master fiddler.

When a copy of Quale's recordings arrived in Valdres in 1978 (see Figure 1), many of the day's fiddlers were thrilled to have a chance to hear it.<sup>27</sup> One fine tune, now often called 'Springar etter Ola Reishagen' (Springar after Ola Reishagen), made its return into the modern repertoire of Hardanger fiddle music from Valdres with thanks to this recording; the tune had been forgotten in Valdres until it made its appearance on Quale's tape.



**Figure 1** *Oscar Hamry: Fairbault, Minnesota 1939*, CD cover.  
*By permission of Frode Rolandsgard*

These five men represent a great number of other Hardanger fiddlers who emigrated from Valdres to North America. These others were active to widely varying degrees in the North American Hardanger fiddle milieu, and many of them were more or less modest in their ambitions as players. But, whether considered individually or as a group, the significance of the emigration of these fiddlers was great. Valdres is a small district which gave birth to a complex and fascinating Hardanger fiddle tradition, and it was and continues to be dependent on the care, effort, and spirit of its musicians to take its music forward.

There is no doubt that the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres would have developed differently had the phenomenon of emigration not taken effect in Norway. A master fiddler such as Knut Sjøheim would have probably made a much larger impact on the evolution of *slidrespel*, for example, and we may have had many more of his tunes in the repertoire of Hardanger fiddle music from Valdres. But, dictated by circumstance on many levels, it was inevitable that so many chose to emigrate to North America; the Hardanger fiddle's fluctuating status in Norwegian and North American societies is equally inevitable.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Arne Bjørndal and Brynjulf Alver, *Og fela ho let*, 2nd edn (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1985), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Two articles in *Valdres Bygdebok*, vol. VI have served as primary sources of information about the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres. These are: Knut Hermundstad and Olav Moe, 'Folkemusikarar i Valdres', in *Valdres Bygdebok*, ed. by Knut Hermundstad, 8 vols (Leira, Valdres: Valdres Bygdeboks Forlag, 1968), VI, 247–371; and Arne Bjørndal, 'Slåttemusikken i Valdres', in *Valdres Bygdebok*, ed. by Knut Hermundstad, VI, 372–405.

<sup>3</sup> The project which forms the basis for this paper began as independent research in 2007. My interest in investigating the emigration of Hardanger fiddlers from Valdres was sparked while spending the winter of 2006–2007 studying the Hardanger fiddle in Norway. That winter, I had the opportunity to play with Valdres fiddler Trygve Bolstad, and during our lesson he told me a bit about master fiddler Arne Steinsrud, who had migrated to America in 1852. Among other things, Bolstad mentioned that Valdres had lost several of its greatest fiddlers during the Norwegian migration period, and that this had undoubtedly influenced the development of the tradition. A curiosity about the level of impact emigration has had on the Hardanger fiddle tradition in Valdres is what motivated me to begin researching and collecting materials. The paper presented at NAFCo in 2008 was prepared expressly for the conference. I have since continued work on the project, both independently and in conjunction with my studies at the Ole Bull Academy.

<sup>4</sup> Bjørndal and Alver, *Og fela ho let*, pp. 17–19; Bjørn Aksdal and Sven Nyhus, eds, *Fanitullen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1993), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ingrid Semmingsen, *Norway to America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Einar Haugen, *The Norwegians in America* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Odd Sverre Lovoll, *A Folk Epic: The Bygdelaag in America* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1975), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Hoeschen, 'The Norwegian Hardanger Fiddle in the Upper Midwest: Documentation and Interpretation of an Immigrant Music Tradition' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Minnesota, 1989), p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Haugen, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Gulbrand Loken, *From Fjord to Frontier: A History of the Norwegians in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1980), pp. 96–97.

<sup>11</sup> Aksdal and Nyhus, p. 298.

<sup>12</sup> See Mary Elizabeth Neal, 'Devil's Instrument, National Instrument: The Hardanger Fiddle as Metaphor of Experience in the Creation and Negotiation of Cultural Identity in Norway' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Anthropology, 1991), p. 327.

<sup>13</sup> Bjørndal and Alver, *Og fela ho let*, p. 48; Aksdal and Nyhus, p. 246.

<sup>14</sup> Carl and Amy Narvestad, *Valdres Samband 1899–1974* (Granite Falls, MN: Valdres Samband, 1974), p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> A. M. Sundheim, ed., *Valdreser i Amerika: Aarbok 1922* (Minneapolis, MN: Valdres Samband, 1922), p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Narvestad, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Information about Arne Steinsrud is taken from: Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 247–48; Olav Moe, 'Gamle Valdres-spelmenn V: Folkemusikken i Sør-Valdres', *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1940), 139–41.

<sup>18</sup> Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, p. 247.



<sup>19</sup> Vermont Bicentennial Committee, *Vermont* (Vermont, WI: Vermont Bicentennial Committee, 1977), p. 229.

<sup>20</sup> Information about Bendik i Nøen is taken from: Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 267–69; Olav Moe, ‘Gamle Valdres-spelmenn VI: Bendik i Nø’n’, *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1941), 220–23; Knut Hermundstad, ‘Bendik Toresson Gausåk eller Bendik i Nø’n’, *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1959), 105–24.

<sup>21</sup> Information about Knut Sjøheim is taken from: Knut Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok VI* (Leira, Valdres: Valdres Bygdeboks Forlag, 1968), pp. 293–96; Olav Moe, ‘Gamle Valdres-spelmenn VIII: Sjøheimguten’, *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1944), 214–17; ‘Sjøheim Brothers Bring Fiddling to the Midwest’, *Sound Post*, 2, no. 1 (1985), 6–7, and 25; Nils Hovi, ‘Eit og anna om Sjøheimsguten’, *Spelemannsbladet*, nos 11–12 (1958), 20–21.

<sup>22</sup> Moe, ‘Gamle Valdres-spelmenn’, pp. 214–17 (p. 216).

<sup>23</sup> Moe, ‘Gamle Valdres-spelmenn’, p. 217.

<sup>24</sup> Information about Trond Eltun is taken from: Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 332–37; Knut Hermundstad, ‘Bonde, spelman og postfører Trond Ivarson Eltun’, *Spelemannsbladet*, nos 1–2 (1958), 6–7.

<sup>25</sup> Hermundstad, *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 333–34.

<sup>26</sup> Information about Ola Reishagen (Oscar Hamry) is taken from: Hermundstad, ed., *Valdres Bygdebok*, pp. 310–13; O. K. Granheim, ‘Ein utvandra Vestre-Slidring – Valdreskulen Oscar Hambrey’, *Tidsskrift for Valdres Historielag* (1959), 155–56; ‘Oscar Hamrey Tunes Taped, To Be Aired May 8’, *Sound Post*, 5, no. 2 (1988), 18–19. For the recording of Oscar Hamry made by Jøger O. Quale in 1939, see *Oscar Hamry, Fairbault, Minnesota 1939*, ta:lik[label], TA43CD, Norway, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Ola Hjelle, ‘Ola O. Reishagen’, in CD booklet, *Oscar Hamry: Fairbault, Minnesota 1939*, ta:lik[label], TA43CD, Norway, 2007.

## Fiddle tunes from under the bed: extracting music from Carpenter's recordings

ELAINE BRADTKE

Mississippi-born, Harvard-educated James Madison Carpenter (1888–1983) drove around Britain between 1928 and 1935 with a dictaphone<sup>1</sup> cylinder machine, capturing songs, stories, tunes and customs (Figure 1). Because his work falls chronologically between that of Cecil Sharp and Percy Grainger at the beginning of the twentieth century, and later field recordings made by the BBC in the middle of the century, it provides an important glimpse into this otherwise neglected era in British traditional culture. Despite his intentions, Carpenter's collection was never published, or until very recently even properly indexed, therefore it represents a relatively untapped resource.



**Figure 1** James Madison Carpenter with his Austin Roadster  
*The James Madison Carpenter Collection, Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center,  
Library of Congress, AFC 1972/001, Photo 102*

In 1972, the Library of Congress purchased Carpenter's vast accumulation of manuscripts, photographs, and sound recordings and it is now held in the American Folklife Center's Archive of Folk Culture. Prior to that, at least some of the boxes and mail sacks were stored under his bed in the sultry Mississippi climate. A long-term international project has produced and updated an online catalogue of the collection and the team is now in the midst of transcribing and editing Carpenter's material for publication. Although Carpenter taught himself to transcribe music in order to notate the songs, there are no extant transcriptions of the fiddle tunes and only one transcription of dance music (from a concertina player). The task has fallen to me to transcribe the instrumental music in his collection. The following is a discussion of what has been learned about Carpenter's field recording techniques, the methods available to the non-technician for extracting music from poor quality audio, the reliability of the recordings as to pitch and tempo, their usefulness as sources for stylistic information, and the pros and cons of highly detailed music notation.<sup>2</sup>

### **The fiddle players**

Carpenter made approximately sixty recordings of fiddle music from a handful of musicians, primarily in the English South Midlands. His three main sources of fiddle tunes were John Robbins of Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, Sam Bennett of Ilmington, Warwickshire, and William Wells of Bampton, Oxfordshire. One additional tune was recorded from an unidentified musician near Stow-on-the-Wold, Gloucestershire. From outside this region there is an example of the Greatham (County Durham) sword dance tune, and, from Scotland, an instrumental version of a Child ballad.

### **The music**

In a letter to Kitteredge, dated 21 November 1933 and written from London, Carpenter reports that he had recently collected 'at least two score of morris-dance and folk-dance tunes, with nearly a score of the droll, enigmatic word-sets that were sung in snatches to the accompaniment of the tunes'.<sup>3</sup> The examples of fiddle playing are largely functional music – the dance tunes mentioned above. However, the fiddlers were not recorded in the act of playing for dancing.

### **The recording equipment**

Carpenter used a cylinder recording machine that could run on a six-volt battery.<sup>4</sup> Most dictating machines of this era could use either direct or alternating current, which meant that as long as one had an automobile (and its battery) one could use the machine regardless of the availability of electricity. The portable dictating machine that Carpenter used was never designed for recording instrumental music. They were intended for use by executives who would dictate their speeches and correspondence onto a cylinder, which would be played back on a different machine by a typist for transcription. The sound was funnelled to the cutting stylus by means of a speaking tube, held close to the speaker's mouth. Carpenter presumably held

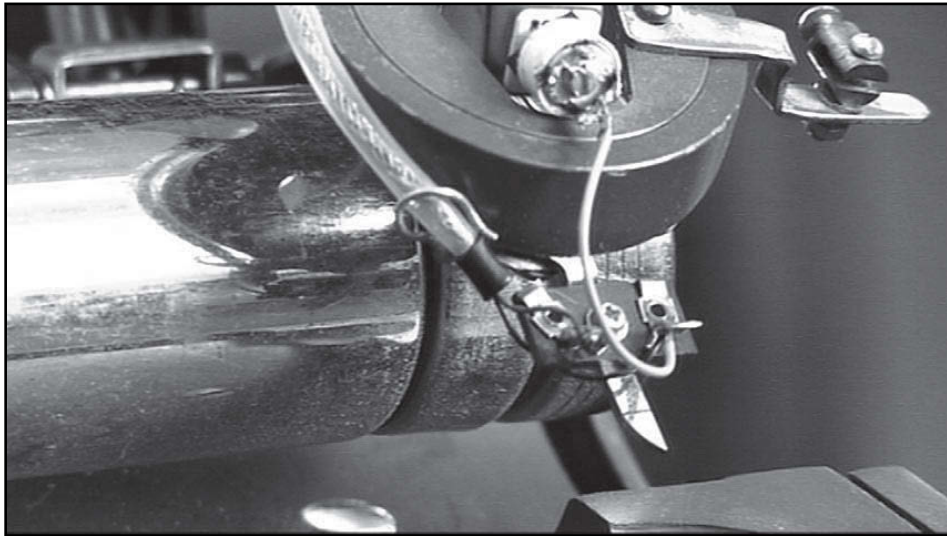
the speaking tube to the 'f' holes of the violin while recording, meanwhile staying out of the way of the bow. Most importantly, the recording machine had extremely limited facilities for playback, which would have made it difficult for Carpenter and his contributors to check the sound quality of the recordings as they were made.<sup>5</sup>

In the business world, the dictaphone system was seen as an improvement on the older phonograph recorder (which combined recording and playback in one machine). The functions of record, playback, and erase were now distributed between three machines; one to record (with limited playback facilities), one for transcription which had a start/stop switch and flexible speed adjustments for use by the transcriber who listened with ear tubes similar to a stethoscope, and a third machine to shave the cylinders, allowing them to be re-used. The separation of functions was well suited to the compartmentalization of early twentieth-century offices, and rather less suitable for the travelling ethnographer.

### **The recordings**

We know that Carpenter shaved some of his earliest cylinders in order to re-use them, but he preserved his subsequent recordings.<sup>6</sup> In this, he was rather forward looking, as most early field recordings were seen as merely aids to transcription. Among ethnographers and folklorists, transcription and subsequent analysis were considered more valuable than the audio artefact itself.<sup>7</sup> As Erika Brady wrote 'the wax cylinders containing recordings of songs and narratives seem to have been considered hardly more important than steno pads once a letter has been typed in its final form'.<sup>8</sup> We do not know exactly what changed Carpenter's mind regarding the disposability of his recordings. Possibly it was his realization (as expressed in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*) that once the recordings were destroyed he had no way to answer any questions that might have arisen from the transcriptions at a later date.<sup>9</sup> He also found the cylinders useful for illustrating lectures. In early 1938, Carpenter corresponded with Alan Lomax at the Library of Congress. Lomax stated his interest in Carpenter's valuable recordings and his hope that the cylinders should not be worn from repeated playing before they were copied.<sup>10</sup> Around this time Carpenter began to copy his cylinder recordings onto 12-inch 78 rpm acetate discs.<sup>11</sup> There is an Ediphone cylinder playback machine at the Library of Congress with an attachment designed to transfer the sound from the cylinder machine to a disc-cutting machine, which is believed to be the one that Carpenter used for this purpose (see Figures 2 and 3).

The condition of the original cylinders, more than seventy years after the recordings were made, is frankly, not very good. They suffer from shallow grooves, some of them are badly worn, cracked, and pitted, and the wax itself is beginning to degrade. In addition, the process of copying the cylinders to discs may have caused further damage.<sup>12</sup> It follows that the extant audio is often either faint or distorted, and obscured by a great deal of surface noise. The combination of less than ideal recording speeds, subsequent use, and decades of storage in poor environmental conditions have taken their toll on the sound quality. As part of a British Academy



**Figure 2** The Ediphone cylinder playback machine owned by the Library of Congress

**Figure 3** A close up of the disc cutting mechanism

*Photos by Chris Jackson BBC*

funded project to catalogue Carpenter's sound recordings, we compared the disc and cylinder copies in terms of speed and sound quality. Occasional passages are sometimes clearer on the discs, though the signal tends to be weaker, due to loss that occurred in the transfer process. We are investigating the possibility of another digital transfer, and further sound restoration options. Unfortunately no level of restoration will bring back audio that no longer exists in the original.

If the poor physical state of the cylinders was not barrier enough to the prospective listener, there is one further complication that had a detrimental impact on the quality of the sound. Dictaphone recording machines could run at variable speeds, a feature that Carpenter exploited all too frequently. According to sound engineer Steve Smolian, who was asked to evaluate the recordings in the collection:

Business cylinders typically run at 90–100rpm, giving a playing time of more-or-less 10 minutes. In conversations with Library staff concerning the folklore accompanying this collection, it was felt they may run at about 75 rpm, extending the playing time to 12 or so minutes. At this slow speed, expectations of fidelity become limited.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, some of the cylinders have produced more than eighteen and a half minutes of audio, approximately eighty-five percent more than the usual duration. In remote areas of 1930s Britain, blank wax cylinders were scarce. When he worked with prolific informants Carpenter was evidently willing to sacrifice fidelity for quantity.

His cylinders and their disc copies, along with his notes, transcriptions, photographs and typed texts formed a large mass of material that in later years he stashed under his bed, as he reluctantly gave up hope of publishing it. In the early 1970s Alan Jabbour contacted Carpenter and started the wheels in motion for Carpenter's life's work to be bought by the Library of Congress. Once in their new home, the disc recordings were copied onto open reel tapes for preservation and listening purposes. The originals were then stored in climate-controlled conditions for the first time. At the time the collection was acquired, the Library of Congress staff thought the discs were straight copies of the cylinders, and therefore copying the cylinders onto tape was considered unnecessary. As part of the Save Our Sounds: America's Recorded Sound Heritage Project, the Library of Congress had digital copies made of the original cylinders and discs, and subsequent cataloguing of both formats has proven that they are not straightforward copies. Some cylinder tracks were copied more than once, some not at all, and some recordings exist only in the disc format. The digitization project was possibly the first time the cylinders were played since Carpenter made his disc copies. The American Folklife Center specified a flat transfer, without any tweaking, adjusting, or cleaning up of the audio. The end result is pretty much what one would hear if the recordings themselves were played back. This has been a disappointment to many researchers who were hoping the digital recordings would be easier on the ears than the tape copies of the discs, but in fact found the sound of the cylinders to be even less palatable. These unprocessed versions of Carpenter's recordings will eventually be made available to the public, along with scans of his manuscripts via the Library of Congress' online *Performing Arts Encyclopedia*.<sup>14</sup>

### **Working with the digital surrogates**

Unclear, disrupted and distorted audio such as this makes transcription all the more challenging. Thankfully, reasonably priced audio processing software is widely available for use by non-technicians. Criteria for our project included the ability to independently alter the speed and pitch of the recordings, accurately mark and time each segment (there are no breaks in the digital transfers), and reduce some of the noise and boost the weak signal, all without altering the original digital recordings. The unfortunate combination of a small budget and limited experience in computer-based audio manipulation, necessitated software that was both inexpensive and user-friendly.<sup>15</sup> We chose two separate software packages, which, although they overlap somewhat, were designed with different uses in mind:

1. Amazing Slowdowner – A transcription tool that alters the speed of the playback or the pitch, independently, and in real time. Useful facilities include an equalizer, adjustable loop length, and the ability to save individual tracks. It runs on Mac and Windows platforms.<sup>16</sup>
2. Magix Audio Cleaning Lab 2005 – A processing tool designed to enhance the sound of analogue recordings and transfer them to CD. Features include noise reduction, equalization and filtering, the creation and editing of individual tracks, and an amplitude display. Some of the adjustments can be made in real time, which provides quick feedback. Unfortunately, it only runs on Windows operating systems, comparable Mac software, at least at the time we were looking, was prohibitively expensive.<sup>17</sup>

From the point of view of someone who learned to edit recordings with a razor blade and splicing block, it was reassuring to see how little has changed, at least on a superficial level. In both cases, the user interfaces emulate the features of analogue equipment using stop, fast forward, rewind, and pause buttons to navigate, and sliders and knobs to adjust the audio output.

Slowdowner is much more flexible about altering the speed and pitch in real time, and for creating variable length playback loops. Combined with its built in equalizer, it proved the best all around choice for transcription. Audio Cleaning Lab was used to set track markers, and timings, while employing the equalizer and filters to further enhance the audibility. Its amplitude display is a useful tool for finding the start and end points of tracks.

Cleaning up old, noisy recordings such as these can be time consuming and frustrating. The process may create audio artefacts such as weird burbling sounds, howls, and whistles. Regrettably, the noise reduction also reduces the impact of sibilants and other consonants. For our purposes, a very light touch was used, and the full brunt of the software brought to bear on only the really desperate cases.

A number of sample tracks have been sent to professional audio restoration technicians with specialist equipment. Because of the low signal to noise ratio in the digital files, it has been interesting, and disheartening to find that they cannot do much more than we can with our amateur system. Though there are new

## BRADTKE *Fiddle tunes from under the bed*

developments that may be able to extract better sound from the original cylinders, in turn promising better results from audio cleaning and restoration.



**Figure 4** A comparison of transcriptions from the three fiddlers.

Note the extra beat at the end of the phrase in the transcription from William Wells.

### **Reliability of the recordings as source documents**

In the process of cataloguing, transcribing, and comparing the disc and cylinder recordings that Carpenter made, certain points concerning their reliability as source material became clearer. These recordings cannot provide us with information on the tempo of the music. Firstly, the recordings of dance music were made out of context (without the necessary interaction of dancers). Secondly, the speeds of the recordings themselves are known to be unreliable. Carpenter admitted slowing the recorder to eek out more time. Without a reference pitch, we cannot adjust the playback to reproduce the pitch and tempo of the original performance. With a modern concert violinist, this might only require a simple speed correction to bring the pitch to A 440, and the playback would then be reasonably accurate. Sam Bennett and William Wells however, were known to use non-standard tuning (less is known about Robbins). Wells and Bennett both sang along with their fiddle playing and tuned their instruments to suit their vocal ranges. A recent discovery of a sound film of Sam Bennett provides evidence that he may have tuned a whole tone sharp.<sup>18</sup> A 1937 recording of William Wells shows that he tuned substantially flat.<sup>19</sup> Alas, Carpenter did not provide a reference pitch at the start of the recordings, so we will probably never know what the original really sounded like.

However, there are some pieces of information that may be gleaned from the recordings. Despite the issues surrounding the speed and pitch of the performances, we are able to discern what notes were played in a relative sense. The notes, as fingered, may be derived through the reference points provided by open strings and



drones. While the presence of noise or the use of noise-reduction technology often masks the sound of bow changes, most of the time it was possible to hear slurs and tied notes. Ornaments, when present were much easier to hear, especially with the slow down and loop facilities.

In transcribing the recordings by each performer, it became possible to build up a picture of their individual styles through their use of drones, double stops, slurs, and ornaments (see Figure 4). William Wells was the most nimble-fingered of the three; his playing is full of ornaments and double stops. Sam Bennett had a more straightforward, driving style and he supplemented the melody with lots of open string droning. John Robbins had a lighter touch; he used fewer drones and practically no ornamentation, in line with his more formal music background.<sup>20</sup> Based on these differences in style, it was possible to identify the performer when Carpenter's attributions were absent or incorrect.

### **Notating the music**

In any transcription project it is important to find the right balance between simplicity and detail in music notation. This balancing act has been the subject of much debate since the first uses of sound recordings as an aid to folksong collecting. Percy Grainger's 1908 article in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* demonstrated his attempts to accurately notate folk music (see Figure 5). He sought to reproduce on paper with the aid of numerous special symbols an objective portrait of the subtleties of pitch and rhythm, ornament and dialect of a recorded performance.<sup>21</sup> Yet he was less than happy with the cluttered results and wrote that 'my attempts at comparative exactitude result, I must confess, in a regrettably disturbing impression to the eye'.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, he lamented the inadequacies of even his enhanced form of music notation and looked with hope for a machine that could transcribe more accurately than the fallible human ear, and render it into a 'readable and universally applicable musical notation'.<sup>23</sup> One hundred years later, we are still waiting.

Grainger's use of the phonograph as an aid to in-depth analytical transcription met with resistance on the part of the other members of the Folk Song Society. This was articulated by Anne G. Gilchrist, who felt the recordings themselves were unreliable.<sup>24</sup> Brady writes that Gilchrist and Cecil Sharp 'objected to the phonograph as a means of recording that was *too* precisely accurate. They believed that ultimately the subjective response of the human ear best caught and conveyed the content of a performance'.<sup>25</sup> Sharp was wary of the phonograph's ability to allow the transcriber to slow down and repeat a song, putting the song under a metaphorical microscope to detect details that the ordinary listener cannot hear. He wrote, 'In transcribing a song, our aim should be to record its artistic effect, not necessarily the exact means by which that effect was produced'.<sup>26</sup>

Cecil Sharp's approach to transcription was to distil the essence of the song from multiple performances by the singer. This process tended to repress some of the variations that occur naturally between verses. Grainger preferred exacting detail extracted from repeated hearings of recorded performances written out in their

**12.—LORD MELBOURNE.**  
(THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH.)

SUNG BY MR. GEORGE WRAY,  
AT BRIGG, LINCOLNSHIRE, JULY 28TH, 1906.

*Thrice phonographed and noted by Percy Grainger.*

Phonograph record A  
Sung in (A ♯, ? A ♯). FAST. M. M. ♩ = about 176. *Jerily, and with restless great energy.*

200

**Figure 5** Percy Grainger's notation from a phonograph recording.

Percy Grainger, 'Collecting with the phonograph', *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, 3 (1908), 200.

*Reproduced courtesy of the English Folk Dance & Song Society*

entirety. Our team's transcription practice falls somewhere in between Sharp and Grainger. Instead of Grainger's system of marking up the music with symbols, and frequent changes of metre, we have used accompanying commentary, explaining for example, raised or flattened pitches, rhythmic anomalies, alterations in tempo, held or stressed notes, and so on. Unlike Sharp, we notate the entire tune with all its repetitions written out. This gives a more realistic account of the subtleties and variations that occur in the course of a given performance. My colleagues working with the song material chose to hide the frequent changes in metre, because they interrupt the flow of the music and 'disturb the eye'. However, English dance musicians tend to have very regular rhythm and tempo, and therefore any changes are significant, such as slow music used for sequences of exaggerated steps known as slow capers. In the case of dance music, changes in metre and tempo directly reflect changes in choreography and must be included.

### **Simplicity versus complexity**

The transcriber must keep in mind the use for which the notation is intended. My first fiddle tune transcriptions were heavily marked with accents and articulation to indicate nuances of pressure and motion of the bow arm (see Figure 6). I was listening and transcribing as a fiddle player, intent on the minutia of the captured performance, and notating information that would be needed to reproduce this performance. When presented with the detailed notation, my colleagues (who are not fiddle players) did not hear the accents and articulations that were noted, or understand what they represented in terms of violin playing technique. To them, and to most people who do not have experience with the notation peculiar to bowed strings, this was superfluous and possibly confusing information. After some discussion, it became a team policy to note down only pitch and rhythm, omitting stylistic indications such as articulation and accent, in part to make the transcriptions more useful to a wider audience.



**Figure 6** An overly detailed transcription of the playing of Sam Bennett  
*Carpenter Collection, Cylinder 105 06:39*

There were good reasons for limiting how much information we notated from the recordings. Firstly, the aim of the project is to produce clear, easy to read transcriptions, to be used in conjunction with the recordings by performers and scholars of varying musical ability and experience. Our approach is descriptive rather than prescriptive, providing a general picture of the contributor's presentation of a tune rather than a specific indication of every detail in that particular recording. The performance aspects that we omit from the notation may be picked up from listening to the recordings, which will be available on the web.

Secondly, many of these tunes are in my own repertoire, and it is disconcerting how much the transcriber's own memory may colour the perceived sound. In fact, the first attempt at transcribing 'Bumpus o Stretton' resulted in something between

how Sam Bennett played it, and how I play it. Research into how the brain processes and remembers music has shown that the greater number of neural links involved, the stronger and more powerful the memory.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Levitin, writing about music, states ‘people use the same brain regions for remembering as they do for perceiving’.<sup>28</sup> In the case of ‘Bumpus o Stretton’, this particular transcriber had memorized, rehearsed and performed on many occasions both the tune and the dance. This repeated use of multiple neural links, reinforced over time, created overpowering musical memories that threatened to override the perception of the weak and sometimes broken sound coming through the headphones. There is much to be said about being too close to the subject. It is far better to keep the transcription simple and general rather than complex and specific. Too much detail may actually impede understanding, and in-depth scrutiny shifts the focus from the tune to the performance. Also, keeping it simple helps guard against the possibility of memory overriding perception (see Figure 7).



Figure 7 Simplified transcription of the playing of Sam Bennett  
*Carpenter Collection, Cylinder 105 06:39*

### Reliability of transcription and transcriber

Since Grainger's article, a great deal has been written about the reliability of transcriptions from recorded sources.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the most interesting conclusions have been drawn from the work of George List. His research shows that no two transcribers will notate a traditional song in exactly the same way, and the differences become greater the more the tune strays from the familiar (western art music) scale system and even, regular rhythm and pulse.<sup>30</sup> Within our own team we experimented with each of us transcribing the same melodies. Upon comparison, the results were predictably varied, each individual's notation reflected their own knowledge, interest, and experience.

This brings us to the final phase of the process, checking the work. This is tedious, but absolutely necessary, and is best undertaken after some time has passed. Even the most painstaking transcriber will find mistakes. When a person has to listen to and concentrate so intently on such difficult to hear examples, auditory hallucinations become an occupational hazard, especially working with familiar material. The brain will fill in blanks from memory and make allowances for

fluctuations in pitch and rhythm. In the process of checking, problematical passages will be subject to intense scrutiny, again, convoluted rhythms will be re-notated, again. As a fellow ethnomusicologist admitted in frustration, 'Every time I go back to a transcription, I change my mind'. After checking our own work, we have found the eyes and ears of a second person to be helpful. It is important, however, that they focus on finding obvious errors rather than dwelling on disagreements concerning subtleties of interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

It is tempting to complain about the difficulties of using the sound recordings in Carpenter's collection. Through his enthusiasm for their contents, Carpenter damaged the recordings he had worked so hard to obtain. He squeezed too much onto his cylinders, wore them down by playing them back, and kept them for years in less than optimal conditions. Despite these faults, it remains an extraordinary resource.

While we may not be able to use it to answer the question of how fast or slowly these tunes were performed, there are other questions that may be answered about playing technique. With careful listening, bowing, ornamentation, double stops, and articulation, important tools of the dance musician's trade, may be heard, thus increasing our understanding of how this music was performed. A comparison of transcriptions shows how the three principal fiddle players in his collection employed distinctive styles, displaying a wider range of performance practice than had been previously understood. In addition, the whole procedure of cataloguing, transcribing, and making links between related items scattered in different physical formats gives us insight into Carpenter's working methods. In dragging it out from under the bed, thus realising Carpenter's dream of publication, we expose the collection to a wide range of people who will learn from and interpret it in their own way.

Appropriate use of audio restoration and manipulation technology enables us to extract music from recordings with very poor signal to noise ratios, especially when used during repeated, analytical listening. However, the transcriber must keep in mind both the needs and abilities of the end user throughout the transcription process, and their own fallibility. There is a spectrum between what is possible to notate and what is useful as functional notation. It ranges from the highest level of detail which may represent on paper aspects that are not capable of being heard without technological intervention, to a guide to be used in conjunction with a recording, or a simple aid to memory. No matter where we choose to place our notations within this spectrum, we must be prepared to admit that there is no such thing as a perfect transcription.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing it is still uncertain whether Carpenter used a Dictaphone dictating machine or its close competitor the Ediphone. The machines held at the Library of Congress,

which Alan Jabbour believes were acquired with the collection, are Ediphones, but of a later manufacture date. Both machines used the same sized cylinders and nearly identical technology; 'dictaphone' was the generic term for the equipment, regardless of the brand.

<sup>2</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the British Academy for funding the research on which this article is based.

<sup>3</sup> The James Madison Carpenter Collection, Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, AFC 1972/001, MS p. 06395.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Bishop, "'Dr Carpenter from the Harvard College in America": An Introduction to the James Madison Carpenter and his Folklore Collection', *Folk Music Journal*, 7 (1998), 404.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Michael W. Smith for information regarding the dictating machine technology, and help in identifying the Ediphone owned by the Library of Congress. For background information and photographs of the machines in use see *The Early Office Museum*, [http://www.officemuseum.com/dictating\\_machines.htm](http://www.officemuseum.com/dictating_machines.htm) [accessed 24 February 2009].

<sup>6</sup> Carpenter Collection, MS 09637.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 325.

<sup>8</sup> Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> Carpenter Collection, MS 09637. One of his informants had played a practical joke on him using a fake dialect.

<sup>10</sup> Carpenter Collection, MS 00081.

<sup>11</sup> Bishop, p. 412.

<sup>12</sup> Steve Smolian, 'Methods to Copy Cylinders in the Carpenter Collection', a report sent to Jennifer Cutting at the Library of Congress, 31 October 2000, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/performingarts/> [accessed 24 February 2009].

<sup>15</sup> Constant, rapid changes and developments in computer technology mean that the software we used may be obsolete by the time of publication. Any researchers undertaking a similar project will need to investigate the current options for themselves.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ronimusic.com/> [accessed 24 February 2009].

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.magix.com/uk/audio-cleaning-lab> [accessed 24 February 2009].

<sup>18</sup> The 35 mm De Forest test film, *Dances by Ilmington Teams in the Grounds of Peter De Montfort's House: Fiddler Sam Bennett, 1926*, owned by Ronald Grant of the Cinema Museum, London.

<sup>19</sup> A live performance of 'The Quaker', recorded by Douglas Cleverdon, 24 April 1937; BBC 1322, released on *You Lazy Lot of Bone-Shakers: Songs & Dance Tunes of Seasonal Events*, The Voice of the People, vol. 16, Topic TSCD 666, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Keith Chandler, 'Musicians in 19th Century Southern England: No 16, John Robbins of Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire (1868–1948)', (2006) [http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/mus19\\_16.htm](http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/mus19_16.htm) [accessed 24 February 2009].

<sup>21</sup> Percy Grainger, 'Collecting with the phonograph', *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, 3 (1908), 147–69.

<sup>22</sup> Grainger, 'Collecting with the phonograph', p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Michael Yates, 'Percy Grainger and the Impact of the Phonograph', *Folk Music Journal*, 4 (1982), 267.

<sup>25</sup> Brady, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Yates, p. 270.

<sup>27</sup> Steven J. Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), pp. 54–58.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel J. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2006), p. 150.

<sup>29</sup> Nazir A. Jairazbhoy, 'The "Objective" and Subjective View in Music Transcription', *Ethnomusicology*, 21 (1977), 263–73, provides an overview of some of the questions that have plagued ethnomusicologists on this topic.

<sup>30</sup> George List, 'The Reliability of Transcription', *Ethnomusicology*, 18 (1974), 374.

## Crossing over through the recording studio: the *Island to Island: Traditional Music from Ireland and Newfoundland* CD project<sup>1</sup>

EVELYN OSBORNE

Crossing Over was the theme of the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention's third incarnation in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada in August 2008. The theme included the physical crossing of the North Atlantic from the Old World Aberdeen, Scotland, to the New World, St. John's of the conference itself. It also represented the crossing over, intersecting, meeting, and weaving together of fiddle related musics, instruments, traditions, and ideas that rarely congregate.

This article will examine the musical and technological crossing over and intersections of traditional fiddle musics through a CD project entitled *Island to Island: Traditional Music from Ireland and Newfoundland*.<sup>2</sup> The title, *Island to Island*, itself suggests a crossing of water from one island to another but in the case of Newfoundland and Ireland it also recalls the historical annual crossings of the North Atlantic made every year for the migratory cod fishery and the crossing over of Irish culture with emigrants who now populate the worldwide Irish diaspora. With emigration, Irish music and culture crossed to the New World in the form of musicians and sound recordings.

*Island to Island: Traditional Music from Ireland and Newfoundland* features musicians from St. John's, Newfoundland, and Cork, Ireland.<sup>3</sup> The instrumental music traditions of Newfoundland and Labrador have always exemplified cross-overs from the Old to the New Worlds. The fiddle repertoire is based in traditions stemming from the British Isles, Ireland, and France and was likely first brought to the island with fishermen and settlers starting in the eighteenth century. During the early twentieth century, radio and recordings transmitted the regional repertoires of other traditional musicians based in continental North America, which were often Irish in character. At the time, these were primarily one-way transmissions into the Newfoundland tradition. The last ten to twenty years, however, has seen a rise in exchanges between musicians in the St. John's and Southern Shore regions with Ireland, particularly Cork and Waterford. This paper will address and examine the *Island to Island* CD as a twenty-first-century traditional music collaboration between geographically distant locations, how modern technology facilitated it, the recording choices made, approaches to repertoire selection, and the reception of the



CD by reviewers. The *Island to Island* project could be viewed as a microcosm of the Irish reaching out to their diaspora in an effort to better understand themselves; of Newfoundlanders seeking to explore their heritage whilst also forging their own identity; as well as an indication of the importance of both historical and recent connections between Newfoundland and Ireland on musical, cultural, governmental and personal levels.

### **Historic connections between Newfoundland and Ireland**

While the Vikings settled at the northern tip of Newfoundland around 1000AD their residency was short lived. The large island off the northern coast of North America was officially discovered by Europeans during John Cabot's voyage in 1497. Newfoundland, now part of Newfoundland and Labrador, would eventually become known as England's first colony and Canada's last province.<sup>4</sup> As the 'Gateway to North America' the island was fought over by the English and French for its strategic military position and rich fisheries. England finally claimed Newfoundland as a colony in 1824, granted the island responsible government in 1855, and conferred dominion status in 1917 under the Statute of Westminster. During the 1930s the island succumbed to war debts and the financial ravages of the Great Depression. The Dominion suspended its constitution in 1934 and joined Canada as its tenth province in 1949.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the migratory fishing years the Irish played a significant role in the economic life of the island. During the early years, Irish men were recruited to work seasonally in the fishery. Waterford, Ireland, was an important stop for the English West Country boats to pick up provisions and crew. While regular permanent settlement did not occur in Newfoundland until the eighteenth century, many Irish men were hired to fish several seasons and over-winter in between. Mannion has termed this 'temporary' settlement, which fits into his model of 'three modes of migration' to Newfoundland including, 'seasonal, temporary and permanent'.<sup>6</sup> Mannion states that 'for much of its early history, Newfoundland had a highly transient, fluctuating population'; this made it 'difficult to measure the growth of the permanent population'.<sup>7</sup> A 1752 census noted that the Irish made up approximately half of the total population and, in 1753, quite often outnumbered the English in various communities.<sup>8</sup> Besides seasonal fishermen who decided to stay, the primary Irish immigrations to the island were 1811–1816 and 1825–1833.<sup>9</sup> According to McCarthy, during 1814 alone, ships arrived with seven thousand Irish immigrants.<sup>10</sup> Unlike many other areas of the Irish diaspora, this pre-dated mass emigrations of the 1840s Irish famine which 'bypassed Newfoundland almost completely'.<sup>11</sup> The majority of the Irish who settled in Newfoundland stayed on the Avalon Peninsula. In St. John's, many Irish mixed with the English but, in other areas of the Avalon Peninsula, Mannion has described the settlers as 'by far the most ethnically isolated' in eastern North America.<sup>12</sup> Today the historic connections of Irish fishermen and settlers brought to Newfoundland from the southwest of Ireland is often cited as the primary connection between the islands.

Peter Browne of RTÉ, author of the Irish liner notes for the *Island to Island* CD, states that the Irish in Newfoundland were 'unique among Irish emigrants to North America in that they went there before the Famine'. Des Walsh, who wrote the introduction to the Newfoundland liner notes, explains that until recently not much attention was paid to the Newfoundland Irish as 'no one really knew we were here'. Historically this was anything but true as, according to Cyril Byrne, nineteenth-century Newfoundland was referred to as the 'trans-Atlantic Ireland'.<sup>13</sup>

During and after the arrival of the bulk of the Irish population, regular communication continued through the Roman Catholic Church and their educational clergy. As early as 1744, there are records of a Roman Catholic school in St. John's.<sup>14</sup> The Presentation and Mercy Sisters first came to Newfoundland to establish schools in 1833 and 1842 respectively, followed by the Franciscan Monks in 1847 and the Christian Brothers in 1875.<sup>15</sup> McCarthy explains that the curriculum in the Roman Catholic run schools was based on that of Irish schools and they often used the same text books. He states that, 'many outport Roman Catholic teachers trained with the Sisters and later the Christian Brothers, the Irish influence was spread to the outlying harbours and did much to preserve the Irish heritage of the old country.'<sup>16</sup> The Christian Brothers played a big part in disseminating Irish step dance in the province, particularly through a performance group known as the St Pat's Dancers. The St Pat's Dancers began in the 1930s as part of the Christian Brothers educational curriculum and were under their tutelage until the mid-1990s when the denominational school system in Newfoundland and Labrador was discontinued.<sup>17</sup> The Sisters were also known for their musical abilities and from their start in Newfoundland were 'prepared to teach all the fine arts – painting, as well as piano, violin, harp, and, of course, voice.'<sup>18</sup>

Newfoundlanders now count Ireland as part of their cultural identity, whether or not they have Irish ancestors. Of course, the idea that Newfoundlanders have a single ancestry is easily refuted when looking at regions of the island that claim English, French and Scottish heritages. However, as Kristen Harris Walsh has pointed out:

From landscape to ethnic stereotype, Ireland and Newfoundland share perceived and real similarities that have enabled and perhaps encouraged Newfoundland culture to model itself after that of Ireland. Nowhere is that more prevalent than in the arts.<sup>19</sup>

Over the past few decades Newfoundland has been branding itself as ethnically Irish in a similar fashion to Mackay's 'tartanism' in Nova Scotia.<sup>20</sup> Many Newfoundlanders now embrace Ireland as their cultural source and agree with Brian McGinn's statement that Newfoundland is 'the most Irish place outside of Ireland'.<sup>21</sup>

The historical connections between Newfoundland and Ireland have been well documented and are quite concrete; the Irish have most definitely been a part of

Newfoundland's history and heritage.<sup>22</sup> However, not all agree that Newfoundland owes its entire cultural inspiration to Ireland. The Newfoundlander as culturally Irish is contested by some. For example, Terry MacDonald has lamented the painting of Newfoundland music as all Irish considering how many of the songs were of English origin and notes that even so called Irish-Newfoundland bands usually sing English songs, although they use Irish instrumentals.<sup>23</sup>

### **Recent connections to Ireland**

In 1996, the governments of Newfoundland and Ireland signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to recognize the historical connections between the two islands and to facilitate new endeavours. Signed between the Taoiseach John Bruton and Premier Brian Tobin, it was reaffirmed in 1999 and again in 2004 by Premier Danny Williams and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern.<sup>24</sup> The terms of the original MOU allowed the formation of the Ireland-Newfoundland Partnership (INP) in Dublin and the Ireland Business Partnerships (IBP) in St. John's in 1999 and 2001 respectively, in order to promote exchanges in business, culture, and education.<sup>25</sup> According to Kristy Clarke, assistant director of the INP, over 200 projects have already been funded.<sup>26</sup> She stated that this is a unique connection for the Irish as MOU's are usually signed with other national, rather than provincial, governments.<sup>27</sup> In part due to the MOU, collaborative projects between Irish and Newfoundland musicians and artists have become more common in the past ten years. Many of these exchanges focus on the historical link between Waterford and St. John's which were, for this reason, paired as sister cities. *Island to Island* was one such cultural exchange programme, funded by the INP, which focused on linking musicians between St. John's and Cork, Ireland.

### **Irish music in Newfoundland**

*Island to Island* is far from the first taste of Irish music Newfoundlanders have had. In his article, 'Stage Irish in Britain's Oldest Colony', Pat Byrne states that Newfoundland has seen two Irish revivals, and I would suggest we are now into a third.<sup>28</sup> The first was in the 1940s and 1950s headed by J. M. Devine whose New York connections allowed him to import the recordings of the McNulty family and then the family itself. Devine sponsored radio programmes for thirty years (1944–1974) featuring the McNulty's music. The family clothing store, The Big 6, also carried McNulty recordings, which they sold by mail order throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. In 1953, the McNultys came to Newfoundland and toured for eight weeks to sold-out venues.<sup>29</sup> Byrne speculates that the 'hard knocks' Irish songs such as those sung by the McNultys rang true to the Newfoundland identity crisis of the 1950s, having gone from a British colony to nationhood to bankruptcy to a Canadian province.<sup>30</sup>

The second Irish revival, according to Byrne happened in the 1970s, when members of the Sons of Erin, Ryan's Fancy, and Sullivan's Gypsies moved to St. John's. Ralph O'Brien, of the Sons of Erin and Erin's pub, spoke of their first experiences in Newfoundland. They became so popular with Newfoundlanders because they

'sang their songs for them'.<sup>31</sup> He went on to say that, at the time, 'the music was going on at home in kitchens but nobody ever thought to put it on stage'.<sup>32</sup>

Although the Sons of Erin members were Irish, the band started in Toronto. In the 1970s, O'Brien and several other Irish musicians chose Newfoundland as their home. Today, these Irish musicians are credited with starting the revival of interest in Irish and then Newfoundland music. As John Graham of St. John's newest Irish pub, Shamrock City, explained:

The Celtic revival happened here back in the early '70s late '60s when you had groups like Sullivan's Gypsies and Sons of Erin and you had Ryan's Fancy. They were the original groups that came here [...] So then you had the Ralph O'Brien's coming over and the Dermot O'Reilly's, Denis Ryan's and Don Sullivan of Sullivan's Gypsies. A lot of them moved to Newfoundland and set up their home here [...] They were electricians and plumbers by trade from Ireland and when they come over here they found that there was a market for Newfoundland music, and it was some of the most successful music of the '70s. Out of those groups, and out of the other traditional musicians who were already in Newfoundland [...] you had groups start up like Yellow Dory and Figgy Duff and these bands evolved into what we call traditional Newfoundland music now. But there was always an element of Irish music in that as well.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly these groups and others influenced today's musicians. As Jason Whelan, the bouzouki player on *Island to Island*, observed, his father greatly admired the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem: 'He'd been to see them, I'd been to see them, Ryan's Fancy, we had all the Ryan Fancy records, I'd even met Dermot [O'Reilly] and these people when I was really young.'<sup>34</sup> Other Newfoundland musicians I have spoken to explained that they started with Irish music as it was the only thing they heard or could find. Ironically, they only discovered Newfoundland music after they began playing Irish music.

O'Brien's Music Store on Water Street, St. John's, also helped to spread Irish music recordings in Newfoundland. The store first opened in 1939 as a used records, hardware, and odds and ends shop. Following Newfoundland's confederation with Canada in 1949, the family was able to make the transition to a music-only business. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s O'Brien's carried all sorts of music, including Elvis Presley and Country and Western as well as Irish music. It was not until the 1980s that the local Newfoundland recording industry became increasingly professionalized and local artists produced enough releases for O'Brien's to have a Newfoundland music section. Now O'Brien's is a specialty store that carries only Newfoundland and Irish music.<sup>35</sup> Gordon O'Brien explained that local releases make up 75% of his stock, whereas the other 25% is Irish. Ironically, since the 1970s Irish music has become more difficult to access. As a small store owner he is now required to use distribution networks in New York rather than dealing directly with labels and artists. This restricts his Irish stock as many smaller, but very good acts, do not

distribute in North America.<sup>36</sup> Of course, the internet enables musicians to seek out particular players and types of music.<sup>37</sup>

Other sources of Irish music available to Newfoundlanders during the second half of the twentieth century have included recordings sent by relations in Boston, travelling musicians, television, as well as the ever popular 'Irish-Newfoundland Show' on the local radio station VPCM.<sup>38</sup>

### **Cork musicians in Newfoundland**

Considering all of the connections between Newfoundland and Ireland, one might assume that *Island to Island* is based upon the rich historical relationship between the two island nations. I would assert that, while this history might make Newfoundland and Ireland intriguing places for each other to investigate, the practical sources of this CD date back a mere twenty years when Séamus Creagh (1946–2009) came to live in St. John's. Creagh (fiddle) and Rob Murphy (Irish flute) had come to Newfoundland on tour in 1988 and then returned shortly thereafter to live for five years until 1993. Aidan Coffey (accordion) was also supposed to be on that tour; however, he was unable to go at the last minute.<sup>39</sup> Marie-Annick Desplanques, who was instrumental in putting together the *Island to Island* project, had already been living in Newfoundland for six years, teaching French and studying in the folklore department at Memorial University of Newfoundland.<sup>40</sup>

When Creagh first arrived in St. John's there were no regular sessions and most traditional music still happened in people's homes, at festivals, or at the regular folk club night at Bridgett's Pub. Desplanques explained that a few sessions were started but never lasted very long.<sup>41</sup> Colin Carrigan explained that the session held on the closing night of the folk festival was the highlight of the year.<sup>42</sup> During their stay in Newfoundland, Creagh and Murphy had a major impact upon the younger generation of instrumentalists in St. John's, many of whom are now in their thirties. Although Murphy attempted to start several sessions, it was the one he started at O'Reilly's pub in the late 1980s or early 1990s which really took hold, inspiring players such as Rob Brown, Michelle Brophy, and Mike Hanrahan.<sup>43</sup> This particular session ran until 2008 and was one of the most popular in the city. Perhaps because it was led by Murphy, it remained primarily an Irish-based session.

When Creagh left the city in 1993 there were few session opportunities, but when he returned in 2006 he was amazed stating, 'they're flying now!'<sup>44</sup> Desplanques credits this to the fact that once they returned to Ireland there was a regular stream of visiting Newfoundland musicians to their house in Cork. She believes they saw sessions in Ireland and were inspired to bring the session environment back to Newfoundland.<sup>45</sup> Of course, their friendship with Creagh, Desplanques, and Murphy at least partially inspired their travel. Either way, since the mid to late 1990s, a strong pub session scene has developed in St. John's with, at the time of writing (2008), between three and five sessions a week.<sup>46</sup> Several of these sessions rely heavily on the international standard Irish session repertoire with few Newfoundland tunes. The majority of the people who attend the sessions are under forty and have

probably had more contact with Irish recordings and Irish instrumentalists, such as Creagh or Murphy, or those who learned from them, than they have with the older generation of Newfoundland dance musicians. The main proponents of this scene were influenced, in part, by musicians from Cork, and several, including those on this CD, have since travelled to Ireland to experience the music for themselves. For them, Ireland is the place to learn and absorb true traditional music. Jason Whelan in particular was struck by the physical similarities between the buildings in Cork and those of Water Street, stating that, if you block out the background, 'it's just like St. John's, I mean it's identical'.<sup>47</sup> The Cork-St. John's connection has also been maintained in the other direction by periodic visits back to Newfoundland.

The recent musical exchanges between Cork and St. John's are primarily due to the influence of Séamus Creagh and Marie-Annick Desplanques. As outlined in her presentation at NAFCo 2008,<sup>48</sup> they sponsored and facilitated many concerts on both sides of the Atlantic. Desplanques showed pictures, posters, and spoke of times when Paddy Keenan and Paddy Moloney came over to Newfoundland to visit, play concerts and meet musicians. Newfoundland musicians also played concerts in Cork; for example, Desplanques showed clippings of Christina Smith and Creagh playing together in Cork in 1991 and photos of the *Island to Island* musicians performing in Ireland during the summer of 2008.<sup>49</sup> This was the first time the Newfoundland musicians from *Island to Island* were able to travel to Ireland as a group. It was not, however, to promote the *Island to Island* CD, but instead it was in support of Graham Wells's new solo CD.<sup>50</sup> Whether or not this connection is forged on historical notions of ancestry, it is clear that the personal contacts between Cork and St. John's are thriving and of mutual benefit to both sides.

### **Musicians featured on *Island to Island***

The *Island to Island* disc features eight musicians; three from Cork and five from St. John's (see Appendix). The musicians from Cork include Séamus Creagh (fiddle), Aidan Coffey (accordion), and Mick Daly (guitar). Until Creagh passed away in 2009, these three played together regularly and Coffey and Creagh had a recording duo. The five Newfoundland instrumentalists include Jason Whelan (bouzouki and guitar), Colin Carrigan (fiddle), Graham Wells (accordion), Billy Sutton (banjo), and Paddy Mackey (bodhran).

The Cork musicians were self selected on the basis that they played and worked together regularly. Selection of Newfoundland musicians was a little more difficult. Jason Whelan, and Graham Wells were the first contacts, partially because Creagh knew them and Whelan is a sound engineer with a studio. Whelan and Wells then selected musicians with which they were comfortable, while considering the desired ensemble balance. The selection of musicians often turns out to be quite an informal process. In a small music scene, such as exists in St. John's, it could have easily grown to include many more equally talented musicians.

### **Recording practices**

So how does one go about co-ordinating a collaborative CD across an ocean? Ideally, each group should be able to travel to the other country, to rehearse and record, and then launch the album with a tour of both islands. In view of the funding available for traditional instrumental music, this was not possible. As one of the Newfoundland musicians pointed out, 'playing tunes is an indulgence' and not what pays the bills.<sup>51</sup> Fortunately for musicians and audiences alike, modern recording technology made this project possible.

When Mick Daly was kind enough to give me a copy of *Island to Island* in 2004, I simply assumed, as audience/consumer, that the musicians had travelled between Newfoundland and Ireland to make the CD. I later discovered that they had not travelled at all, but had instead recorded their tracks in their home cities. The musicians from St. John's sent their tracks to Cork where selections were made and the mastering was done. Colin Carrigan spoke of this as being a 'virtual collaboration'.<sup>52</sup> With the exception of Creagh and Desplanques, who travelled to St. John's to oversee the recording sessions, the musicians from St. John's and Cork did not meet until after the project was finished.

In line with the trend of today's recording styles neither group were recorded in a formal studio but in their homes. In St. John's, Jason Whelan oversaw the recording in his mother's empty living room, with hardwood floors and high ceilings.<sup>53</sup> In Cork, they recorded in Mick Daly's living room which has a futon and many bookcases. This resulted, of course, in different room sounds and consequently the studio which mastered the recordings in Killarney, had to compensate for this, making the Newfoundland tracks warmer and the Cork tracks brighter.<sup>54</sup>

Both groups chose the same method of recording: they played together and recorded 'live off the floor,' instead of recording one instrument at a time, a practice often equated with the polished recordings of major music labels. Why did both groups choose this method? Carrigan stated that it was an aesthetic choice. By playing together, they had the chance to respond or play 'off each other'. This facilitated their desire to 'capture not slickness, but life'.<sup>55</sup> By playing together they could best recreate the liveliness of the music in its normal setting. Whelan, the sound engineer for St. John's, explained that 'a lot of the fiddle and accordion were just done facing each other with a cardioid microphone, which is generally not responsive in the back. It was pretty much just a live performance. We just did a couple of takes of each one and we picked the ones we wanted'.<sup>56</sup> The same was true in Cork; Creagh and Coffey recorded the fiddle and accordion together. The only instruments regularly overdubbed were Daly's guitar and Mackey's bodhran. Following this approach, there was minimal overdubbing, the major exception to this rule was when Coffey overdubbed an accordion part on one track, in order to play with the St. John's musicians.

This choice to record in a live ensemble reflects two aspects of the tradition as practised today. First it recreates the 'session', or the environment in which traditional instrumental music is currently most often performed. It also reflects

the normal social and musical relationships between these particular players. In Fairbairn's 1994 paper, in which she researched the origins of the Irish music session, she discussed how it, as an informal group performance context, has overtaken the solo tradition, offering both a venue for socializing and for learning new music.<sup>57</sup> Sessions are now found throughout North America, Europe, and Australia, and have been adapted to other styles of western traditional musics including Scottish and bluegrass. In a world of recordings, the session has become the social venue of choice for folk musicians. By recording in this ensemble scenario, the *Island to Island* musicians were maintaining the current social and musical traditions of which they are regularly a part, and which is now found both in Cork and St. John's.

However, in many ways these musicians were also going against the multi-tracking standards that are widely accepted in all genres of music recording. For example, Porcello has shown in the Austin, Texas, music industry that effects are used to create a feeling of playing live.<sup>58</sup> In the *Island to Island* project the microphones seem to have been trusted, more or less, to convey the actual experience. There was very little manipulation during the recording. Instead they simply utilised good microphones, placed at an appropriate distance for each instrument, while still allowing eye contact. Furthermore, there were no headphone mixes, no special effects, and overdubbing was limited.

### **Music featured**

So, what music was selected to demonstrate the connections between Ireland and Newfoundland, or more specifically between St. John's and Cork? The liner notes suggest that the music is very similar, much like a 'meeting of cousins'. However, from talking to the musicians I believe that they intended to highlight the differences between their traditions as well as the similarities.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, they were not overly concerned with following the assumed historical trends by selecting music that was specifically from the regions which are ancestrally related. Instead of selecting tunes specifically from the southwest of Ireland or the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland, the music chosen reflected their own tastes and experiences as modern musicians, with the expanded resources to choose from any region within their tradition. That said, the Cork musicians, who specialize in music from the Sliabh Luachra region, which lies on the borders of Cork and Kerry, did play a number of these tunes, but did not limit their choice to that region. In Newfoundland there are not many tunes available in recordings or printed format, which are identified as being specifically from the Avalon Peninsula. For the purposes of this article, I will be focusing on the music selected by the Newfoundland musicians.

The *Island to Island* CD consists of fourteen tracks, split evenly between Cork and St. John's. Three of these could be considered cross-over tracks (tracks 3, 4, and 10 – see the Appendix). Two showcase the musicians playing music from the other side of the Atlantic. For example, the Cork musicians play two Newfoundland tunes from the west coast of the island – 'Flying Reel' composed by Emile Benoit (1913–1992) and 'Hound's Tune' from the repertoire of Rufus Guinchard (1899–1990). In



return, Carrigan and Wells play two Donegal reels, 'Johnny Doherty's' and 'The Ravelled Hank of Yarn', from the repertoire of John Doherty (1895–1980). Although the CD appears to be drawing similarities between the two traditions, Benoit and Guinchard have limited Irish influence and according to MacAoidh, Donegal has quite a bit of Scottish influence.<sup>60</sup> Benoit is known to have stemmed from the French tradition within Newfoundland and Guinchard's music is noted by Russell as having both French and West Country English traits.<sup>61</sup> Track 3 features Coffey playing along with the St. John's musicians on more Rufus Guinchard tunes – 'Lizzie's Jig' and 'Sam's Jig'. Perhaps it is here that the virtual collaboration really took place through the magic of the recording studio.

While fourteen tracks were included, many more were recorded. Sutton, Wells, and Carrigan originally got together and did rough cuts of at least sixteen possible sets. They then sent these to Cork where Creagh made suggestions of what should be recorded for the final CD.

I asked each group of musicians how they went about selecting tunes for the CD and the answers were rather different. The Cork musicians all agreed that they recorded a number of tunes which they liked and were playing at the time, and then selected from those. However, the Newfoundland musicians took a different approach. Guided partly by the producer, Séamus Creagh, who asked that they avoid the common Newfoundland tunes, the musicians looked for pieces not currently in vogue and not recently recorded. Carrigan stated that he tried to find tunes that had that 'identifiably Newfoundland sound' and Wells said that they 'made a point of finding tunes that were Newfoundland and off the beaten track' by looking to old recordings or locally made tapes at O'Brien's Music Store.<sup>62</sup> Despite their efforts, Coffey said that he had hoped the Newfoundlanders would have played fewer Irish tunes but understood that 'Irish music is more ubiquitous' and that it was harder for him to find Newfoundland music as there was not the same amount of 'easy access'.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, Coffey explained that 'the structure of the tunes from Newfoundland were different' and that there were unexpected extra beats.<sup>64</sup>

Newfoundland is becoming known for its 'crooked' tunes, or tunes which have too many or too few beats according to the standard sixteen beat per strain format. It is generally accepted amongst local musicians that the asymmetrical beat structures or forms represent the music's link to the largely historical community dancing tradition. At dances known as 'times', the solo dance musicians adapted tunes by adding or removing beats as was needed to accommodate the dancers. These 'times' were held during the winter months in 'outport' coastal communities up until the middle of the twentieth century. Says Coffey:

I think the origin of that, as far as what I read about it [...] was because of the dances that people would have been doing in Newfoundland, they would have adjusted standard tunes and put an extra bar on to accommodate a dance that might have come from Brittany, or whose origins might have been in France

[...] there's a mixing of cultures over in Newfoundland, so therefore the music adapted to satisfy the dancing.<sup>65</sup>

Christina Smith has identified Newfoundland as having a higher incidence of tunes with asymmetrical features than other regions, and many musicians point to these tunes as being identifiably characteristic of Newfoundland fiddle music.<sup>66</sup> There are a total of thirty-one tunes in fourteen sets on *Island to Island* (see Appendix). Of these, seventeen are presented as Newfoundland tunes with the remaining fourteen being Irish tunes. In total there are nine tunes which show deviations from the standard AABB and sixteen-beat form.<sup>67</sup> Eight are from Newfoundland and one from Ireland, but played by Newfoundlanders – 'Johnny Doherty's'. The identification between Newfoundland music and crooked tunes is evidently strong as all four of the Newfoundland tunes chosen by the Irish musicians are asymmetrical. With almost a third of the selections on the CD being crooked, when normally the presence of one asymmetrical tune would be unusual, it seems a concerted effort was made to draw attention to this aspect of the tradition. Also significant is the fact that they were allowed to stay 'crooked' and were not 'straightened' in an attempt to 'correct' the tunes to standard format.

The Newfoundlanders joked that, although they looked under rocks and tables to find lesser known tunes, they feel that most Newfoundland music originated in Ireland. As Whelan, who spent time with Creagh in Ireland playing music in the Sliabh Luachra area of Kerry, stated about the Kerry slides and polkas:

I would go for them all the time. I loved them and a lot of players over there don't like them [...] its overlooked the relation between Newfoundland traditional music and that. All the Newfoundland tunes, I mean, I'm sure in some form they're all variations of, or they're heavily influenced because that was the kind of music that was here.<sup>68</sup>

Billy Sutton also echoed this viewpoint stating:

That's where a lot of the people that were here over the past 500 years came from. So, I mean like you said there was no radio. It got passed down and I mean people playing at dances, and the tunes might have changed and evolved over the years and changed slightly, but [...] that's where they came from.<sup>69</sup>

In line with previous opinions, Coffey suggested that Newfoundland tunes might sound Irish because the music reflects the background of the region's original immigrant population. He also recognized the globalization of traditional music in general and the boom of Irish music in particular stating, '[It is] available all over the world so it's no surprise, they would have a fair repertoire of Irish music'.<sup>70</sup>

A closer examination of the tunes selected, however, shows that the Newfoundlanders only included three Irish derived tunes, excluding the Donegal cross-over tracks (4.1, 4.2 – see Appendix). Two of the three have strong connections

to the United States, rather than Ireland, through the popular New York City based ensemble, the McNulty Family, who were standard fare on Newfoundland radio for thirty years. The names have changed whilst on the island but the tracks 'Kitty Jones' (8.2) and 'Mussels in the Corner' (11.3) were recorded by the McNulty's as 'Stack of Wheat' or 'Ann Carawath' and 'Maggie in the Woods' in 1950 and 1941 respectively. 'Maggie in the Woods' or 'Mussels in the Corner' has become the standard Newfoundland tune and particularly identified with the provincial fiddle tradition. It has, however, gone through significant changes since the McNulty's influence and has an extra beat between the low and high strains, as this version attests. The other Irish derived tune, 'Pussy Cat Got Up in the Plumtree' was recorded by Newfoundland's Wilf Doyle in 1962, but also by the Bothy Band as 'This is my Love Do you Like her?' in 1977.<sup>71</sup>

The 'Blackberry Quadrille,' presented here as the 'Blueberry Quadrille' (2.3) was popularized by the famous Canadian fiddler Don Messer (1909–1973). Under Rufus Guinchard's fingers, however, it gained an extra beat and it is this version which is recorded on *Island to Island*. Four more tunes from Guinchard's repertoire (3.1, 3.2, 10.2, 11.2) are also included, all but one of which are crooked, as are both of the Emile Benoit compositions (6.3, 10.1). Three recently composed tunes by Avalon Peninsula musicians, Geoff Butler and Billy Dinn (8.1, 13.1, 13.2) and four other Newfoundland tunes (2.1, 6.1, 6.2, 11.1), not traced to other sources were part of the Newfoundland offerings on *Island to Island*.

For the casual listener, these tunes all sound more or less the same. Even reviewers from publications such as *Folk World*, *The Living Tradition*, *Irish Music Magazine*, *The Irish World* and *The Irish Post* remarked on the similarity of the two musics.<sup>72</sup> One reviewer admits that he could not tell the difference between the two groups, whereas another suggests that the Newfoundland tunes might be more authentic than modern Irish music.<sup>73</sup> Sutton, Wells, and Whelan, all of whom play Irish session music regularly, agree that musicians are more discerning than the general listening public.

## **Conclusions**

So what is the result of this musical exchange? It has been shown that there are deep historical ties between Newfoundland and Ireland, and that recent connections are also very important to musicians in helping to shape the contemporary tradition in St. John's. As is implied by the authors of the liner notes for *Island to Island*, this CD successfully demonstrates strong musical links, in that 'tunes from both traditions blend easily together and there is a unity of sound that could not be contrived'.<sup>74</sup> They go on to say that Irish music in Newfoundland has been protected by isolation and that it represents a 'fairly pure form of the craft'.<sup>75</sup> Undoubtedly, there are many Irish-derived tunes in Newfoundland and our tradition owes a great debt in terms of repertoire to Ireland, both historically and recently through travel, visiting musicians, and recordings. However, I wonder how it is that when the musicians make an effort to showcase non-Irish based Newfoundland tunes, including a high

number of crooked tunes, that reviewers regard everything as being essentially Irish. Is it that the musicians are so adept that they make everything sound easy and do not make the extra or lack of beats sound out of place? Does the similar instrumentation fool the ear? Has Séamus, and by corollary his Irish colleagues, ended up with a Newfoundland accent? Or, is it that the post dance generation of Newfoundland players has learned so much from Irish recordings and travel that they can move seamlessly between the two traditions? Or, is it simply that there is such a strong connection, notwithstanding odd structures and newly composed tunes, that our roots show through in spite of apparent efforts to the contrary?

How does this project and others like it benefit both islands? Certainly an international collaboration helps bring the relatively obscure Newfoundland tradition into the international limelight. Irish listeners will learn more about the Irish diaspora, which has helped to fuel so many vibrant traditions around the world. Modern recording technology here has allowed for the meeting of musics that might not otherwise meet on CD for the general public to hear. This could perhaps be used as a model for a virtual meeting of musics from other closely related traditions; it could help to illuminate those delicate questions concerning tune nationality and subtle stylistic differences which are so important to instrumentalists, while providing new musical connections for the general public. Although localization is increasing in response to globalization, it is a fact that technology, be it radio, records, or digital downloads are embraced by fiddlers in even the most isolated of communities. Playing tunes with musicians across an ocean is just another expression of this. As Paul Greene has pointed out in *Wired for Sound*, 'music can now no longer be adequately modeled as something that happens in a local context and employs only the expressive means specific to a locality.'<sup>76</sup>

The connections between Newfoundland and Ireland socially and musically have been growing stronger in recent years, fuelled in part by artistic endeavours such as this, which are crossing over and over, while creating a stronger and stronger weave. Without modern recording technology, high-quality collaborations, virtual or personal, could not seek to highlight both our similarities and our differences. Perhaps the casual listeners will not hear extra beats but musicians who sit down from either side of the Atlantic will notice and note the reunion of two long-parted traditions getting to know each other once again.

## **Appendix**

### *Island to Island* CD track list

Séamus Creagh and Marie-Annick Desplanques, producers, *Island to Island: Traditional Music from Newfoundland and Ireland*, Ossian OSSCD 131, Cork, Ireland, 2003. Irish Artists: Séamus Creagh (fiddle), Aidan Coffey (accordion), and Mick Daly (guitar). Newfoundland Artists: Jason Whelan (bouzouki and guitar), Colin Carrigan (fiddle), Graham Wells (accordion), Billy Sutton (banjo), and Paddy Mackey (bodhran).

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- Track 1 – Polkas (Séamus, Aidan & Mick)
  - 1.1 Quinn’s Polka
  - 1.2 The Church Polka
- Track 2 – Doubles (Graham, Billy, Jason, Colin & Paddy)
  - 2.1 Cook in the Galley
  - 2.2 Pussycat Up in the Plumtree
  - 2.3 Blueberry Quadrille
- Track 3 – Doubles (Jason, Colin & Aidan)
  - 3.1 Lizzie’s Jig
  - 3.2 Sam’s Jig
- Track 4 – Reels (Colin & Graham)
  - 4.1 Johnny Doherty’s
  - 4.2 The Ravelled Hank of Yarn
- Track 5 – (Séamus, Aidan & Mick)
  - 5.1 The Job of Journeywork
  - 5.2 The Moneymusk
- Track 6 – Jigs (Graham, Billy, Jason, Colin & Paddy)
  - 6.1 Captains and Ships
  - 6.2 Newfoundland Spring
  - 6.3 West Bay Centre
- Track 7 – Polkas (Séamus, Aidan & Mick)
  - 7.1 Pádraig O’Keeffe’s
  - 7.2 Many’s a Wild Night
- Track 8 – Hornpipes (Graham, Colin & Jason)
  - 8.1 Like You Would
  - 8.2 Kitty Jones
- Track 9 – Jigs (Séamus, Aidan & Mick)
  - 9.1 Tom Billy Murphy’s
  - 9.2 Brennan’s Fabourite
- Track 10 – (Séamus, Aidan & Mick)
  - 10.1 The Flying Reel
  - 10.2 Hound’s Tune
- Track 11 – (Colin, Graham & Jason)
  - 11.1 Who Stole the Miner’s Hat
  - 11.2 Hughie Wentzell’s
  - 11.3 Mussels in the Corner
- Track 12 – Jigs (Séamus, Aidan & Mick)
  - 12.1 Kilfenora Jig
  - 12.2 Thomond Bridge
- Track 13 – Jig and Reel (Graham, Billy, Jason, Colin & Paddy)
  - 13.1 Billy Dinn’s Jig
  - 13.2 Billy Dinn’s Reel
- Track 14 Reels (Séamus, Aidan & Mick)
  - 14.1 McGrath’s Reel
  - 14.2 Mulhaire’s (Martin Mulhaire’s No. 9)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a part of my dissertation research. I would like to thank for their generous support: the Ireland-Canada University Fund and the Sprott Foundation which funded my research in Ireland; the J. R. Smallwood Foundation which funded research in Newfoundland and Labrador; and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) who generously offered me a doctoral fellowship.

<sup>2</sup> Séamus Creagh and Marie-Annick Desplanques, *Island to Island: Traditional Music from Newfoundland and Ireland*, Ossian OSSCD 131, Cork, Ireland, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Creagh and Desplanques, *Island to Island*.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Byrne, 'The Confluence of Folklore and Literature in the Creation of a Newfoundland Mythology within the Canadian Context', in *Canada and the Nordic Countries in Times of Reorientation: Culture and Politics*, ed. by Jorn Carlsen, the Nordic Association for Canadian Studies Text Series 13 (Aarhus: Nordic Association for Canadian Studies and Aarhus University, 1998), pp. 55–77 (p. 56). As discussed by Pat Byrne, the tag line 'England's first colony' is a 'factitive moniker'. The 1583 Gilbert visit was a proclamation of British law, not recognition of colonial status and carried no tangible effect on the people living or working in Newfoundland. With at least a dozen ships of different countries in the harbour, Gilbert's speech was nominal at best and ineffective at worst. As Harris has pointed out, it was effectively a geopolitical news release to notify the King of Spain to leave North America alone, see L. Harris, *Newfoundland and Labrador: A Brief History* (Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1968), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> Olaf U. Janzen, *A Reader's Guide to the History of Newfoundland and Labrador to 1869* (2008), [www2.swgc.mun.ca/nfld\\_history/nfld\\_history\\_intro.htm](http://www2.swgc.mun.ca/nfld_history/nfld_history_intro.htm) [accessed 4 June 2009]. Jeff A. Webb, 'Collapse of Responsible Government 1929–1934: Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage' (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2001), p. 35, <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/politics/collapse-responsible-government.php> [accessed 4 June 2009]; Jeff A. Webb, 'Responsible Government, 1855–1933: Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage' (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2001), <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/politics/responsible-government-1855-to-1933.php> [accessed 4 June 2009].

<sup>6</sup> John J. Mannion, 'Introduction', in *The Peopling of Newfoundland: Essays in Historical Geography*, ed. by John J. Mannion (St. John's, NL, Canada: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Mannion, 'Introduction', p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Mike McCarthy, *The Irish in Newfoundland 1600–1900: Their Trials, Tribulations and Triumphs* (St. John's, NL: Creative Publishers, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Mannion, 'Introduction', p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> McCarthy, *Irish in Newfoundland*, p. 120.

<sup>11</sup> Mannion, 'Introduction', p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> John J. Mannion, *Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974), pp. 23–24.

<sup>13</sup> Cyril Byrne, 'The Waterford Colony in Newfoundland 1700–1850', in *Waterford History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. by Thomas P. Power (William Nolan Geography Publications, 1992), pp. 365, 369.

<sup>14</sup> McCarthy, *Irish in Newfoundland*, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> McCarthy, *Irish in Newfoundland*, pp. 179, 182.

<sup>16</sup> McCarthy, *Irish in Newfoundland*, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup> Kristen Harris Walsh, 'Irish-Newfoundland Step Dancing and Cultural Identity in Newfoundland', *Ethnologies*, 30 (2008), 125–40.

<sup>18</sup> Corona Wyse, *Not Words but Deeds* (St. John's, NL: Flanker Press, 2006), p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Walsh, 'Irish-Newfoundland Step Dancing', p. 126.

<sup>20</sup> Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), p. 160.

<sup>21</sup> Brian McGinn, 'Newfoundland: The Most Irish Place Outside of Ireland', The Institute of Communication Studies, University of Leeds, [nd] [ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=id\\_s&requesttimeout=500&folder=158&paper=159](http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=id_s&requesttimeout=500&folder=158&paper=159) [accessed 4 June 2009].

<sup>22</sup> Historical geographer John Mannion has done extensive work on the immigrations of Irish to Newfoundland and their part in the work force of the early migratory fishery. See for example, John Mannion, 'Irish Migration and Settlement in Newfoundland: The Formative Phase, 1697–1732', *Newfoundland Studies*, 17, no. 2 (2001), 257–291; John Mannion, 'Victualling a Fishery: Newfoundland Diet and the Origins of the Irish Provisions Trade, 1675–1700', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 12, no. 1 (2000), 1–60. Keough also pointed out that with the end of the fishery, residents turned to the currency of their historical connections to Ireland to help make a new way in the world, see Willeen Keough, 'Creating the "Irish Loop": Cultural Renaissance or Commodification of Ethnic Identity in an Imagined Tourist Landscape?' *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 34, no. 2 (2008), 12–22 (p. 18). In 2008, the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* dedicated a special issue to the Irish in Newfoundland (vol. 34, no.2). This shift towards an emphasis on culture rather than immigration history has also included a significant work by Keough, who examined the history of Irish women on Newfoundland's southern shore; see Willeen Keough, *The Slender Thread: Irish Women on the Southern Avalon, 1750–1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). See also Thomas F. Nemeec, 'The Irish Emigration to Newfoundland', *Newfoundland Quarterly*, 69, no. 1 (July 1972), 15–19, 22–24.

<sup>23</sup> Terry MacDonald, 'Where Have All the (English) Folk Songs Gone? Newfoundland's Rejection of Its Dorset Inheritance', *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 14 (1999), 180–92. See also David Gregory 'Maud Karpeles, Newfoundland, and the Crisis of the Folksong Revival, 1924–1935', *Newfoundland Studies*, 1, no. 2 (2000), 151–65.

<sup>24</sup> Ireland Newfoundland Partnership, 'Contemporary Relations', Ireland Newfoundland Partnership, [nd] [www.inp.ie/?q=node/9](http://www.inp.ie/?q=node/9) [accessed 4 June 2009]. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 'Premier Williams Signs MOU Re-Affirmation and Concludes Ireland Tour', Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2004) [www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2004/exec/0708n09.htm](http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2004/exec/0708n09.htm) [accessed 4 June 2009]. See also Joshua D. Lalor, 'Ethnicity, Culture, and Globalization: Exploring the Memorandum of Understanding Between Newfoundland and Labrador and Ireland', *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 24, no. 1 (2004), 25–53.

<sup>25</sup> Kristy Clarke, interview by author, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Clarke, interview by author.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> My current dissertation research focuses on these three Irish revival periods and their influence on Newfoundlanders' musical identity, see Evelyn Osborne, 'Fiddling with Style: Negotiating "Celticism" in the Traditional Instrumental Music of Newfoundland and Labrador' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland, forthcoming).

## OSBORNE *Music from Ireland and Newfoundland*

<sup>29</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 canadien*, 1 (1991), 59–68.

<sup>30</sup> Pat Byrne, ‘Stage Irish’, p. 67. My forthcoming dissertation contains an in-depth look at the McNulty Family’s tour to Newfoundland and their influence on Newfoundland music, particularly the instrumental tradition, see Osborne, ‘Fiddling with Style’. Also forthcoming is an article by Ted McGraw on the McNulty’s influence on the Newfoundland song tradition (*Journal of the Society for American Music*, Fall 2010), and a retrospective CD compilation of their music produced by Mick Moloney (due out in December 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Ralph O’Brien, interview by author, St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Ralph O’Brien interview by author, St. John’s Newfoundland, Canada, 2008. See [www.ryansfancy.com](http://www.ryansfancy.com).

<sup>33</sup> John Graham, interview by author, St. John’s, Newfoundland, 2008. This perception of Figgy Duff’s background contrasts with the account in Lise Saugeres, ‘Figgy Duff and Newfoundland Culture’ (unpublished dissertation, Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Billy Sutton, Graham Wells, and Jason Whelan, interview by author, St. John’s, Newfoundland, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon O’Brien, interview by author, St. John’s, Newfoundland, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> A popular website for accessing tunes is [www.thesession.org](http://www.thesession.org) [accessed 4 June 2009].

<sup>38</sup> Kevin Broderick and Mark Walsh, interview by author, Bay de Verde, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, 17 March 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Aidan Coffey, Séamus Creagh, Mick Daly, and Marie-Annick Desplanque, interview by author, Cork City, Ireland, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Marie-Annick Desplanques received her doctorate from Memorial University in 1992. She is now on the faculty at the University College Cork, her biography and works are listed here: [www.ucc.ie/en/DepartmentsCentresandUnits/RoinnanBhaloidisFolklore/M-ADesplanques](http://www.ucc.ie/en/DepartmentsCentresandUnits/RoinnanBhaloidisFolklore/M-ADesplanques) [accessed 4 June 2009]. Marie-Annick Desplanques moved to Newfoundland c.1982 to teach French and study French populations on the west coast of the island through Memorial University of Newfoundland’s folklore department. She met Séamus when he came over to perform at Soirée ’88. Séamus then moved to St. John’s and resided there from 1988 to 1993 after which they returned to County Cork together. Séamus Creagh (b. 22 February 1946) passed on during the writing of this paper at age 63 (15 March 2009). See *Irish Times*, 16 March 2009, [notices.irishtimes.com/2423607](http://notices.irishtimes.com/2423607) [accessed 19 May 2010].

<sup>41</sup> Coffey, Creagh, Daly, and Desplanque, interview.

<sup>42</sup> Colin Carrigan, interview by author, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Coffey, Creagh, Daly, and Desplanque, interview.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> In 2008, the session scene in the city was in flux. To my knowledge there were sessions at Auntie Crae’s on Water Street (Tuesday lunchtimes); at the Georgetown Pub (Tuesday evenings); at Erin’s Pub (Friday evenings); at O’Reilly’s Irish Newfoundland Bar (Saturday nights); and at Bridie Molloy’s (Sunday afternoons). NAFCo 2008 also sparked some sessions at Nautical Nellies which have been changing from Thursday nights and Saturday



afternoons. Since 2008 the long standing session at O'Reilly's has moved to a new Irish bar called Shamrock City.

<sup>47</sup> Sutton, Wells, and Whelan, interview.

<sup>48</sup> Marie-Annick Desplanques, 'I Got That Tune from My Grandfather and He Got It from the Internet!' An Ethnographic Snapshot at the Millennium Age of Irish and Newfoundland Music Family Connections', paper presented at the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention 2008, St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, 5 August 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Graham Wells, *Traditional Music From Newfoundland*, Chain Rock Entertainment [no matrix number], St. John's, NL, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Sutton, Wells, and Whelan, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Carrigan, interview.

<sup>53</sup> Sutton, Wells, and Whelan, interview.

<sup>54</sup> Coffey, Creagh, Daly, and Desplanque, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Carrigan, interview.

<sup>56</sup> Sutton, Wells, and Whelan, interview.

<sup>57</sup> Hazel Fairbairn, 'Changing Contexts for Traditional Dance Music in Ireland: The Rise of Group Performance Practice', *Folk Music Journal*, 6 (1994), 566–99.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Porcello, 'Music Mediated as Live in Austin: Sound, Technology and Recording Practice', in *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, ed. by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), pp. 103–17.

<sup>59</sup> Coffey, Creagh, Daly, and Desplanque, interview; Creagh, and Desplanques, *Island to Island*; Sutton, Wells, and Whelan, interview; Carrigan, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Caoimhín MacAoidh, *Between the Jigs and the Reels: The Donegal Fiddle Tradition* (Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim: Drumlin Publications, 1994), pp. 22–105 (chapter 3 'Influences').

<sup>61</sup> Kelly Russell, *Rufus Guincharde: Father of the Newfoundland Fiddle* (St. John's, NL: Pigeon Inlet, 1982), p. 25; Kelly Russell, *Kelly Russell's Collection: The Fiddle Music of Newfoundland and Labrador, Volume One, Rufus Guincharde and Emile Benoit* (St. John's, NL: Pigeon Inlet, 2000), p. v. See also Colin Quigley's biography of Emile Benoit, *Music from the Heart: Compositions of a Folk Fiddler* (Athens, GA; London: University of Georgia Press, [1995]).

<sup>62</sup> Carrigan, interview; Sutton, Wells, and Whelan, interview.

<sup>63</sup> Coffey, Creagh, Daly, and Desplanque, interview.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Christina Smith, 'Crooked as the Road to Branch: Asymmetry in Newfoundland Dance Music', *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 22 (2007), 139–64.

<sup>67</sup> The following tunes recorded on *Island to Island* are asymmetrical. 'Blueberry Quadrille' (2.3) aka 'Blackberry Quadrille' has an extra beat in the high strain in bar 4; 'Lizzie's Tune' (3.1) bar 7 and 15 are 9/8 giving each turn 17 beats rather than the standard 16; 'Sam's Jig' (3.2) includes one 9/8 bar in the A strain and two in B giving 17 and 18 beats respectively; 'Flying Reel' (10.1) is by Emile Benoit each strain is only 8 beats long, A is played three times and B twice; 'Hound's Tune' (10.2) the low strain is 9 bars, or 18 beats long; 'West Bay Centre' by Emile Benoit has a low strain with a beat structure, including the repeat, of 6+7+ 6+6 when it returns to the start but 6+7+6+7 on the final turn, meaning it has only 6 bars and is 13+12 beats on the repeat but 13 + 13 beats at the end . These tunes can be found in Russell, *The Fiddle Music of Newfoundland and Labrador Volume 1: Rufus Guincharde and Emile Benoit*, pp. 4,

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12, 13, 17, 36, 56. 'Captains and Ships' (6.1) was originally a song and carries a A BB or 8 beats plus 16 beats form; 'Mussels in the Corner' (11.3) is normally 16 + 16 beats long, however, this version from Fogo Island has an extra beat at the end of the low strain making it 17+16. Only one of the listed Irish tunes was asymmetrical. 'Johnny Doherty's' (4.1) has nine bars in the first turn giving it 18 beats.

<sup>68</sup> Sutton, Wells, and Whelan, interview.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Coffey, Creagh, Daly, and Desplanque, interview.

<sup>71</sup> Wilf Doyle, *More Dance Favourites*, London Records, NA-3508 c.1962; The Bothy Band, *Out of the Wind*, Polydor 2382456, 1977.

<sup>72</sup> Tom Keller, 'Folk World CD Reviews: V/a Island to Island', *Folk World* (2004) [www.folkworld.de/27/e/cds2.html](http://www.folkworld.de/27/e/cds2.html) [accessed 4 June 2009]; Rogers Malcolm, 'The Irish Post', Copperplate Distribution, 2003 [www.copperplatedistribution.com/oss131.html](http://www.copperplatedistribution.com/oss131.html) [accessed 4 June 2009]; Aidan O'Hara, 'The Irish Music Magazine', Copperplate Distribution, 2003, [www.copperplatedistribution.com/oss131.html](http://www.copperplatedistribution.com/oss131.html) [accessed 4 June 2009]; Xenia Poole, 'The Irish World', Copperplate Distribution, 2003, [www.copperplatedistribution.com/oss131.html](http://www.copperplatedistribution.com/oss131.html) [accessed 4 June 2009]; Danny Saunders, 'Review: Various Artists *Island to Island: Traditional Music from Ireland and Newfoundland* Ossian Publications OSSCD 131', The Living Tradition folkmusic.net, [nd], [www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/webrevs/oss131.htm](http://www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/webrevs/oss131.htm) [accessed 4 June 2009]

<sup>73</sup> Malcolm, 'The Irish Post'; Saunders, 'Review'.

<sup>74</sup> Creagh, and Desplanques, *Island to Island*.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello, eds, *Wired for Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), p. 2.

## A history of cross-cultural exchanges in Finnish and Swedish diddling

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From peasant folk dances to jazz fusions to Japanese animé on the internet, the story of changes in Finnish and Swedish diddling reveals a long history of cross-cultural exchange. Over the last 500 years musical ideas have travelled across the Baltic Sea, the Bay of Bothnia, and the Atlantic Ocean to the opposite reaches of the Pacific Rim. Though the exchange of musical ideas across cultures may have increased in speed and frequency with the advent and dissemination of recording technology, jet travel, and the internet, it is certainly nothing new. As James Clifford argues:

The processes of human movement and encounter are long-established and complex. Cultural centers, discrete regions and territories, do not exist prior to contact, but are sustained through them, appropriating and disciplining the restless movements of people and things [...] Intercultural connection is, and has long been, the norm [...] Stasis and purity are asserted – creatively and violently – against historical forces of movement and contamination.<sup>1</sup>

Romantic nationalist ideas about the folk, as propagated by Johann Gottfried von Herder, were such an assertion against the adoption of foreign cultural elements in European cities,<sup>2</sup> and led to lasting misconceptions about folk culture and folk music as ethnically pure and untainted by foreign influences. In actuality, missionaries, conquerors/imperialists, royalty, settlers, merchants, sailors, and musicians have been travelling across the seas and oceans throughout the last millennium, carrying with them melodies, dances, terminology, and aesthetics.

In this paper, I illustrate three epochs in the history of Nordic diddling characterized by profound musical exchanges: the journey of Polish dances from Poland to Sweden and Finland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the introduction and appropriation of jazz from the USA to the Nordic countries in the twentieth century; and an internet phenomenon connecting Japan, Finland, and individuals from across the world in the twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup>

### *Rallatus and Trall*

Diddling, also known as liltling or mouth music in English, *rallatus* in Finnish, and *trall* in Swedish, refers to singing using vocables or nonsense syllables. The style is

usually lively and rhythmic. Prior to the advent of recording playback technologies, instrumental dance tunes would be diddled on occasions when instruments were not available to accompany dancing. Diddling also occurred historically in participatory song and dance games, and in friendly song competitions between boys and girls in which the last line or two of an improvised verse would be diddled.<sup>4</sup> Judging by the available archive recordings of *rallatus* and *trall*, the most popular genres for diddling in Sweden and Finland were polskas and polkas, and to a lesser extent marches.

Unfortunately, there is very little documentation of Nordic diddling practices before the introduction of recording technology; early scholars seem to have been primarily interested in collecting songs with ballad or epic poetry texts and not nonsense syllables. The earliest known written mention of diddling in Finland appears in *Lyhykäinen Neuvo Hyviin ja Sijvollisin Ihmisten Tapoin; or A Little Advice on the Customs of Good and Civilized People*, from 1761, which maintained that *trallotta*, to diddle, was inappropriate for civilized indoor behaviour.<sup>5</sup> However, documentation exists of the fiddle music and dances that share the same repertoire as seventeenth-through nineteenth-century diddling. Thus I will begin by chronicling the journey of the main diddling repertoire, *polska* and polka, from Poland to Sweden to Finland.

### **Crossing the Baltic: Polish origins of Nordic diddling repertoire**

The terms *polska* and polka, as well as *pols* and polonaise, derive from the word 'Polish' in various European languages. Polish-labelled dances and dance music were composed and performed not only in Poland, but across central and northern Europe. As Polish genres were danced, played, and newly composed in other European courts they were initially conceived of as either having some link to Poland or containing Polish musical characteristics. This labelling of the dances and dance music genres as Polish – which preceded the romantic nationalist movement by nearly two centuries – reflects a growing awareness of ethnic identity and local language in sixteenth-century post-Reformation Renaissance Europe.<sup>6</sup> Sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Polish dance music was distinguished by its descending rhythmic density within each measure (♩ ♪ ♫ ♬). In the sixteenth century it was common for some central European court dances to consist of two parts with the same melodic material played in duple time in one part and in triple time in the other part. When a duple-time melody was transformed into triple time, the melody was condensed in the beginning of the measure in Polish dances, instead of towards the end of the measure as was common in other genres.<sup>7</sup>

These Polish dances originated amongst Polish peasants, but were appropriated by the Polish court, and from there spread to other courts in Europe, such as the French court (where the polonaise developed), the Danish court (where King Christian IV, 1558–1648, employed Polish court musicians), Prussian courts, and the Swedish court. The Swedish and Polish courts were joined in late sixteenth-century by the Swede Sigismund August, who succeeded his Polish aunt on the Polish throne in 1587, was crowned in Sweden in 1593, and ruled both countries until 1599. Sweden and Poland were ruled together by the Vasa dynasty for 80 years, leading to intense cultural exchanges between Sweden and Poland, precisely when

the Polish dances were fashionable.<sup>8</sup> The Polish dances popular in the Swedish court were adopted by the Swedish bourgeoisie, and eventually the upper class dances were adopted by Swedish merchants and peasants. Finland was a part of the Swedish kingdom from roughly the twelfth century through 1809, and as such Western and Southern Finland received ongoing influxes of missionaries, merchants, and settlers from Sweden, who brought with them the Polish dances.

By the eighteenth century, the *polska* was an established and important component of peasant wedding celebrations in Sweden and Western Finland.<sup>9</sup> *Polska* music and dancing continued to be prominent in Swedish and Finnish peasant life through the early nineteenth century. Though *polskas* dwindled in popularity with industrialization, urbanization, modernization, and mass mediaization, they have featured prominently in twentieth-century Swedish and Finnish revival movements and are practiced today in folk dance clubs, folk music festivals, and folk music education programmes.

Along the route of their cross-Baltic journeys, the Polish dances gradually became acculturated into Swedish and Finnish folk culture. Indeed, they were appropriated into local Nordic traditions to such an extent that they almost entirely lost their former associations with Polish music and culture. As Polish musicologist Ewa Dahlig-Turek observes, 'outside Poland, in the new environment, rhythms once defined as Polish got new meaning, new performance context and new form. In fact, they are no longer Polish.'<sup>10</sup> Polish melodies, rhythms, dances, and terminology travelled from Poland to the Nordic lands, but not necessarily all in one piece. As melodies travelled, they were often adapted into local styles, sometimes adopting new rhythms and even new metres. At times the names of dances and genres were preserved but not the actual contents or styles. Swedish and Finnish *polskas* came to be dance genres in triple time in moderate tempo with emphasis on beats one and three. The rhythmic characteristics of modern Swedish and Finnish *polskas* vary according to local style: the three beats of a measure may be symmetrical or asymmetrical (for example, a shortened one and lengthened two beat, or lengthened one and shortened two beat) with eighth-note or triplet subdivisions. Nordic polkas are faster dance tunes in duple time subdivided into eighth and sixteenth notes. See Figure 1 (opposite) for a musical transcription of a Swedish *polska* as diddled by Måns Olsson (1865–1961) and Figure 2 (overleaf) for a musical transcription of a Finnish polka as diddled by Anita Lehtola from the band Loituma.

Thus, Polish dance music underwent a transformative journey not only across countries and seas, but across social classes and back again. Rhythms, dances, and musical genres that were once deemed symbols of Polishness came to be considered the quintessential folk heritage of different regions in the Nordic countries.

### **Crossing the Atlantic: jazz fusions**

The next major cross-cultural influence to impact Swedish and Finnish diddling came from across the Atlantic Ocean. Jazz was brought to the Nordic countries in the 1920s and 1930s by ocean liners carrying Nordic emigrants returning home, and by gramophone, sheet music, radio, touring British jazz musicians, and touring

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Figure 1 'Lap Nils *Polska*' as diddled by Måns Olsson

African-American jazz musicians. Sheet music preceded any live or recorded aural examples of jazz to the Nordic countries. In Finland, the word 'jazz' first appeared in 1919, but the early Finnish jazz, or *jatsi*, bore little sonic resemblance to American jazz; it tended toward melancholy melodies, minor keys, no swung rhythms, little improvisation, a resemblance to the foxtrot, and racist, exoticizing, supposedly, African imagery. The first live sounds of jazz were brought to Finland in 1926 by an American cruise ship carrying hundreds of Finnish-Americans returning to their homeland. Amongst the passengers were several Finnish-American musicians who had formed a jazz band on board – their subsequent tours around Finland had a major impact on the early development of Finnish jazz.<sup>11</sup> Sweden, less isolated from mainland Europe than Finland, received more direct infusions of jazz from touring African-American musicians:

One could perhaps say that jazz came to Sweden on Wednesday the 25th October, 1933. That was the day that Louis Armstrong gave his first concert in Stockholm, before a large, youthful audience that was completely captivated by his playing [...] Louis Armstrong signalled the beginning of a new age, the start of the first musical revolt among young people. Even the newspaper critics could not stem the tide with their supercilious and prejudiced comments

– ‘music from a madhouse’ and ‘ape language from the jungle’ and other similarly exaggerated epithets [...] For many people, Armstrong’s concerts in Sweden (six in all) were a decisive turning point. The audiences included many musicians who would be responsible for creating the Swedish jazz of the 1930s and 1940s [...] The event also broke with traditional patterns. Previously Sweden’s cultural influences had mainly come from Germany and Central Europe. From now onwards the younger generation would look to the West for inspiration.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently both Sweden and Finland developed their own jazz traditions. Musicians secured state funding for jazz by the 1960s in Finland and the 1970s in Sweden. In the 1970s formal jazz education programmes sprung up in both countries, and in the 1980s the prestigious Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and Royal College of Music in Stockholm opened jazz departments.<sup>13</sup> Jazz became established as one of multiple musical idioms in Nordic urban soundscapes.

In the 1960s and 1970s fusions between jazz, rock, and folk music became popular. Swedish and Finnish jazz musicians were inspired by trends in the USA and the UK, such as free jazz and fusion. Particularly influential were Don Cherry (who worked in Sweden for long periods) and his incorporation of non-Western music elements into jazz compositions, the fusion style of Miles Davis, and the folk

Basic Melody

Diddled with rhythmic embellishments

The image displays two musical staves for a Finnish polka. The top staff, labeled 'Basic Melody', shows a single melodic line in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes. The bottom staff, labeled 'Diddled with rhythmic embellishments', shows the same melody but with a more complex rhythmic pattern, featuring many sixteenth notes and eighth notes, creating a 'diddled' or 'fiddle' effect. Both staves are written in treble clef.

**Figure 2** A Finnish polka as diddled by Anita Lehtola

rock fusion of the British band Fairport Convention. Paul Austerlitz observes that ‘rock, free jazz, fusion, and all manner of other trends arrived fast, almost at the same time, so while they were often seen as diametrically opposed in the U.S., these styles dovetailed in Finland.’<sup>14</sup> Nordic jazz and rock musicians were inspired to tap into elements of folk music from their own local traditions. In Finland, bands such as Piirpauke and Karelia began incorporating ancient Finnish epic songs (*runolauluja*), shepherds’ flutes, and other traditional Finnish instruments into their genre-defying jazz-rock-folk-tinged improvisations. In Sweden, the radio programme *Jazz and Folk Music: A Musical Adventure*, sponsored by the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation and the Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research, was one of the most significant experiments in Swedish jazz-folk fusion. The programme was intended for Sweden’s entry for the *Triumph Variété* international contest in Monte Carlo in 1965, and subsequently won first place for best radio entertainment.<sup>15</sup> In this radio programme, four Swedish jazz musicians, Bengt-Arne Wallin, Jan Johansson, Georg Riedel, and Bengt Hallberg, were invited to create their own arrangements using the actual audio field recordings of traditional Swedish folk musicians housed in the archive of the Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research.<sup>16</sup> The programme was released on LP in 1965 as *Adventures in Jazz and Folklore*, and re-released on CD by Caprice Records in 1995.

Of the thirteen tracks on the recording *Adventures in Jazz and Folklore*, two feature field recordings of traditional Swedish diddlers. Track 10, ‘Jämtländsk brudmarsch’ (bridal march from Jämtland), arranged by Bengt-Arne Wallin, utilizes a recording of diddler Erik Axel Näsström (1871–1961) from northern Jämtland, Sweden, who learned the wedding march from his grandfather Olof Zachrisson (1778–1871).<sup>17</sup> The arrangement begins with an unadulterated playback of the original field recording of ‘Jämtländsk brudmarsch’ by Näsström, who is allowed to diddle the entire tune once through without intrusion. The second time through Näsström’s diddled march, a military style snare drum enters, followed by timpani, playing up a march feel. Clarinet, bass clarinet, and flute enter playing legato harmonic accompaniment in a light classical style. The recording of the diddler then fades out, a ride cymbal with a heavy swing rhythm takes over, and saxophone and guitar interpret the melody of the bridal march in a jazz swing style. The saxophone takes a few improvised solos in a straight-ahead jazz style with occasional melodic references to the original folk melody. The orchestra then fades out to a military style snare drum, which fades out to a replay of the original bridal march diddled by Näsström. The overall effect is more a juxtaposition than an integration of folk, light classical, and swing and straight-ahead jazz.

One of the most musically brilliant and captivating folk-jazz fusions on *Adventures in Jazz and Folklore* is Jan Johansson’s arrangement of a diddled *polska*. On the second track entitled ‘Lapp-Nils *polska*’, Swedish jazz pianist Jan Johansson (1931–1968), an exceedingly creative musician, created his arrangement using a field recording of a *polska* diddled by Måns Olsson (1865–1961) from Jämtland. Måns Olsson learned it from Johan Olsson Munter, also known as Munter-Johan (1844–1917), and from his uncle Lapp-Nils who learned from Nils Jonsson (1819–1886).<sup>18</sup>



The producer of *Adventures in Jazz and Folklore*, Olle Helander, recounts the creation of Johansson's arrangement:

[Jan Johansson's] three contributions were recorded entirely without the help of a written score – just solo improvisations framed by spontaneous collective playing [...] Jan Johansson's version of Lapp-Nils *Polska* was mixed directly in the studio. Through the loudspeaker we played the tape of the diddler, Måns Olsson, to get acquainted with the tune. Then we played it a second time while the musicians added their own variations and – not least! – their accompaniment to the swinging old-timer from way up North. The result was amazing! Rupert Clemendore, West Indian conga drummer on the session, stubbornly insisted that it must have been one of the other jazz musicians, possibly Jan Johansson himself, who had previously recorded the 'scat singing'!<sup>19</sup>

The arrangement begins with the original field recording of Olsson diddling Lapp-Nils *polska*. The *polska* is in triple time with triplet subdivisions, giving it a swing feel that is quite compatible with jazz swing rhythms, and, although the majority of the measures have symmetrical beats, the intermediary cadences (measures four and twelve) have a lengthened first beat and shortened second beat, creating a syncopated feel that is also compatible with jazz syncopation. (See Figure 2 for a musical transcription of Lapp-Nils *polska* as diddled by Olsson.) Jan Johansson's quintet (piano, guitar, double bass, drums, and bongos), enters on Olsson's second repetition of the *polska* tune with quirky unobtrusive accompaniment. The field recording then fades out and the jazz musicians take turns playing their own fairly faithful renditions of the melody, retaining the triplet *polska* feel in their swung rhythms, maintaining the triple time signature, and playfully incorporating the chromaticism and accidentals of the original version into their variations. Eventually the *polska* melody is abandoned in an increasingly chaotic collective jam in which the only discernible remnant of the *polska* is the triple metre. Finally, the original diddling returns from amongst the sonic chaos, which respectfully fades in volume to give centre stage to the diddler (which, to my ears, sounds surprisingly good with this unorthodox accompaniment). Johansson's arrangement of the Lapp-Nils *polska* became relatively popular and well-known amongst certain folk and jazz circles in Sweden, and also led to an increased popularity of the original archive material and the diddler Måns Olsson.

While Johansson and his quintet creatively and successfully incorporated and explored many elements of folk diddling, they remain rooted in a jazz idiom (albeit a freer jazz idiom of the 1960s). The next musical example illustrates how contemporary folk musicians incorporated elements of jazz into their diddling.

The urban folk music revivals of the late twentieth century in Sweden and Finland emphasized an authenticity of process (how music is made) over an authenticity of product (how the resulting performance or recording sounds).<sup>20</sup> This ideology authorized and encouraged contemporary folk musicians to improvise, compose, and create their own variations of traditional material. Of all the Nordic

countries, the contemporary folk music scene in Finland took the most extreme approach, challenging genre boundaries and demanding freedom for contemporary folk musicians to express their own music in their own way and to incorporate whatever musical and extra-musical influences had touched their lives.<sup>21</sup> The result in Finnish contemporary folk music comprises extensive fusions. For example, I surveyed 67 live concerts of contemporary folk music in Helsinki in 2003–2004, and found that while 98% of the concerts contained elements of Finnish folk music material, 35% of the concerts contained avant-garde/experimental musical elements, 27% incorporated elements from Scandinavian folk music, 27% included other Finno-Ugric traditions, 25% incorporated jazz, 19% brought in non-Nordic folk musics, 15% drew upon non-European folk/traditional musics, 10% combined aspects of European classical music, and 9% integrated African-American derived popular music styles.

One of the relatively long-standing bands in this eclectic Finnish contemporary folk music scene is Loituma, which incorporates subtle elements of jazz into its diddling.<sup>22</sup> Loituma started out as a course band comprised of students from the Folk Music Department of the Sibelius Academy, which uses innovative pedagogy to encourage creative musical explorations.<sup>23</sup> Originally founded in 1989, the primary band members are Anita Lehtola (voice, 5-string *kantele*, or zither), Sari Kauranen (voice, *kanteles*), Timo Väänänen (voice, *kanteles*) and Hanni-Mari Turunen (voice, fiddle, 5-string *kantele*). Their 1995 album *Loituma* (rereleased in the USA as *Things of Beauty*) contains an all-vocal rendition with diddling of 'Ievan polkka' (or Eve's Polka).<sup>24</sup>

'Ievan polkka' is a traditional Finnish folk melody that was recorded in 1938 by Finnish popular singer Matti Jurva, with new lyrics written in the 1930s by Eino Kettunen in the Savo dialect of Finnish (which is regarded as funny sounding by many Finns), telling a humorous courtship story with sexual undertones.<sup>25</sup> As was common in historical courtship singing games, the last couplet of each verse is diddled. In 'Ievan polkka' each of the six verses ends with diddling on the syllables 'Salivili hipput tupput täpyyt / Äpyyt tippu hiljalleen', which are all nonsense save for the last word *hiljalleen* which means gradually or little by little. However, these nonsense syllables are given sexual innuendo because of their placement after lines such as 'tanssimme laiasta laitaan' (we dance to and fro), 'laskemma laiasta laitaa' (which Pekkilä translates as 'we move to and fro' but which also carries the connotation of 'go down/lie down side to side') and 'huhkii laiasta laitaan' (grind to and fro).<sup>26</sup>

Loituma's version of 'Ievan polkka' combines a traditional Finnish polka song with diddling, with an arranging style popular with twentieth-century collegiate a cappella groups and with jazz scat singing. The recording is entirely a cappella, with the accompaniment provided by Timo Väänänen (the only male in the group) singing an imitation of a walking bass line and Sari Kauranen and Hanni-Mari Turunen singing sparse riffs and ostinatos that outline basic harmonic progressions, all using nonsense syllables (an arranging style that reminds me of the a cappella groups that were popular on my college campus in the USA). At times the three accompanying

singers render their lines more or less staccato or legato, and occasionally join the lead singer to sing the melody and text in unison for the final half of a verse for contrasting effect. The lead singer Anita Lehtola sings the first three verses, diddles the song melody three times, and concludes with the last three verses. As Lehtola diddles the polka melody, she varies the syllables and rhythms. The first two versions of the diddled melody contain numerous additional subdivisions (e.g., two eighth notes become four sixteenth notes, quarter notes become eighth notes). These rhythmic subdivisions are emphasized and occur more frequently at the beginning of measures – a rhythmic practice common in early Polish dances, described above. (See Figure 3 for the basic melody and an example of the melody with diddled rhythmic variations.) The third time that Lehtola diddles the melody, she departs drastically from the Finnish diddling style to embrace a jazz interpretation style. Using fewer rhythmic subdivisions, swung eighth notes, dips and slurs, a slightly raspier vocal timbre, and nonsense syllables with more of the consonants b, g, v, and d and less of the consonants p, r, y, k, and t, Lehtola transforms her interpretation of the polka from a Finnish diddling style into jazz scat singing. The incorporation of these jazz elements into the Finnish folk melody is fluid and relatively brief, but musically highly effective and memorable.

These examples, Jan Johansson's incorporation of a diddled Swedish *polska* into a jazz quintet improvisation and Loituma's appropriation of jazz scat singing into a diddled Finnish polka, illustrate how early and mid-twentieth-century influences from across the Atlantic resulted in creative explorations and new cross-idiom fusions.

### **To the opposite shores of the Pacific: an internet phenomenon**

After one of my field research visits in the Nordic lands, I returned home to Los Angeles and, inspired by performances of Swedish diddlers and my lessons in Finnish diddling, I decided to enter into the competitions at the local Topanga Banjo and Fiddle Festival as a diddler. Diddling is not common at the Topanga competitions, which cater more to young fiddlers, bluegrass and old-time banjoists, mandolinists, flat-picking guitarists, and the occasional spoons or jug player. After a brief argument among the judges as to whether I should be entered into the singing category or the miscellaneous instruments category, I was allowed to diddle my set on the main stage of the festival. The medley that I diddled consisted primarily of American old-time tunes. However, in my residency at the Sibelius Academy Folk Music Department, I had become acquainted with some of the musicians from Loituma and their music, and I was exceedingly fond of 'Ievan polkka'. I decided to include it in my medley at the Topanga competition, reasoning that since polkas do occasionally appear in American repertoire, since 'Ievan polkka' was in a major key in duple time, and since 'Ievan polkka' was relatively obscure (or so I thought), that it could pass for an American tune. After my performance (which, unfortunately, did not win), a group of young teenage American girls came rushing up to me, squealing with delight that I had diddled that song and demanding my autograph. I was completely flabbergasted that the 13-year-old girls from Los Angeles were so

excited about, and indeed even knew of, a traditional Finnish folk song released on a small local label (Kaustinen Folk Music Institute) by a band that was far from mainstream even in Finland. That was my awakening to the transnational internet phenomenon that Loituma's diddling had become.

In the spring of 2006, someone uploaded a flash animation of a Japanese animé character combined with an audio sample of an excerpt of the diddled section of Loituma's 'Ievan polkka' to the internet.<sup>27</sup> The animation contained 4–5 frames of a girl spinning a vegetable identified variously online as a leek, Welsh onion, or *negi*. The animated character, known as Orihime Inoue, and her leek were taken from the Japanese animation series *Bleach*. This short animation became known primarily as 'Loituma girl', and occasionally as 'Leekspin'.<sup>28</sup>

Within a short period of time, 'Loituma girl' became massively popular across the globe. The band Loituma – shocked by their sudden popularity eleven years after the release of the album – received massive amounts of fan mail, had to hire a manager, and had to rerelease their recently sold-out album *Things of Beauty* (adding a special video of a live performance of 'Ievan polkka' on the June 2006 album reissue).<sup>29</sup> The Loituma girl phenomenon was recognized as a Global Hit on the BBC/Public Radio International radio programme *The World*.<sup>30</sup> According to the publicly edited online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, which has a separate entry for the Loituma girl phenomenon, variations of the video and/or music have been used as ring tones and for commercials by transnational corporations and local companies in the UK, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Romania.<sup>31</sup>

Individual internet users from Japan, the USA, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Russia, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, and many other countries created and uploaded onto the internet their own versions of 'Loituma girl'. By February of 2009, YouTube hosted 3070 video clips identified with the term 'Loituma', 1940 video clips containing the phrase 'Ievan polka', 2330 video clips with the misspelled name 'Levan polka', and 1110 video clips entitled 'leekspin'.<sup>32</sup> Some of these variations have been viewed millions of times, for example, the view count of 'Loituma TECHNO!' is 5,595,754.<sup>33</sup>

These thousands of variations of 'Loituma girl' present an astonishing flourishing of grassroots creative appropriation and remaking of commercial material, as well as transnational creative dialogue. The video clips contain a broad spectrum of variations. The visuals have been altered by: subtle changes in the animation background, the representation of the girl character, or the object being twirled (one video shows a giant leek whirling a small girl); a complete substitution for new animation, such as an anthropomorphic donkey named Dolly with an audience of claymation sheep, various monsters, and other cartoon characters; the insertion of movie characters or historical figures twirling an object, such as Star Wars figures Han Solo and Chewbacca twirling lifesavers, and Stalin or Hitler twirling rifles; homemade videos of real life people twirling leeks or other objects; the pasting of Loituma's recording to unrelated scenes, such as a comedy scene with actor Jim Carrey; homemade videos of people dancing to Loituma's diddling; and complete departures from the original theme containing abstract video collages or montages,

or new narratives. Variations of the audio track of the diddled 'Ievan polkka' melody comprise either remixes of Loituma's recording or newly performed renditions of the 'Ievan polkka' melody. Remixes of Loituma's recording span a variety of electronic dance music genres, from techno to breakbeat to jumpstyle to hip-hop to house – most containing a sample of the original Loituma recording (sometimes unadulterated, other times filtered, speeded up, or otherwise electronically manipulated), over various synthetic drum beats, soundscapes, and bass lines. Newly performed covers of Loituma's 'Ievan polkka' vary from diddling accompanied by hard rock, punk, or other styles; to purely instrumental performances of the polka melody by a variety of instruments including keyboards, French horn, and guitar; to sung versions of the melody with new lyrics. Many of these variations were created as responses to and in ongoing dialogue with previous audio and video variations of 'Loituma girl'.

The YouTube platform has provided a virtual space and community in which consumers from around the world can reclaim a small amount of creative agency, individually expressing their own responses to music and video, and creating their own variations instead of passively consuming them. It has also facilitated an extensive exchange of dialogue in words (in online comments and discussions), music, and video beyond national and cultural entities between individuals from across Europe, North America, and Asia.

### **Conclusions**

In summary, analysis of cross-cultural musical exchanges in the history of Nordic diddling reveals long-standing and rich practices of intercultural musical sharing and dialogue that have been occurring for centuries. Dynamic cultural exchanges between the lower and upper classes combined with alliances amongst European courts facilitated the exchange of Polish dance music repertoire from Polish peasants to Polish courts, across the Baltic to Swedish courts, to Swedish merchants and peasants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Missionary work, migration, and imperialism from Sweden to Finland resulted in shared repertoire and practices in diddling from at least the seventeenth century onwards. In the 1920s and 1930s, African-American jazz traditions were brought to the Nordic countries by sheet music, radio, and ocean liners carrying returning emigrants, touring British musicians, and touring African-American musicians. In the 1960s and 1970s, jazz fusion and folk rock fusion bands from the USA and the UK inspired Nordic jazz musicians to incorporate local folk music, including diddled *polskas* and polkas, into their arrangements. By the 1990s, urban post-revival folk musicians in Finland felt free to incorporate jazz and other international styles into their diddling. In the twenty-first century, an anonymous joining of Japanese animé with Finnish folk diddling inspired a global internet phenomenon of creative variation and self-expression.

Thus, cross-cultural exchanges have shaped diddling throughout its documented history. These cross-cultural exchanges have been facilitated by imperialism, court politics and fashions, trade, immigration, travel, printing technology, recording technology, radio, and the internet. The nineteenth-century

romantic nationalist ideas about folk music as being nationally bounded or ethnically pure were a misconception: Nordic diddling and folk music in general, though manifesting regional variations and local styles, has never been bounded by ethnicity or nation. Furthermore, new widely available recording technology, sound and video editing software, and internet platforms such as YouTube have allowed an unprecedented exchange of musical and visual ideas across continents, which has served not only to popularize Nordic diddling around the world, but provided thousands of individual media consumers with the artistic agency to contribute their own variations and expressions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late 20th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 3–7.

<sup>2</sup> William A. Wilson, 'Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 6, no. 4 (1973), 819–35.

<sup>3</sup> This essay draws upon extensive field research in Finland and shorter field research trips in Sweden, as well as analysis of archive recordings, commercial recordings, and internet materials. Although the term Nordic technically encompasses Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands, I have not conducted research on the musical traditions of the latter four; thus, the use of the term Nordic in this paper refers only to characteristics and practices that are common in both Sweden and Finland.

<sup>4</sup> Anneli Asplund, 'Tanssilaulua ja Laululeikkiä', in *Kansanmusiikki*, ed. by Anneli Asplund, Petri Hoppu, Heikki Laitinen, Timo Leisiö, Hannu Saha, and Simo Westerholm (Helsinki: Werner Söderström Osakeyhtiö, 2006), pp. 129–43.

<sup>5</sup> Asplund, p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> Ewa Dahlig-Turek, 'On the History of the *Polska*', in *The Polish Dance in Scandinavia and Poland*, ed. by Märta Ramsten (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv, 2003), pp. 11–25.

<sup>7</sup> Ewa Dahlig-Turek, 'On the History of the *Polska*', p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Ewa Dahlig-Turek, 'On the History of the *Polska*', pp. 11–25.

<sup>9</sup> Petri Hoppu, 'The *Polska* at Finnish and Swedish Peasant Weddings in the 18th and 19th Centuries', in *The Polish Dance in Scandinavia and Poland*, ed. by Märta Ramsten (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv, 2003), pp. 145–54.

<sup>10</sup> Ewa Dahlig-Turek, 'Rhythms of Swedish *Polskas* and Their Relation to Polish Folk Dances', in *The Polish Dance in Scandinavia and Poland*, ed. by Märta Ramsten (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv, 2003), pp. 155–64 (p. 164).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Austerlitz, 'Birch-Bark Horns and Jazz in the National Imagination: The Finnish Folk Music Vogue in Historical Perspective', *Ethnomusicology*, 44, no. 2 (2000), 183–213; Juha Henriksson, 'A Short History of Finnish Jazz', The Finnish Jazz & Pop Archive, [www.jazzpoparkisto.net/finnish\\_jazz.php](http://www.jazzpoparkisto.net/finnish_jazz.php) [accessed 21 February 2009].

<sup>12</sup> Lars Westin, 'Jazz in Sweden – an overview', in *Music in Sweden* (Stockholm: Swedish Institute, 1998), [www.visarkiv.se/online/jazz\\_in\\_sweden.htm](http://www.visarkiv.se/online/jazz_in_sweden.htm) [accessed 21 February 2009].<sup>13</sup>

Paul Austerlitz, *Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race, and Humanity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005); see also Westin, 'Jazz in Sweden'.

<sup>14</sup> Austerlitz, *Jazz Consciousness*, p. 155.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Lundberg, 'Swedish Folk Music: From Village Greens to Concert Platforms', in *Music in Sweden* (Stockholm: Swedish Institute, 1998), [www.visarkiv.se/online/swedish\\_folkmusic.htm](http://www.visarkiv.se/online/swedish_folkmusic.htm) [accessed 21 February 2009].

<sup>16</sup> Matts Arnberg and Olle Helander, liner notes, *Adventures in Jazz and Folk Music*, in the series Musica Sveciae/Folk Music in Sweden, CD, Caprice Records, CAP 21475, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Ville Roempke, liner notes, *Vall- trall- & Lapp-Nils låtar*, in the series Musica Sveciae/Folk Music in Sweden, CD, Caprice Records, CAP 21489, 1996. The original recording of 'Jämtländsk brudmarsch' by Näsström can be heard on track 1 of *Vall- trall- & Lapp-Nils låtar*.

<sup>18</sup> Ville Roempke. The original recording of this *polska* diddled by Olsson, entitled 'Lapp-Nils *polska* after Munter-Johan', and can be heard on track 35 of *Vall- trall- & Lapp-Nils låtar*.

<sup>19</sup> Olle Helander, liner notes, *Adventures in Jazz and Folk Music*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>20</sup> Owe Ronström, 'Revival Reconsidered', in *The World of Music*, 38, no. 3 (1996), 5–20; Juniper Hill, 'From Ancient to Avant-Garde to Global: Creative Processes and Institutionalization in Finnish Contemporary Folk Music' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, UCLA, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> See Juniper Hill, 'Rebellious Pedagogy, Ideological Transformation, and Creative Freedom in Finnish Contemporary Folk Music', in *Ethnomusicology*, 53, no. 1 (2009), 86–114; and "'Global Folk Music" Fusions: The Reification of Transnational Relationships and the Ethics of Cross-Cultural Appropriations in Finnish Contemporary Folk Music', in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 39 (2007), 50–83.

<sup>22</sup> By the time I was doing my fieldwork (2002–2008), the band Loituma performed infrequently, but the individual members remain active in various solo and other projects.

<sup>23</sup> See Juniper Hill, 'The Influence of Conservatory Folk Music Programmes: The Sibelius Academy in Comparative Context', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 18, no. 2 (2009), 205–39.

<sup>24</sup> Loituma, *Loituma*, CD, Kaustinen, Finland: Kansanmusiikki-instituutti (Folk Music Institute), KICD 36, 1995. Re-released in the USA by Northside as Loituma, *Things of Beauty*. Northside Records 6010, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Erkki Pekkilä, 'Herder and Loituma girl: Geography, Space, and Virtual Reality in the Mediation of Modern Folk Music', paper presented at the International Council for Traditional Music World Congress in Vienna, Austria, July 2007. I am grateful to Dr Pekkilä for providing me a copy of his paper.

<sup>26</sup> Pekkilä; 'Loituma *Things of Beauty*: Notes on the Songs Lyrics in Finnish and English', Northside, [www.noside.com/nsd6010note.html](http://www.noside.com/nsd6010note.html) [accessed 22 February 2009]. Note that the English translations of the lyrics on the record label's website are only approximate and do not convey the sexual connotations that appear in the original Finnish.

<sup>27</sup> YouTube [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) [accessed 22 February 2009].

<sup>28</sup> Pekkilä; Marco Werman, 'Global Hit', *The World*, radio programme, BBC and Public Radio International, 18 August 2006, [www.theworld.org/?q=node/3625](http://www.theworld.org/?q=node/3625) [accessed 21 February 2009]; YouTube, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) [accessed 22 February 2009].

<sup>29</sup> *Things of Beauty* by Loituma, Northside, [www.noside.com/Catalog/CatalogAlbum\\_01.asp?Album\\_ID=45](http://www.noside.com/Catalog/CatalogAlbum_01.asp?Album_ID=45) [accessed 22 February 2009]; Pekkilä.

<sup>30</sup> Werman, 'Global Hit'.

<sup>31</sup> 'Loituma girl', *Wikipedia*, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loituma\\_Girl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loituma_Girl) [accessed 22 February 2009].

<sup>32</sup> YouTube.

<sup>33</sup> 'Loituma TECHNO!', YouTube, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_mdMb6bRXt4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mdMb6bRXt4) [accessed 22 February 2009].

## The silent witness: the fiddle manuscripts of John 'Boss' Murphy (1875–1955)

COLETTE MOLONEY

John, or 'Boss' Murphy as he was more commonly known, was born in 1875 in the townland of the Leap, near the village of Churchtown, County Cork, in Ireland. He was a fiddle player who, during the three-year period 1933–1935, compiled a music manuscript from his own repertory. After his death, his fiddle and manuscript remained in his family home. I was given access to his music manuscript in the early 1980s, and it opened up an area of local musical history of which, despite growing up just a few kilometres away, I was hitherto unaware. As the Murphy manuscript was compiled in the twentieth century, there were, in the 1980s, members of the community who could recall John Murphy and the musical scene in Churchtown during his lifetime. I interviewed a number of people in the Churchtown area in 1985 and again in 2003, to ascertain biographical details for John Murphy, and to research the music in the locality from approximately 1890 to 1955, the period when Murphy would have been most active as a musician. This paper therefore is based on the information gleaned from the Murphy manuscript, the Murphy family, public records, and also the memories recounted by musicians, or those close to them, of musical life in the area.

John Murphy was a farmer by profession, but he was renowned locally for his fiddle playing. His father, William 'Boss' Murphy (1829–1911), had also been a fiddle player and had endeavoured to teach John and his siblings to play the instrument. The siblings, a brother, Bill (1871–1906) and three sisters, Bridget (1870–1910), Mary (1872–1962), and Margaret (1874–1913), did not continue to play fiddle in adulthood. John's musical literacy was gained primarily from his father, as the latter had learnt to read music at a hedge school in the locality taught by Thomas Croke. There had been no formal education available to Catholics in rural Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries therefore informal schools, known as hedge schools, were common. The teachers in these schools were paid by the pupils and classes were held in huts, barns, or even in the open air, basically any place that they would not be discovered by the authorities. The curriculum in the hedge schools varied according to the expertise of the particular hedge schoolmaster but most taught at least the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics, while some had



a range of subjects including music, Latin, and Greek.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Croke, many years later, stayed for long periods of time in the Murphy household and would perhaps also have taught the young John directly.

As in many parts of rural Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century the social life of the Churchtown area was largely dependent on house dances. These dances, which frequently included refreshments and card games, were usually all-night affairs, concluding around 6:00 a.m. to allow for the commencement of farm duties. There was a strong social and musical bond between the musicians and dancers at these events in the small domestic setting. The musicians were not paid for their services and generally alternated between playing and dancing. This helped to create a performing community where each individual contributed in some way to the evening's entertainment. Quadrilles, schottisches, flings, mazurkas, jig sets, and hornpipes were the dances of choice at these house dances. Apparently musicians were numerous in the area at the time, but very few details of individual players survive into the present century.

Another musical and social outlet, particularly during the summer months, was the stage. This was a small platform, erected at a crossroads or on waste ground, where dances were held on summer evenings. These stages were numerous in the Churchtown area during the first half of the twentieth century with the best known location in the early decades of the century being the Conkerfield. The Conkerfield stage was located in a field near the site of the current Catholic Church in Lisgriffin, a village about 7 kilometres from Churchtown. The stages continued until the 1950s, but, as the century progressed, their number and frequency drastically decreased.

From the 1890s, John was a regular performer at most of the house dances, stages, and sessions in the area, and he often ventured further afield to listen to a visiting musician or to play in a session. Indeed, he occasionally travelled to Kanturk, a town about 22 kilometres from Churchtown, both to hear and play music. He was also a frequent visitor to the military barracks in the nearby town of Buttevant where he listened to the military band rehearse and afterwards he often played fiddle for those assembled in the bandroom.

Jim Callaghan, from the townland known as the Windmill in Churchtown, regularly performed with John Murphy at local dances and stages. Callaghan was best known as a fiddle player, though he was one of the few concertina players in the area. Jim Callaghan was regularly seen following the Buttevant Military Band as they walked, each Sunday, from Buttevant to Churchtown and Lisscarroll and back. He, like John Murphy, was also a frequent visitor to the bandroom at the military barracks in Buttevant. This interaction between traditional musicians in the Churchtown area and the British military barracks in Buttevant may seem a little unusual given the political situation of the time, but it was not unique to the area, and the instruction witnessed at the band rehearsals undoubtedly contributed to the repertory and facility in musical notation of the traditional musicians.

In the late 1920s the house dances in the Churchtown area were moved to a derelict lodge near Ballygrade Church, where they were held every Saturday night.

In this new setting they were no longer hosted by an individual family, but instead were financed by an admission fee which each person paid. The lodge was able to accommodate a larger number of dancers than an ordinary house dance hence its use marked the beginning of a transition from house dance to public dance. The musicians were now paid for their services, which helped to create a division between musician and dancer. Previously, virtually all musicians were also dancers and generally alternated between playing and dancing at a house dance. When there was payment involved only a small number of musicians were invited to play for a dance. They tended only to do the job for which they were being paid, and hence did not take part in the dancing. The public paid an admission fee for the dance and, apart from providing the odd party piece, other musicians did not in general feel the necessity to relieve the paid musicians, so the paid musicians took no part in the dancing. Instead of the communal musical contribution which heretofore had existed, the addition of lodge dances set up a category of semi-professional musicians: particular musicians tended to play at dances and in public, and others assumed the position known locally as 'house musicians' in that they only played at home for their own enjoyment.

The house dances and stages continued throughout the early years of the twentieth century, though they became progressively less numerous and eventually died out around the 1940s. As the century progressed, however, the *ceili* dances such as the 'Siege of Ennis' supplanted many of the other types, though the 5-part jig set and one version of the quadrille remained for some time. The Catholic Church in Ireland had discouraged dancing and music for centuries, and this disapproval became more persistent with the advent of a more puritanical form of Catholicism in the mid nineteenth century. There were frequent stories of priests condemning dancing from the pulpit, or, in other parts of the country, of priests breaking musical instruments at house dances, or driving their cars over the stages used for crossroads dances.<sup>2</sup> The Churchtown area, however, appears to have escaped the worst effects of the Catholic Church's anti-dancing policy. In the 1930s, the Church successfully lobbied for legislation that banned informal dances. The Dance Hall Act of 1935, which was enacted into law by the Irish Government, made it an offence to hold a dance without a licence.<sup>3</sup> If a licence was granted, a fee had to be paid to the government. In many parts of rural Ireland, including Churchtown, house dancing continued into the 1940s, despite police raids and denunciations from the pulpit. The Act, however, ultimately resulted in a decline in domestic music-making throughout Ireland as dancing moved into venues which were large, public, commercial, and often policed by the clergy. Here, locally popular dances, such as the sets of quadrilles, were replaced by the canon of group *ceili* figure dances, which had been disseminated by the Gaelic League. This particular organisation, which had been set up in 1893 to promote the Irish language, later extended its interest to include Irish music, song, and dance.<sup>4</sup>

The house dances in Churchtown, together with those at the lodge at Ballygrade, faded out during the 1940s due to the advent of popular music, pub

sessions, and dance halls. After the Dance Hall Act of 1935 the occasional fine for holding a dance without a permit also helped to signal the demise of the local house dances. Musicians then formed themselves into bands and began to play for *ceilís*, locally and further afield. The repertory of dances changed as the musicians were now required to play for the two-hand reel, '*Briseadh na Carrigeacha*', 'The Siege of Ennis', 'The Military Two Step', 'The Gay Gordons', and the waltz. The quadrilles, schottisches, mazurkas, and jig sets had completely vanished from the repertory. The disappearance of house dances also had other consequences for the musical communities in rural Ireland. Opportunities for a musician to play, either solo or in a small group, for an appreciative audience were reduced. With the disappearance of the house dances many musicians became discouraged and abandoned playing altogether as performing music had lost its purpose and local social context. The local musical social system in which everybody contributed to an evening's entertainment declined when music-making became a business, and when musicians had to travel away from their localities to perform. The former amateur, communal, informal performance setting was replaced by musicians forming themselves into bands to perform in the more disciplined, organised, formal, and uniform style favoured by the dance hall. Many local traditional musicians simply stopped playing, or alternatively just played at home for their own enjoyment, once the house dances and stages ceased in the locality.

While the musical scene evolved in Churchtown during the early decades of the twentieth century, John Murphy saw his personal circumstances change significantly. After the death of his father William Murphy in 1911, John inherited the family farm at the Leap. In 1915, at the age of 40, he married Margaret Cullinan-O'Keeffe (c.1879–1942), a widow. Margaret had managed her own pub in the village of Churchtown following the death of her first husband. After her marriage to John Murphy they renamed the pub Murphy's and continued to operate the business until 1933. John is known to have played his fiddle in this pub at Christmas and on other special occasions. He remained on the family farm all his life but, as his responsibilities to his own family and farm grew, so his musical excursions decreased. John had been a regular player at both house and stage dances in the area but, as these social outlets declined, he did not make the transition to playing with a band for *ceilís*. He did continue to play the fiddle regularly in his own home and gave infrequent performances at local concerts or accompanied dancers at *Feiseanna*. These *Feiseanna* were dancing competitions organised by the aforementioned Gaelic League.<sup>5</sup>

After John's marriage, the Murphy house at the Leap also became a meeting place for local and travelling musicians to play and discuss their music. Two of the most frequent musical visitors were the previously-mentioned local fiddler, Jim Callaghan, and travelling fiddle teacher, Jim Condon. Condon, from the Knocklong area of County Limerick, taught fiddle in Churchtown and the neighbouring village of Liscarroll in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Churchtown in the early twentieth century was a haven for travelling companies. These companies set up in the area for a few weeks at a time and they provided musical entertainment, plays, acrobatics, conjuring tricks, and puppets, for the amusement of the local people. Many of the musicians with these groups received open invitations to the Murphy residence. One travelling player, for whom John had a particular respect, was known simply as 'Jim the fiddler' and he spent many musical evenings in the Murphy house with John noting down tunes from him. The repertory of these travelling companies spanned traditional, popular, and light classical music, and John Murphy is known to have learnt many tunes from 'Jim the fiddler'. The quality of performance of the travelling companies diminished as the years progressed and their audiences consequently decreased. The companies finally ceased to include Churchtown and Liscarroll on their itinerary after the 1950s.

One of John's greatest ambitions was to deliver the musical heritage, which he had received from his father and others, into the hands of his children. As a necessary prerequisite to this he endeavoured to teach them to play the fiddle and enlisted the help of Jim Condon in the task. However, his four children, Bill (1916–1984), Peggy (1917–1971), Bridie (1918–1991), and Jack (1920–2000) lacked interest and failed to master the instrument. Although the girls played the piano a little, their father regarded piano music purely as 'drawing room' music and as no substitute for good fiddle playing.

By the early 1930s, John had abandoned any lingering hope he may have held of his own children learning to play the fiddle and he began to direct his thoughts towards future generations. Like many of his contemporaries he had witnessed the disappearance of older tunes and tune-types from the local repertory, and a general decline in interest in traditional music. Motivated by a desire to preserve his repertory for future generations of his own family, he embarked on the task of compiling a manuscript collection from tunes that he had already written in jotters, or that he retained in his memory. The mammoth task of notating the tunes was undertaken during the period 1933–1935. Technical problems, which he encountered during the notational process, were directed to the staff of Pigott's music shop on one of his visits to Cork city, which would have been a round journey of approximately 120 kilometres.

In later years, John Murphy suffered from arthritis and so eventually had to cease playing the fiddle. He died in May 1955, as the result of a road traffic accident.

John Murphy is just one of a number of early twentieth-century Irish traditional musicians who decided to commit their repertory to manuscript. The notion of collecting Irish music was not a new one, but the main waves of collection appeared to coincide with periods when Irish music was at a low ebb. Edward Bunting (1773–1843)<sup>6</sup> collected the remnants of a Gaelic harp tradition in 1792 and there was a proliferation of collectors, such as George Petrie (1790–1866),<sup>7</sup> Henry Hudson (1798–1889),<sup>8</sup> and John Edward Pigot (1822–1871),<sup>9</sup> active in the period

1840–1850, immediately after the ravages of the famine had decimated Irish music. These eighteenth and nineteenth century collectors were invariably trained in the European art music tradition and were selective in the material that they collected, at the very least, restricting their collections to what they saw as truly Irish items. In addition, their published collections were aimed at musicians from the Western art music tradition rather than the traditional musicians who were their sources. Captain Francis O'Neill (1848–1936), at the turn of the twentieth century, was probably one of the first traditional musicians to collect music and publish it for the use of fellow musicians within the tradition, although it must be remembered that much of his collection was noted by James O'Neill, who was a classical violinist.<sup>10</sup>

An increased facility in music notation amongst traditional musicians and a decline in Irish music led to a wave of private music collections being created by traditional musicians in the 1930s, the same decade that also saw the formation of the Irish Folklore Commission. Murphy, who created his manuscript between 1933 and 1935, typified many musicians during this period in that he aimed to have it available for the use of future generations of his own family. In common with other similar collectors, he was not puritanical in his approach to choosing material for inclusion. Instead he appears to have transcribed his repertoire without any selectiveness in respect of its origin. His collection therefore gives a true impression of what the repertoire of a traditional fiddle player in the area was at the time, a mixture of dance tunes and airs, with a splattering of non-Irish items.

This manuscript, as it exists today, is a 96-page document which is arranged in a single collation (see Figure 1). The cover of the manuscript is no longer intact and a number of the back pages are damaged, but the manuscript would appear to be complete. There are 312 individual items noted, if each quadrille is counted as one item rather than its composite parts of five or six tunes. In the case of six tunes their notation is too erratic to decipher. There appears to have been a variety of dance tune types used, with the jig and the reel being the most popular, followed closely by the waltz (see Figure 2). The majority of the contents of the manuscript are no longer heard in the aural repertoire of the area. There are a number of tunes with local place names such as the jigs the 'Walls of Liscarroll' and the 'Rakes of Dromina', Dromina being a village a few kilometres from Churchtown (see Figures 3 and 4). There are also common tunes under unusual titles and vice versa: the well-known jig 'The Blackthorn Stick', for instance, is given in the Murphy manuscript as 'The Fire on the Mountain' and the tune given as 'The Mug of Brown Ale' is different to the tune which is commonly known by that title (see Figures 5 and 6). In general though, the jigs, reels, hornpipes, and set dances appear Irish in origin, apart from a few notable exceptions such as a slip jig known as 'Sir Roger de Coverly' and the reel 'The Blue Bells of Scotland'. It is in the flings, galops, waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, schottisches, barn dances, and marches in particular that the popular, classical, and Scottish repertoire is to be found. Tunes such as the 'Jenny Lind Polka', 'Toby Polka', 'French Polka', 'Highland Schottische', 'Paris Schottisches', and the 'Golden Sunshine' and 'After the Ball' waltzes, are just a few examples of the non-Irish repertoire, which

8 *The Cuckoo's Nest. Cuckoo's Nest-*

*2 time*

*a. Hornpipe*

*2 time*

*Rodney's. Glogy.*

*2nd time*

*The Stage. Hornpipe*

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation. At the top left, the number '8' is written. The title 'The Cuckoo's Nest. Cuckoo's Nest-' is written in cursive across the top. The music is arranged in two systems, each consisting of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system is marked '2 time'. The second system is marked 'a. Hornpipe'. The third system is marked '2 time'. The fourth system is marked 'Rodney's. Glogy.'. The fifth system is marked '2nd time'. The sixth system is marked 'The Stage. Hornpipe'. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and phrasing slurs.

Figure 1 Page eight from the John Murphy Manuscript

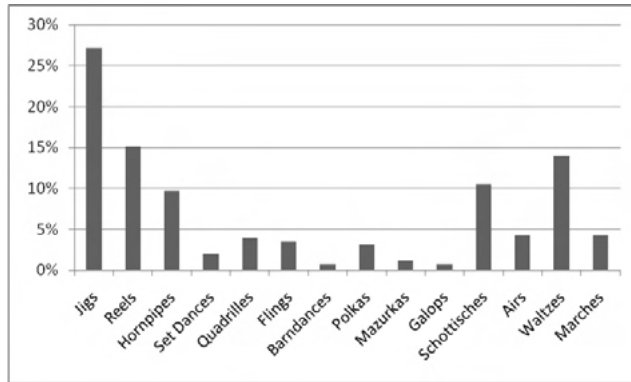


Figure 2 Breakdown of tune-types in the Murphy Manuscript



Figure 3 'Walls of Lis Carroll'



Figure 4 'Rakes of Dromina'



Figure 5 'The Fire on the Mountain'



Figure 6 'The Mug of Brown Ale'

was common among traditional musicians in the Churchtown area. The interaction between John Murphy and the musicians with the travelling companies, and the Military Band in Buttevant could account for some of the non-Irish repertory. In addition, there was a gramophone in the Murphy household and John Murphy regularly listened to 78rpm recordings, particularly those by the Irish tenor John McCormack (1884–1945)<sup>11</sup> and the Italian tenor Enrico Caruso (1873–1921).<sup>12</sup>

There are ten quadrilles included in the manuscripts and all have either five or six figures, with each figure being in either simple or compound duple time. There is a mixture of styles evident: the music for the 'Clifton' and 'Peacock Quadrilles', for instance, displays their popular origins, whereas the music used for the 'Irish' and 'Killarney Quadrilles', as the titles suggest, is more Irish in style, and there are also three Scottish Quadrilles. This mixture is probably indicative of the assimilation



of the quadrilles into Ireland with the original music being gradually replaced by native tunes.

The 'Boss' Murphy Manuscript may have been compiled between 1933 and 1935, but it is probable that much of the repertory that it contains was actually part of the aural repertory of the area earlier in the century, or indeed in the previous one. Musically, John Murphy was particularly influenced by his father and it is likely, especially since he was compiling the manuscript to pass his musical heritage on to future generations of his own family, that he would have included tunes which he had learnt from his father. As his responsibilities to farm and family grew in the 1910s he no longer played such an active part in the musical life of the community, in that he ceased to play regularly for house dances and stages. As a result, he would have been less influenced by the changes in taste that his contemporaries were experiencing and therefore much of his repertory probably reflects that which was popular in his younger years, *c.*1890–1915.

The composition of the repertory in the manuscript would also add weight to this assumption. In 1985, when I interviewed the Liscarroll fiddler, Nora Farrissey (1916–1995), she could only remember one type of quadrille, a 'Plain Quadrille', being danced in the area in her youth. Nora was born in 1916 and was therefore probably only active in the local musical scene from the late 1920s onwards. The multiplicity of varieties of quadrilles in the manuscript would therefore point to the repertory of an earlier time, when the quadrilles were still popular in the area. Moreover, dances such as the *schottische* declined in usage as the century progressed and therefore the multiplicity of these tune-types in the manuscript would also add weight to the argument that the repertory dates from an earlier period.

The music in the manuscript is idiomatic of the fiddle and a number of tunes have a range which requires the use of the second or third position on the instrument as an extension on the E string, but this is restricted to items which were of popular or classical origin such as 'The Prince Imperial Galop' (see Figure 7). Nora Farrissey recalled being taught to use second and third positions on the E-string of the fiddle by both the fiddle teacher, Jim Condon, and his successor, Willie Dunne (*d.*1953). It is likely, therefore, that fiddle players in the Churchtown area would have had the technical skills required to play the tunes in the manuscript. The tunes are generally noted with a key signature of G or D major, or very occasionally that of C, F, or A major, though the latter were usually in the items from popular and classical music.

The transcription of tunes in the manuscript is skeletal. Hence the type and extent of ornamentation or variation that may have been used is not clear. There are ornaments indicated, however, in three tunes. In bar 6 of 'Coming Through the Field' the first melody note in the bar is preceded by a single grace note or 'cut' (see Figure 8). The reels 'The Blue Bells of Scotland' and 'The Kerry Star' each have a single 'tr' sign in bar 8 of the tune (see Figures 9 and 10). There is no explanation offered in the manuscript as to the meaning of the 'tr' indication, but, from the position and duration of the note to which it is attached, it could have indicated a 'roll' or a bowed treble.



Figure 7 'The Prince Imperial Galop'



Figure 8 'Coming through the Field'

The manuscript contains a selection of tunes and settings which have now vanished from the popular repertory, both locally and nationally, and represents that of a traditional musician in the Churchtown area of North Cork during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The vast majority of the tunes, and indeed many of the tune-types, which the manuscript contains, are no longer found in the aural repertory of the area. The manuscript therefore provides a snapshot of the music of a small rural community at a particular point in time. The tunes and tune-types are similar to those used contemporaneously in other areas of the country, although it is likely that many of the settings were unique to the area. The mixture of Irish and non-Irish material is not unusual for the era; the influence of the travelling companies, and the military band in Buttevant, may also have been

responsible for the presence of some of this material. To date, none of the descendants of John Murphy have utilised either his fiddle or manuscript in the way that he hoped, and there are few if any traditional fiddle players in the Churchtown area today. Nonetheless, the musical content of the Murphy manuscript was published in 2003, thereby reaching a wider audience and facilitating the reintroduction of its repertory into the aural tradition, albeit not necessarily in its native area.<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 9** 'The Blue Bells of Scotland'



**Figure 10** 'The Kerry Star'

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Patrick Weston Joyce, *English as we Speak it in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Son, 1910), p. 146.
- <sup>2</sup> Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance* (Dingle: Brandon, 1999), p. 123.
- <sup>3</sup> Brennan, p. 125.
- <sup>4</sup> Helen O'Shea, *The Making of Irish Music* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), p. 17.
- <sup>5</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *A Pocket History of Irish Music* (O'Brien Press: Dublin, 1998), p. 98.
- <sup>6</sup> Charlotte Milligan Fox, *Annals of the Irish Harpers* (London: Murray, 1911), p. 10.
- <sup>7</sup> Donal O'Sullivan, *Irish Folk Music and Song*, Irish Life and Culture 3 (Dublin: Colm O Lochlainn for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland, 1952), p. 17.
- <sup>8</sup> O'Sullivan, p. 14.
- <sup>9</sup> O'Sullivan, p. 22.
- <sup>10</sup> Nicholas Carolan, *A Harvest Saved: Francis O'Neill and Irish music in Chicago* (Cork: Ossian Publications, 1997), pp. 33–34
- <sup>11</sup> Arthur Jacobs, *A New Dictionary of Music* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1958), p. 225.
- <sup>12</sup> Jacobs, p. 65.
- <sup>13</sup> Colette Moloney, ed., *The Boss Murphy Musical Legacy* (Churchtown, Co. Cork: Churchtown Village Renewal Trust in association with Noah's Ark Press, 2003).

## Harry Choates (1922–1951) as Cajun folk hero

HOLLY EVERETT

This paper connects with fiddling traditions around the North Atlantic in its consideration of the folkloric processes contributing to the reception and construction of the popular image of musician Harry Choates. Through teaching a course in occupational folklife over the past three years and examining the subject with students as a component of other folklore classes, as well as my own experience as a fiddler and pianist, I have developed a keen interest in the occupational folklife of musicians.<sup>1</sup> I am also intrigued by the contrasts between stereotypes of musicians of different genres and musicians' perceptions of themselves, both as public personalities and private individuals, and the role that folklore plays in each.<sup>2</sup> It is through the folklore about Harry Choates that I first became acquainted with him, as a fellow fiddler excitedly recounted the mysterious circumstances under which he died. As biographer Andrew Brown writes, 'since his tragic death [...] Harry Choates has never escaped the veneer of legend'.<sup>3</sup>

Choates was a talented multi-instrumentalist who performed in Louisiana and Texas in the 1930s, 1940s, and very early 1950s. Best known for his exciting, skilful fiddling, Choates brought Cajun music to wider audiences in both Texas and Louisiana with crossover recordings such as the wildly popular, soon-to-be anthemic 'Jole Blon' in 1946, which peaked at number four on the national Billboard charts (a tune recorded by a number of other artists and known by a variety of spellings).<sup>4</sup> Brown observes that 'Choates truly was the definition of a musical outlaw decades before that term came into vogue'.<sup>5</sup> I would suggest that he was not only an 'outlaw', but an outlaw hero, utilizing folklorist Michael Owen Jones's formula, (PC + CB) x SD (R + I + E) = HERO, which I'll discuss in greater detail later.<sup>6</sup>

As the 'most popular Cajun musician of his day',<sup>7</sup> Harry Choates broadened the repertoire of that music with his 'Cajunization' of western swing, as well as country fiddle tune standards. By almost all accounts, he had a short and troubled life. Cajun music historian John Broven writes that although he made many recordings after 'Jole Blon', he was unable to reach his previous level of success and 'his life became a mess, a wild orgy of wine, women, and song'.<sup>8</sup> Choates died in an Austin, Texas jail cell at the age of twenty-eight while awaiting trial for non-support of his wife

and children. As a result of his flamboyant stage persona and tragic death, Choates is often grouped with performers such as Janis Joplin.<sup>9</sup> In this paper, I will examine some of the factors that come into play in the construction of Choates as a legendary musician and outlaw hero.

Harry Choates was born in 1922 in a number of places in Louisiana, depending on which account one is reading: Rayne, New Iberia, or just southwest of Abbeville in the rural community of Cow Island. Scholars have recently pinpointed Cow Island as his birthplace.<sup>10</sup> Choates's mother, Edolia Rouen, thought to be a descendant of the Acadian people of eighteenth-century Nova Scotia, had been married for four years to Clarence Choate (the 's' was added later), of German ancestry. The family moved to Port Arthur, Texas, in 1929, attracted by the booming east Texas economy that followed the discovery of the Spindletop oilfield in 1901, which drew a considerable influx of Cajun families into the state.<sup>11</sup> This was not the first migration of Cajuns into the region, but it would be the one that 'forever changed the ethnic makeup of the area',<sup>12</sup> eventually resulting in the regional appellation, 'Cajun Lapland', identifying the area where Cajun country overlaps Texas.

While Choates eventually found short-term work in the petrochemical industry as an adult, his musical career began earlier. At the age of 12, he played the fiddle for tips in downtown Port Arthur.<sup>13</sup> Although Brown reckons that Choates may have played with band leader and fiddler Leo Soileau as early as 1938, his first documented association with an established group was with Happy Fats and the Rayne-Bo Ramblers, beginning in 1939. Choates was not quite 17. Over the next decade, he would play with and lead a number of bands. In addition to his mastery of various fiddle styles, he was an accomplished jazz guitarist.

Although Choates died while only in his twenties, his early start and experience with a number of bands means that occupational narratives about Choates have been told by a wide range of musicians. For the purposes of this paper, I will concentrate on stories that focus on four aspects of Choates's life: his alcoholism, his musical ability and showmanship, his 'pranksterism', and his death. As Choates's drinking tends to be a factor in many of the occupational narratives whether or not it is the focus of the story, it is here that I will begin.

Choates's alcoholism is frequently cited in the brief biographies that abound on the internet. However, during his lifetime the extent of his addiction was not always apparent, even to those with whom he worked. One of the last bands Choates played with regularly was Jesse James and All the Boys (a.k.a. 'the Boys', 'His Boys', and 'His Gang'). Peter Narváez and I interviewed one of James's early steel guitarists, James Grabowske at his home in Austin, Texas in 2008.<sup>14</sup> Grabowske explained, 'I knew [Choates] drank a lot [...] but he never got obnoxious, was always happy [...] but I come to find out that he was just a dyed-in-the-wool alcoholic after all this time spent with him. And he did drink a lot, but he never would show it [...] And he wouldn't openly drink on the bandstand, which Jesse didn't allow'. Drummer Dowell Smith was also surprised by Choates's ability to perform while seriously intoxicated. As he told Brown, 'I played many a night with him and he'd be wildass drunk, but you'd

never know it. Talk about somebody that could carry their liquor.’<sup>15</sup> The degree to which audiences in different areas were aware of Choates’s alcoholism is unclear. Moreover, drunkenness on stage was not unusual for musicians at the time, with bands such as Jesse James’s being one of the exceptions. As Smith recalled, ‘[M]ost everywhere you went, hell, 70 percent of the band was so drunk they didn’t know where they were’.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, statements like Smith’s are in direct contrast with Ryan André Brasseaux’s interpretation of bands of the era, and especially Cajun bands, as actively seeking to improve the public image of musicians.<sup>17</sup>

Choates’s alcoholism can, and has been, read in different ways in different contexts. For example, his alcohol-fuelled behaviour on-stage was sometimes understood to be part of his flamboyant showmanship. Jim Grabowske still speaks of Choates’s performances with awe. ‘What a great musician he was, what a showman he was!’ he exclaimed during the interview. Bandmate Ivy Gaspard told Brown about an incident that occurred one night in Port Arthur:

There was no bandstand, and at one end was the ladies’ restroom, with a swinging door to go in. Well, Harry was hung over pretty good before we started playing. He was sitting down, which he never did unless he was feeling that way. We started the dance off with an upbeat number like *In the Mood*. Well, during the song, Harry got to feeling good about the way the music was sounding, so he stood up to play [...] but he loses his balance, and staggers through the swinging doors into the ladies’ restroom. Of course, his fiddle is amplified, we can hear him in there. Soon afterward, here he comes back out, still fiddling – I don’t believe he knew how he even got in there, but he never missed a lick.<sup>18</sup>

On another occasion, a drunken Choates fell off the bandstand, landed on his feet, but again, never stopped playing. Gaspard observed that the audience ‘thought it was part of the act [and] gave him a big hand’.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of his state of inebriation, by all accounts Choates’s musicianship remained at high level until a year or so before he died. By that time, his health had deteriorated such that it began to affect his stage presence, if not always his playing ability. As Gaspard noted, ‘He wasn’t the showman he had been’.<sup>20</sup>

Choates was also a merciless prankster. For example, a fellow musician recounted an instance in which Choates ‘awoke a sleeping [bandmate] by putting a firecracker in his ear and lighting it, damaging his eardrum’.<sup>21</sup> Those unlucky enough to share a room with Choates on the road might awake to find a rat in their bed.<sup>22</sup> And, to use the vernacular, apparently Choates could dish it out, but he couldn’t take it – attempts to get revenge for Choates’s pranks were quickly met with anger and insults.

Yet, despite his erratic and often aggressive behaviour, Choates was generally well-liked by his colleagues and the public who came to hear him perform. In some circles, he was considered a hero, ‘The Fiddle King of Cajun Swing’, and later the ‘Godfather of Cajun Music’. As musician Carlton Guidry recalled, ‘In my Cajun

household, Choates was almost a god, even with his known drinking problem. My dad was one of his biggest fans, and for a teenage Cajun to be backing up my dad's favourite artist, playing his favourite song, "Jole Blon", well, it was beyond description.<sup>23</sup> Guidry was performing with a band in Jacinto City (near Houston) one night in 1950 when Choates asked to sit in. The 17-year-old Guidry witnessed Choates '[tear] the house down for well over an hour with his music and energy'.

How can Choates's popularity and status, as indicated by Guidry and others, be reconciled with the much less pleasant aspects of his personality and behaviour? As I first read accounts of Choates's antics, I wondered how someone who appeared to fulfil at least three quite negative stereotypes (alcoholic, dissolute musician, Cajun) could also be considered a heroic figure, beyond the admiration and affection that is often directed at a talented musician.

Folklorist Michael Owen Jones has offered a useful formula for the creation of a folk hero –  $(PC + CB) \times SD (R + I + E) = \text{HERO}$  – which I will now apply to Choates. In Jones' equation, PC represents *personal charisma* or, as in the case of outlaw heroes such as bank robber Pretty Boy Floyd, *psychotic character*. CB stands for *credulous biographer* and SD for *social definition*. The next part of the recipe adds R or *recognition* to I, *imputation*, and E, *expurgation*. In Choates's case, numerous accounts, just a few of which I have mentioned here, attest to his personal charisma, even when extremely drunk. Credulous biographers perhaps first appear in the form of the listening public, unaware of Choates's personal troubles and behaviour offstage, enjoying his spirited performances and later puzzling at his seemingly sudden death. Later on, uncritical biographers pen the liner notes to various releases of Choates's recordings, further constructing his legendary status. For example, Tim Knight's liner notes for Arhoolie's re-release of several Choates tracks attribute his Austin arrest to 'his aggressive temperament' which 'caused him to run afoul of the law',<sup>24</sup> rather than the more straightforward and sadly mundane failure to make alimony payments. Brown singles out the anonymously-penned liner notes of the 1960 release, *The Original Cajun Fiddle of Harry Choates*, as another example of the repetition of 'tall tales' about Choates with little attention to fact.<sup>25</sup>

However, as the construction of Choates as a Cajun musician and hero demonstrates, the biographers of any given personality are not simply repeating facts or 'tall tales', but constructing specific narratives meant to be meaningful in particular contexts. Thus, as Jones explains, social definition is also a crucial part of the formation of a folk hero.<sup>26</sup> He writes,

If the incipient hero and his actions are seen as potentially the apotheosis of a set of values, then the individual's identity and behaviour must be altered by means of expurgation and imputation, since no [individual] fulfils in every way the persona demanded by the group. The process obtains whether the hero ultimately serves as a model of behaviour for emulation, as a source of wish-fulfilment, or both.<sup>27</sup>

It is in this part of the process, then, that folklore plays such an important role, as various narratives form a corpus that defines and amplifies the subject's heroic qualities. In examining the contexts in which Choates performed, both expurgation and imputation appear to be at work. Choates's musical prowess and sociability are emphasized, while his alcoholism is attributed to the perils of the musician's lifestyle, the regrettable price of genius, or the emotional stress of assimilation.<sup>28</sup> His expertise as a jazz guitarist – a Houston guitarist and banjoist declared that Choates 'played three times more guitar than he ever did fiddle' – is regularly omitted in discussions of his repertoire, whereas his fiddling, as a vital aspect of traditional Cajun music-making, is highlighted.<sup>29</sup>

Choate, moreover, was not only a renowned fiddler, he was a celebrated *Cajun* fiddler. Houston record producer Bill Quinn emphasized the ethnic connection in recording sessions in 1946 following the great success of Choates's 'Jole Blon', newly adamant that Choates record only traditional tunes and songs. In fact, Brown declares, 'John Lomax himself could not have produced more authentic recordings of traditional sounding Cajun fiddle music, rendered in its purest possible form'.<sup>30</sup> Tracks such as 'Allons a Lafayette (Let's Go to Lafayette)' and 'Basile Waltz' were recorded in French with acoustic instrumental accompaniment. Even Brown turns to romanticizing both Cajun culture and Choates in describing the results of these sessions, rhapsodizing that, listening to these recordings, 'one couldn't imagine that the fiddler heard on these recordings even had an awareness of electric instruments – much less had been playing electric jazz guitar nearly every day for the previous seven years'.<sup>31</sup> Yet, this rural-urban, acoustic-electric hybrid musician did indeed exist. Recordings with titles such as *The Original Cajun Fiddle of Harry Choates*,<sup>32</sup> *Harry Choates: Fiddle King of Cajun Swing*,<sup>33</sup> and *Cajun Fiddle King*,<sup>34</sup> however, reinforce the Cajun connection and elide Choates's other areas of musical endeavour.

The Cajun presence in Texas during Choates's time continued to be centred in East Texas' 'Golden Triangle', an area roughly marked by the cities of Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange. As previously noted, this is where Choates first embarked on his musical career. Cultural geographers Dean Louder and Michel LeBlanc observe that the 'Cajuns who departed Louisiana during the agricultural depression of the 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s were the "most marginal of the marginals [...] the people who had less than the [Louisiana] prairie people, who had nothing"'.<sup>35</sup> Although East Texas's oilfields and associated businesses offered steady employment, as a group, Cajuns continued to be economically oppressed in their new home.

Group identity was reinforced not only by maintaining traditional practices such as music-making, but by the prejudice with which their Anglo-Texan neighbours, and in many cases bosses, met the im/migrants.<sup>36</sup> Brown notes that, 'the likes of Harry Choates [...] would not have even made it through the lobby of most Southern recording studios of the time', attributing Bill Quinn's acceptance of the Cajun musician to his east coast upbringing.<sup>37</sup> Even into the 1970s, university-educated Cajuns in Texas found it difficult to find employment matching their



qualifications, due to 'the major oil companies' reluctance to hire and promote Cajun administrators'.<sup>38</sup> Louder and Leblanc write that the Catholic Cajuns also chafed at the religious condescension of their Anglo-Protestant neighbours, quoting an interviewee who exclaimed, 'You see, here in Texas the Baptists are going to try to tell you what to do'. The Cajun appreciation of plentiful food, drink, music, dancing, and gambling has never met with the approval of conservative Protestants.<sup>39</sup> In addition, such disapproval has often been based not on personal experience with Cajun culture, but rather the stereotype of the Cajun as 'drunken, indolent' and simplistically focused on hedonistic pursuits.<sup>40</sup>

But Choates also worked outside of Cajun Lapland. His performance circuit ran from Louisiana to central Texas. Choates would meet his end in the city that now officially bills itself as the 'Live Music Capital of the World', Austin. In contrast to east Texas, as French studies scholar François Lagarde notes, 'Austin [and central Texas] has never been very "French"'.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps Choates was *allowed* or *expected* to be 'more' Cajun in central Texas than in Cajun East Texas. Moreover, Ryan Brasseaux asserts that 'Cajuns viewed [Jole Blon's] popularity as a positive and validating affirmation removed from the prejudice that often underscored relationships between Francos and Anglos'.<sup>42</sup> Grabowske, although he grew up in Texas and California and performed with various bands throughout Texas, was not familiar with the Cajun sound until he first heard Choates perform. He and Choates first crossed paths in Corpus Christi, on Texas's Gulf coast, around 1947. At the time, Grabowske was playing with country bandleader Charlie Walker. Grabowske said, 'I thought that was the greatest innovation, I never heard it before. And he [Choates] came in there and all of them were very different looking. They were all Cajuns, you know.<sup>43</sup> And his band all wore, which was unusual back then, they all wore black, and you know, you just didn't, most of the cowboys back then [wore matching cowboy shirts with stitching and piping and hand-painted silk ties] [...]. And could they play!' But not everyone reacted as favourably as Grabowske. Western swing fiddler Tony Sepolio recalled, '[Choates] bothered my musicians – they didn't care for his type of music. The public did, but [the musicians] didn't'.<sup>44</sup>

While Choates was able to play various styles of music with ease, his Cajun repertoire was a main attraction throughout his Texas circuit. As Grabowske explained, bands of the day frequently changed their sets according to the anticipated audience demographics – polkas for the central Texas Germans, mariachi tunes in south Texas, and so on. Two nights before his final arrest in Austin, Choates asked fellow fiddler George Uptmor to sing in his place at one of his appearances in Waco. Uptmor remembered, 'Well, God, that was a dream come true to me. I didn't sing a whole lot of Cajun – I told Harry I'd do the best I can. He said, "Oh, hell, there ain't no real Cajuns out here anyway, just say anything. They won't know the difference"'.<sup>45</sup> Choates's own command of Cajun French was weak. Although he spoke English with a Cajun accent, as music critic Michael Corcoran has noted, 'Choates was a Cajun who gained fame singing in a language [...] he wasn't fluent in and rarely used in conversation'.<sup>46</sup> Neither is there any evidence that Choates was particularly

concerned with preserving Cajun music. Both Brown and R. Brasseaux indicate that the post-World War II push to record Cajun music did not necessarily come from musicians such as Choates, but from record producers seeking to capitalize on the interest in Cajun music and culture initiated by Choates's wildly popular 'Jole Blon'.<sup>47</sup> Still, fluent or not, his recording of 'Jole Blon' – and this was not the first recording of the song – was the most well-known and the one that other musicians wore out trying to learn Choates's licks.

The lingering, legendary aspects of Choates's early death revolve around his addiction to alcohol and his treatment while in jail. As one internet poster explained to another on the Mudcat Café website,

You should check out Harry Choates (pron Shoats) [sic] if you haven't heard him. Remembered by some as 'a no good, wine-head son-of-a-bitch' and also as the best known and perhaps most successful of Cajun fiddlers in his short career. The last 5 of his 28 years were spent basically on a wild drunken spree. In 1951, he was arrested for non-payment of maintenance and thrown into an Austin jail, pending transfer to Beaumont. During the night, he suffered an attack of the DTs and was brutally beaten to shut him up. He fell into a coma and died.<sup>48</sup>

Herein lies the crux of the mystery. What really happened to Choates during his time in jail? As indicated by 'Stewie', there are persistent rumours regarding Choates's treatment at the hands of the law that have contributed to the folklore surrounding the musician. In *Country Music, U.S.A.*, folklorist Bill Malone reports that Choates 'died in the Austin city jail under clouded circumstances, a victim of delirium tremens or, as many of his friends insisted, of police brutality'.<sup>49</sup> The personal experience narratives of those who visited Choates in jail play into the rumours as well, bearing witness to Choates's suffering. Fiddler Junior Burrow told Corcoran that '[Choates] didn't know us. He didn't know anything [...] I'd never seen anything like it'.<sup>50</sup>

Grabowske's account of the last hours of Choates's life have been widely reported, no doubt due to the guitarist's striking recall. But as many times as Grabowske has told the story of his last visit with Choates, it was heartrending to see how vividly the experience sprang to life in his memory as he recounted it to Peter Narváez and me, and how he still puzzles over it. At the time of Choates's arrest, the two men were both members of Jesse James and His Boys. The band played live on Austin's KTBC radio station every day at 1.00 pm. Grabowske recalled,

Me and the fiddle player and the drummer – from the radio station it wasn't far to the courthouse – we went up there to see him and when we got there he was shaking all over and he was delirious. He didn't even recognize [us] and he was banging his head on the [bars]. We said, 'We've got to do something' [...] And so we were going back to the radio station to try to seek help [...] from Mr Kellum, the radio station manager. But when we left we heard sirens, when

we left the courthouse and we were walking back. [Before that] we went to the person there in the jail and told him. See, his [Choates's] head was bloody, it was awful, and he was just flopping around in there. I didn't even know what DTs were [...] but by the time we got back to the radio station, [Choates] was dead on arrival at the hospital.

Just as Grabowske did not know the cause of Choates's frightening appearance and behaviour, biographers and journalists have wondered whether or not his jailers recognized the seriousness of his condition. Grabowske confirmed that Choates's death inspired intense speculation at the time.<sup>51</sup> While he doubts that any beatings took place, he still marvels at the guards' seeming indifference to the state in which Choates's bandmates found him. Grabowske continued, 'When we got there, his eyes were blurry, glazed, and he would fall and run into the walls [...] It was bad, it was horrible'. He notes that although Choates's vision had deteriorated such that he apparently could not see his fellow musicians, he appeared to recognize their voices.

Like Grabowske, Brown dispels as much rumour as he can, detailing Choates's suffering due to suddenly being cut off from the alcohol on which he had been dependent for so many years. Due to the longstanding addiction, Brown speculates that Choates quickly advanced to the most dangerous stage of withdrawal, delirium tremens. Without medical attention, this stage of withdrawal can be fatal. Choates's health was already extremely poor at the time of his arrest. The autopsy conducted by the Travis County Coroner, Dr Harold Williams, declared fatty metamorphosis of the liver and inflammation of the kidney to be the most significant factors in the musician's death. However, as Brown notes, Williams also documented a 2.5 cm cut across Choates's forehead, a contusion on his hip, and lesions on the skin that may have been a result of advanced liver disease.<sup>52</sup> Whether or not the cut and contusion were self-inflicted, which is highly plausible given Grabowske's description of Choates banging his head and stumbling around in his cell, the question remains regarding the various officers' response to Choates. Either physical violence or neglect on its own would have hastened Choates's deterioration. The question remains as to motivation – but brutality *or* indifference on the part of the jailers may have been interpreted by Choates's fans as ultimately a murderous act of discrimination against a member of an ethnic minority in medical crisis.

Choates's ethnic background, exciting performances, and sudden, seemingly inexplicable death at a young age have all contributed to the construction of a folk hero.<sup>53</sup> Thus, I propose an additional element to Jones' folklore formula – MD for *mysterious death*. Covering a wide range of circumstances, a *mysterious death* is the final factor that may inspire a variety of folkloric responses, from personal experience and occupational narratives, such as those related by Grabowske, to legends, as exemplified by Stewie's post to the Mudcat Café. It is important to note that currently, even with the mass-mediation of painstakingly detailed accounts of Choates's time in jail and the subsequent autopsy, legends about Choates's death

continue to circulate. With the addition of *mysterious death*, the formula might be rendered  $(PC + CB) \times SD (R + I + E + MD) = HERO$ , as it is the social definition of the death that determines its meaning. Moreover, all elements of the formula must be understood to be unstable, in that the quantity and composition of each is constantly in flux in the crucible of the folk process.

As I have indicated, there is little in the documentary record to suggest that Choates actively sought to claim and project a Cajun identity, either privately or publicly, beyond that which he employed in the heightened moment of performance. However, as a flamboyant public figure he was well-situated to function as a locus for beliefs, attitudes, and images, both esoteric and exoteric, around Cajun ethnicity in Texas. We may engage Jones's formula by utilizing accounts which omit or soft pedal, and thus expurgate Choates's less admirable qualities, or consider the positive reception of the same traits and occurrences as acts of social definition and in this case, perhaps, cultural resistance. Jones reminds us that 'outlaw heroes [...] often emerge during periods of relative deprivation or oppression among various groups in society', in which there are positive needs for negative social behaviour whether the group in question passively identifies with it or actually engages in it as well.<sup>54</sup> The *social definition* of Choates as a Cajun outlaw hero facilitated the redirection of his potentially deviant behaviours into more 'socially acceptable'<sup>55</sup> and potentially empowering forms, enabling a marginalized group in Texas's ethnic mix to simultaneously affirm Cajun identity and resist Anglo-Texan cultural hegemony.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Holly Everett, 'The Association I Have with this Guitar is My Life': The Guitar as Artifact and Symbol', *Popular Music and Society*, 26 (1990), 331–50.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Holly Everett and Peter Narváez, 'Me and the Devil': Legends of Niccolò Paganini and Robert Johnson', *Contemporary Legend*, new series 4 (2001), 20–47; and Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000). A recent popular culture example of such contrasts was the extremely successful reality television series, *The Osbournes* (2002–2005) starring heavy metal shock-rocker Ozzy Osbourne. As the lead singer of Black Sabbath and later as a solo artist, Osbourne entranced fans and repulsed parents across North America, Europe, and beyond. The MTV series *The Osbournes* portrayed the private life of Osbourne as a relatively mild-mannered, drug-addled father and husband. The 'real' Osbourne perhaps remains unknown to the public. During an interview aired on BBC radio in 2009, Osbourne said that he is so mortified by his appearance in *The Osbournes* that he is unable to watch it.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Brown, *Harry Choates: Devil in the Bayou*, liner notes, Bear Family Records BCD 16355, 2002, p. 3. I have not found any documentation of interviews with Choates himself, nor references to such materials. To date, the most comprehensive and credible account of Choates's life is that penned by music historian Andrew Brown for the liner notes of the two-CD set, *Harry Choates: Devil in the Bayou*. In addition to clarifying the details of Choates's brief life and career, Brown's recounting includes a wealth of data gleaned from interviews with Choates's contemporaries. While this paper draws heavily from Brown, it is the folkloristic analysis of this and other biographical accounts that contributes to a greater understanding of both Choates's legacy and the occupational folklife of musicians in general.

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<sup>4</sup> Barry Jean Ancelet, *Cajun Music: Its Origins and Development* (Lafayette, LA: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1989), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Owen Jones, '(PC + CB) x SD (R + I + E) = HERO', *New York Folklore Quarterly*, 27 (1971), 243–60.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Jean Ancelet, *The Makers of Cajun Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> John Broven, *South to Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1983), p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> See Paul M. Lucko, 'Choates, Harry H.', in *The Handbook of Texas Online*, [www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fch67.html](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fch67.html) [accessed 28 June 2008]; Mary Meaux, 'PA's [Port Arthur's] Choates Receives Marker', *Port Arthur News*, 21 July 2008, [www.panews.com/local/local\\_story\\_173185123.html](http://www.panews.com/local/local_story_173185123.html) [accessed 2 July 2009].

<sup>10</sup> Cow Island lies in Vermillion Parish, which today promotes itself as 'the Most Cajun place on Earth'. See the parish's website at [www.vermilion.org/](http://www.vermilion.org/) [accessed 25 June 2009].

<sup>11</sup> Brown, p. 7; Ryan André Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown: The Emergence of an American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 276.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Plochek, 'Cajuns of Texas: Let the Good Times Roll', in *Texas Almanac 2008–2009*, ed. by Elizabeth Cruce Alvarez and Robert Plocheck (Dallas: Dallas Morning News, 2008), p. 543.

<sup>13</sup> Tim Knight, *Harry Choates: The Fiddle King of Western Swing*, liner notes, Arhoolie CD 380, pp. 2–3.

<sup>14</sup> James 'Jim' Grabowske is a legendary musician in his own right. Similarly to Choates, he began playing professionally while still in his teens. He is an inductee of the Texas Steel Guitar Hall of Fame. Interview 5 May 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> Ryan André Brasseaux, 'Bayou Boogie: The Americanization of Cajun Music, 1928–1950' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2004), p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, p. 75.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, p. 82.

<sup>24</sup> *Harry Choates: The Fiddle King of Western Swing*, Arhoolie CD 380, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> Brown, pp. 91–92. See *The Original Cajun Fiddle of Harry Choates*, D records D-7000, Houston, 1960.

<sup>26</sup> Santino has discussed the importance of occupational narrative in the formation of the folk hero. See, for example, Jack Santino, 'Characteristics of Occupational Narrative', in *Working Americans*, ed. by Robert H. Byington, Smithsonian Folklife Studies, no. 3 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), pp. 57–70.

<sup>27</sup> Jones, p. 246.

<sup>28</sup> Regarding the pressure of assimilation that some see as contributing to Cajun musicians' early deaths, see Ryan André Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown: The Emergence of an American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 187. It is difficult to assess the credibility of such a statement with regard to Choates in light of the fact that he was never interviewed.

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In addition, the topic does not appear to have been discussed with any of his bandmates or relatives by later interviewers.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, pp. 15, 92.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, p. 46.

<sup>32</sup> *The Original Cajun Fiddle of Harry Choates*, D records D-7000, Houston, 1960.

<sup>33</sup> *Harry Choates: Fiddle King of Cajun Swing*, Arhoolie, LP 380, 1982, re-issued as CD 380, 1993.

<sup>34</sup> Harry Choates, *Cajun Fiddle King*, Aim Records AITG 1205, Australia, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Dean Louder and Michel Leblanc, 'The Cajuns of East Texas', in *French America*, ed. by Dean Louder and Eric Waddell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), pp. 301–15, (p. 311). Here the authors quote an anonymous interviewee, who explained that Cajuns in Louisiana looked down on those who left to go to Texas, judging them to be 'ill mannered [...] and unkempt'.

<sup>36</sup> Carl Brasseaux, 'Grand Texas: The Cajun Migration to Texas', in *The French in Texas*, ed. by François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), pp. 273–86 (p. 281); R. Brasseaux (2009), pp. 135–37.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> C. Brasseaux, p. 278.

<sup>39</sup> Louder and Leblanc, pp. 313–14; see also R. Brasseaux (2009), pp. 29, 131–32.

<sup>40</sup> Shane K. Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), pp. 16, 50.

<sup>41</sup> François Lagarde, 'Birth, Stock, and Work: French Immigration in Texas', in *The French in Texas*, ed. by François Lagarde (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), pp. 157–77 (p. 161).

<sup>42</sup> R. Brasseaux (2004), p. 96. While it is outside the scope of this paper, both of R. Brasseaux's works discussed here (2004 and 2009) examine at length the wider cultural significance of 'Jole Blon', as well as the factors that facilitated Choates's great success with this oft-recorded tune.

<sup>43</sup> I asked my mother, who grew up in Lamesa, Texas (about 480 km northwest of Choates's established gig route) in the 1940s and 50s, if she remembered when she was first aware of Cajuns and/or Cajun culture. Unlike Grabowske, she recalled, 'I first heard of Cajuns when I was a child. My dad had relatives in Louisiana and one of his cousins married a girl they said was Cajun. We in fact met her when they came to visit. She was a very pretty girl. I expected her to look foreign in some way, but she did not.' My mother does not remember ever hearing of Harry Choates.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, p. 85.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Corcoran, *All Over the Map: True Heroes of Texas Music* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, pp. 45–46; R. Brasseaux (2004), p. 108.

<sup>48</sup> Stewie, post to discussion thread 'Lyr Req: Rubber Dolly' *The Mudcat Café*, 6 March 2000, [mudcat.org/Detail.CFM?messages\\_\\_Message\\_ID=190658](http://mudcat.org/Detail.CFM?messages__Message_ID=190658) [accessed 20 June 2009]. The Mudcat Café is a music and lyric database and networking site for individuals interested in traditional music.

<sup>49</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, rev. edn. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), p. 231.

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<sup>50</sup> Michael Corcoran, 'The Ghost of Harry Choates', *Austin American-Statesman*, 17 July 2001, [nl.newsbank.com](http://nl.newsbank.com) [accessed 12 July 2008].

<sup>51</sup> See also Brown, pp. 89–90.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, pp. 88–89.

<sup>53</sup> The general public was probably unaware of the very serious extent of his alcoholism or of his personal problems, and the contemporary paparazzi machine that reports celebrities' every move, especially run-ins with the police, did not yet exist.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, p. 253.

<sup>55</sup> Jones, p. 252.

## Random acts of violins: Oliver Schroer and two British Columbia fiddle communities

ANDY HILLHOUSE

Oliver Schroer, who passed away on 3 July 2008, shortly after his 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday, was a prominent and unusual Canadian fiddler. His diverse audiences ranged from suburban folk festival patrons and rural British Columbian fiddle students to urban avant-garde music enthusiasts. As a musician, he was definitively difficult to define. His varied career as a producer, teacher, and composer, his idiosyncratic performance style, and his eccentric fashion sense earned him a reputation on the Canadian folk music scene as a maverick.<sup>1</sup>

He was a prolific fiddle tune writer who drew on a wide variety of traditional and popular music forms for inspiration. Much of his work was very idiosyncratic,<sup>2</sup> although some of his tunes were quite accessible for fiddlers of various abilities, and some even had strong formal and stylistic referents to traditions such as Irish dance music and Cajun music. His tune titles often employed humorous wordplay or evoked a strong sense of place, enabling a connection with his audience even during his most avant-garde ventures. In addition to his solo work, and his work with his band the Stewed Tomatoes, he collaborated with musicians from, among other places, Finland, Italy, and Ireland.<sup>3</sup> His self-identification, despite his contemporary image, cosmopolitanism, and tendency toward fusion and experimentation, was as a folk musician, a term that implies connection to place and historical continuity.<sup>4</sup> Schroer's self-descriptions signified his simultaneous identification as both a folk fiddler and a composer with a unique voice. For instance, he once referred to himself as an 'extended folk musician',<sup>5</sup> and he titled his collaborations with Italian accordionist Filippo Gambetta as 'folk music from nowhere', inverting the localism evoked by the term 'folk'.<sup>6</sup>

How does one culturally and theoretically situate such an idiosyncratic musician, who resists categorization and identification with any particular tradition, yet who consistently identified himself with folk music? Do identification with particular localities and notions of community continuity play a role in the life of a soloistic and cosmopolitan musician like Schroer? In this paper, I demonstrate that in order to address these questions it is informative to turn to his various musical relationships. Such a study sheds light not only on the values and ideals of the



individual, Oliver Schroer, but also on those with whom he collaborated. Schroer's work as a fiddle mentor to young people provides a case study through which to consider how notions of continuity and oral transmission, commonly researched aspects of folk music study, remain as signifiers of 'folk' and tradition even when a musician pursues stylistic distinctiveness. I will focus primarily on Schroer's alliances with two fiddle communities in British Columbia: the Youth Valley Fiddlers of Smithers and the Coast String Fiddlers of Roberts Creek. He worked with both of these communities closely as a mentor, from 2001 (at Smithers) and 2003 (at Roberts Creek) until his passing.

### **Alliance studies**

I use the term 'alliance' deliberately, taking up Beverley Diamond's call for an 'alliance studies' approach in ethnomusicology. She explains the concept as follows:

What exactly might alliance studies be? It might look at ways that concepts and social relationships of the past are embedded in the present. Alliance studies might track connections to places, or networks of people. Such a focus would shift our attention to such things as genre formations, technological mediations, language and dialect choices, citational practices, and issues of access and ownership.<sup>7</sup>

I propose that the concept of alliances can be useful in studying those musicians like Schroer who seem to avoid categorization. Schroer is an example of how musicians utilize 'networks of people' through their collaborations to counter the expectations of particular 'genre formations'. Further, focusing on alliances is a way to understand how individuals construct their musical/social worlds, when there are many options open to them. What are the shared affinities and values that draw musicians together, when these affinities are not necessarily based on ethnic or regional identity? This question implies not only relationships among professional musicians but also those between professional and amateur musicians, such as those between Schroer and the communities at Smithers and Roberts Creek.

Alliance studies can also help address gaps in the research that are a result of the privileging of certain musics and regions by both academia and the music industry. As James Leary recently discussed in his analysis of the Wisconsin polkabilly band the Goose Island Ramblers, certain folk practices are politically selected as emblematic of large regions and nations, while other areas are 'minimized or ignored'.<sup>8</sup> Leary argues that, in the United States, the music of the Upper Midwest is absent from the canon of great American folk and vernacular musics due in large part to its 'wildly combinatory' nature and the perception of it as 'too recent, too varied' and 'too fluid'.<sup>9</sup> The syncretic music of the area historically has drawn on Norwegian, Métis, Finnish, German, Polish, and Irish dance music styles. According to Leary, it has received much less attention from American folklorists and ethnomusicologists than have Anglo-Celtic and African-American musics.<sup>10</sup>

Leary's work raises questions about the study of folk music in similarly ethnically diverse regions in Canada. Folk music practices in British Columbia, with its recent settlement of fishers, miners, and loggers from many of the same ethnic groups discussed in *Polkabilly*, have received relatively minimal attention outside of the late Phil Thomas's seminal work.<sup>11</sup> In terms of fiddling in particular, British Columbia is virtually absent in the literature. With a focus on processes of interaction between groups, music in ethnically diverse regions with fluid populations may take a more prominent place in research.

In the contemporary era, in which musicians often maintain multiple identities and fluctuate between them, it is important to develop ways to discuss both idiosyncratic musicians such as Schroer and emerging practices in places such as British Columbia, despite their lack of alignment with clearly defined, singular, and bounded traditions. By examining not only the music, but the kinds of values and ideals that are expressed through musician's alliances, it is possible to describe these musicians without having to place them into genre categories they may not agree with (for example 'Celtic' or 'Old Time').

### **Values and ideals**

By tracking Schroer's alliances, one can identify where his values and ideals converge with or differ from those that guide the production of folk music elsewhere. An example is Schroer's expressed affinity with Finnish folk music.<sup>12</sup> Schroer collaborated with Finnish accordion player Maria Kalaniemi, an early graduate of the folk music programme at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. His conceptualization of contemporary folk music shows some similarities with the philosophy that guides that programme. I use an excerpt of ethnomusicologist Juniper Hill's analysis of that institution as a starting point for an exploration of his ideals:

The legitimacy of Finnish contemporary folk music is founded on an ideal process of creating folk music, as well as an ideal way of being a folk musician and an ideal relationship of folk music to society. Finnish contemporary folk musicians believe that the most authentic approach to creating folk music is to attempt to enter into and continue the process of creating music by learning the tradition and using it as a foundation for their own personal creative expressions, incorporating whatever influences have touched their lives. Through this ideal process, they achieve another ideal: transforming folk music into a living tradition relevant to contemporary society; and they avoid their anathema, or 'anti-ideal,' the freezing of folk music as a museum piece.<sup>13</sup>

The notion of the transmission, through mentoring, of an ideal folk music process and a 'way of being' a folk musician resonates with my own interpretation of Schroer's relationship with the British Columbia fiddlers. The fact that the Sibelius programme incorporates free improvisation, collaborations with non-Finnish folk musicians, and original composition is very much a result of the values and ideals of those who founded the programme, according to Hill.<sup>14</sup> What values and ideals did

Schroer transmit to his students, and what reciprocal effect did his engagement with them have on his work? Did Schroer model a 'way of being' a fiddler to his students, and if so, what was it?

In the public eye, the 'way of being' associated with Schroer involves the attributes of uniqueness and musical adventurousness. In a *Globe and Mail* obituary, Canadian folk musician Grit Laskin describes Schroer's playing: 'it was his own style—physically what he did with his bow technique and the kind of rhythms and structure in the music he wrote – there was nobody else like him'.<sup>15</sup> From this description, and others like it, emerges a cluster of ideals and values: emancipation from authority, free expression of personality and openness to multiple influences. A contrasting cluster – rootedness in tradition, ties to place and social inclusiveness – are less often applied to Schroer, but these aspects played a part in much of his collaborations and teaching. Schroer's brother Andre, in the same article, expresses a similar perception of Oliver's uniqueness, but also makes mention of the notion of tradition: 'He was a very complex individual who in one way skewed authority [...] but still had one foot in traditions'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, dialectically operating sets of ideals coexist in much of Schroer's work as a performer and mentor. Whether in his early commitment to learning folk fiddle styles and subsequent striving for a personal style, his alternation between highly collaborative and completely soloistic albums, or his choice to record a CD of original tunes on a 1000 year old pilgrimage trail,<sup>17</sup> the dialectical binaries of individualism/communalism and radical innovation/historical continuity are recurrent themes throughout his career. For example, he describes his transition from budding traditional fiddler to original tune composer in a letter written a little over a month before he died. Speaking of his discovery of traditional fiddling in his twenties, he writes:

First of all, it was music that was inclusive. Old and young could do it together. It knew no bounds in terms of socioeconomic or intellectual background [...] I was hooked. I got into that social aspect of music at first [...] A human connective thing. But I have a restless mind. So at a certain point, I wanted more than the traditional tunes. Even after delving into various world musics, I still heard something different in my mind's ear. So I started composing tunes.<sup>18</sup>

In the above quote, Schroer is pointing to an early stage in the arc in his development as a musician. Beginning his career by engaging with traditional music and associating himself with the 'human connective' aspect of it, he later felt the desire to pursue original composition. His entrance to teaching came after over a decade of developing a personal style. His mentoring presented an opportunity for him not only to transmit a personal legacy of tunes, but also, importantly, to engage in a process of cultural continuity at a face to face, grassroots level within these local communities, while transmitting the ideal of individual creativity represented by his solo work. I interpret his return to teaching as a personal negotiation of the

basic dialectic scholars have long associated with folk music and folk revival, that of community, continuity, and individual innovation.<sup>19</sup> Schroer's response to this tension was to emphasize process over product – what one student referred to as transmitting a 'mindset as opposed to a repertoire'<sup>20</sup> – an approach that has much in common with that identified by Juniper Hill at the Sibelius Academy. In this respect his teaching differed greatly from fiddle music revivals that model themselves on collections of tunes and archival recordings that focus on particular localities and regions.<sup>21</sup>

### **Youth Valley Fiddlers and Coast String Fiddlers**

Organizers of fiddle camps at Smithers and Roberts Creek embraced Schroer's approach enthusiastically. It is important, however, not to conflate these two communities; in fact they contrast in several ways. While Smithers is a rural farming community in the north of British Columbia (a 14-hour drive from the major provincial centre of Vancouver), Roberts Creek is in close proximity to Vancouver, reachable by a 40-minute ferry ride. It is semi-rural and less isolated than Smithers. The repertoire focus of both fiddle organizations also differs. While the bulk of Smithers Valley Youth Fiddlers repertoire has always been diverse, the Roberts Creek Coast String Fiddlers have a substantial Scottish influence. This is not reflective of a dominant ethnic identity in the broader community of Roberts Creek, but of the national origin of the founder of the Coast String Fiddlers, Ann Law, who predominantly hires Scottish teachers for the annual fiddle camp. Indeed, the Coast String Fiddlers have travelled to Scotland three times, and regularly wear tartan in performance. Despite these differences, both communities shared the practice of hiring fiddle teachers from outside the community to workshop or teach with the students, and both operate annual fiddle camps. The two fiddle communities also share some basic expressed ideological aspects, which bear mentioning.

Neither of the group's mission statements mentions the preservation or perpetuation of any single tradition as a goal. The Coast String Fiddlers' mandate is to 'play an international mix of fiddle music, including Scottish, Appalachian, Shetland and Finnish as well as compositions by Canadian Fiddlers and members of the group, some of which defy categorization'.<sup>22</sup> The Valley Youth Fiddlers frame their mandate not in terms of repertoire but in terms of six aims: Community, Creativity, Family Focus, Learning, Performing, and Self Respect.<sup>23</sup> Regional, national or ethnic traditions are not mentioned on their website, while community and personal achievement are highlighted. Schroer's teaching methods, which involved strictly oral transmission of tunes, universal opportunity for improvisation, and ensemble arrangements that made use of students at all levels of ability, were certainly in keeping with the ideal of face to face interaction, the egalitarianism, and the valuing of individual creativity in both groups.

To highlight Schroer's affiliation with the aforementioned ideals is not to deny the possibility of competing notions of what constitutes the acceptable boundaries of tradition within the organization, or amongst fellow fiddle teachers at camps and

workshops. These teachers may transmit varied ideals of innovation, with diverse viewpoints loosely held together under the broad umbrella of the mission statement principles. In the case of Smithers in particular, Schroer was one of several teachers, but ultimately, according to Valley Youth Fiddlers founder Leslie Jean Macmillan, he had the strongest impact among them, partially due to an alignment of his ideals and values with the organization.<sup>24</sup> In Roberts Creek, where there is a stronger emphasis on Scottish style, according to one student he had less of an influence and was less involved, although he remains a celebrated figure in the community.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Truffles, Smithers, and Twisted String: creativity, continuity and diversity***

Three notable projects that emerged from Schroer's connection to these British Columbian fiddle communities embody the above-mentioned ideals of individual creativity and face-to-face interaction. These are *Truffles*,<sup>26</sup> his compositional work, and resultant CD, with children in the Smithers area, the album *Smithers*,<sup>27</sup> a CD of tunes he composed for fiddle students there, and the Twisted String, which involved youth from Roberts Creek and Smithers.

*Truffles* was what Schroer called an 'ongoing composition project' that began with twenty-minute workshops with youth between the ages of 7 and 17 in Smithers in 2004. The goal of the workshops was for each child to compose a fiddle tune, and in the words of Schroer, to build 'a tradition of composing for fun and self expression'.<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere he reveals an interest in facilitating community continuity. He wrote on the liner notes of the *Truffles* CD, 'By the end of a week, I had a pile of eighteen new tunes written by the kids. That is already the start of a common repertoire – a living tradition – the Smithers fiddle tradition in the making.' Describing the resultant tunes, he continues, 'these are catchy melodies. They have everything I look for in a repertoire – a lot of variety, emotional range, humour, hooks. Some of the tunes sounded traditional and some of them were pure imagination-driven gems.'<sup>29</sup> With this description, Schroer expresses an explicit interest in creating a fiddle tradition, which he defines not in terms of an identifiable local style but in terms of melodic creativity emerging from within the community. At the same time, he is describing a repertoire and associated musical values that are reflective of his own. Schroer positioned himself, therefore, as a model – the embodiment of the ideals that he hoped would guide the emerging community.

Specifically, Schroer modelled the acquisition of a diverse repertoire: 'there is a really wide scope here, everything from lyrical or whimsical songs to Newfie Jigs, French Canadian, Irish, Breton, cartoon music, hymns, pure fancy'.<sup>30</sup> Finally, an aspect of the project that demonstrated a link with Schroer's own narrative-based approach to tune writing was the use of stories as generating tools for composition. Schroer describes this with characteristic wordplay: 'A lot of these tunes were built around stories. We would find a story that was meaningful for the kids and take it from there. Spinning yarns, weaving melodies – it's all cut from the same cloth.'<sup>31</sup> *Truffles* was not only a lesson in how to produce distinctive music, but it also transmitted an ideal of community music making as a process that involved

free imagination, stylistic diversity and communication of extra musical meaning, through the inclusion of accompanying stories.

*Smithers* is a CD Schroer compiled as a gift to 59 of his fiddle students in the area. He composed one tune for each of them, kept the project secret, and had it delivered to them for Christmas 2007. He recorded the CD not long after his leukemia diagnosis, and employed one of his most ardent protégés, 18-year-old Smithers native Emilyn Stam, as piano accompanist for the entire CD. *Smithers*, with its individually dedicated tunes, is the bringing together of individualist and communitarian ideals. The CD is at once an acknowledgement of each student's personality and unique attributes, and an affirmation of their membership in the Smithers community. The repertoire on *Smithers* consists predominantly of jigs and waltzes. This is unusual in light of his overall repertoire, and considering the general arc of his career, it marks a re-engagement with traditional forms, and easily transmittable tunes. This strongly contrasts to his albums of solo fiddle tunes that he referred to as 'fractal music', tunes that are composed from small interchangeable motifs. The emphasis on uniqueness in the performance style on *02* (1999) and *Restless Urban Primitive* (2001) means it is unlikely a community will receive the fractal tunes into tradition. The CD *Smithers*, on the other hand, consists largely of tunes written in common dance music forms and represents a contrasting emphasis on inclusiveness and transmission.

*Truffles* represents the ideal of unfettered creativity and *Smithers* demonstrates how Schroer's engagement with that community inspired his own work. The Twisted String, an ensemble of former fiddle students from Smithers and Roberts Creek, potently represents Schroer's legacy of tunes; the group today is dedicated to performing Schroer's music. Yet it also represents a legacy of performance practice, particularly with the unannounced roving performances that the group calls 'random acts of violins'. During these performances the players dress in clashing, bright colours and the group plays tunes and arrangements that are characterized by syncopation, a pop sensibility, and an emphasis on groove. One particularly symbolic performance was on the Toronto subway during a visit the group made there in the midst of Schroer's illness in February 2008, a moment recorded by a mother of one of the fiddle students and made available for viewing on YouTube.<sup>32</sup> One can see in the video that the group is engaged in face-to-face interaction with a public involved in a commonplace, repetitive city activity. These rural and semi-rural fiddlers signify community, spontaneity, and freedom of creative expression in the midst of an alienating activity of urban life, as they enact this playful social commentary.

## **Conclusion**

Twisted String's choice of the Toronto Subway as a performance venue has continuity with Schroer's own career. He developed his technique and repertoire playing in the subway before beginning his life as a touring and recording musician. Whether in this symbolic way, or in other more concrete ways, Schroer modelled a 'way of being' a contemporary fiddler, to communities where there is no dominant inherited,

revived or recontextualized tradition. The 'way of being' transmitted by Oliver to his students involved the importance of individual expression, but it also encompassed the goal of establishing continuity. A similarity between Schroer's approach and that of the Sibelius Academy is in the use of traditional music as a 'point of departure' for individual creativity.<sup>33</sup> According to his student Emilyn Stam, Schroer stressed the importance of learning traditional tunes from a wide variety of repertoires.<sup>34</sup> Whether or not styles were engaged with deeply enough for students to become versed in the nuances that make a regional style distinctive is in need of further music analysis, but my impression is that the internalization of melodic structure was more important to Schroer than the learning of regional stylistic elements such as ornamentation and bowing. Ultimately, the goal of learning traditional music was to provide the tools for individual creativity. The tradition being 'born', ideally, was one of a creative process, and a way to engage musically with contemporary culture, as much as a tradition of tunes.

Finally, Schroer's alliance with the British Columbia fiddle students was but one branch in the complex network of musicians with which he worked. In my own experience as a musician on the North American and European folk scenes I have noticed that Schroer is not unique in this regard; many contemporary musicians on the professional folk music circuit utilize such networks to maintain their careers and broaden their creative resources. Case studies concerning the alliances of individual musicians would serve to shine the light on how these musicians negotiate with expectations of genre and stylistic categories, as well as notions of community and continuity, as they pursue often singular creative paths.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gay Abbate, 'Fiddler was a Prolific Composer and Performer with a Style All His Own', *Globe and Mail*, 19 July 2008, p. S-12.

<sup>2</sup> See Oliver Schroer, *O2*, Big Dog Music BD9901, 1999, and Oliver Schroer, *Restless Urban Primitive*, Big Dog Music BD0101, 2001, for examples of his soloistic fiddling style.

<sup>3</sup> The collaborators to which I am referring are chromatic button accordionist Maria Kalaniemi (Finland), diatonic button accordionist Filippo Gambetta (Italy), and flute player Nuala Kennedy (Ireland). Schroer recorded with Kalaniemi on his CD *Stewed Tomatoes*, Big Dog Music BD001, 1996, with Gambetta on his CD *A Million Stars*, Big Dog Music BD0401, 2004, and recorded an entire CD with Nuala Kennedy, *Enthralled* (not yet released at time of writing).

<sup>4</sup> As James Leary noted in his study of Midwestern Polkabilly music, terms such as 'roots', 'traditional', and 'folk' 'all connote long-standing, even mystical relationships between people and places'. James Leary, *Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver Schroer, personal communication, October 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, June 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Beverley Diamond, 'The Music of Modern Indigeneity: From Identity to Alliance Studies', John Blacking Memorial Lecture, presented at the annual meeting for the European Seminar

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in Ethnomusicology, Jokkmokk, Sweden, 6–10 September 2006, [www.marta-dahlig.com/esem/pdf/ml/JBML2006-Diamond.pdf](http://www.marta-dahlig.com/esem/pdf/ml/JBML2006-Diamond.pdf) [accessed 9 July 2009] (para. 7 of 57).

<sup>8</sup> Leary, *Polkabilly*, p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> Leary, *Polkabilly*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Leary, *Polkabilly*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> See Phil Thomas, *Songs of the Pacific Northwest* (Vancouver: Hancock House, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Oliver Schroer, personal communication, November 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Juniper Hill, 'From Ancient to Avant-Garde to Global: Creative Processes and Institutionalization in Finnish Contemporary Folk Music' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2005), p. 339.

<sup>14</sup> See also Tina K. Ramnarine, *Ilmatar's Inspirations: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Changing Soundscape of Finnish Folk Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Ramnarine uses the term 'new folk music' to identify this trend in Finland (p. 5).

<sup>15</sup> Abbate, 'Fiddler was a Prolific Composer', p. S12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Oliver Schroer, *Camino*, Big Dog Records BD 0401, 2006. In 2004 Schroer recorded this CD while walking the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route in Spain.

<sup>18</sup> Oliver Schroer, 'Leukemia', letter to mailing list subscribers [www.oliverschroer.com/leukemia.htm](http://www.oliverschroer.com/leukemia.htm) [accessed 9 July 2009].

<sup>19</sup> Philip Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. xviii.

<sup>20</sup> Emilyn Stam, personal communication, July 2008.

<sup>21</sup> See Chris Goertzen, *Fiddling for Norway: Revival and Identity* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1997) for one of the most thorough ethnomusicological studies of regional and national fiddle music revival.

<sup>22</sup> Coast String Fiddlers, 'About the Coast String Fiddlers' [coaststringfiddlers.com/about/](http://coaststringfiddlers.com/about/) [accessed 9 July 2009].

<sup>23</sup> Valley Youth Fiddlers, 'About Valley Youth Fiddlers' [www.vyf.ca/about/](http://www.vyf.ca/about/) [accessed 9 July 2009].

<sup>24</sup> Leslie Jean MacMillan, personal communication, July 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Chelsea Sleep, personal communication, June 2008.

<sup>26</sup> *Oliver Schroer and Truffles*, Big Dog Records [no matrix number], 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Oliver Schroer with Emelyn Stam, *Smithers*, Big Dog Records BD0702, 2007

<sup>28</sup> Oliver Schroer, 'Truffles', [www.oliverschroer.com/truffles.htm](http://www.oliverschroer.com/truffles.htm) [accessed 9 July 2009].

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Carmen Rosen, 'Random Acts of Violins in the Toronto Subway', YouTube, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdHBQ4uQM6E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdHBQ4uQM6E) [accessed 10 July 2009].

<sup>33</sup> Hill, 'From Ancient to Avant-Garde to Global', p. 341.

<sup>34</sup> Stam, July 2008.



## Two models in the world of Métis fiddling: John Arcand and Andy DeJarlis

SARAH QUICK

Andy DeJarlis and John Arcand are two fiddle-composers well known in Western Canada in part because of their influence on Métis fiddling practice. Previous scholarship has tended to focus on traditional tunes and traditional stylistics in relation to Métis fiddling; while recent compositions and commercial fiddling have largely been conceived as negatively influencing the unique qualities that define traditional Métis fiddling as a genre. This paper, however, suggests that commercial compositions are also worthy of study for their insight into the musical worlds that fiddler-composers reaffirm in their tunes and tune titles.

### **Métis identity and Métis fiddle music**

*Métis* translates from French as a person of mixed heritage, and in this case the term (among others) first referred to the progeny of European and Aboriginal unions during the fur trading days in North America. Métis currently refers to a collective group recognized by the Canadian government, although exactly what Métis means in terms of Aboriginal rights and who then qualifies for these rights is contested and negotiated at national and provincial levels. While Métis are not recognized as a separate group in the USA, historically, Métis from the Red River region of Manitoba and North Dakota were the prototypical models for Métis national identity; and all three Prairie Provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta) in Canada have been seen as the eventual homes to scattered Métis communities after the Red River Métis' late nineteenth-century dispersals. Métis is now seen as a cultural identifier in much broader terms with overlapping affiliations to First Nations communities in many locales across northern Canada. Furthermore, the lines between First Nations and Métis communities (and French communities in some places) are often difficult to draw because of the historical, familial, and political interrelationships between these communities.

Several references to Native fiddle dances appeared in accounts of nineteenth-century life on the Canadian prairies (and beyond),<sup>1</sup> but Roy Gibbons' research appears to be the first in the scholarly record to have used the term 'Métis' to describe the fiddle performance style practised by Native peoples in the Prairie Provinces. In

the late 1970s, Gibbons recorded Métis and First Nations fiddlers in Saskatchewan and Alberta; he referred to these fiddlers generally as Métis, but since he included reserve locations for some recordings, I include First Nations as a descriptor.<sup>2</sup> In general, although this genre is identified with Métis culture, First Nations people are also active participants in fiddle dance performance.

Anne Lederman is the scholar most often cited regarding Métis fiddling's formal qualities, due to her seminal research in the mid-1980s when she worked with Métis and First Nations reserve communities north of Winnipeg, Manitoba. In her scholarly and popular publications she has asserted that the fiddle music she sought out and recorded exhibited a syncretism of Native and European musical structures. Lederman argued that although localized (non-Native) stigmas existed toward these fiddlers' renditions of tunes often in 'crooked' or asymmetric phrases, these musical-structural features were indicative of Native musical influence from Ojibwa singing. Lederman also contended that this syncretic tradition had largely been ignored because of the assumptions of past scholars viewing European and Native musical forms as very different. Lederman, instead, pointed to the similarities between vocal/drum performance and rhythmic fiddling, the fiddle's range mimicking the human voice and its performance, primarily for dancing.<sup>3</sup>

Other scholars and projects have generated study of and broader attention to this fiddling genre. Folklorist Nicolas Vrooman's 1983 Folkways recording on the Turtle Mountain Chippewa reservation in North Dakota was re-released as a Smithsonian Folkways CD in 1992. The Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatchewan published a collection of Métis music that included a couple of Métis fiddle tunes in 1993, while the Gabriel Dumont Institute recorded, archived, and published a collection in 2002, based on several elder Métis fiddlers from the Prairie Provinces and the Northwest Territories, entitled *Drops of Brandy: An Anthology of Métis Music* with an accompanying set of four CDs. Byron Dueck has researched fiddle and dance performance on First Nations reserves in the vicinity of and including Winnipeg, Manitoba; I have taken up the study of fiddle and dance performance primarily in Alberta (but also in Saskatchewan settings); and Anne Lederman observed and recorded fiddle dance activities in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories in 2008, continuing Craig Mishler's earlier research on Gwich'in fiddling.<sup>4</sup>

Besides the asymmetric phrasing that gives Métis fiddling an 'out of metre' feel, as brought to light by Lederman's research, Métis fiddling is seen as contrasting with more mainstream Canadian fiddling (often described as 'down east' style) in a number of other ways. Elder fiddlers generally accompany themselves by clogging their feet in a set rhythmic pattern, similar to that which Québécoise fiddlers do. A number of the old tunes require tuning the fiddle in non-standard tunings, and most fiddlers play open strings or double stops for phrase emphasis. Finally, many fiddlers point to Métis fiddling's 'bouncy' or 'jumpy' quality, which can be attributed to bowing techniques as well as the already mentioned use of asymmetric phrases.

As Mark Slobin characterised, *affect* is an analytic tool for recognizing what musicians do to convey a mood so that their audience is moved in a certain way.<sup>5</sup>

The dance aesthetic emphasized in Métis fiddling obviously ties to its traditional function as dance accompaniment, and the dances, in turn, often accompany celebratory social gatherings. Therefore, this dance aesthetic relates to the affect, or the emotional mood that performers generally convey in the upbeat tunes played to inspire dancing, a mood intertwined with informal fun, the lifting of spirits, and the celebrating of significant events. Nonetheless, affect can also be related to the creation of new tunes, and here I focus especially on the affective qualities of Dejarlis and Arcand's tunes and tune titles in comprising a dense and evocative terrain of meaning-making.

### **Andy Dejarlis**

Andy Dejarlis is now recognised as the first major Métis fiddling recording artist, his career extending from the 1930s into the 1970s. He died in 1975 having only reached the age of 60, but during his lifetime he recorded close to forty LPs, composed hundreds of fiddle tunes, and in 1970 received a Gold Record from London Records for sales exceeding 500,000 albums.<sup>6</sup> Born near Woodridge in southeastern Manitoba in 1914, Dejarlis started fiddling when he was fifteen or sixteen, learning from his father and other well-known local fiddlers. He moved with his family to Winnipeg in 1933 or 1934, and soon after he began playing for the local radio and dances.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in 1935 he had his own radio programme with the 'Red River Mates' on CJRC in Winnipeg, and in 1936 he and his band also broadcast over CKSB in St Boniface, Manitoba. In 1938, Dejarlis took violin lessons from Professor Rutherford in Winnipeg for six months; and during the 1930s and 1940s, he toured with his band in many communities in Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan; in 1946 and 1947, Dejarlis lived in Vancouver and performed as 'Andy De Jarlis and His Early Settlers' for old-time dances. He returned to Winnipeg in 1948, suffered from several bouts of ill health, but still performed regularly at old-time dances.<sup>8</sup>

In 1956 Dejarlis first recorded with Quality records,<sup>9</sup> and in 1959 he began a recording career with London records that lasted fifteen years. He moved to Montreal in 1962 to continue recording with London records and during this time he appeared on Don Messer's Jubilee and was featured on a television show on CFTM-TV in Montreal. In addition to his many recordings with his 'Early Settlers', he published three books of mainly original tunes (1961, 1963, and 1969). Dejarlis returned to Manitoba in 1965, receiving in his later years many awards and accolades for his recording career, compositions, and contributions to Manitoba (his tune titles make extensive use of Manitoba place names).<sup>10</sup>

Dejarlis's impact is seen in both the traditional dance repertoire as well as tunes associated with more recent dance forms such waltzes, polkas, two-steps, and fox trots. Of the tunes associated with accompanying traditional Métis dances, he recorded the 'Red River Jig', 'Drops of Brandy', a 'Duck Dance', and 'Whiskey Before Breakfast'. His version of the 'Red River Jig' is perhaps the most significant version influencing contemporary fiddlers' repertoires, and, to some, his versions of these traditional tunes have become the standard models to follow.

DeJarlis also recorded other tunes already in the local Manitoba repertoire. In addition to the jigs – ‘Romeo’s First Change’ and ‘House Party Jig’ – standards for square dance first changes, he recorded ‘Crossing the Ferry’ as a second change, ‘Wind that Turns the Mill’ as a breakdown, and ‘Trading Post Reel’ – all based on traditional tunes. In these cases, he did not attribute these tunes to himself, but in other cases, perhaps when he added to or refashioned significant portions of the tune, he claimed them as his own. For example, Anne Lederman cited ‘Grandpa’s Whiskers’ (jig) as well as parts of ‘Jack Pine Trail’ and ‘Pemmican Reel’ as likely to be already in the aural tradition in Manitoba.<sup>11</sup>

DeJarlis’s influence is quite pronounced among many fiddlers (Métis and non-Métis) in western Canada and beyond. At old-time jam sessions and fiddle contests, several DeJarlis tunes are consistently present: ‘Sunshine and Flowers’ (fox trot), ‘Manitoba Waltz’, ‘Lucky Trapper’s Reel’, ‘Rooster on the Fence’ (reel), ‘Poor Girl’s Waltz’, and ‘Sleeping Giant Two Step’ are just some of the many. Besides several Aboriginal fiddlers – Reg Bouvette, Alex Carriere, Mel Bedard, Cliff Maytwayashing, and John Arcand to name only a few – and several other western Canadian fiddlers have recorded DeJarlis tunes – Graham Townsend, Patti Lamoureux, and Calvin Vollrath. He was particularly known for his long and smooth phrases in waltzes (not a quality usually associated with the older Métis style), and his ‘Manitoba Waltz’ (one of many waltzes he created) won an award in 1967 from BMI. Even ‘down-east’ fiddler Don Messer produced a tribute album of DeJarlis tunes called *Manitoba’s Golden Boy*.<sup>12</sup>

DeJarlis’s style of fiddling has actually been characterised as conforming to the smooth sound of Don Messer to create a ‘synthesis of Messer’s “down-east” style with native and Métis repertoires’.<sup>13</sup> As Lederman observed, this conformity altered some of the traditional tunes so that they fit into the ‘straight’ 16-bar formula.<sup>14</sup> Along with his penning names to traditional tunes, this aspect of DeJarlis’s career is controversial – perhaps too harsh a qualifier since he is also a source of pride. Furthermore, even though DeJarlis’s tunes fit the standard in metric consistency and bar lengths, overlapping phrases (another feature attributed to traditional Métis fiddling) appear in many of the tunes he recorded. Also, some of his tunes do not divide into the symmetric two-measure motifs that guide the structure of many mainstream Canadian tunes (for example, ‘Lucky Trapper’s Reel’, ‘Pemmican Reel’, ‘Jolly Dolly Polka’, and ‘Bull Moose Reel’). Still, an impression exists that DeJarlis contributed to old fiddling ways ebbing out of practice, and, to some, these old ways are what makes this kind of fiddling intrinsically Aboriginal. Nonetheless, many fiddlers also distinguish Andy’s ‘Red River’ style – his way of bowing faster tunes, in particular – from the down-east style. Mel Bedard, another well-known and commercially-recorded fiddler from Manitoba, who had known DeJarlis, spoke of this particular style during his interview for the *Drops of Brandy* anthology:

It was jumpy sort of a thing [as compared to] [...] the Don Messer style, it was more smooth, more even flow, [...] this Red River style, distinctive notes,

individual notes stick out in the playing [...] so it differed very much from the down-east style. The down-east style is up tempo and the Red River style is nice danceable tempo [...] and the bowing is very different in it – very, very different.<sup>15</sup>

Andy Dejarlis was actually born Joseph Patrice Ephreme Desjarlais, a common Métis surname with ties to a Québec family active in North America's fur trading history.<sup>16</sup> Early on he used the anglicised 'De Jarlis' as his professional name, and Marcel Meilleur, who played with Dejarlis for many years as his harmony fiddler, recounted that Dejarlis had changed the spelling so that radio station announcers would not mispronounce it.<sup>17</sup> In 1971, he legally amended his name to Andrew Joseph Patrick Ephreme Dejarlis, likely for copyright purposes.<sup>18</sup> On his albums and tune books, he described his fiddle style as 'Red River Valley' and made no direct references to his own Métis heritage. Perhaps he concealed this aspect of his identity as a necessity, especially early in his career when the stigma of having such a heritage remained high.

As I discuss at length in my dissertation, many Métis people have hidden or were not fully aware of their Métis heritage – some up until quite recently, consciously, and others only because their parents had hidden or denied this aspect of their heritage in order to shield them from the negativity that they or their own parents had faced.<sup>19</sup> Watson's brief account of Andy Dejarlis's life indicates that at least by 1970, he did not shy away from acknowledging his heritage, and 'some of the proceeds from his playing were given to the Winnipeg Friendship and Métis Centre'.<sup>20</sup> Still, Mel Bedard was the first to directly allude to this heritage with his album *Métis Fiddler* in 1980; and Bedard told me in an informal conversation that the reason no one had done this before him was that they were still ashamed. Furthermore, the related stigma coming from the perception of what is and is not 'proper' rhythm in fiddling could have played a part in Dejarlis not acknowledging this heritage. As mentioned above, traditional Métis fiddling is known for its asymmetric phrases, which to fiddlers coming from more mainstream Canadian fiddling backgrounds sounds as if beats are added or dropped. Dejarlis can be seen as having created a more commercially-marketable style, or as John Arcand described it 'a modernised version of Métis fiddling', that downplays some qualities now associated with the older style of Métis fiddling.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, some of Dejarlis's tunes provide fodder of a different kind. Many reference particular places and people, some closely tied to Dejarlis's personal experiences.<sup>22</sup> Others can be seen as historical indexes to fur trading, Métis heritage, or even Indianness; and the reels 'Road to Batoche', 'Louis Riel', and 'Coureur de Bois', the 'Fort Gary Jig', the 'Fort Ellice Waltz', as well as the 'Red River Cart' (polka) are all obvious pointers by their names alone. With the inclusion of hunting and trapping lifestyles in this scope, so too are 'Lucky Trapper's Reel', 'Bull Moose' (reel), 'Caribou Reel', 'Pemmican Reel', 'Buckskin Reel', and 'Buffalo Chase'. 'Moccasin Reel', 'Totem Pole Reel', 'Sitting Bull', 'Wigwam Polka', and 'Flaming Arrow' (reel) have Indian-themed titles that, as in some of the other tunes, could be dually interpreted

as Métis *and* Indian themes. This list designates tunes that are mostly quick and upbeat and generally exhibit the ‘jumpy’ feel that Mel Bedard alluded to for the Red River Valley style above.

Many of these tunes have additional sound signatures: the fast tunes – with the exception of ‘The Lucky Trapper’s Reel’ and ‘Red River Cart’ (polka) – are all either in minor keys, relatively rare in the repertoire, or they make use of non-major modes or minor phrases. The fiddlers I worked with generally recognise tunes as having a certain key and speak in terms of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ keys. They also recognise shifts in the tonal structure within tunes and speak to their accompanists (piano or guitar) in terms of minor and major chords. Shifting from a major to a minor key or a different tonality (mode) is actually quite common in the older repertoire, a feature often attributed to Scottish tunes. For example, the traditional ‘Wind that Turns the Mill’, a tune that Andy DeJarlis recorded as a breakdown on one of his square-dance albums, shifts in and out of modal phrases in the second part; and ‘Caber Feigh’, an old Scottish tune that Anne Lederman found in a few fiddlers’ repertoires for quadrille accompaniment, also shifts between modes in its first part. DeJarlis utilised this shifting tonality in many of the tunes he created (or refashioned) such as in ‘Woodridge Breakdown’, ‘Stern Wheeler’, ‘Surveyor’s Reel’, ‘The Merry Scotchman Breakdown’, ‘Blueberry Jig’, ‘Pierre’s Special’, and many others.

Still, I suggest that in some tunes DeJarlis’s use of these keys and phrases signified more than a nod to traditional melodic qualities in (Scottish) fiddling, but also the widespread tradition of marking exotic and primitive ‘others’ in Western classical and popular music. As musicologist Michael Pisani has mapped out in *Imagining Native America in Music*, the bag of tricks available for representing ‘others’ in European music was transferred to the musical sounds of ‘the Indian’ emerging during the nineteenth century into what he calls ‘the war dance trope’ in classical and popular music. By DeJarlis’s time, ‘the Indian’ had been conventionalised into a small but potent set of musical cues – indexes to ‘tom-tom’ drumming through percussion or pulsing instrumental fifths (the first of four beats always heavily accented), the use of minor modes or gapped scales (a holdover from exoticism in European music), recurring rhythmic or ornamental motifs, and the use of descending phrases. These sounds of ‘the Indian’ were prevalent in popular musicals and films early in the twentieth century into the 1960s and beyond.<sup>23</sup> Pisani explains the various threads contributing to these set of conventions: European exoticism (representing nearby peasants as well as more distant easterners) combined with military marches as well as ethnographic and more exhibition-style representations/performances of American Indian instruments and music. Although Pisani did not include North American fiddling as a part of his musical analysis, the marking of ‘Indian Other’ is evident in several tunes with ‘Indian’ or ‘squaw’ in their titles across many North American traditions. Furthermore, some of these stereotypical musical qualities have some basis in Native musical practice (such as the use of descending phrases); besides Lederman, Alan Jabbour has argued Amerindian influences are evident in the cascading melodies in the fiddling traditions of the Upper South.<sup>24</sup>

The most obvious instance of DeJarlis using the war-dance trope comes with his recording of 'Sitting Bull' on *Red River Echoes* recorded sometime in the early 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Before the reel begins, we hear a man state, 'Me ... Big Chief ... Sitting Bull' in stilted, Hollywood Indian talk followed immediately by bass drums beating the familiar tom-tom rhythm. The fiddle then launches into a very quick and catchy A-minor reel with descending phrases in the first section, and lower rhythmic fifths in the second section. After the fiddle ends, we hear the piano play three notes (two low, shorter 'As' and then a longer, higher 'E' – again a fifth) before the recurring tom-toms again sound and fade away.

Other examples appear on *Swing Your Partners* and *Travelling West*, albums that DeJarlis recorded at least a decade later.<sup>26</sup> *Swing Your Partners* includes 'Road to Batoche', an E-minor tune that again makes use of the prelude and fading postlude of tom-toms; while *Travelling West* features the reels 'Louis Riel' and 'Flaming Arrow'. 'Louis Riel' is also in E-minor (with three parts instead of the ubiquitous two), and features many of the same motifs as 'Road to Batoche,' which makes sense considering their titles. Unlike 'Sitting Bull' and 'Road to Batoche,' only three beats (short-short-long) played alongside an accordion's E-minor chord sound before the fiddling starts, but following the fiddling at the end the familiar tom-toms fade away. The tune itself is quite dramatic: its first section starting on the lower strings, the shorter middle section moves into higher pitches, until the pinnacle effect of the final section that introduces the highest tones, double stops, and the most variation in phrasing, to finally end in descent back to where the tune began.

The recording of 'Flaming Arrow' strays from the other tunes in that it lacks tom-toms and overall the tune is not in a minor key. However, minor (or non-major) phrases appear at opportune moments: after starting out in D-major, the tune moves into an E-minor interlude; in the second section a similar melodic shift occurs, but this time it is a shorter and even more shocking inclusion of a five-note (possibly D-minor) phrase. The jarring effect of these phrases (especially the second) and the title of the tune lead me to believe DeJarlis was again creating more Indian imagery with their inclusion. Appendix 1 presents all DeJarlis's tunes with Indian or Métis imagery suggested in their titles, of which I am aware, and that make use of minor keys or other non-major modes. Because I do not have access to all of DeJarlis's recordings, in some cases my analysis was based on his published tune books or other fiddlers' recordings or versions.

Until closely listening to DeJarlis's recorded version of 'Sitting Bull', I did not consider that DeJarlis (and/or members of his band) may also have been incorporating the popular and stereotypical sonic markings of Indians and Western themes into his tunes. Rather, I had conceptualised many of them as a group alongside other more recent compositions by John Arcand (as I believe many familiar with these tunes do). As Pisani related in the concluding pages of *Imagining Native America in Music*, the indexical properties of musical stereotypes do not emanate on the basis of (ethnocentric) ideologies alone but also on their affective qualities, or as he

wrote, the 'pleasure in musical sounds and the recognition of recurring tropes and ideological patterns'.<sup>27</sup>

I believe contemporary fiddlers' appreciation of these particular DeJarlis tunes have more to do with the uniqueness of these tunes rather than the stereotypical imagery these kinds of musical tropes were perhaps meant, at one time, to evoke. Rather, I would argue that these tunes are interesting and influential fusions of musical allusions; and in contemporary practice, these tunes have become unmoored from their most blatantly stereotypical contexts (the tom-tom frame) and continue to be played and recorded by Métis and First Nations fiddlers (and others). Further, the affect that DeJarlis (and his band-mates) were trying to convey with these recordings is rather difficult to fully establish without the full context of their performance(s) and intentions. For example, the minor key as well as the overall dramatic build up in 'Louis Riel' reel suggests that DeJarlis was also trying to convey the sombre and dramatic events of Louis Riel's life; and a similar interpretation could be applied to the evocative properties of 'Road to Batoche', which could include an additional layer of meaning, referencing DeJarlis's own travels to this highly charged location in Métis cultural memory.

### **John Arcand**

John Arcand is now well recognised in Western Canada for his promotion of traditional Métis fiddling as well as for his own fiddle compositions. I first met John Arcand as a student in his class at the Emma Lake Fiddle Camp in northern Saskatchewan in 2000, which I also attended in 2001 and 2002.<sup>28</sup> In 2000, I attended his third annual Fiddle Fest near Saskatoon; I have attended every year since, except in 2006.<sup>29</sup> As with DeJarlis, I will briefly characterise John Arcand's fiddling career before discussing his compositions.

Born over a generation later than DeJarlis in 1942, near the Debden-Big River region of northwestern Saskatchewan, John Arcand began fiddling at a young age – mimicking his uncles, father, and grandfather's playing at house parties. He recalled he and his brothers pulling down a particularly rough fiddle off the wall with a broom handle so that he could practice; and by the age of twelve, Arcand had begun to play for dances as well. Although he continued to be an active player at dances and other venues such as at 'Back to Batoche' during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, his primary income came from working in the logging industry, and it was only recently that he has been able to dedicate his career to fiddling. Early turning points in his career came with his first solo recording, which references a DeJarlis tune (*Road to Batoche: Centennial Year 1985*),<sup>30</sup> as well as being hired as one of the first fiddle instructors at the Emma Lake Fiddle Camp in Saskatchewan in 1988. During this period he also began to compose tunes, and to date he has composed over 300 and has recorded fourteen solo albums.<sup>31</sup> Besides recording his and others' fiddle compositions, Arcand's recordings also feature tunes he remembers his father and grandfather playing, and other traditional dance tunes; and his last eight recordings include a version of the 'Red River Jig'.



Arcand's fiddling career really took off during the late 1990s, when he also began to step up his efforts in fiddle and dance preservation. While living in Greencourt, Alberta, in 1997, he began his first fiddle festival as a part of these efforts. He continued the festival annually when he moved back to Saskatchewan in 1998, the event growing each year. In 1999, he instigated what became the *Drops of Brandy* project through the auspices of the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatchewan. Also in 1999, he was invited to the Fiddles of the World Conference in Halifax to represent Western Canada and in 2001 he travelled to Dublin as a 'delegate in an Irish/Métis Cultural Exchange'. At this stage in his career, he regularly travels to several fiddle contests, fiddle camps, workshop and festival settings as a performer, judge, and teacher, in Canada and in the United States. Recently, his efforts have been recognised through several awards such as the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Arts and Culture and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Canadian Grand Masters' fiddle championship, both given to him in 2003; in 2005 he was given a Saskatchewan Centennial Medal, and in 2008 he received the Order of Canada.<sup>32</sup> Probably his most well-known tunes are 'Big Bear' and 'Grey Owl', two tunes similar to the above grouping of upbeat DeJarlis compositions. 'Grey Owl' and other Arcand tunes have been featured in his own tune books as well as in *Canadian Fiddle Music*.<sup>33</sup>

John Arcand's respect for DeJarlis's compositions can be seen in his recording of several DeJarlis's tunes over the years (see Appendix 1 for some of these), as well as his inclusion of a DeJarlis-specific fiddle tune contest at his Fiddle Fest in 2005, the contest requiring fiddlers to play two DeJarlis tunes, a waltz and a tune of choice. In 2008 and 2009, a group emulating the old recordings of Andy DeJarlis performed as 'the Red River Mates' from Manitoba for one of the nightly old-time dances. DeJarlis has also been an inspiration to Arcand as a composer, since many of Arcand's compositions have a similar sound to DeJarlis's tunes in their use of minors and related rhythmic patterns: he has also taken up DeJarlis's manner of signalling Aboriginal themes through his tune titles. Thus, one of the affective (as well as iconic and indexical) qualities of these tunes is their likeness to DeJarlis's earlier works.

Appendix 2 presents the set of Arcand's tunes I have identified as featuring similar thematic and musical qualities as DeJarlis's tunes presented in Appendix 1. However, some distinctions exist between these two sets of compositions. For one, Arcand's tune titles tend to be more context-specific. All except 'Distance Drums' relate to a place, event, or person(s), or a combination of these kinds of references, whereas many of DeJarlis tune titles ('Moccasin Reel', 'Totem Pole Reel', 'Wigwam Polka', and so on) have more generalised connotations. Furthermore, Arcand's recent recording of 'Distant Drums', composed in 1993, includes a traditional Cree Drum song for the introductory

and postlude frames, a definite move away from the stereotypical tom-toms found in Dejarlis's earlier recordings.<sup>34</sup>

Probably because of his own background, Arcand's historical tune references are often Saskatchewan-based. For example, 'Big Bear' references the nineteenth-century Cree leader who refused to sign Treaty 6 in 1876 and was later unfairly implicated in the 1885 North-West Rebellion, and 'Cut Knife Hill' refers to the site of a battle, east of current day Battleford, Saskatchewan, during the North-West Rebellion, where the Canadian military attacked a Cree group by surprise.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the tunes listed above, several other Arcand tunes in major keys point to historic themes, Métis cultural icons, or Métis leaders through their titles. For example, 'Northcote Reel' refers to the famous steamboat used for munitions against the Métis fighters during the 1885 'rebellion' (some Métis refer to this as a resistance) that in 1886 ended up beached near Cumberland House. Besides the appendix-listed 'Yvon Dumont', a well-known Manitoba Métis leader, who also became Manitoba's Lieutenant-Governor, Arcand has composed 'Vitale Morin's Reel', 'Medric McDougall's Jig', and 'Harry Daniels' – all based on leaders who have been active in Métis political organizations. In addition, 'Les Michif' points to both the language and term sometimes also used to identify Métis peoples, and 'The Stolen Bell of Batoche' refers to the bell from the church at Batoche that ended up in Ontario because some Canadian soldiers took it as battle-pickings after the 1885 rebellion.

I asked John Arcand about the creative process of composing and titling tunes, and he had difficulty in explaining this process as a set schema of events.<sup>36</sup> In response to whether the tune came first and then later a title, he said that 'sometimes the tune is first, sometimes the person or place is in [...] mind before the tune'. He also emphasised that these types of tunes (those with historical/ personal names) very definitely have a story or some sort of personal significance to him, pointing to many of the tunes on his newly released *Les Michif* in 2006 named for particular people. *Les Michif* features 'Gerald White's Memorial Duck Dance', 'Harry Daniels', 'Blaine's Breakdown', 'Rene Gaudreault', all tribute tunes to these individuals.<sup>37</sup> Harry Daniels was a well-known Métis activist and political leader, who played a part in Canada's constitutional recognition of Métis through the Native Council of Canada. Daniels passed away in 2004, and Arcand said of Daniels and his passing, 'he was a great friend and a true Canadian Métis leader', and that 'he felt compelled to somehow capture [...] in a tune in his honour'. Arcand was working from his own respect of and experiences with Harry Daniels to create a tribute tune: and the fact that Daniels had a lively personality and would kick up his heels to jig from time to time also comes through in this tune.

In other cases in titling, tunes have remained nameless until particular circumstances lent themselves to a title. For example, Arcand had been playing a newly-composed tune around the time that two young Montana fiddlers and their father (a guitar player) visited for a week to study with him as a Métis fiddling mentor. The tune is primarily in E minor, similar to a number of Arcand's tunes

listed in Appendix 2 that these young fiddlers were already playing. Thus, naming the tune 'Fox Family Reel', after this enthusiastic family of musicians, made sense as well as marked the occasion of their visit.<sup>38</sup>

These tunes are recent examples of the many tunes Arcand has composed referencing people and places significant to him, and looking at his compositions over time, it is possible to get a sense of his travels, and the places, people, and events he has interacted with by the titles alone. Colin Quigley examined the creative process associated with composing fiddle tunes through his intense study of Newfoundland fiddler Emile Benoit, and he found that, like Arcand, Benoit's titles pointed to 'the places, communities, roads, and natural landmarks that framed his life; the people he wished to entertain are memorialised in the titles of the tunes they enjoyed; and crucial experiences that exemplify his values and beliefs are recalled by tunes named for them.'<sup>39</sup> Quigley argued that although tune titling is an understudied aspect of fiddle traditions, it is 'an important meaning-giving act through which the musician and the audience connect the musical experience of the fiddle tune with their other individual and shared worlds of experience.'<sup>40</sup> Arcand and, I believe, most fiddler-composers title many of their tunes to connect to specific people, events, times, and places based on personal experiences. Yet, in the case of the Métis-themed or Aboriginal-themed titles based on historical events, Arcand did not personally experience these events, although he does have familial and commemorative experiences that provide connections to these historic events.

### **The evolving legacies of DeJarlis and Arcand**

Métis fiddling can be seen as a tradition that has undergone several levels of mixing, and as having undergone several transformations. In its beginning phases, this musical form combined both indigenous and European musical influences in a syncretic fiddle and dance practice. Additional layers of music and dance influences were added to this mix over time, and eventually certain aspects of past fiddling practices were negated because of outside influences, as certain fiddlers broadened their audience base. Aspects of Andy DeJarlis's career exemplified this phase. However, as Métis fiddling (and Aboriginal fiddling more generally) has become valued as a distinct tradition, the stigma of playing tunes the old way or 'out of metre' has receded and is now embraced. Furthermore, some of DeJarlis's compositions as well as his recording of traditional tunes indicate he was not completely accommodating to the down-east style associated with more mainstream Canadian fiddling. Indeed, DeJarlis's career (and others after him) can be seen as creating new fusions of fiddle practice combining local and more mainstream stylistics. Fiddlers have not ignored DeJarlis's compositions because of some of his accommodations to mainstream Canadian fiddling; rather, fiddlers continue to play DeJarlis tunes, tunes from other Métis fiddlers who emulated DeJarlis's career, as well as other popular tunes coming from outside the local, traditional nexus.

However, now that there is some momentum for the old ways to be celebrated and continued, new fusions are taking place. John Arcand's career can be seen as

a more conscious acknowledgement of these various influences in Métis fiddling. Arcand has recorded Andy Dejarlis, Marcel Meilleur, Reg Bouvette, and other commercially-successful fiddlers' tunes; and he has also composed in this more mainstream style. Nevertheless, he has also recorded many 'crooked' traditional tunes that he learned from his father, uncles, and other fiddlers he has known personally; and lately he has used the older traditional aesthetics in Métis fiddling as models, in that he has begun composing tunes based on non-standard tunings and asymmetric phrasings. For example, his fourteenth album *Meeeyashin* includes 'Le Bonhomme', an upbeat tune with many overlapping phrases, definitely not in the standard 16-bar mode; and in the album notes Arcand wrote that when he 'composed "Le Bonhomme" it really sounded like a good ole Métis tune and made me think of my father and grandfather, so the title seemed fitting'.<sup>41</sup>

The world that Arcand links to in composing and naming fiddle tunes includes an expansive view of a past beyond his own lifetime: they provide an additional *affect*, another layer of meaning for fiddlers/listeners to contemplate with their performance. With these particular titles, Arcand evokes the significance of these past people, places, and events, and I believe relates to his way of marking out both a significant fiddling heritage and a significant Métis heritage. His compositions create social worlds manifesting his own historical consciousness of Métis and First Nations heritage.

## Appendix 1 Aboriginal themes and non-major modes in DeJarlis tunes

### DeJarlis tunes mostly in a Minor key \*also recorded by John Arcand

Sitting Bull	A minor with some G Major in both parts ( <i>Red River Echoes</i> , vol. II, [n.d.], London Records of Canada, EB 5, circa early1960s)
Caribou Reel*	E minor ( <i>Andy De Jarlis' Canadian Fiddle Tunes from the Red River Valley</i> 1958, Toronto, Ont.: BMI Canada, p. 5)
Road to Batoche*	E minor ( <i>Swing Your Partners</i> n.d., London Records of Canada, EBX 4174, circa early 1970s)
Totem Pole Reel	fluctuates between D Maj and E min (DeJarlis <i>Good Old Time Music</i> [n.d.], London Records of Canada, EBX 4109, circa late-1960s)
Bull Moose*	fluctuates between D Major and E minor ( <i>The Happy Old Days</i> 1974D, London Records of Canada, EBX 4190)
Louis Riel*	E minor ( <i>Travelling West</i> 1974D, London Records of Canada, EBX 4185)

### DeJarlis tunes with non-major parts

Wigwam Polka	B minor first part; D Major second part ( <i>Canadian Fiddle Tunes</i> 1961)
Coureur de Bois	Fluctuates between E Major and F# minor in first part / D Major second part ( <i>Andy De Jarlis' Canadian Fiddle Tunes from the Red River Valley</i> 1961, Toronto, Ontario: BMI Canada, p. 12)
Moccasin Reel*	D Major with E minor phrases in both parts ( <i>Andy De Jarlis' Canadian Fiddle Tunes from the Red River Valley</i> 1958, Toronto, Ont.: BMI Canada, p. 19)
Buckskin Reel	D Major with brief non-major phase in second part ( <i>Early Settlers Old Time Tunes</i> [n.d.], London Records of Canada, EBX 4185, circa early to mid-1960s)
Buffalo Chase	F Major with G minor (or other non-major) shadings in first part ( <i>Jolly Old Time Music</i> [n.d.], London Records of Canada, EB102, circa mid-1960s)
Pemmican Reel	D Major with brief non-major phrase in second part ( <i>Andy's Centennial Album</i> [n.d.], London Records of Canada, EB108 circa 1967)
Flaming Arrow	D Major with E minor phrase in first part and brief phrase in second part ( <i>Travelling West</i> 1974D, London Records of Canada, EBX 4185)

\*also in *John Arcand: Métis and Old Tyme Fiddle Tunes*, vols 1–41 (1996)

## Appendix 2 Arcand tunes that use Aboriginal themes as well as minor keys or phrasings

Batoche Centennial Reel	G major with A minor phrasings ( <i>John Arcand Metis and Old tyme fiddle tunes, vol. 4</i> 1996, Alberta, CA: Maritime Publishers, p. 12)
Battle of Batoche	G major with A minor phrasings ( <i>John Arcand Metis and Old tyme fiddle tunes, vol. 4</i> 1996, Alberta, CA: Maritime Publishers, p. 10)
Big Bear	E minor with D major phrases ( <i>Traditionally Yours</i> 2001, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Right Tracks Studio, JA-007)
Grey Owl	fluctuates between D major, E minor and B minor ( <i>Traditionally Yours</i> 2001, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Right Tracks Studio, JA-007)
Distant Drums	E minor with D major and B minor phrases ( <i>Original and Traditional</i> 2004, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Right Tracks Studio, JA-010)
Yvon Dumont	E minor with D major phrases ( <i>Vicki and Me</i> 2005, Hague, Saskatchewan: Keyteck Studios, JA-012)
La Reel de Grande Baptiste	G major first part, E minor second part ( <i>John Arcand Metis and Old tyme fiddle tunes, vol. 4</i> 1996, Alberta, CA: Maritime Publishers, p. 12)
Cut Knife Hill	E minor ( <i>Original and Traditional</i> 2004, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Right Tracks Studio, JA-010)
Fox Family Reel	E minor 1st part, G Major 2 <sup>nd</sup> part ( <i>Thru the Years</i> 2005, Hague, Saskatchewan: Keyteck Studios, JA-011)
Les Moccasin	G major with D minor phrases ( <i>Meeyashin</i> 2007, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Desmond Lagace Studios, JA-014)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Quick, 'Performing Heritage: Métis Music, Dance and Identity in a Multicultural State' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 2009), pp. 131–41. The research that went into this paper would not have been possible without the generosity of Vicki and John Arcand, as well as access to a number of Andy DeJarlis records through Phil Katz, who gave me access to the Cleven collection of DeJarlis LPs in the Washington Old Time Fiddlers' Association archives.

<sup>2</sup> Roy W. Gibbons, *Folk Fiddling in Canada, a Sampling* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Anne Lederman, 'Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Two Manitoba Communities: Camperville and Ebb and Flow' (unpublished master's thesis, York University, 1986); Anne Lederman, 'Indian and Métis Fiddling in Manitoba: Origins, Structure, and the Question of Syncretism,' *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 8, no. 2 (1988), 205–30; Anne Lederman,

'Native and Métis Fiddling: Portrait of a People,' *Fiddler Magazine*, Winter issue (2001/2002), 3–10.

<sup>4</sup> Nicolas Vrooman, *Plains Chippewa/Métis Music from Turtle Mountain* (Smithsonian Folkways, SF40411, 1992); Lynn Whidden, *Métis Songs: Visiting was the Métis Way* (Regina, Saskatchewan: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1993); Leah Dorion-Paquin and others, *Drops of Brandy: An Anthology of Métis Music* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2002); Byron Dueck, 'Public and Intimate Sociability in First Nations and Métis Fiddling,' *Ethnomusicology*, 51, no. 1 (2007), 30–63; Quick, 'Performing Heritage'; Anne Lederman, 'Aboriginal Fiddling in the North: Two Traditions,' in this volume; Craig Mishler, *The Crooked Stovepipe: Athapaskan Fiddle Music and Square Dancing in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> Reverend Franceene Watson, 'Red River Valley Fiddler Andy De Jarlis: His Musical Legacy Touched by New Dimensions,' *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin*, 33, no. 2 (1997), 16–22 (p. 20).

<sup>7</sup> Marcel Meilleur, 'Fond Recollections of Fiddling Great Andy DeJarlis,' in *Red River Echoes: the Life and Music of Marcel Meilleur*, ed. by David Dandeneau (Manitoba: Pemmican Publications, 2003), pp. 41–50 (p. 43); Watson (1997), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Meilleur (2003), pp. 45, 47; Watson (1997), pp. 17–18.

<sup>9</sup> Although every biographical account mentions that DeJarlis first recorded for Quality records, I have not been able to find the titles of any of these recordings.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Green, 'DeJarlis, Andy,' in *The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/emc/index-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/emc/index-e.html) [accessed 28 February 2009]; Watson (1997), p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Lederman, *Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Western Manitoba*, Falcon Productions CD387, 2003. This collection is a commercial re-release of Lederman's 1986 field recordings.

<sup>12</sup> Don Messer, *A Tribute to Manitoba's Golden Boy: Andy De Jarlis*, MCA Records, MCA 7014, Willowdale, Ontario, [n.d.].

<sup>13</sup> Green, 'DeJarlis, Andy'.

<sup>14</sup> Lederman, 'Native and Métis Fiddling: Portrait of a People', p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Melbard Bedard, interview by Herb Lafferty for Gabriel Dumont Institute, 9 August 2001 [www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/06745.pdf](http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/06745.pdf) [accessed 28 February 2009].

<sup>16</sup> Green, 'DeJarlis, Andy'; for research on Desjarlais ancestry, see Heather Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1660–1900* (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Meilleur (2003), p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Green, 'DeJarlis, Andy'.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Quick, 'Performing Heritage', pp. 108–11.

<sup>20</sup> Watson (1997), p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> John Arcand, interviewed by author, telephone interview, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan/Columbia, South Carolina, 20 March 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Watson (1997), p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2005); see also Philip Deloria, 'The Hills Are Alive with the Sounds of Indian Music,' in *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004), pp. 183–223.

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<sup>24</sup> Lederman, 'Indian and Métis Fiddling in Manitoba', pp. 205–30; Alan Jabbour, 'Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier,' in *Driving the Bow: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 2*, ed. Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger (Aberdeen, Scotland: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2008), pp. 4–13.

<sup>25</sup> There is no date on this LP; however, according to Meilleur (2003, p. 37), the album was recorded between 1961 and 1962.

<sup>26</sup> Andy Dejarlis, *Swing Your Partners*, London Records of Canada, EBX 4174 [n.d.]. Andy Dejarlis, *Travelling West*. London Records of Canada, EBX 4185, 1974.

<sup>27</sup> Pisani (2005), p. 331.

<sup>28</sup> The Saskatchewan Cultural Exchange Society, which sponsored the Emma Lake Fiddle Camp since 1987, moved the camp to a new location in 2006 in order to save costs, and as of 2009 this camp was no longer operating either.

<sup>29</sup> See [www.johnarcandfiddlefest.com/](http://www.johnarcandfiddlefest.com/) [accessed 28 February 2009].

<sup>30</sup> John Arcand, *Road to Batoche: Centennial 85* (North Battleford, Saskatchewan: Cana Song Recording, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> John Arcand, interviewed by author, Emma Lake, Saskatchewan, 28 June 2000; Maria Campbell also highlighted the Arcand family of fiddlers in her biographical account, see *Hal reed* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> 'John Arcand, "Master of the Métis Fiddle,"' [www.johnarcand.com/bio.html](http://www.johnarcand.com/bio.html) [accessed 23 February 2009].

<sup>33</sup> John Arcand, *John Arcand Metis and Old tyme fiddle tunes, vol.1- 4* (Alberta, CA: Maritime Publishers, 1996); Edward Whitcomb, *Canadian Fiddle Music* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Arcand (1996), p. 16; John Arcand, *Original and Traditional*, Right Tracks Studio, JA-010, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> For a reconstruction of this surprise attack see Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary, Alberta: Fifth House Publishers, 1997), pp. 126, 140–42.

<sup>36</sup> This communication took place via e-mail and phone conversation through the help of Arcand's wife Vicki since at the time John was teaching at a fiddle camp. She asked him questions (over the phone) that I had given her via e-mail; she then typed his answers, and sent them back to me via e-mail. All quotes in this paragraph stem from the e-mail on 5 July 2006.

<sup>37</sup> John Arcand, *Les Michif*, Desmond Lagace Studios, JA-013, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> This Fox family visit occurred in Spring 2004, but the earlier visit was noted in my summer fieldnotes for 2004 when I later visited John and Vicki Arcand during the Fiddle Fest.

<sup>39</sup> Colin Quigley, *Music from the Heart: Compositions of a Folk Fiddler* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> Quigley (1995), p. 97.

<sup>41</sup> John Arcand, *Meeyashin*, Desmond Lagace Studios, JA-014, 2007.



## Aboriginal fiddling in the North: the two traditions

ANNE LEDERMAN

This is a preliminary report, undertaken initially under the auspices of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Evidence so far indicates two distinct fiddle and dance traditions: one active throughout the First Nations communities of the Mackenzie Delta, and one further south in the Métis communities around Great Slave Lake. The first is characterized by more asymmetric tunes, greater retention of older dance forms, faster tempos, and a 'one-step' approach to jigging; whereas the second has sequences of more distinct jigging steps and stronger ties to prairie Métis traditions. However, in both areas, the 'old style' is giving way to a two-step and waltz repertoire based on popular country/western songs, though still maintaining some of the rhythmic characteristics of the older music.

The Northwest Territories (NWT) and the Yukon cover approximately 1,655,000 square km, and have a population of only about 75,000 people (see Figure 1). The Aboriginal population ranges from approximately 20% in the Yukon, to about 50% in the NWT. This includes all three Aboriginal groups: Inuit, First Nations, and Métis, with the largest concentration of Inuit being in the most northerly regions and the majority of Métis in the south.<sup>1</sup> Although there are a couple of well-known Inuit fiddlers, namely, Colin Adjun of Kugluktuk and Frank Cockney (now deceased), it quickly became clear that fiddle traditions are strongest among the other two groups: First Nations, especially the Gwich'in First Nation of the Mackenzie Delta (a large area crossing the borders of Alaska, Yukon and the NWT) and the

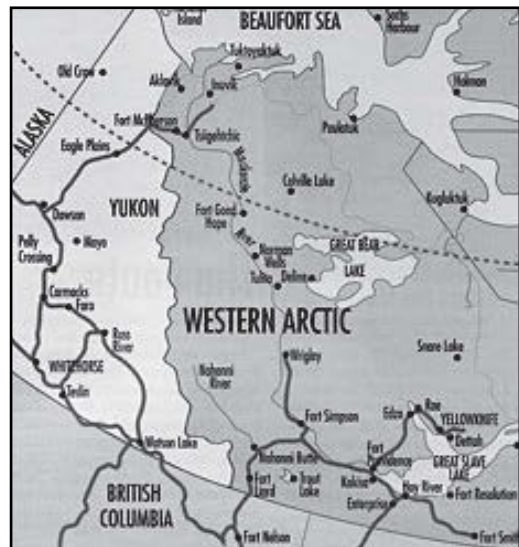


Figure 1 Map of Yukon and the Northwest Territories<sup>2</sup>

Métis of the Great Slave Lake area. Therefore, I will focus on these two groups: the two traditions.

By piecing together historical accounts, we can safely say that Aboriginal communities in the North developed their practices originally by adapting the Scottish and French Canadian tunes and dances that arrived with traders, explorers, and adventurers from Québec, the Prairies, and Scotland – the Shetland and Orkney Islands (especially the latter) in the mid-nineteenth century. These traditions were then refracted through the prism of an Aboriginal aesthetic, as in many other parts of Canada. Whereas in many other places much of the old dance tradition is gone or only dimly remembered, in some communities in the North, such as Old Crow, it still thrives. This enabled me to see, in 2007, many of the dances I had only heard described in Manitoba in the mid-1980s. Furthermore, the sparse population across the north means both that communities are quite isolated, and that ‘everyone knows everyone else’s business’, so to speak, making it almost the perfect ‘Petri dish’ for this sort of study. In short, the conditions that prevailed throughout much of the Prairie Provinces in the nineteenth century, where many of the same dances and tunes have been documented, still exist,<sup>3</sup> to some extent, in the north, though with the added complication of modern technology. Thus, the North not only offers the opportunity to see and hear some of the oldest-style expressions of Aboriginal fiddle and dance traditions in North America, but also, perhaps, an accelerated version of their transformation.

I have divided the basic tune repertoire in the North into three historical waves. The first wave consists of the tunes used for older Scottish and/or French-Canadian dances. The second wave includes common North American fiddle tunes generally used for ‘square’ dancing which appear to have entered the repertoire somewhat later.<sup>4</sup> The third wave is the even newer two-step, foxtrot and waltz repertoire, largely adapted from popular Country songs. Historically, these waves apply to both traditions, but they differ in current practice, as we shall see.

### **The Gwitchin tradition in Old Crow**

Gwitchin fiddle and dance practices in Alaska and Canada are the subject of a long-term study by Craig Mishler, published in his thorough and enlightening book *The Crooked Stovepipe*.<sup>5</sup> Most of the dances he documented, I was able to witness in the community of Old Crow, Yukon, in July 2007. It was clear that his description of Gwitchin dance practices is still relevant for Old Crow twenty-one years later, for the most part. Similarly, some of the tunes in Old Crow are variants of the tunes Mishler has published, although others are different.<sup>6</sup> Often the Old Crow versions I heard were more ‘standard’ in form, though still generally somewhat ‘asymmetric,’ that is, consisting of phrases of irregular lengths.

Old Crow is an isolated, fly-in settlement of about 300 people. They held their first Old Crow Fiddle Festival over the weekend of 1 July 2007, featuring four days of continuous activity: feasts, music and dance. Fiddlers consisted of the four main local players – Ben Charlie (who no longer lives in the community), Doug Charlie (whose wedding on the Saturday put a one-day pause in the festival), Allan Benjamin, and

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Harold Frost<sup>7</sup> – as well as several players from other Gwitchin communities<sup>8</sup> and a few outsiders such as myself, who were all pressed into musical service at various times. Fiddlers started performing about one o'clock in the afternoon and rotated each hour throughout the day. The music stopped only for a couple of hours for the evening meal around 7.00 pm, when huge trays of caribou, moose, beaver, muskrat, and whitefish were heaped on the tables. Dancing began in earnest after that, and continued until about 4.00 am each morning.

There are some interesting things to note about the fiddle repertoire in Old Crow:

- a. All the tunes are in the keys of A, D or G major. There are no minor keys, though A mixolydian does turn up occasionally, as in the tune of Allan Benjamin's 'Boil 'em Dzeegyuu Down' ('dzeegyuu' is the Gwitchin word for rhubarb – see Figure 2).
- b. Most of the tunes have asymmetric phrasing, even the most popular Country songs.
- c. Two altered tunings are still used, often even for newer Country tunes. Either the bottom string goes up to A, giving (from lowest pitch) A D A E, or both bottom strings go up, giving A E A E.
- d. Tempos are fast, with reels between 126 and 132bpm, and two-steps between 126–132bpm.

Figure 2 'Boil 'Em Dzeegyuu Down', composed and played by Allan Benjamin, Old Crow<sup>9</sup>

### **The first wave: old Scottish/French dance tunes**

Since the tunes in this group are inextricably associated with particular dances, and since the dances often offer as much or more evidence about the origin, history, and transmission of the music as the tunes themselves, I feel it necessary to explain their execution in some detail. As far as we can tell, these dances all came into the north with early traders, largely in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company who had established posts in the Northwest Territories by 1804, and moved westward into the interior of Yukon and Alaska by the mid 1840s. These early Hudson's Bay employees tended to be of either French-Canadian ancestry (having come up overland from southern Canada), or Scots, many of them young men from the Orkney Islands.<sup>10</sup> There is evidence that all of these dances (with the possible exception of this particular version of the Double Jig) were done throughout the Prairies at one time, and most are in the repertoires of revival Métis dance ensembles on the Prairies.<sup>11</sup> My guess is that most of the tunes also date back to the mid-to-late nineteenth century, though they may have evolved greatly since then. The following is a brief description of the dances and tunes in this group, as done in Old Crow.

On the correspondence of dance figures and tunes, my sense is that dancers in Old Crow generally change figures as they perceive the tune going to a new section, and fiddlers sometimes adapt the length of their sections to where the dancers are, but it is an inexact science at best.

#### **1. 'The Red River Jig' ('Jig Ahtsi Ch'aadzaa')**

'The Red River Jig' is synonymous with step dancing, or 'jigging', as it is known in most Aboriginal communities throughout the Northwest.<sup>12</sup> As Mishler has earlier described, this dance is usually performed by one male and one female at a time in Old Crow, each with their own basic step. However, unlike Mishler's experience in other communities, where partners held hands for the first part of the dance, in Old Crow partners dropped hands as soon as they moved onto the floor, and simply faced each other, loosely circling clockwise, without any of the fancier 'gyroscope' or 'petal' patterns of women advancing towards their partners and retreating that he documents. Nor were any dancers 'spelled off' by others, each couple simply dancing two times through the tune.<sup>13</sup>

Each Old Crow fiddler's version of the tune is somewhat distinct, though they were all recognisable as variants of the 'standard' prairie tune (see Figure 3).

#### **2. 'The Double Jig'**

Though done to asymmetric versions of 'Fisher's Hornpipe', usually with the bottom string of the fiddle tuned up to A (see Figure 4), as is the dance of the same name throughout the Prairies,<sup>15</sup> this two-couple reel is quite different in the north than prairie versions I have observed. The movements are as follows:

- a. Couples begin by facing each other, men left, women right. The first couple (furthest from band) dances up through the second couple in side-by-side

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Figure 3 'Red River Jig' musical score. It consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The first staff shows the main melody with first and second endings. The second staff contains a note: "NOTE: one of the repeating 2- beat figures is often dropped or added on the B part." The third staff shows a 3X repeat of a rhythmic pattern. The fourth staff shows the B part with a repeat sign and a final measure labeled "Last Time".

- lots of E, A and D drones throughout

**Figure 3 'Red River Jig', as played by  
Harold Frost, Old Crow<sup>14</sup>**

Figure 4 'Double Jig' musical score. It starts with a chord diagram for a G major triad (G, B, D) in the key of G major. The score is divided into sections A1 through A5 and B. Section A1 is labeled "INTRO" and includes a fermata. Section A2 has a 3/4 time signature change. Section A3 is labeled "Dance starts here". Section A4 includes a repeat sign and the instruction "rpt. A3, A4/A2". Section B includes first and second endings. Section A5 includes a 3/4 time signature change. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time.

Form A1 A2 A3 A3 A4 A3 A4 B B  
A3 A3 A4 A3 A2 B B  
A3 A3 A2 A3 A5 B B

-bowing indicated only on the first few bars where I could see it on the video

**Figure 4 'Double Jig', as played by Allan Benjamin<sup>20</sup>**

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formation, hands not joined, then turns face-to-face again at the 'bottom' of the set, jiggling a few steps on the spot.

b. The first couple joins hands in promenade position (left to left, right to right), goes back up the set and down, then turns around each other clockwise.

c. The first couple splits and each does a figure eight around the other two dancers, with the first man going first around the man, then around the lady, and the first lady doing the opposite.

d. Partners move to the centre for a 'left-hand star',<sup>16</sup> join hands diagonally and do four single steps left (4 beats of music) then four right. The first couple then moves to the bottom of the set (closest to the band) and the dance repeats with the other couple leading.

This is similar to Mishler's description,<sup>17</sup> but without the fancier jiggling steps he mentions. Instead, couples do a basic 'pas de Basque' step throughout, except for the 'star' figure where they switch to single steps.<sup>18</sup> Also, the head couple does not go down and up the set as often at the beginning, and Mishler's second figure is eliminated entirely – one in which the lead couple goes down and up with, alternately, the other woman and man between them. I have not, as yet, been able to connect this dance precisely to an older Scottish form, but two-couple reels were apparently common in the Orkney and Shetland Islands, at least one of which includes the 'star' figure described here.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. 'The Handkerchief Dance' ('K'ooniit'aii Ch'aadzaa')

This dance is done to a particular reel in open A tuning where both bottom strings are tuned up giving A E A E (see Figure 5), and is performed in a group of three people, usually one man and two women. The man is in the middle holding the ends of two sashes with each of the two women holding the other ends. The dancers jig on the spot to two or three phrases of music, then the man raises one sash so that the lady on the opposite side can go under, followed by himself, then all back to original places. The sequence repeats with the dancers again jiggling for a couple of phrases, followed by raising the other sash for the other lady, man again following. After each woman has gone under the sash a couple of times, three new dancers take over (although at one point in Old Crow only two women came up, keeping the young man on the floor to the general merriment of the onlookers).

Mishler's description from Alaska is the same except that the dancers start in a straight line, whereas the Old Crow dancers seem to be always in a triangle formation. Mishler was informed that dancers should match their 'setting' figure (on the spot) and their moving figure to A and B parts of the tune, but that this tended not to happen in practice,<sup>21</sup> which matches my observations in Old Crow, where moving on the high phrase of the tune varied according to which man was leading the dance. Mostly, the dancers were clearly listening for the beginning of a phrase to start the moving figure, but not necessarily the high phrase. As Mishler has also pointed out, the dance is a version of the old Scottish Threesome Reel (also

called ‘Hankies Reel’ and the ‘Dashing White Sargeant’) as described by Flett and Flett.<sup>22</sup>

The tune Ben Charlie played in Old Crow seems to be a much more regular version of the one Mishler recorded.<sup>23</sup> Mishler claims a connection to a Shetland tune in open A tuning called ‘Wynadepla’, but I am of the opinion that they are not close enough to necessarily be related.<sup>24</sup>

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A part usually 3 X, sometimes 4

1, 2, 3 Last Time

D.S.

- lots of A and E drones throughout.  
- sometimes an extra beat of the first figure of B

**Figure 5** ‘Handkerchief Dance’, as played by Ben Charlie, Old Crow<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. ‘Duck Dance’ (‘Dats’an Ch’aadzaa’)

This three-couple dance is well-documented throughout the Prairies, but, unlike most of the other dances here, it seems unknown in Québec.<sup>26</sup> However, three-couple reels were well-known in the Shetland and Orkney Islands, including older forms in the side-by-side formation of this dance.<sup>27</sup> Mishler believes it may be related to a seventeenth-century English Playford dance called ‘Grimstock’.<sup>28</sup>

In most communities all versions of this dance seem to involve a basic set of four moves, in various orders and repeated a various numbers of times, although three times each is mentioned as standard on the Prairies,<sup>29</sup> and seems to be the practice in Old Crow, but not in Mishler’s description.<sup>30</sup> The dance movements unfold as follows:

- a. Three couples in side-by-side formation, one behind the other, move back and forwards 3 full times, 3 steps more or less each way each time, starting backwards. (Mishler describes moving forwards first, with four steps, then just back and forwards one more time, immediately moving into the split).
- b. Couples split and go around the outside. In Old Crow and the Prairies this happens three times, but only once in Mishler’s description.
- c. For the ‘duck and dive’,<sup>31</sup> the head couple makes an arch for couple 2 then ‘dives’ under the arch made by couple three. They turn and repeat the arch and dive going in the other direction; they are followed by the other two couples similarly alternating. As Mishler recorded and I observed in Old Crow and on

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the Prairies, the whole movement down and up is repeated for a total of two times. (This move seems to be the exception to the 'three-time' rule.)

d. The figure of 8 is performed three times each in Old Crow but only twice in the communities Mishler observed. Couples stand side by side again with crossed hands (left to left, right to right). Each couple moves as a unit in a figure of 8 pattern by going between the other two and turning at the top and bottom of the set.

Prairie versions I have seen also add in an 'arch' move after the first two moves here, in which the second and third couples go under the arch made by the first, followed by a repeat of the first movement, while northern Gwitchin communities go straight to the 'duck and dive'.

In Old Crow, the dance is done to a reel in D major which is somewhat reminiscent of the Scottish 'Fairy Dance' (see Figure 6), while Mishler's tune is different and several other tunes turn up on the Prairies. So, while each community seems to associate the dance with a particular tune of the older wave, it is the least tied to one particular tune overall.

\*see variations at bottom

\*variations of first bar

Figure 6 'Duck Dance' as played by Allan Benjamin<sup>32</sup>

### 5. 'Drops of Brandy' ('Varaandi' is the local pronunciation of the word 'brandy')

This is the old Scottish line dance of the same name and done to versions of the standard prairie tune used for this dance, which is probably based on Québec versions originally (see Figure 7). It is as Mishler describes, and, with minor variations, is as done throughout the Prairies and Québec.





**Figure 7** 'Drops of Brandy' or 'Varaandi' as played by Ben Charlie<sup>33</sup>

### 6. 'The Eight Couple Dance' ('Nihk'iidoo') and 'Mountain Rope' ('Neets'ee Tl'yaa')

I saw these dances done as a pair in Old Crow, both with eight couples, though Mishler says that neither the sequence nor the number of couples is fixed anymore.<sup>34</sup> I have not seen the first one done elsewhere, but the second is well-known on the Prairies as the 'Reel of Eight' or 'Old Reel of Eight'.<sup>35</sup> An asymmetric version of 'Arkansas Traveller' was the tune for the first in Old Crow ('Nihk'iidoo', see Figure 8), while the second was done to another D reel reminiscent of 'Whiskey Before Breakfast', at the beginning, but with a B part that seemed more like another variation of 'Arkansas Traveller' (see Figure 9).<sup>36</sup>

The first dance is quite simple, with dancers starting off in two lines, men and women facing each other (like 'Drops of Brandy'). Then, each alternate couple moves (man forwards, lady backwards) to create a new set of four couples beside the first. The dance proceeds with an alternation of jiggging on the spot to one part of the tune, and 'travelling' on the other in a figure of 8 pattern with the corresponding couple in the other set. This is strongly reminiscent of documented Shetland reels (where they were done with fewer couples) and one mentioned in the Orkneys for eight couples but not described in detail.<sup>37</sup>



Occasionally the high part is played only once, and there may be an extra beat on D going back into the low part.

**Figure 8** 'Eight Couple Reel' ('Arkansas Traveller'), as played by Allan Benjamin<sup>38</sup>

The second dance starts with all couples in a large circle (men on the left in each couple) and proceeds through the following figures:

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- a. Opposite couples cross, then cross back to their place.
- b. Women go in to the centre for left-hand and right-hand stars, and back to their place.
- c. Men do the same.
- d. Women make an inner circle. Holding hands they circle left, then right.
- e. Men come forward and take hands in front of the women (the basket), and circle left.
- f. Men swing their arms back out so there are two concentric circles, one of men, one of women. They then circle right.
- g. All move back into large circle, and circle left, then right.
- h. All do a grand chain without clasping hands.
- i. All reel around the set with elbow swings (men counter-clockwise, women clockwise).
- j. Repeat '1' – couples cross and back to place.

The whole dance may be done more than once. When I saw it they got as far as the men's star for the second time when the fiddler stopped. At this point, I do not know whether or not this is standard practice.

The musical score for 'Mountain Rope' is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of three staves. The first staff shows the key signature and time signature. The second staff begins with a repeat sign and a first ending bracket labeled 'A'. The third staff contains four measures with first and second endings, a second ending bracket labeled 'B', and a 'D.S.' marking at the end.

Figure 9 'Mountain Rope' as played by Allan Benjamin<sup>39</sup>

### 7. 'The Rabbit Dance' ('Geh Chaadzaa')

I did not see this dance at Old Crow but was told that it is done. Mishler's description corresponds to prairie practice: two lines of men and women facing each other; the lead couple moves down, up, and around; eventually the woman breaks off and the man chases her, then vice versa. As is the case with the 'Duck Dance', it may have roots in an old English dance, in this case, 'Hunt the Squirrel'. This dance is also unknown in Québec.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, the tune as played by Bill Stevens, a popular Alaskan Gwitchin fiddler, is a reel, but definitely a version of the 6/8 tune used in Manitoba for the same dance. This gives rise to the idea that it might have transformed from a 6/8 'Old World' tune into standard simple time in Canada (see Figures 10 and 11). This

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has been the subject of conjecture in the case of 'Drops of Brandy' performed as a 9/8 tune in both Scottish and Irish tradition, but in simple time in French-Canadian and Aboriginal communities, that is, a reel, though often in 6/4, maintaining the 'three-beat' structure of the 9/8 jig. However, it is usually asymmetric in the Northwest.<sup>41</sup>

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A drones throughout, when convenient

**Figure 10** 'Rabbit Dance' as played by Eldon Campbell, Kinosota, Manitoba<sup>42</sup>

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**Figure 11** 'Rabbit Dance', as played by Bill Stevens, Alaska<sup>43</sup>

What are we to conclude from all this? I would say that the dance and tune evidence in Gwitchin culture shows strong historical ties to nineteenth-century fur trade practice throughout the Prairies, but also some direct links to Orkney/Shetland practice of the time.<sup>44</sup> Manitoba evidence indicates that many dances and tunes came from Québec to the Prairies,<sup>45</sup> and many of the dances described here are also common in Québec. However, there are several indications that transmission was probably also happening directly from the Old World to the North as well as up from the Prairies. The first is the known presence of Orkney fiddlers in the north, and their documented influence on the culture of other Aboriginal communities, notably James Bay.<sup>46</sup> Even stronger evidence is found in the fact that certain dances in the Northwest have not been documented in Québec, namely the 'Duck Dance' and the 'Rabbit Dance',<sup>47</sup> and one, the 'Double Jig' described here, appears not to have been documented on the Prairies (although this is just a preliminary observation at

this point). The predominance of reels for older forms of dancing is also consistent with a possible Orkney/Shetland-derived repertoire, the latter we know is similarly reel-based. Finally, evidence may lie in the prevalence of asymmetric phrasing itself, which, in my view, while primarily due to the influence of Aboriginal culture,<sup>48</sup> may also point to the older Scandinavian-influenced asymmetric forms of the Islands. Further research into the links between Norwegian, Shetland and Aboriginal repertoire may yield greater insights in this direction.

### **The second wave: common North American fiddle tunes**

These are mostly reels and two-steps for 'square' dances, plus waltzes, two-steps, polkas, and schottisches. Square dances in Gwitchin communities involve large numbers of couples in a circular or roughly rectangular formation. They tend to consist of a set of simple figures done with two couples and progress around the circle.<sup>49</sup>

Mishler makes a convincing case that the square dances themselves are of American origin and probably came up north between 1890 and 1910, the time of the Gold Rush. Tunes appear to have entered the repertoire throughout the twentieth century and correspond to those popular in other parts of the country to a great extent, although often played in asymmetric versions. Currently, popular ones for dancing in Old Crow include 'The Crooked Stovepipe', 'Rubber Dolly', 'Miller's Reel', 'Buffalo Gals', 'Big John McNeill', 'Boil Them Cabbage Down', and 'Flop-Eared Mule'.<sup>50</sup>

### **The third wave: foxtrots, two-steps and waltzes**

These tunes are adapted from Country songs that, in my observation, were generally popular between 1940 and 1970. They frequently feature asymmetric phrasing (unlike the original songs they are based on), and are sometimes played in altered tunings. Thomas Manuel of Fort Good Hope told me that at home, he plays mostly 'two-steps' and 'waltzes' for dancing, not the old repertoire.<sup>51</sup> The country tunes are usually just played instrumentally, although Ben Charlie recorded several in both versions, with words and without.<sup>52</sup> Popular ones include 'Blue Moon of Kentucky' (Bill Monroe), 'Frozen Heart' (George Jones), 'Diggi Diggi Lo' (J. D. Miller, see Figure 12), and 'On My Mind'.

'Diggi Diggi Lo' (see Figure 12) and Albert Beaulieu's 'Blackboard of My Heart' are really in 'swing' time, that is 12/8, but following standard practice I have notated them in 4/4. The dotted eighth/sixteenth figures are played as triplets of quarter/eighth.

MM. ~168

Figure 12 'Diggy Diggy Lo', as played by Ben Charlie<sup>53</sup>

### **The Slave Lake Métis**

The Métis communities of the southern Northwest Territories who still have active fiddlers – mainly Fort Providence, Fort Resolution, and Hay River – trace their personal and musical lineage to the riverboat transportation system of the early part of the twentieth century, which regularly brought up players from the Prairies.<sup>54</sup> While the same basic three waves of repertoire exist in these communities, preliminary research<sup>55</sup> indicates there are several significant differences between them and Gwitchin tradition, both in repertoire and dance style. However, since I was unable to observe community dances in this area, at this point I can only highlight certain aspects spoken of by my informants.

The First Wave – that of Scottish and French dance tunes – seems to be almost gone in the southern areas. Angus Beaulieu plays mostly country repertoire (the Third Wave) and says that he generally left the older fast dance reels to his elders, all of whom have passed on, so that these dances are not generally done in the community anymore.

Well, myself, I never played for too many old dances [...] In the younger days, we had two fiddlers, we had an old time fiddler here who done all the old dances before I started travelling around the community [...] It was still around but then when I started, I thought, well, I don't need to learn that.<sup>56</sup>

There have been performance dance groups doing demonstrations of the older dances within the past twenty years,<sup>57</sup> and there are still active callers, but the window may be closing. We are left primarily with the later two waves: North American fiddle repertoire, and an adapted country repertoire. In an interesting reversal of expectations, it is often older players, such as Angus Beaulieu, who play mostly country foxtrots, two-steps and waltzes, leaving the fast reels (including the older dance tunes) to the younger players, who tend to play more often for shows than for dancing.

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The dance style is different. This is what northern residents most commonly note as a distinguishing mark between the two traditions. For example, when the 'Red River Jig' is performed in the south, it tends to follow the prairie model of distinct steps for high and low parts of the tune, with dancers having a repertoire of several different steps. This is in contrast to Gwitchin communities, where each dancer tends to have one signature step. As Rick Lafferty informed me:

It's pretty well all the same, right from Manitoba to here, similar, the way it's supposed to be done, the good old Métis style, the traditional way. The steps are different, you add and change, but the form, in general, right from Manitoba.<sup>58</sup>

Tunes tend to be more regular in structure, pointing once more to the influence of recordings from southern Canada. Although this again depends to some extent on the player's age, older players tend to have more asymmetric phrasing (see Figure 13).



**Figure 13** 'Blackboard of My Heart', as played by Angus Beaulieu, Fort Resolution, NWT<sup>59</sup>

One aspect that both traditions share is the great value placed on personal creativity and innovation. This is reflected both in the highly individual versions of tunes (two fiddlers rarely play together), and in 'show' aspects of certain players performances. For example, Angus Beaulieu (Fort Resolution) accompanies himself on the electric keyboard by pre-setting the rhythm and hitting the root note with his bow hand to change chords at the appropriate point, while Allan Benjamin (Old Crow) sometimes holds the bow between his toes, and saws out a tune by turning the fiddle away from him and moving it against the bow.

In conclusion, while the historical forces on the two traditions are similar, leading to the same three basic waves of repertoire, cultural factors have led to differences. In the northerly Gwitchin areas, more Aboriginal influence and more isolation seems to have contributed to a greater preservation of older tunes and

dances and a much more asymmetric approach to phrasing. In the south, greater cultural identification with the prairie Métis has led players to emulate their southern counterparts more. This has affected the repertoire, both historically, when much of it was coming up directly from the prairies, and in more recent years, when much has been learned from southern recordings of prominent players such as Andy Dejarlis and Reg Bouvette. Phrasing is also more symmetric overall. In my work in the 1980s, I noticed a similar tendency for phrasing to be more irregular in First Nations communities than in Métis areas, a fact I attribute largely to the greater influence of Aboriginal tradition in which phrasing in traditional song is highly irregular.

Commercial country music is one major cultural factor considerably affecting both traditions in similar ways. The tendency throughout both northern traditions to turn country songs into instrumental dance tunes is almost a signature of contemporary northern practice, and is not to be found anywhere else in the country to the same extent. This practice is threatening to close the wonderful window on the past that parts of the north still provide, which may limit our ability to further understand the origins and evolution of Aboriginal fiddle and dance traditions in North America. However, time marches on, and this practice, interesting in its own right, is certainly deserving of further study.

### **Appendix: Notes on transcriptions**

All transcriptions are by the author. I have transcribed bow slurs where I could make them out. Because of the gymnasium setting, some tunes were not clear enough on the recording to be able to make out the bowing. The form is frequently different the first time through a tune and minor variations in form are a hallmark of the style throughout. Players often substitute one note for another here and there, and frequently use doubling of notes (2 shorter notes of the same pitch instead of one longer note), but versions are remarkably consistent in general. I have indicated some of these possibilities by putting certain notes in brackets. I have also indicated some of the double-stringing, since it is an important part of the style, but with an eye to keeping the transcription readable.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Government of Yukon and NWT official websites, [www.gov.yk.ca](http://www.gov.yk.ca), [www.gov.nt.ca](http://www.gov.nt.ca) [accessed 9 April 2010].

<sup>2</sup> Inuvik Visitors Guide (Inuvik, NWT: Northern News Services, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Anne Lederman, ed., *Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Manitoba*, vols 1 and 2, Falcon Productions LP and audio cassette FP 187 and FP 287, Toronto, 1987; re-released on CD by the Canadian Museum of Civilization Archive Series, FP 386–387, 2004. Gabriel Dumont Institute, *Drops of Brandy*, CD collection, GDI 001, GDI 002, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'square' is used loosely here because sets often consist of large numbers of couples, not the standard four of square sets in other parts of North America.

<sup>5</sup> Craig Mishler, *The Crooked Stovepipe: Athapaskan Fiddle Music and Square Dancing in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Typically, every player, even in the same community, has his own versions of tunes.



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<sup>7</sup> Ben Charlie, Allan Benjamin, and Harold Frost have commercial recordings available. Information on acquiring these recordings is available on the Old Crow website, [www.oldcrow.ca](http://www.oldcrow.ca) [accessed 9 April 2010].

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Manuel and Everett Kakfwi from Fort Good Hope, and Michael Francis from Fort McPherson were the other Gwitchin fiddlers present.

<sup>9</sup> From Keitha Clarke's *Yukon Fiddle Project*, CBC, 2008, used by permission.

<sup>10</sup> Mishler, pp. 15–20.

<sup>11</sup> More research needs to be done to confirm that the Eight Couple (six here), was common on the Prairies, but tune evidence noted below would seem to indicate there were a pair of dances in Manitoba with these tunes.

<sup>12</sup> I use the general term 'Northwest' to indicate the entire Aboriginal fiddle and dance tradition from northern Ontario through the Prairies, British Columbia, the Yukon and Northwest Territories. I do not know, at this time, how Nunavut fits into the fiddle and dance tradition described here.

<sup>13</sup> See Mishler, pp. 65–69. However, it is to be noted that I was observing contest situations for the most part, rather than merely social ones.

<sup>14</sup> Harold Frost, Old Crow, from his audio cassette recording *Vuntut Gwitchin Fiddler* [no matrix number, n.d.].

<sup>15</sup> James P. Leary, ed., *Medicine Fiddle: A Humanities Discussion Guide*, to accompany the film *Medicine Fiddle*, Up North Films (Marquette: Northern Michigan University, 1992), [no pagination]. 'Lord MacDonald's' is mentioned in North Dakota.

<sup>16</sup> 'Left-hand star' is a term commonly used in square dance terminology for this figure. I did not hear it called this locally.

<sup>17</sup> Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, pp. 69–72.

<sup>18</sup> J. F. and T. M. Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 110. The 'pas de Basque' step, as called by Flett and Flett, p. 110, is a simple right left right, left right left pattern done to reels. It is commonly used throughout many group dances in Aboriginal communities in the Northwest.

<sup>19</sup> Flett and Flett, p. 202.

<sup>20</sup> Allan Benjamin, from a recording made by the author, Old Crow, July 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, p. 95.

<sup>22</sup> Flett and Flett, pp. 140–42.

<sup>23</sup> See Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, p. 193. There may be a general trend on the part of younger players towards simplifying some of the older dance tunes.

<sup>24</sup> Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Charlie, Old Crow, from his self published CD *Ben Chuck: Old Crow Fiddler* [no matrix number, n.d.].

<sup>26</sup> Author's correspondence with Pierre Chartrand, director of Centre Mnemo, in Montreal, an institute for the study and teaching of traditional Québec dance.

<sup>27</sup> Flett and Flett, p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, pp. 92–93.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, *The Dances of the Métis* (Winnipeg: Métis Resource Centre Inc., 2001), educational DVD produced and distributed by the Métis Resource Centre Inc., [www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca](http://www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca) [accessed 8 April 2010].

<sup>30</sup> Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, pp. 89–93.



<sup>31</sup> Again, so-called in other square dance traditions, 'duck and dive' is not a term used locally, to my knowledge.

<sup>32</sup> Allan Benjamin, from an interview conducted by Keitha Clark for the Yukon Fiddle Project, CBC Whitehorse 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Charlie, from his CD *Ben Chuck: Old Crow Fiddler*.

<sup>34</sup> Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, pp. 72–77, 84–88.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, *The Dances of the Métis*, and Leary, *Medicine Fiddle*, [np].

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, my oldest prairie informant, Grandy Fagnan of Camperville, Manitoba, played 'Arkansas Traveller' always with a 'brother' tune similar to this one, which implies that two dances might have been done there as well as 'partners', possibly these same two. However, other tunes are used elsewhere. Mishler documents 'Lord MacDonald's' for the Eight Couple and 'Whisky Before Breakfast' for the 'Mountain Rope', see Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, pp. 185–86. 'Whisky Before Breakfast' is also used in Turtle Mountain for the same dance called Reel of Eight, see Leary, *Medicine Fiddle*, [np]. 'Lord MacDonald's' turns up on the video collection *The Dances of the Métis*, called 'Old Reel of Eight'. 'Lord MacDonald's' seems to rank as the all-time nineteenth century favourite Scottish tune, judging by its use for several different dances in various places – at the very least, the 'Double Jig' (Reel of Four), 'Eight Couple' and 'Old Reel of Eight'. Other Scottish tunes of similar age and provenance, which similarly turn up in many asymmetric versions throughout Québec and the Northwest, include 'Drops of Brandy', 'Soldier's Joy' (possibly the original source of this 'Mountain Rope' tune), 'Fisher's Hornpipe', and possibly others which may have been altered beyond recognition, such as 'The Fairy Dance'.

<sup>37</sup> Flett and Flett, p. 191.

<sup>38</sup> Allan Benjamin, from a recording made by the author, Old Crow, July 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Allan Benjamin, from a recording made by the author, Old Crow, July 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, pp. 81–84.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Cooke comments on the rhythmic fluidity of certain tunes in Shetland tradition between 6/8 and 2/4; see Peter Cooke, *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles* (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 57–58, 76–77.

<sup>42</sup> Eldon Campbell, Kinosota, Manitoba; see Lederman, *Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Manitoba*.

<sup>43</sup> Bill Stevens, Alaska, from his self published CD *Gwitch'in Athabascan Fiddle Music* [no matrix number, n.d.].

<sup>44</sup> The atypical form of the 'Double Jig', which seems to be more closely related to Shetland/Orkney practice than to the Prairies, is evidence for this. However, it is possible that at one time there were several forms of two-couple reels, and that 'Fisher's Hornpipe' has become attached to all of them over the years.

<sup>45</sup> Several of the fiddlers I recorded and interviewed in the mid 1980s had traced their family back to Québec. Also see Track 1, *Drops of Brandy* CD, in which the Radio introduction to Mr Genthon's 1940 performance of the 'Red River Jig' records that Mr Genthon's father learned the 'Red River Jig' in 1842 from a man named Latourelle who had just come from Québec, where it was called 'La gigue du bas-Canada'.

<sup>46</sup> Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, pp. 19–20. The influence of Orkney tradition in James Bay is documented by oral tradition; see liner notes to James Cheechoo, *Shay Chee Man*, CD, Kwisiekan Productions, KWIS 001, 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Is it just an interesting coincidence that both of these dances seem to relate to English tradition? It is tempting to speculate that they may have come with mainland Scots into the Northwest.

<sup>48</sup> The case for asymmetric phrasing as a result of the influence of Aboriginal culture is presented extensively in Anne Lederman, 'Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Two Manitoba Communities: Camperville and Ebb and Flow' (Master's dissertation, York University, 1986), and summarized in Anne Lederman, 'Old Indian [sic] and Métis Fiddling in Manitoba: Origins, Structure and the Question of Syncretism', *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 8, no. 2 (1988), 205–30; and Anne Lederman, 'Native and Métis Fiddling: A Portrait of a People', *Fiddler Magazine*, 8, no. 4 (2001), 4–10.

<sup>49</sup> See Mishler, *Crooked Stovepipe*, pp. 99–112.

<sup>50</sup> Author's recordings, Old Crow Fiddle Festival; these tunes were played repeatedly for square dances over the four days I was there. Other tunes are mentioned in an interview with Charlie Peter Charlie by Craig Mishler, Fairbanks, Alaska, 1986 (Mishler, personal collection, given to the author). Charlie Peter Charlie is father of Doug and Charlie who played at the Festival. He notes as being popular in his lifetime 'Chicken Reel', 'St Anne's Reel', 'Devil's Dream', 'Golden Slippers', 'Redwing', 'Turkey in the Straw', 'Red River Valley', 'Over the Waves', 'Tennessee Waltz', and the 'Teardrop Waltz' (composed and recorded in the 1960s by Reg Bouvette, popular Manitoba Métis fiddler).

<sup>51</sup> Unrecorded conversation, Old Crow Fiddle Festival, 30 June 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Ben Charlie, *Ben Chuck: Old Crow Fiddler*, CD, HTA 12336, 2000.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Richard Lafferty, interview by author, July 2007.

<sup>55</sup> I undertook interviews with two prominent fiddlers, Angus Beaulieu (Fort Resolution) and Richard Lafferty (Hay River), (Lederman Collection, Canadian Museum of Civilisation), and had many informal conversations with callers such as Fred Koe, and media people. Both CBC Radio and the Native Communications Society allowed me access to their archives and provided me with copies of recordings they had made at northern events over many years. Several players in this area, including Richard Lafferty, Angus Beaulieu, Stanley Beaulieu, and Ed Lafferty, have made commercial recordings, though copies of these can be hard to find.

<sup>56</sup> Angus Beaulieu, interview by author, 18 July 2007. The older fiddler he is referring to is his uncle, Johnny Beaulieu.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Lafferty of Hay River performed with the Métis Reelers, a NWT group that was active from approximately 1983 to 1989 or so, according to Richard.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Lafferty, interview by author, 16 July 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Angus Beaulieu, Fort Resolution, NWT, from his CD *Angus Beaulieu I* [no matrix number, n.d.].

## Step dancing to hip hop? Reconsidering the interrelationship between music and dance in the Ottawa Valley step dancing community

SHERRY JOHNSON

Ottawa Valley step dancing originated in the lumber camps of the Ottawa Valley, bordering both the provinces of Ontario and Quebec in Canada, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is an amalgamation of Irish, Scottish, English, French-Canadian, and Aboriginal styles of solo percussive dance. The style has been further influenced in the twentieth century by American tap dancing and clogging. The most important context for contemporary Ottawa Valley step dancing is the competition circuit, a series of fiddle and step dancing contests that occur throughout the province of Ontario each weekend from May to September. I have been participating in this 'circuit' of competitions with my family, as a fiddler, step dancer, teacher, and judge, for over thirty years.

I was at a contest last summer when a visiting percussive dance teacher and scholar from the USA asked me how long I thought it would be before Ottawa Valley step dancers in Ontario got tired of dancing to fiddle music and would start to dance to more popular musics. This question was based on his own experience of competitive clogging, which is now often danced to country, pop, rock 'n roll, and even hip hop. Although at the time I thought I knew the answer – 'never' – it caused me to think more deeply about the relationship between fiddling and step dancing in the Ontario contest community, and prompted me to talk with a number of fiddlers and dancers about the nature of this relationship.

The dance and fiddle styles in Ontario have developed in close association with one another. Along with old-time social dancing, the two were, and often still are, performed together at house parties and old-time dances. A number of well-known fiddlers also step danced, and that practice has only increased as the popularity of contests as a primary context for both fiddling and step dancing in the province has grown. The majority of contests include both fiddling and step dancing, and even people who start with just one often end up inspired by their friends at the contests and learn the other. Since the early 1980s the majority of contestants in Ontario contests both play fiddle and step dance. So the discussion that follows is set in the context of this particular relationship between fiddling and step dancing. I do not suggest, however, that this relationship is unique. There

are other traditions across Canada and beyond in which fiddling and step dancing have a similar close relationship, Cape Breton being, perhaps, the other most notable example of this tendency.<sup>1</sup> But it is significant that this is not the case in the American competitive clogging context with which the visiting teacher mentioned earlier was most familiar.

The most obvious consequence of having participants who both fiddle and step dance is that the dancers know and love the music to which they are performing. Dancers who also fiddle can describe more clearly to the fiddler what they want in terms of music that will enhance their routines. At the same time, fiddlers who also dance know what inspires and drives them as dancers and no doubt play the same way for their dancers. They listen to fiddle music for pleasure, seek out new tunes and styles, and share these with their contest friends. That is not to say, of course, that the teenagers are not also listening to the latest popular music, but if they are involved in the contest circuit for even a couple of years, it is because they love the music.

Young fiddlers and step dancers – teenagers – are always on the lookout for new, interesting tunes that will challenge their own abilities and catch the listener's interest. Everyone wants tunes that are just a little different than everyone else's, but not so different that they would not be considered old-time. In part, I think it is this constant search for something new, always within rather strict although not immovable boundaries, that prevents Ottawa Valley step dancers from going beyond fiddle tunes for their music. There are a plethora of new tunes, some borrowed from other traditions and perhaps modified slightly, and others newly composed by the fiddlers within the circuit themselves.

While my initial response to the question of dancing to other kinds of music was 'never', I am ready to accede to a very tentative 'maybe'. Ironically, just a couple of weeks after I was asked the question that sparked this reflection, one of my adult beginning students brought in a CD of hip hop music and wanted to use it for her lesson. I put it on. The tempo was perfect for her ability and she clearly enjoyed dancing to this piece, her favourite song at the time, but the rhythms of the steps just did not fit with the rhythms of the music. There was no lift or drive to the music, and therefore none in her dancing. To me, it felt wrong. To her, a beginner dancer and without having grown up listening to fiddle music, it felt fine. What should I do? The teacher in me understands the importance of making lessons relevant to students and meeting them where they are. If she finds more meaning in dancing to hip hop, then maybe I should just be happy that she's practising and dancing, and say no more. But the dancer in me, and I must admit, to some extent also the preservationist (in that I want dancers to know and be able to perform the roots of the style before they join the innovators who are so important to the style's survival), found it hard to condone dancing that lacked the very drive and power that is so characteristic of Ottawa Valley step dancing. In the end I compromised – I thought quite generously – and told her that if she did the majority of her practising to fiddle music, I would not mind if she went through her routine once per practice session

or lesson to her own music. Of course, I could not monitor the compromise, but gradually she stopped bringing her hip hop CD to lessons, replacing it with CDs by Leahy and Great Big Sea. I am hoping that she, too, realized that her hip hop music was not enhancing her dancing, that it did not *feel* the same as when she was dancing to fiddle music. Unfortunately, I never got to ask her. She abruptly moved from Toronto and we quickly lost touch.

More support for a response of ‘maybe’ can be found in the few examples of experienced dancers who have choreographed routines to musical theatre pieces, country songs, and hip hop for novelty classes or talent shows. Dressed in music-inspired costumes and using more arm and hand movements than is typical in step dancing, these routines have a more tap-like quality, although they do indeed use the basic building blocks of Ottawa Valley step dancing. What strikes me most, again, is that a driving rhythm does not seem to be of vital importance in these routines. So, while they are interesting and enjoyable to watch, I do not believe they will ever become the norm for step dancing in Ontario. Given this, my response to the initial question is now just slightly softer than ‘never’.

Thinking about whether or not Ottawa Valley step dancing could be performed well to other music led me to consider more carefully the historical relationship between step dancing and fiddling in Ontario. Anecdotal accounts of early Ottawa Valley step dancing suggest that dancers did not have routines the way we do now. The fiddler started to play and the dancer danced in response to whatever the fiddler was playing. Indeed, the dancing was considered to be a rhythmic accompaniment to the fiddle and therefore the dancer played with and off of the rhythm of the fiddle:

In the old days, we just danced. The fiddle played, we danced. Rhythm. Me, I started dancing on radio. You didn't have to [have] the legs wrapped around the neck. The floor is where your rhythm is. Nobody could see you. So you work on your rhythm. That's dancing [...] When I'm dancing alone, there's no routine. I travelled with Don Messer ten years across country. Never had a routine when you're dancing alone because it depends on the piece of music that [the fiddler is] gonna play for you. You don't do the same thing for another piece because that music is different. The accent and the drive is in different places, so it doesn't work.<sup>2</sup>

People learned to step dance by watching and listening to the rhythms of other dancers and imitating them; sometimes they might ask neighbours or family members who were particularly well-known as dancers to ‘show’ them a few things.

When, in the 1950s, some of these model dancers started to teach more formally – that is, take on individual students, set up regular lesson times, and most importantly, take money in exchange for lessons – some of them developed more formal ways of putting the rhythms together into steps and then putting the steps together into routines. Because these routines were pre-choreographed to showcase

a wide variety of rhythms and techniques, they became the preferred format for competitions.

By the time I started competing in the mid-1970s, house fiddlers – fiddlers hired by the contest to play for all of the dancers – were common. By attending contests every weekend throughout the summer, we soon became familiar with these house fiddlers. We knew which ones played fast and which ones played slow, which ones were likely to stop too early or keep going past the standard length of a routine, and we started to develop preferences for particular fiddlers based on their styles. We had our favourites, but my siblings and I always danced to the house fiddler provided by the contest. It was considered the sign of a good dancer that he or she was able to dance to any fiddler and to any set of tunes, and so we almost always left the choice of tunes up to the fiddler. The steps, then, had very little connection to the music, since the steps could, conceivably, be danced to any tune of the correct time signature.

What I did not realise at the time, and only learned when I started my research, is that some of the dancers, who were good friends with some of the house fiddlers, would sit down with the house fiddler at the beginning of the season and choose tunes that seemed to go best with their particular routines. In fact, it turns out that one of the house fiddlers would tell his favourite dancers what tunes to dance to or not. A former open class dancer from this time period told me,

He knew what tunes were good for dancing. In fact I can remember very vividly saying to him at one point when I was competing, ‘Can you play this particular tune for me for a reel?’ And he said to me, ‘No’. ‘No,’ he said, ‘you don’t dance well to that tune.’ Now I couldn’t have told you what the name of the tunes were that he played for me, but I knew if it was the right tune because it just felt right. And it had the right lilt and it had the right drive behind it.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately there is very little film or video footage of step dancing from this time period. It would be interesting to compare dancers who were dancing to chosen tunes and dancers who were dancing to whatever the fiddler decided to play. Would I be able to tell which dancers chose their own tunes to which to dance? Would those tunes, in fact, *enhance* the steps?

In the mid-1990s a trend began amongst the most advanced competitive Ottawa Valley step dancers of choreographing routines to particular tunes. These dancers chose their tunes first, and in fact, a particular version of a tune as played on a CD, usually by one of their favourite fiddlers from the contest community, and choreographed their routine to that music. In many cases, the dancers tried to match the rhythms of the fiddle tune exactly. So instead of choreographing steps with complete freedom within that 4- or 8-bar structure, the dancers started with a particular rhythm and had to figure out what to do with their feet to create that rhythm. In one way, this process was easier, as one element of step creation – rhythm – was eliminated; however, in another way, it was more difficult because tunes are

repeated for a competitive Ottawa Valley step dancing routine. Although the clog is only played once through, A A B B, the jig is played once and a half, A A B B A A. The reel is played three times, usually changing tunes for the last 32 bars. So we have A A B B A A B B for one reel and then A A B B for the second. Notice, for example, that the A part is played four times in the jig and the first reel. The dancer then will have to come up with four visually different ways to create that particular rhythm. Of course, for many of these tunes, there is melodic repetition within each larger section. So, if the dancer is dancing to, say, 'The Old Man and the Old Woman' as the first reel, he or she would have to find eight visually different ways to create the same syncopated rhythm of the B section (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** 'The Old Man and the Old Woman'

After so carefully constructing their routines, it was important that the dancers had the exact same music every time they performed. They often chose a fiddler at the beginning of the season, ideally the one who had made the CD to which they had choreographed their routine, and danced to her or him at every contest. The fiddler would put the same ornaments and variations in the tune at the same place each time in order to maintain the symmetry between the rhythm of the dance and the music.

In the last few years there has been a movement away from an exact matching of rhythm. Dancers are still choreographing their routines to particular pieces of music, but they are playing with rhythm a little more freely. In a way, they are returning to the earlier practice of playing with and off of the rhythm of the fiddle. The crucial difference being that previously dancers were improvising the rhythms in response to the playing of the fiddle. Now these routines are pre-choreographed to particular tunes that must be played the same way each time in order to effectively show off the dance rhythms.

Before I give the idea that contests have turned this dynamic, creative tradition into a static, mechanical, even dead, performance, I hasten to add that I do not believe this to be the case. Contests are not solely about what happens on the contest stage; in fact, the stage is only a very small part of what Ontario fiddling and step dancing contests are about. The lifeblood of contests is what happens off the stage: in the practice rooms and in the campground. Here dancers and fiddlers try out new techniques, steps and tunes, often working collaboratively to teach and critique and encourage each other. Many performances *are* improvised, with the

dancers and fiddlers playing with variations and ornaments to motivate and inspire each other. That this is not done on stage, where a \$500 or \$1000 or, in some cases, even a \$1500 prize and title is at stake, is not surprising. For me, it is most important that dancers have the ability and the opportunity to practice, within their primary performance context, this creative, generative aspect of the tradition that maintains this intimate connection between the feet and the fiddle.

While it may sound like the relationship between fiddling and step dancing was least important during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when we were dancing to any fiddler and any set of tunes, I do not believe this is so. No matter how closely the routine is constructed to either match or play with the rhythm of the steps or not, there is a qualitative difference between those dancers who dance *to* the music and those dancers who dance *with* it. Cathy-Lynn Yorke-Slader, a top open class dancer in the late 1970s and early 1980s, called it 'feeling' the music. She told me:

When I was competing, a lot of judges would comment on how they felt that I *felt* the music when I was dancing, that I was dancing as *part* of the music and not just that this music was playing behind me and I was doing steps.<sup>4</sup>

Long-time dance teacher, Buster Brown, calls it interpretation. As a judge he would take off marks for timing when he felt that the dancer was not *feeling* the music. He explained it to disgruntled dancers this way:

Alright you weren't blatant on timing, but you weren't *feeling* your music, you were hedging. You were either a little ahead, you were a little behind. No, you weren't blatantly *off* time, but you were not *on* time, you were not *feeling* the music, and that's what I call interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

Another important step dancing teacher in the Ottawa Valley, Gilles Roy, is quite critical of young dancers today who, he feels, don't dance with the music:

Step dancing anymore, as far as I'm concerned, don't exist. They've got a lot of good athletes out there, but there's no dancers. Dancers should dance to the music. That's it. Nobody dances to the music. When they start and they've got that speed in their mind, and it's a hundred miles an hour, let me tell you, they have got to razzle-dazzle the crowd 'cause they can't dance and it's the only way out. And then the fiddler could drop dead of a heart attack and they wouldn't even know it [...] What the hell, time changes and everything else. You gotta go with it. But I'm a traditional Canadian step dancer. You got to be able to put the accent and the drive same as like the fiddle is doing. And you gotta rock with the music and you're bouncing and now you're talking about a step dancer. There's a lot of feeling comes from the heart.<sup>6</sup>



It may be tempting to dismiss his comments as that of an old man who has been left behind as the dancing has progressed, but I found that a number of people of all ages expressed the same sentiments, only less colourfully.

Like Buster and Gilles, the relationship between the dancing and the music is one of the ways that, as a judge, I find it easiest to separate the competent dancers from the great dancers. Except for some beginners, most dancers are in time with the beat of the music and can execute their steps with accuracy. But a great dancer is dancing *with* the music, as part of the music. Gilles makes the distinction between timing and rhythm. Being on time means dancing with the beat of the music. Dancing in rhythm means that all the clicks of the feet in between the beats are even or sounded in relation to the fiddle. For Gilles, the real test for a dancer is to dance to 'crooked tunes', tunes that are not always played in full eight-bar phrases. He told me that he makes his advanced dancers do that, even though such tunes are not part of the Ottawa Valley repertoire:

You just gotta feel it on your skin when it's coming. You gotta listen to the music. It's as simple as that. You don't listen to the music, you're dead. You can tell on the guy's last note where he's going. You can, you can hear it.<sup>7</sup>

Both Gilles and Buster point to their teacher, and the legendary 'father of Ottawa Valley step dancing', Donnie Gilchrist, as one who really felt the music:

Donnie Gilchrist danced twice from the heart, didn't know a thing about music. You'd play, he'd get on that stage and dance. Didn't matter what. Didn't tell the fiddlers, 'Hey, I want a certain tune, so many bars.' 'Play. Anything you want. I'll dance.' That is a dancer.<sup>8</sup>

And Buster said, '[Donnie Gilchrist] was a great dancer. He could just get up and feel the music, interpret with his feet, you know, and it would never be the same thing twice'.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, there is little film or video footage of Donnie's dancing, and that of older dancers, that is accessible to younger generations of Ottawa Valley step dancers.

There is a surprising lack of literature that focuses specifically on the interrelationship between music and dance, rather than overemphasizing one to the detriment of the other.<sup>10</sup> I believe that a detailed examination of the interrelationship between fiddling and step dancing in the small, close-knit community of Ontario fiddle and step dancing contests could contribute significantly to this literature. As I extend my research from this paper, I will examine how this relationship is understood and performed by fiddlers and step dancers: both those who do only one or the other, and those who do both. How does knowing how to step dance affect how one plays the fiddle? How does knowing how to fiddle affect how one step dances? Furthermore, I will observe how fiddlers and step dancers relate to each other and the community, both socially and on-stage. What do fiddlers need

to know about dancing in order to play well for dancers? What do step dancers need to know about fiddling in order to dance well to the music? What elements of fiddling and step dancing are valued by the community, and how do they relate? Examining the relationship between these two modes of expressive culture will provide an alternative way of understanding each of them and their role in continual construction of both individual and community identity. How long will it be until Ottawa Valley step dancers in Ontario get tired of dancing to fiddle music and start to dance to more popular musics? When the relationship between fiddling and step dancing within the community becomes less important, perhaps, but I hope this will never happen.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Frances MacEachen, 'Step Dancing in Cape Breton', in *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, ed. by Selma Jeanne Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), V, 696–99 (p. 698).

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Roy, interview by author, recorded 27 August 2001, Carleton Place, Ontario.

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Lynn Yorke-Slader, interview by author, recorded 25 November 2001, Stittsville, Ontario.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Buster Brown, interview by author, recorded 30 August 2001, Arnprior, Ontario.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Roy, interview.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Buster Brown interview.

<sup>10</sup> László Felföldi, 'Connections Between Dance and Dance Music: Summary of Hungarian Research', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 33 (2001), 159–65 (p. 163).

## 'Old style' Cape Breton fiddling: narrative, interstices, dancing

JESSICA HERDMAN

### **Introduction: symbiosis**

Pointing out the symbiotic relationship between fiddling and dancing in Cape Breton traditional practices is almost redundant. Nearly every conversation I have had about Cape Breton fiddling with both members of the community or interested scholars has included some reference to dancing, whether indirectly or explicitly. The dancing and fiddling is simply perceived as interrelational, with one propelling the other. In 1973, scholar John Gibson suggested:

Cape Breton has never lost its step-dancing and that is probably the most important factor in the story of the fiddle. Step-dancing is to fiddling as rhyme is to poetry; both make something memorable and transmittable; in the case of step-dancing, while people dance that way the music must continue.<sup>1</sup>

Since the period during which Gibson asserted this view, the point has been made time and again that the traditional fiddle music of Cape Breton has an infectious liveliness so obviously connected with dancing. As fiddler Sandy MacIntyre is known to say, 'If you're not dancing, you'd better pinch yourself, because you're probably dead.'<sup>2</sup>

As the tradition has developed during the past several decades, however, it has begun to interface with elements of globality, variously affecting this perspective, and resulting in a complex narrative. After a brief contextualization of this discourse, this paper will focus on two specific analyses of performance practice that aim to musically concretize these views: firstly, I will compare fiddlers' dance tune performances from across different generations and commercial roles; and secondly, I will compare an idolized innovative old-generation fiddler's performance of a listening tune versus a dance tune.

### **Commercialism: duality**

As Cape Breton musicians were swept up in the wave of the Celtic boom in the 1990s, the fiddling was integrated into impressive spectacles, sometimes somewhat

detached from its origins. Being a teenage violinist in Ontario during this rising Celtic craze, and spending summers with my family back in Cape Breton, I was acutely aware of the difference between the tradition that I saw being practiced in Cape Breton and the manner in which it was being portrayed in the media. If Natalie MacMaster integrated flashy dance numbers into her sets, or Ashley MacIsaac broke into seemingly spontaneous dance in his grunged-out Cape Breton arrangements, this all seemed more like part of the show; despite the awareness on the part of the performers, and their known dancing abilities, the intricate connection between the music and dance would have been difficult to convey in these types of mass-Celtic-culture contexts.

Yet, there exists a duality to the image of the Cape Breton fiddler, and the import of associated social practices. On the one hand, there is the impression drawn from the commercially-manipulated ideals – the etic view; on the other hand, there is the vision apparent in the community discourse – the emic view. Within the latter, the integrality of the connection between dancing and fiddling is not only understood, but is also frequently expounded upon.

#### **'Old style' – emergence and discourse**

The narrative about the history of the tradition developed a strong bent towards authenticity and preservation in the wake of the 1971 CBC documentary *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*.<sup>3</sup> This oft-cited film, in asserting the seeming decline of the island's fiddling practices, incited a wave of fear about the possible loss of these traditions. In a simplified view, the community narrative emerged from this period as a bipartite formula that has persisted in some ways into the twenty-first century: firstly, eighteenth-century Scottish fiddling practices had been preserved into late (or mid) twentieth-century Cape Breton; secondly, these practices were then being lost or manipulated by the present generations.

The idealization of 'old style' engaged with and developed out of both earlier and concomitant socio-political forces and conceptions. The trendy Celticism emergent in the 1980s–1990s Western mass culture was rooted in the fabrications of Enlightenment Scotland and the manipulations of the Highland image.<sup>4</sup> The resurgence of these ideals in twentieth-century Nova Scotia continued the Enlightenment romanticization of the 'old' customs (supposedly the most ancient practices, but realistically primarily those customs extant only in the post-Battle of Culloden period of the militarily and socially threatless Highlander).<sup>5</sup>

As this folkloric mystique infiltrated the projected Nova Scotian identity through the clever machinations of MacDonaldian tourism of the 1930s onward, Cape Breton was brought under the Celtic labels and triumphs of tartanism.<sup>6</sup> This surge of antimodern commercialism propelled the expectation of a disconnection between broadcasted folkloric practices and continued dynamic traditions. That is, with the obviously commercialized mystique of the spectacles from the Celtic boom – such as the *Riverdance* shows – a detachment from actually continuous social practice was relayed. This fantastic projection of Celtic artistic practices was

nonetheless drawn from extant – though mostly exaggerated and idealized – Celtic traditions. In Cape Breton, from the growth of MacDonaldian tartanism to the mystical boom of Celticism, living cultural traditions continued throughout the communities on the island.

In her doctoral dissertation, Doherty explained that in the post-1971 climate of concern, the second half of the above bipartite formula (the loss or manipulation of the traditional Cape Breton fiddling style by younger generations) became loudly asserted. In order to preserve this pristine, original form of the tradition, young fiddlers were encouraged toward the emulation of chosen models of the ‘old style’. With the above idealization of the older ways, the ‘old style’ was propelled as the yardstick by which younger players could measure their ‘authentic’ connection to their tradition. Doherty discovered that the application of the term ‘old style’ came to encompass nearly any older generational player active prior to the 1971 *Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*; interestingly, innovative fiddlers from earlier generations were some of the most frequently held up exemplar proponents of the ‘old style’.<sup>7</sup>

### **Interstices**

The acceptance of these older generational fiddlers’ innovations as traditional components of the fiddling practice engages with the Hobsbawmian social phenomenon of ‘interstices’. Within a formalized social past:

We will always have interstices, that is matters which form no part of the system of conscious history into which men incorporate, in one way or another, what they consider important about their society. Innovation can occur in these interstices, since it does not automatically affect the system, and therefore does not automatically come up against the barrier: ‘This is not how things have always been done.’<sup>8</sup>

These interstices, lying outside of the protective cultural guard-rails, allow for a degree of innovation and manipulation of cultural practice. This change, so long as it,

is sufficiently gradual to be absorbed, as it were, by increments, it can be absorbed into the formalized social past in the form of a mythologized and perhaps ritualized history, by a tacit modification of the system of beliefs, by ‘stretching’ the framework, or in other ways.<sup>9</sup>

In the narrative surrounding Cape Breton fiddling, the acceptance of certain aspects of players’ innovative musical manipulations points to the interstices active both within the specific practices of the fiddling, and within those social practices related to fiddling. While there is certainly a larger spectrum of natural interstices within the tradition, this paper will address two requirements for allowable bold experimentation to be accepted into the discourse of traditional playing that are related to the above concepts of commercialism and ‘old style’: firstly, the innovative

practices must be developed for an emic audience; secondly, they may not interfere with other integral social practices. In the case of Cape Breton fiddling, as noted above, the fundamental associative relationship is between fiddling and dancing. Over-manipulation of attributes of the fiddling is not functional in tandem with this social practice.

### **Dancing**

In particular, we see the necessity of a certain degree of conservatism with playing for solo step dancing. Glenn Graham articulates the adherence to tradition that solo dance demands:

Stepdancing has lasted, and is going on with the fiddling. So as long as that stepdancing is there to keep us in check, we have to play a certain way rhythmically to compliment that. And if it goes beyond that, that's when the style will be lost. But it doesn't. Because, if you're playing for dancers, if you're playing for dancing, a lot of that old style has to remain there.<sup>10</sup>

Because of the changing nature not only of the social makeup of dance settings, but also the integration of exogenous dancing features into the square sets, fiddling has likely retained the closest linkage with solo step dancing rather than social dancing.<sup>11</sup> While aspects of the tradition have undergone mutations during the past century, the practitioners involved with solo step dancing have most frequently remained members of the community. The resultant nature of performance is one of symbiosis between fiddler and dancer mentioned above. Solo step dancing also involves an aspect that is not as active with square sets: the critical participation of the observing community. Most of the evening at a dance involves square sets, in which any attendee may participate. In a typical third figure, danced to a reel, men and women face one another and have the opportunity to show off their solo reel steps. The exhibition of prominent step dancers occurs more explicitly, however: at some point at each dance, the fiddler will slip into a strathspey, signalling for the solo step dancers to step up and perform. A crowd will form to observe each step dancer, and their interactions with the fiddler. Although a number of these observers may be tourists, many are involved, informed community members. With the nature of the open critical discourse surrounding the Cape Breton traditions, the latter proponents would thus be engaged with a certain degree of evaluation of the fiddler-dancer relations. There is a resultant pressure for the performers towards maintenance of traditional style – so revered in Cape Breton circles – while, of course obtaining a level of equally vital individual expression.

The essential requirement for the fiddlers in this performative context is that they play in a manner conducive to step dancing. Playing for dancing requires particular techniques that become concretized as stylistic attributes. While some of these features may have a rootedness elsewhere – in imitation of bagpipes, or from the nature of the intangible Gaelic flavour – some degree of their perpetuation has

been demanded by the practical needs of dancing. While the continuity of elements of this stylistic approach would certainly not be restricted to dance contexts, the requirements of playing for dancers demands that these performance practices be generally applied to dance fiddling.

### **Demands of dancing: resultant 'old style' techniques**

Interviews with informants have revealed a logical overlap between the discourse on 'old style' and that on dance playing.<sup>12</sup> Three integral elements identified consistently by informants as necessary in both 'old style' and dance playing will be examined in this paper in relation to the application of related techniques. Playing for both social dance sets and step dancing alike requires these components: timing, lift, and drive. By timing, informants are basically referring to metric consistency and precision. There is a deeper implication to this term, however, as it also signals the fiddler's ability to select a proper tempo for dancing. As Andrea Beaton states, this process is not simply the application of a single tempo for every dance or solo step dancer: 'Timing is so important. I guess every dancer would have a timing that they like – some like to dance fast, and some don't.'<sup>13</sup> Doherty also emphasizes the importance of timing within the tradition: 'Good timing is a characteristic aspired to by all Cape Breton fiddlers, and is one of the criteria most commonly referred to in the appraisal of an individual fiddlers [*sic*] style. [...] The concept of timing is of course inextricably linked with the dance.'<sup>14</sup>

The ideas of lift and drive are also recurrent in the community discourse on Cape Breton fiddling. In her study of *puirt-a-beul*, Sparling strives to explain the concept of lift:

The lift is hard to describe but one knows that it is happening by spontaneous audience applause and cheers, and by body language such as tapping or moving feet, erect bodies sitting forward in chairs, and smiles. I personally respond to lift physically, wanting to move and to dance. It is the sense of excitement that arises when a singer or musician suddenly moves from the strathspey to the reel, with their change in tempo and rhythm. Lift occurs when a performer moves to a new tune in a new key or mode. It results from syncopation, which is often due to the 'Scotch snap' (sixteenth to dotted-eighth-note rhythm), but also happens in fiddling as the result of repeated notes interspersed with leaps, which gives the sense of a drone against which a melody is heard.<sup>15</sup>

Informants also clearly associate lift and drive with a surge of energy or a propulsion toward movement and dance. Lift or drive would likely be what makes one's feet tap uncontrollably to the ebullience of a fiddler's playing. These ideas, while clearly meaningful, are challenging to conceptualize. Andrea Beaton contemplated this: 'Good lift, you know, good swing. I don't know – it's hard to explain.'<sup>16</sup>

Some of the techniques that are associated with 'old style' are almost exclusively employed in dance tunes: for example, the up-driven bow, high-bass tuning, and cuts and cutting. In particular, some of these techniques – up-driven

bows and cuttings – are generally only used in the performance of strathspeys. This again emphasizes the specific connection between solo step dancing, which necessitates the use of strathspeys, and 'old style' techniques.

Because of these interrelations, there are traceable stylistic elements of 'old style' that can be connected inter-generationally, and across players' roles within the tradition in the performance of dance tunes. A comparative analysis would offer a view of this continuity. To exemplify this, I will examine four fiddlers in recordings engaged with different social and performative contexts, representing four points in the twentieth-century Cape Breton fiddling tradition: mid-century (Bill Lamey – Appendix A); post-1971 (Buddy MacMaster – Appendix B); the Celtic boom period (Ashley MacIsaac – Appendix C); and the present young generation (Robbie Fraser – Appendix D) (see also Appendix E). Although these four fiddlers all have their unique characteristics of style, roles, and images, they are nonetheless emically considered to be both important dance fiddlers, and bearers of the 'old style'. The tune used for this study is a prototypical exemplar of a standard step dancing tune, 'King George IV Strathspey'.<sup>17</sup>

The recording of Bill Lamey comes from the compilation album *Bill Lamey Full Circle*.<sup>18</sup> Although it was released as a commercial recording, all of the tracks on this album are from amateur recordings done by community members in the casual context of dances and house sessions. Bill Lamey is upheld as a master Cape Breton fiddler, having had a seminal role in the recording and radio industry in the 1940s and 1950s. While Bill himself idealized bearers of the 'old style' tradition (such as 'Big' Ronald MacLellan and 'Little' Mary MacDonald), he is now championed by several of the recent generations of master fiddlers (such as Jerry Holland and Dave MacIsaac) as an outstanding specimen of traditional playing.

The recording of Buddy MacMaster comes from his first album, *Judique on the Floor*, released in 1989.<sup>19</sup> Now 86, Buddy is distinguished as one of the older generations of master fiddlers. As noted by Doherty, although there are aspects of Buddy's playing that exhibit newer stylistic attributes, in the post-1971 atmosphere he was grouped into the older generational representatives of 'old style'. According to Paul MacDonald, however, Buddy was reputed as an 'old style' player long before this period.<sup>20</sup> Buddy's playing is inseparable from the Cape Breton dancing tradition and the square dance circuit: 'It is the community dance that is at the heart of his music'.<sup>21</sup>

The recording of Ashley MacIsaac is from his *Fine Thank You Very Much* album, released in 1996 (and re-released in 2004).<sup>22</sup> This 'traditional album' followed directly behind his triple-platinum 1995 grunge-Celtic CD *Hi, How Are You Today?* Ashley exhibits a duality in a more pronounced way than any of the other internationally successful Cape Breton musicians. The Cape Breton discourse identifies him not only as an 'old style' player, but also as an innovative experimentalist. Ashley's 'old style' is certainly connected with dance playing, as his initial participation in the tradition was as a step-dancer, and he later became extremely active in the dance circuit as a fiddler (from the age of 12 or 13).<sup>23</sup>



The recording of Robbie Fraser comes from his *Hear this ...Here it is* album of 2004.<sup>24</sup> As the first album by a young fiddler, it exhibits the early stages of his musical development. Nonetheless, since he began performing onstage at the age of 5, Robbie was praised as both a dance player and a bearer of the 'old style'.<sup>25</sup>

### **'King George IV Strathspey'**

Although there are countless fascinating aspects of melodic manipulation, intonation, and accompaniment, this comparison is only intended to survey aspects of fiddling performance practice associated with the 'old style' employed by these fiddlers that are related to the requirements of dancing. It will be noted that there is a great variety of approach to performance practice within this realm; this diversity is related to the prized individuality within the Cape Breton style. There are, nonetheless, consistent practical motivations to these stylistic manoeuvres that relate back to the emically prized concepts of timing, lift, and drive.

My relational analysis of these performances is not meant to provide a definitive sketch of performance practices; rather it is intended to offer a perspective on how these interpretations relate to a common goal: 'drivin' 'er for the dancer' (see Appendixes A–D for apposite representationally selective transcriptions of each fiddler).

These ideas noted above of timing, lift, and drive serve as overarching principles in the application of 'old style' techniques; while each player employs the 'old style' manners in a different way, they are consistently functional for the rhythmic stability, emphasis, and energy necessary for dance playing. The first area of study will focus on the aspects of 'old style' performance practice related to bowing, while the second area of study will focus on those related to left-hand techniques; these will be analyzed in relation to their functionality for timing, lift, and drive.

Although there are many variances in bowing approaches, each fiddler's application of bowing techniques adheres to the most vital dance-bowing feature: that each bowing choice allows for powerful emphasis on the strong or important beats of the bar. A specific technique that all four fiddlers employ prominently in the A section (mm. 1–8) is the up-driven bow. This technique not only facilitates a re-articulation of the second beat of the measure, but also offers a bow distribution that positions the bow closer to the frog (its natural heavy point) for the third beat of the measure, thus helping to accentuate the fiddler's timing (see Figure 1). Bill Lamey also employs a combination of other 'old style' bowing patterns in the A section. For example, in measure 7, he uses a dig bow on the first beat (placed on an *appoggiatura*), followed by a hooked up-bow on the second beat, in order to recover the bow for a cutting on the third beat.

HERDMAN 'Old style' Cape Breton iddling



Figure 1 Up-Driven Bow Distribution

Each fiddler also changes his approach to this bowing in their various iterations; however, within these differences, the articulation in this A section consistently follows a pattern: a lift after the first beat, and a strong accent on the second beat. This articulatory structure can be seen as providing a lift to the phrase, through the accentuation of the off-beat. This second-beat accent also directly interacts with step dancing, as the basic strathspey step involves an emphatic forward kick on the second eighth-note, and a hop on the second beat (see Figure 2). This motion engages with the fiddler's motions: an up-driven bow (as the dancer kicks), followed by a lift and an accented second beat (as the dancer hops).

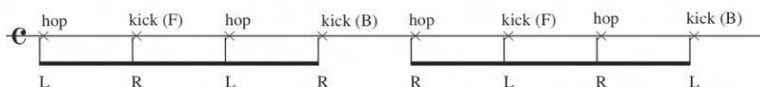


Figure 2 Basic Strathspey Step<sup>26</sup>

The bowing applied by all fiddlers in the B section falls within the classification of 'choppy bowing': there are no audible slurs or hooked bowings throughout. This type of bowing is connected not only with the traditional Cape Breton style in general, but is also, more specifically, attached to dance fiddling. As fiddler Andrea Beaton explained, the separate bows allow for a clearer articulation of beats for dancers – essentially, helping to accentuate the timing.<sup>27</sup>

Similar to the pervasive use of 'choppy bowing' is the application of 'dig bow' (or 'bow push').<sup>28</sup> The frequently employed 'dig bows' often appear in conjunction with other emphatic techniques, making them less conspicuous; however, they are more noticeable in Robbie Fraser's playing, due to a lesser degree of ornamentation. Since Robbie was at an early stage of his fiddling development in this recording, it is not surprising that he used fewer embellishments than the more mature fiddlers here. Fiddler Glenn Graham suggested to me that the gradual integration of more 'dirt' is often a part of a fiddlers' musical growth.<sup>29</sup> However, the same compulsion towards the emphasis of strong beats is notable in Fraser's B section; although he does not use the left-hand ornamentation that we will see in the other fiddlers' playing here, he accents the same beats through the use of a 'dig bow', and frequently a drone.

There is a great deal of droning throughout these performances that is most likely to be rooted in the bygone need to amplify for dance playing. That is, all of the fiddlers apply drones quite consistently throughout the tune: in the A section, the pervasive drone is accomplished by stopping the G and D string with the first finger (thus creating an a/e' drone); in the B section, the drone is similarly a/e'', but on open strings. This type of droning resembles the effect of playing in the 'old style' tuning

of high-bass, where droning on the open strings would create the same pitches (a/e; a'/e''). Thus, the prominent usage of these drones by all of the fiddlers seems to be a continuance of an older necessity for dance playing – amplification.

That said, each fiddler approaches these drones in a different manner. MacIsaac's and Lamey's are the most consistently audible, whereas MacMaster's and Fraser's are gentler. Mostly, the fiddlers also tend to bow the droned tone more audibly in conjunction with another type of accent. For example, on the second beat of the measure, the drone tends to be more detectable concomitant with the up-driven bow. Further, the first and third beats that fall on Cs (sharp or natural) in the B Section (for example, measures (mm.) 10 and 12) are also generally droned more emphatically, in conjunction with ornamentation that will be investigated below. It is apparent that the application of various techniques is often combined to articulate important beats and phrasing – thus contributing to the accentuation of the fiddler's lift or timing.

This phenomenon is also apparent in the fiddler's usage of ornamentation. For the most part, throughout this tune, the left hand embellishments fall on the strong beats of the measure. For example, all of the fiddlers tend to ornament the third beat of the measure throughout the A section; the first beats here do not require additional accentuation because of their natural accent through the rhythm of the Scotch snap. In the B section, as noted above, fiddlers consistently ornament the first and third beats that fall on Cs (sharp or natural). Although each fiddler ornaments these Cs in their own individual manner, there is obvious overlap in the usage of certain 'old style' embellishments; in particular, most fiddlers favour the use of either vibrato or the 'warble' (ornaments which are based in the same movement) for these strong beats. The choices of ornamentation thus vary only slightly from fiddler to fiddler; and as in the approach to bowing, the resultant phrasal patterns and emphases are similarly oriented toward the needs of dancing.<sup>30</sup>

### **Conservatism versus innovation in idealized 'old style' pre-1971 fiddlers**

The association of this 'old style' with dance playing can be further implied by examining a pre-1971 innovative fiddler's more conservative approach to tunes employed for dancing, and a more experimental approach to tunes disconnected from dancing. Angus Chisolm's performances of 'Mrs Scott Skinner' (see Appendix F), a listening air, and 'Christie Campbell' (see Appendix G), a dance strathspey, will illustrate this.<sup>31</sup>

Chisolm's interpretation of 'Mrs Scott Skinner' is noticeably influenced by the popular Classical style of the period in terms of three aspects: rubato, phrasing, and extended techniques. All of these elements are clearly tied to Kreisleresque interpretations, as comparison will illustrate.<sup>32</sup> First, Chisolm freely applies rubato throughout the piece. The most frequent uses of rubato, however, appear in the typical *gemütlich* style of early twentieth-century Classical performance practice: accelerandi and decelerandi oriented around the shapes of runs. For instance, in measure 1, the top of the run in beat 3 is stretched out, while the scalar descent

from it accelerates into the fourth beat. Chisolm also frequently uses ritardandos into the ends of phrases, and pauses on their culminatory points – another typical technique in the Kreisler style. This is apparent in measures 4, 6, 8, and so on. Chisolm's phrasing is related to his use of rubato, and similarly follows the Kreisleresque patterns: generally, the high points of phrases (pitch-wise) are reached in a crescendo (corresponding to an accelerando), while the terminations of phrases (which are normally falling patterns) are relaxed to in a diminuendo (corresponding to a ritardando). For example, see measures 1–4.

In Chisolm's performance of 'Mrs Scott Skinner', his extended techniques include vibrato, shifting, and non-traditional chords.<sup>33</sup> While vibrato is normally an ornament in Cape Breton fiddling, Chisolm applies it more continuously; furthermore, in the moments when the vibrato is exaggeratedly audible, it is wider than traditional fiddling vibrato.<sup>34</sup> Position playing is rarely demanded in traditional tunes. Although this tune is a J. Scott Skinner composition (which does at times require up to the fifth position), the pitches do not necessitate position playing; thus, it is a choice on the part of the performer to shift, as Chisolm does. Beyond the use of upper positions (likely only the third position in this tune), Chisolm's shifting approach is imitative of the quintessential Kreislerian schmaltzy style, typically called the 'Romantic shift': he does an audible, saccharine slide into the final moment of the shift (the slide is particularly discernible in the last semitone of the movement). Lastly, Chisolm's frequent use of non-traditional chords is most apparent in association with his shifts, for instance, the recurring motive in measure 6, which is performed with a simultaneous 'Romantic shift'.

As a master fiddler before the 1970s, Angus Chisolm's suave, unorthodox style in his listening tunes snuggled into the interstices of the allowable innovations within the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. The practical demands of dancing, however, did not offer the same opportunities for extreme stylistic flexibility in dance tunes. Further, the participants who were engaged with dance fiddling would have objected to the loss of the lift, drive, and timing – concepts that are most easily accomplished through the application of 'old style' techniques.

### **'Christie Campbell Strathspey'**

The strathspey 'Christie Campbell' is a favourite among Cape Bretoners, and is an exemplary tune belonging to the 'old style' – particularly because it is one of the few remaining tunes that fiddlers continue to play in high-bass tuning (a/e'/a''/e''). Throughout his performance of this tune, Chisolm also employs many of the 'old style' techniques explored in the performances of 'King George IV Strathspey' above.

The most pervasive 'old style' bowing that he uses are the cuttings that cut up the tune. These terminate every phrase of the A section (mm. 2, 4, 6, and 8), and are also used sporadically throughout the B section (mm. 12 and 16). Interestingly, Dunlay and Greenberg's transcription of Mary MacDonald, one of the undisputed 'old style' players, shows nearly the same pattern of cutting as Chisolm in measure 12 (beats 1 and 2), and identical cutting in measure 16 (beats 1 and 2).<sup>35</sup> While some of these cuttings are ornamental, or perhaps part of the Gaelic flavour, those falling

at the ends of phrases (or sub-phrases) operate functionally to energize the pick-up into the following phrase. For instance, in measure 8, after landing on the strong third beat for a full quarter note, the application of a cutting on the fourth beat animates the movement into the new phrase, through the acceleration of the bow. Thus these phrasal pick-ups with cuttings help to drive the tune.

Many of Angus Chisolm's ornamentations also fall on the strong beats, as with the above performances of 'King George IV'. His drones generally follow a similar pattern to those of the above fiddlers in that they fall most prominently on strong beats of the measure; both of these applications therefore help to emphasize the timing of the tune. Chisolm's use of drones throughout this tune further parallels the 'old style' approach to 'King George IV' above. In essence, Chisolm drones frequently on the open a (normally g when not scordatura) string throughout the A section, and on the open e'' in the B section. Again, for the most part, the prominence of this droning is most likely based in the prior need for fiddlers to amplify their sound.

In contrast to the above listening tune, 'Mrs Scott Skinner', Chisolm's performance of this step dance tune, 'Christie Campbell', not only avoids extreme creative stylistic experimentation, but also projects copious qualities associated with the 'old style' of playing. These techniques are particularly important not only in emphasizing Chisolm's timing, but also in aiding his drive and lift – all features that informants have declared necessary both for the performance of 'old style' and for ideal dance fiddling.

## **Conclusion**

In particular contexts fiddlers throughout the twentieth century have engaged with the performative interests of varying audiences and market types, resulting in experimental approaches to stylistic attributes. However, the acceptance of these innovative approaches as aspects of the traditional practice only occurs in the interstices; for the most part, these interstices have been found in connection with listening rather than dance tunes.

Analysis of cross-generational players, Bill Lamey, Buddy MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, and Robbie Fraser, has shown that, despite their varying roles in the tradition, and their (often period-based) divergent performance contexts, fiddlers identified as 'old style' players tend to display techniques of performance practice emically associated with the 'old style' when playing dance tunes. Further, an analytical perspective on Angus Chisolm, an innovative master fiddler from the idealized pre-1971 period has contrasted elements of conservatism versus experimental traits, dependent on the position of the tunes within the tradition. This stylistic divergence evinced in the playing of a single fiddler points musically to the accepted interstices versus proscribed innovations in the tradition. The conservative traditional approach is again connected with the performance of dance tunes.

It seems that we are always discovering variances to the 'old style'; perhaps it is simply that one of these sub-styles is that employed for dancing. Whenever fiddling has continued to have a prominent role in the social practices of Cape Breton, dancing has blossomed in tandem. Although I would not suggest that the 'old style' in its entirety has been preserved in conjunction with dancing, there is a

continuity of certain technical attributes associated with 'old style' fiddling in the performance of dance tunes.

As I worked through my connections between musical analysis and ethnographic perspectives for this paper, I was continually reminded of a humbling remark that Kinnon Beaton had made about the elusive Mabou Coal Mines style: 'You can get all the PhDs that you want, I think, and you're not going to identify what that sound is.'<sup>36</sup> While I hope that this analytical view of specific performance techniques has provided a perspective on the continued interrelations of the emic expression of 'old style' and the practical demands of dance playing, admittedly, such a theoretical perspective has a limited reach – which I nonetheless hope to keep stretching in future.

### Appendix A

The musical score is presented in two systems, A and B, across six staves. System A (measures 1-8) is in treble clef and contains a melody with various rhythmic patterns, including triplets and grace notes. System B (measures 9-15) is also in treble clef and contains a bass line with similar rhythmic patterns. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 15.

Bill Lamey, 'King George IV Strathspey'

Appendix B

[intro] A

4

7

10 B

13 vib

16

Buddy MacMaster, 'King George IV Strathspey'

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Appendix C

[intro] A

3

6

9 B vib vib

12

15

*p*

Robbie Fraser, 'King George IV Strathspey'



Appendix D

The musical score is written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It consists of six staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains measures 1 through 8. A first ending bracket labeled 'A' spans measures 1 through 8. The second staff contains measures 9 through 11. The third staff contains measures 12 through 14. A second ending bracket labeled 'B' spans measures 12 through 14. The fourth staff contains measures 15 through 17. The fifth staff contains measures 18 through 20. The sixth staff contains measures 21 through 23. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of the sixth staff.

Robbie Fraser, 'King George IV'

## Appendix E: Ornamentation and style notation key

### Ornamentation and Style Notation Key

#### Bowing



'up-driven bow'<sup>37</sup>

[Extra pressure, stronger accent on third note; often lift between first and second up-bows]



articulatory lift

[Extra lift (earlier release) of finger]



dig-bow

[Extra pressure at beginning of stroke; then released]



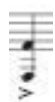
thrown bow

[Sometimes resulting in a bounced quasi-cutting]



sunk bow

[Extra weight at beginning of stroke]



accented sunk bow



crushed bow

#### Fingered/Other



'warble'

[Melody note sounded; partial release of pressure; return of pressure]



'vibrato'

[Fast, ornamental shake]



'turn'

[Melody note, pitch above, return to melody note]



lifted run

[Increased speed of 16ths; resulting in nearly 16th-dotted 8th emphasis]



weighty rubato

[Extra weight and time taken]

Appendix F

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Mrs Scott Skinner' by Angus Chisholm. The score is written in a single system on a treble clef staff, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). The music is characterized by a complex, rhythmic melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Performance instructions are placed throughout the score, including 'vib' (vibrato), 'rit.' (ritardando), 'accel.' (accelerando), and 'swung' (indicating a swung feel). The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 4, 8, 12, 17, 21, 25, and 29 clearly marked. The piece concludes with a final measure containing a double bar line and a fermata over the final note.

Angus Chisholm, 'Mrs Scott Skinner'

HERDMAN 'Old style' Cape Breton iddling

Appendix G

Angus Chisholm, 'Christie Campbell Strathspey'<sup>39</sup>

Notes

<sup>1</sup> John G. Gibson, *Fiddlers to the Fore* (Port Hawkesbury: Scotia Group Publications, 1975), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, Margaree Forks, Cape Breton, 19 August 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Every in-depth analysis of the Cape Breton musical tradition written since the early 1970s by both scholars and amateurs has included some reference to this documentary. For examples, see Elizabeth Doherty, 'The Paradox of the Periphery: Evolution of the Cape Breton Fiddle Tradition, c. 1928–1995' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Limerick, 1996); Burt Feintuch, 'The Conditions for Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Social and Economic Setting of a Regional Soundscape', *Ethnomusicology*, 48, no. 1 (2004), 73–104; Virginia Hope Garrison, 'Traditional and Non-Traditional Teaching and Learning Practices in Folk Music: An Ethnographic Field Study of Cape Breton Fiddling' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1985); Glenn Graham, 'Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Making and Maintenance of a Tradition' (unpublished master's thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2004); Allister MacGillivray, *The Cape Breton Fiddler* (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1981); Ian McKinnon, 'Fiddling to Fortune: The Role of Commercial Recordings Made by Cape Breton Fiddlers in the Fiddle Music Tradition of Cape Breton Island' (unpublished master's dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1989); and Marie Thompson, 'The Fall and Rise of the Cape Breton fiddler: 1955–1982' (unpublished master's dissertation, St Mary's University, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> For perspectives on this manipulation of tradition, image and identity, see: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Theresa Sorel, 'Scottish Cultural Nationalism, 1760–1832: The Highlandization of Scottish National Identity' (unpublished master's dissertation, University of Guelph, 1997).

- <sup>5</sup> See Marjorie Harper and Michael Vance, eds, *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia, c. 1700–1999* (Halifax: Fernwood, 1999), pp. 267–97.
- <sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of this ‘triumph of tartanism’, see Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994); and Celeste Ray, ed., *Transatlantic Scots* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), pp. 158–78.
- <sup>7</sup> Doherty, ‘Paradox of the Periphery’, pp. 294–96.
- <sup>8</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The Social Function of the Past’, *Past and Present*, 55, no. 1 (1972), 4.
- <sup>9</sup> Hobsbawm, ‘Social Function of the Past’, p. 6.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with Glenn Graham at the Gaelic College, St Ann’s, Cape Breton, 17 August 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> For the details of these changes, see Emily Addison, ‘The Perception and Value of Dance Halls in Inverness County, Cape Breton’ (unpublished bachelor’s thesis, Trent University, 2001).
- <sup>12</sup> For specific quotations, see Jessica Herdman, ‘The Cape Breton Fiddling Narrative: Innovation, Preservation, Dancing’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2008), pp. 69–71.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Andrea Beaton, 22 August 2007.
- <sup>14</sup> Doherty, ‘Paradox of the Periphery’, p. 357.
- <sup>15</sup> Heather Sparling, ‘Song Genres, Cultural Capital and Social Distinctions in Gaelic Cape Breton’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, York University, 2005), p. 291.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Andrea Beaton, 22 August 2007.
- <sup>17</sup> Dunlay and Greenberg have found this tune in several Scottish collections, including the Skye and Lowe’s collections as ‘King George IV Strathspey’. It is associated with ‘the whole string of George tunes’, which include ‘King George (V) Strathspey’, ‘The Old King’s Reel’, and ‘The King’s Reel’. “‘The King’s Reel’ is frequently played in a group following “King George IVth Strathspey” and with “The Old King’s Reel”, especially for stepdancing.’ See Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton* (Toronto: DunGreen Music, 1996), pp. 38–41.
- <sup>18</sup> Bill Lamey, *Bill Lamey: Full Circle*, CD 82161 7032 2, Rounder Records, 2000.
- <sup>19</sup> Buddy MacMaster, *Judique on the Floor*, CD, ACD 9020, Sea-Cape Music, 1989.
- <sup>20</sup> Paul MacDonald, liner notes in Buddy MacMaster, *Judique Flyer*, CD, SMPCD1012, Stephen McDonald, 2000.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Ashley MacIsaac, *Fine Thank You Very Much*, CD, 2 70053, Ancient Music, 1996.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview between Ashley MacIsaac and Joey Beaton, 21 December 1993, cassette tape, *Beaton Interviews*, CMIC Archives, Judique, NS.
- <sup>24</sup> Robbie Fraser, *Hear this ... Here it is*, CD, 7 7859 14660 2 1, Robbie and Isaac Fraser, 2004.
- <sup>25</sup> For community references to Robbie’s ‘old style’ attributes, see Herdman, ‘The Cape Breton Fiddling Narrative’, pp. 116–17.
- <sup>26</sup> ‘L’ logically represents the use of the left foot, while ‘R’ represents the use of the right.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Andrea Beaton, 22 August 2007.
- <sup>28</sup> In their analysis of Cape Breton fiddling performance, Dunlay and Greenberg explain: ‘a little bow-push is applied to so many of the notes [...] so here a bow-push is notated only when it is an especially energetic accent.’ Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton*, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Glenn Graham, 28 August, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed analysis of these performances, and also these fiddlers' recordings of 'The King's Reel', see Herdman, 'The Cape Breton Fiddling Narrative', pp. 117–25.

<sup>31</sup> Both of these Angus Chisholm recordings come from unpublished home session or dance contexts, privately catalogued by David Gillis (an active dance community member) as recorded in the 1960s.

<sup>32</sup> These *gemütlich* stylistic attributes are apparent in the many recordings of Fritz Kreisler's performance practice. All of these techniques could similarly be connected to the playing of J. Scott Skinner himself, who is viewed as having developed a Classical, smoothed-out style of Scottish fiddling; his models would have been from the Kreisler generation. Further, this approach has also been connected to other Scottish players such as Hector MacAndrew; however, Skinner seems to have had a deeper impact on Cape Breton fiddling than any other Scottish players. Regardless, the style that Chisolm chose to emulate in this listening piece stretched far beyond the realm of the traditional Cape Breton style.

<sup>33</sup> The term 'extended techniques', when applied to Cape Breton fiddling, encompasses the usage of any technical features that surpass the demands present in traditional Cape Breton tunes.

<sup>34</sup> This wider vibrato is also what my generation of violinists call 'sheep' vibrato, in that the oscillations are still quite tight; this type of vibrato is again typically connected with the Kreisler style.

<sup>35</sup> Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton*, p. 123.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Kinnon Beaton, 21 August 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Quotation marks are placed around emic terminology. See Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton* for elaboration on Cape Breton techniques.

<sup>38</sup> Angus Chisholm's more consistent, wider vibrato is marked with '\_\_\_' in areas where the vibrato is particularly audible. On single pitches in 'Mrs Scott Skinner', his marked vibrato is also in the continuous (i.e. not ornamental) Classical style.

<sup>39</sup> Transcribed as the pitches *sound*, rather than in scordatura notation.

## Musical fingerprints of the North-East Scotland fiddle style

PAUL ANDERSON

### **Introduction**

The fiddle style of the North-East region of Scotland, which broadly speaking covers the area between Dundee in the South and Morayshire in the north, is one of the most recognisable and spirited fiddle styles in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Defining what actually makes the North-East style 'North-East' in character and clearly different from other notable styles such as 'Shetland' and 'Highland' is actually rather difficult to do and I am fairly sure that if the question was asked of any old 'North-East' player, 'What makes your fiddling North-East in character?', they would probably struggle to articulate its characteristics, just as surely as they could listen to a dozen fiddlers from different areas and pick out the North-Easter quickly and easily.

One problem in trying to define the unique characteristics of any fiddle style is that many of the subtle – and sometimes not so subtle – nuances and techniques which in aggregate make up the type, can also be found to varying degrees in other fiddle styles. It is, however, the combination of these particular techniques and the way in which they are played which define the genuine North-East fiddler. As a participant observer, a North-East fiddler, born, bred and trained, and actively involved in the tradition for more than twenty years, I will now attempt to characterise and dissect this musical fingerprint.

As I have observed, these musical fingerprints, and their use, vary not only from district to district within the North-East, but also to a large extent from player to player, with each player very definitely having a distinctive voice. That said, although individual fiddlers bring their unique touch to the performance of any tune, a number of identifiable characteristics stand out: unisons, the 'up-driven bow', long and short notes, 'snap bowing', grace notes and ornamentation, and finally the syncopated triplet. It is these features which combine to characterise the style.<sup>2</sup>

### **Unisons**

The playing of unisons is one of the most immediately noticeable features of the North-East fiddle style. Although it is used sparingly by fiddlers of other districts, most in the North-East employ the technique in many different kinds of

performances. It is an essential component of the North-East musician's sense of how a tune should sound.

The unison is most readily found within the playing of strathspeys, but it can also be heard to a lesser degree within the playing of slow airs, marches, jigs, hornpipes, and reels. It is executed by playing either the open E, A or D string, while playing the fourth finger on the string below (a unison cannot be played on the G string as there is no string below). Thus, when playing the open E string, a fourth finger will be played on the A string below it. This, however, is only part of the technique, as a third finger grace note must be inserted before the unison proper. The grace note must also be sounded in unison with the open string, which creates a fairly strident discord but, like all grace notes, it must be played swiftly. The unison and the slide can be a difficult technique for young or inexperienced fiddlers, as the fourth finger is the shortest, weakest finger and is also the least used by traditional fiddlers in general. As a result, sliding onto pitch is a common problem.

The challenge of playing unisons is widely acknowledged. Douglas Lawrence, one of the North-East's most respected fiddlers, told me that 'grace notes should be played like lightning!'<sup>3</sup> Pipe Major Iain Grant, an authority on the military tradition, similarly declares, in the context of piping, 'Your finger should be like a whip'.<sup>4</sup>

It is this playing of the discordant grace note just prior to the unison proper which gives the technique its distinctive fire and attack. Crucially, there is no extra pressure applied to the bow when playing the unison, but rather the accent is achieved by the combination of the grace note, the unison and the speed of the bow, which will be moving at pace. Unisons give Scottish fiddling an accent which was termed by many of the older players in Aberdeenshire as 'gurr', and which can be clearly heard in the strathspey playing of well-known exponents of the North-East style.

The unison is usually notated as follows:



However, in reality, it should be played with the open string played in tandem with the third finger grace note, thus:



Hector MacAndrew (1903–1980), the noted fiddler from Fyvie who so impressed Yehudi Menuhin at Blair Castle,<sup>5</sup> recalled that older fiddlers used to say, 'use your cranny, that's what the old fellas used to say, use the unisons.' (The fourth finger is called the 'cranny' in the North-East of Scotland.)



### **Long notes and short notes**

One of the most important aspects of playing in the traditional Scottish style and one also common to the piping tradition is the emphasis on the long notes while also ensuring that the short notes are extremely short. This feature is exemplified most characteristically in the 'Scotch snap', or 'snap bowing': a dotted quaver followed by a semi-quaver and the reverse. It should be noted that, although the short notes are very short, they must be crisply and cleanly played. These long-short patterns are usually written thus,



but when playing in the North-East style these dotted notes must be much longer in practice than they appear on the page and the short notes must be correspondingly shorter. Indeed the feature is more accurately reflected by double dotting:



These patterns are most notably found in the playing of strathspeys, but can also be found in hornpipes, marches, jigs, and slow airs.

This extreme differentiation between the long and short notes may seem like a fairly small detail but, in practice, it gives the music a good deal more tension and greater rhythmic attack. As Douglas Lawrence once commented, 'There are no unimportant notes'.<sup>6</sup> Even when playing slow airs these rhythmic patterns should also be emphasised, though they will not have the attack and accent so central to the playing of strathspeys. Instead, they should flow smoothly and lyrically while still strongly differentiating the notes' duration.

### **Snap bowing**

Snap bowing or the 'Scotch/Scots snap', as some call it, is the most instantly recognisable Scottish rhythmic fingerprint. As such, is an essential element of the strathspey's rhythmic structure. It consists of a semi-quaver followed by a dotted quaver. The semi-quaver is very short yet crisply and cleanly played followed by the dotted quaver which is elongated to make what is essentially a double dotted note. Although there are exceptions, on the whole snap bowing will use separate bow strokes; the short down bow is played near the tip with the long up bow driven from the tip to the heel. It is typically written like this,



but should really be played more like this:



### The up-driven bow

Following on from the snap, the up-driven bow is a technique which is prominent in the Scottish fiddle tradition, again found mostly in the playing of dance strathspeys and slow strathspeys. The slow strathspey differs from its dance equivalent in that, rather than being a tune which is performed for dancing, it is really an instrumental piece performed for listening, rather like a song or a slow air. It is played in common time and, although it has the same stylistic qualities and bowing techniques as are found in dance strathspeys, it will also have the emotional input found in a slow air. It must be played in a lyrical manner at medium tempo.

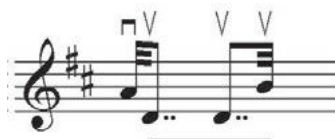
Like the strathspey in which it is executed, the up-driven bow's origins are ancient and shrouded in mystery. Credit for its development is generally given to Niel Gow (1727–1807), who was famed for the power of his up stroke,<sup>7</sup> though there is a possibility that it was in use prior to Gow's lifetime. The up-driven bow is used because it gives a lift, power, and drive that cannot be achieved by bowing in any other way; if it does not convey these qualities, this difficult-to-master technique is better left unused. Basically, the up-driven bow is a refinement of the Scots snap which, in itself, is traditionally one of the most distinctive features of Scottish dance music.

The up-driven bow consists of a four note group: a semi-quaver followed by two dotted quavers finishing with another semi-quaver. (It should be noted that in the Scots fiddle tradition, and particularly in the North-East style, the dotted quavers will actually be double dotted while the semi quavers will be demi-semi quavers.)

The first note of the group is a down bow, which is then smartly followed by three up bows (the first two notes should be a good example of 'snap bowing'). These three up-bowed notes should be driven to the heel of the bow, using its entire length. In addition, the bow must be smartly lifted between the second and third up bow, giving a crisp and clean staccato. The up-driven bow is notated as follows:



However, with the double dotting of the dotted quavers, it would actually be played like this:



### **Double stopping**

Double stopping and the use of drones are common to many different fiddle styles and traditions and this is also true in North-East Scotland. Both techniques involve the playing of two strings at the same time but, while drones involve a note played on either the E, A, or D strings with the open string being played below it, the double stop can utilise many fingering combinations. For example, the third finger on the A string (D sharp) can be played with the second finger on the D string (F sharp), giving a D major chord. It appears like this on the page:



However, while double stopping and drones can be an almost constant feature of some fiddle styles, they should be used more sparingly in the North-East style, where they are used to give extra character, extra 'fire' to a tune.

Typically when tunes are committed to the page, such nuances are excluded. William Marshall's strathspey 'Craigellachie Brig', for example, is usually noted thus:



A more accurate depiction of how it might be played by the fiddlers of the North-East of Scotland, with the addition of the double stops, drones and double dotted notes, is as follows:



Like with 'The Laird o' Drumblair', often written:



This is how it would be notated with the drones, double dotted notes, double stop and unison included:



These chords, although played sparingly, give strathspey playing much of its character. There are, of course, no hard and fast rules on the use of double stops, so it is very much down to the individual to decide where and when chords should be applied.

### Grace notes and ornamentation

Grace notes are an important part of any traditional fiddler's armoury and, unlike the piping tradition, in which ornaments are very strictly adhered to, ornamentation in the fiddle tradition is very much down to the individual's personal taste. As mentioned before, in relation to the playing of long and short notes, grace notes must be crisply and cleanly played; a slow and untidy example is worse than none at all. Grace notes are an essential part of giving accent and life to the music, and while they are played much as they are in any other region, taken in combination with the other techniques discussed, they are very much part of the overall style.

Typical ornamentations found in the North-East fiddle style are the single grace note, the double grace note and the 'turn', as follows:



This can also be interpreted on paper like this,



### The syncopated triplet

The playing of the syncopated triplet, in place of the ordinary variety, is something of a North-East speciality and can be used to great effect in the performance of strathspeys, though it should be used sparingly to give a lift to the music and provide variation. The full bow should be employed in its execution. As Hector MacAndrew remarked: 'Syncopated triplets are obvious by their absence, now. They give you lift and lilt'.<sup>8</sup>

Normal triplets are played as follows:



Syncopated triplets, however, are played thus:



### **Conclusion – a dialect of the fiddle**

Most of these observations have been related to the clearly definable, technical aspects of North-East fiddle style such as unisons and the up-driven bow, but I strongly believe that there is also something more elusive and difficult to define which shapes all distinctive fiddle styles, and that is their connection with local dialect. The language and accents musicians hear will have a subtle yet profound impact on their playing. A fiddler from Boston, Debbie Billmers, once commented to me, ‘North-East people talk in strathspeys;’<sup>9</sup> she could clearly hear the rhythm and the accent of the strathspey in the regional dialect. I believe that the refinement of the strathspey in the North-East of Scotland is therefore no accident, any more than is the character of Highland and Island, or Shetland, or Donegal, music. Gregory Dorchak has noted the importance of the Gaelic language to Cape Breton fiddle style,<sup>10</sup> and I firmly believe that language has played a similarly significant role in the development of North-East style.

Musical notation is a poor carrier of stylistic markers, as is written language, which points to the necessity of learning from other players and learning by ear. That is not to say that staff notation does not have its place, but rather that nuances of style and character are best learned by using and training the ear, just as we learn language from other speakers. Only then can a ‘musical dialect’ be absorbed properly and incorporated into one’s own playing style. Individually, many of these rhythmic and melodic features may be found in the fiddle traditions of other regions and nations. Taken together, however, these details of style may be said to add up to a regional musical fingerprint, a series of criteria any one of which may hint at a player’s origin, but which, taken together, reveal a musical dialect and the fiddler as a North-East player as surely as does his or her spoken language.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> For background on Scottish music in general, see John Purser, *Scotland’s Music: A History of the Traditional and Classical Music of Scotland from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream with BBC Scotland, 1992) and Francis Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966/1970). For more detailed analysis of Scottish fiddle styles, see Katherine Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Culture: Aspects of the Tradition* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007). For a look at particular players, see Moyra Cowie, *The Life and Times of William Marshall 1748–1833: Composer of Scottish Traditional Fiddle Music, Clock Maker and Butler to the 4th Duke of Gordon* (Elgin: the author, 1999), Mary Anne Alburger, *Scottish Fiddlers and their Music* (London: Gollancz, 1983; Hardie Press 1996), James Scott Skinner, *My Life and Adventures* (Aberdeen: City of Aberdeen in association with Wallace Music, 1994), and Mary Anne Alburger, ‘J. Scott Skinner and George Riddell’, in Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, Emily B. Lyle, and Katherine Campbell (eds), *The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection*, vol. 8 (Aberdeen and Edinburgh: Mercat Press for the University of Aberdeen in association with the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, 2002), 588–89. Paul Anderson, *The Elphinstone Collection: Fiddle tunes from North-East Scotland compiled by Paul Anderson*, with CD (Upper Breakish: Taigh na Teud, 2009) features unpublished North-East fiddle music, including the entire known repertoire of Tarland’s Peter Milne. Helen Jackson

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discusses the context of Gow's tradition in *Niel Gow's Inver* (Perth: Perth & Kinross Libraries, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Examples of Anderson's playing can be found on Paul Anderson, *Home and Beauty*, Greentrax CDTRAX340, Cockenzie, East Lothian, 2009; for a fiddle masterclass in North-East style, see [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/masterclass](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/masterclass) [accessed 24 June 2010].

<sup>3</sup> Told to me repeatedly during lessons given by Douglas Lawrence, and see *Hector MacAndrew - Legend Of The Scots Fiddle*, Greentrax CDTRAX335, Cockenzie, East Lothian, 2009) for a selection of tunes played in an informal home setting.

<sup>4</sup> P/M Iain Grant was my bagpipe tutor for a short period during my childhood.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Gilchrist, 'Bowling before a new audience', [living.scotsman.com/music/Bowling-before-a-new-audience.2324542.jp](http://living.scotsman.com/music/Bowling-before-a-new-audience.2324542.jp) [accessed 17 June 2010]; *Mr Menuhin's Welcome to Blair Castle*, BBC Scotland television programme (from a personal video in my collection).

<sup>6</sup> This was stressed during lessons given by my former teacher, Douglas Lawrence.

<sup>7</sup> For information on Niel Gow, see Rev. Dr Macknight (attrib.), 'A Brief Biographical Account of Neil Gow' *The Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany*, 71 (Jan. 1809), frontispiece and 3–5, and Alastair Duncan, 'Niel Gow', [www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/inart441.htm](http://www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/inart441.htm) [accessed 17 June 2010].

<sup>8</sup> *Mr Menuhin's Welcome to Blair Castle*, 1974, and for some discussion of 'lilt' in the Shetland tradition, see Peter Cooke, *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 117–18.

<sup>9</sup> See Paul Anderson, 'Folk who speak in Strathspeys', [www.leopardmag.co.uk/feats/110/folk-who-speak-in-strathspeys](http://www.leopardmag.co.uk/feats/110/folk-who-speak-in-strathspeys) [accessed 17 June 2010].

<sup>10</sup> Gregory Dorchak, 'The Formation of Authenticity within Folk Tradition: A Case Study of Cape Breton Fiddling', *Driving the Bow: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic* 2, ed. by Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger, Elphinstone Institute Occasional Publications, no. 6 (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, 2008), pp. 153–65.

## Inishowen uncovered: further strands of the Donegal fiddle tradition

LIZ DOHERTY

Caomhín MacAoidh, in his book *Between the Jigs and the Reels*, which introduces County Donegal and its music, refers to Inishowen as ‘the most easily identified cultural catchment in [the county] [...] Being a peninsula, only its southern extent needs marking. This is usually taken along an east-west line passing through Newtowncunningham and Derry.’<sup>1</sup> The Inishowen peninsula comprises the most northerly part of Ireland, stretching some 26 miles in length and in breadth, and covering in total an area of approximately 309 sq miles. To the east side is Lough Foyle and to the west is Lough Swilly, known locally as the Lake of Shadows. The heart of Inishowen is dominated by mountains, with most of the population congregating in various towns near the coastline. Current population figures, based on the 2006 Census of Ireland, are in the region of 32,000.

County Donegal was one of the last counties of Ireland to be established by the English administration in the sixteenth century. It consisted basically of two territories, Inis Eoghain and Tír Chonaill. Inis Eoghain, which literally translates as the Island of Eoghan, although known locally as ‘O’Doghertye’s country’, included the portion of the city and county of Derry which lay on the west bank of the River Foyle. Tír Chonaill, or the ‘countrye of O’Donnell’, comprised all of what remained of the present county of Donegal.<sup>2</sup> These two regions have followed separate political paths for most of their history, with Inishowen looking southwards and eastwards towards Tyrone and Derry rather than westwards towards Tír Chonaill. This historical fact is reflected in the current ecclesiastical divisions under which Inishowen forms part of the diocese of Derry (despite the fact that politically Inishowen and Derry have been constituents of two separately defined jurisdictions since the early twentieth century), while the rest of the county is in the diocese of Raphoe.

### Reviving regional styles

The current visibility and popularity of the ‘Donegal fiddle style’ is testimony to the success of a very well-planned and well-executed revival, initiated by a small body of dedicated and informed music activists in the mid-1980s, in an effort to stall



**Figure 1** Map of Donegal

what appeared to be the inevitable decline of a local style and repertoire that had dwindled to become the domain of only a few players, many of them of an advanced age. In Donegal, as in the rest of Ireland, local repertoires and musical dialects had gradually disappeared as, from the beginning of the twentieth century, the musical life of the country was propelled towards a more homogeneous style and repertoire. This move was encouraged and supported by a variety of factors which impacted both from external sources (for example, recordings and publications from the Irish community in the USA) and internal sources (for example, the advent of radio, rural-urban migration, and the establishment and practices of the organization Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann which was founded in 1951, and which promoted a revival in Irish traditional music through competitions, national gatherings, and the formalization of the transmission process). This movement accelerated through the 1960s and 1970s and assumed a mantle of ‘cultural imperialism’<sup>3</sup> as ‘the renaissance of indigenous Irish performance culture, the electronic media and nationalist cultural movements elevated the performance genres of Clare and Sligo into canonical and authenticating archives of Irish musical identity.’<sup>4</sup> Whereas prior to this, Irish traditional music comprised what appeared to be a myriad of local and regional styles and tunes, constructed around the music of a number of key individuals, an ‘Irish’ style and repertoire began to emerge as people chose to ignore their local sounds and players in their quest for the popular ‘standards’ and ‘hits’.

This movement, however, is in intermittent reverse mode as we speak – in certain areas, considerable emphasis is being placed on re-asserting the local ‘blas’<sup>5</sup>



or musical accent to the extent that, in some instances, 'regional peculiarities [have] come to be celebrated as more authentic than a generic Irish style.'<sup>6</sup> Niall Keegan proposes that:

regional style has become the premier method amongst the community around traditional Irish music for the stylistic categorization of a performance and performer. The use of the words of regional style both affirms the 'traditionality' of the performance and thus performer [...] The use of such terminology places the performance both geographically and diachronically, in the context of a local social continuum in stark contrast with the reality of mass mediated music which, through the processes of secondary orality and visibility, decontextualises and depersonalizes performance [...] Regional style is perhaps so important in the imagination of many traditional musicians because of its exclusivity.<sup>7</sup>

Dowling highlights the reality of traditional music practice in Ireland where the core of the tradition is represented through the idiolect (individual style) with a collective of these similar idiolects from across a wider community or region being defined as a dialect.

Authenticity in traditional music is tied to the identification of an individual player with an ensemble of characteristics – the nature of embellishment, tempo, syncopation, instrumentation and repertoire – which are themselves attached to counties or small inter-county regions. Most musicians are aware that regional styles are in fact derived from the characteristics of a dominant virtuoso who serves as a prototype for the region with which they are identified. But the identification is with the region, not the musician. As a result, one of the most powerful structuring myths of Irish traditional music is that it exists as a collection of regional styles.<sup>8</sup>

Typically, pre the 'cultural imperialism' movement of the twentieth-century, musicians 'cultivated a solo art, periodically enriched by interchanges within a tight network of other local musician-neighbours.'<sup>9</sup> Feldman suggests that:

[the] older generation of fiddlers were the last to receive the tradition of regional dance music directly from their musical and genealogical forbearers as eminently local knowledge and, by and large, with minimal influence from the mass media. Though they did have a strong sense of preserving a national cultural inheritance they also took ironic pride in their regional musical identity [...] they recalled and accessed different niches of the Irish cultural archive that had been forgotten by the rest of the country. This was a magnification of the virtuoso ethic in Irish traditional music performance. Just as each fiddler was assessed by his ability to mark the music with his own personality and technique, local regions were noted for their distinctive take on Irish music, that is, for the tunes, tune variants, and playing styles that

could be found there and nowhere else. The national shape of Irish music since the late nineteenth century, if not earlier, has been the regional mutation and variation of a shared aesthetic ground.<sup>10</sup>

The re-asserting of regional styles within the traditional music idiom in recent times has not been without its own issues. Sean Corcoran comments that ‘concepts of regionalism in music are often linked to related concepts of “isolation”, “remoteness” and the survival of the pre-modern,’<sup>11</sup> and notes that ‘Allen Feldman, collecting fiddle music in Donegal in the late 1970s, saw “islands of musical tradition” kept going “by a few isolated, ageing men” battling hopelessly against the “inevitable historical occurrence” of modernization.’<sup>12</sup> At a more global level, Alan Lomax, in his ambitious attempt to define stylistic regions of music, song, and dance with statistical precision for the entire globe (Cantometrics), found that broad generalizations seem to work quite well from a distance but that, close-up, most local styles are far from homogeneous.<sup>13</sup>

It is valid to accept that when it comes to Irish traditional music the concept of local and regional labels has been embraced as a tool to classify repertoire and style generated and transmitted by influential individuals in specific geographic constituencies. While these regional styles (and so, by extension, individual styles) were increasingly submerged throughout the course of the twentieth century in favour of a more homogenous ‘Irish’ sound, in recent times, and in areas where sufficient links to older musical practices have been maintained – places such as Fermanagh, Oriel, and Sliabh Luachra, for example – dynamic efforts have been instigated to re-assert these musical dialects (and idiolects) through a series of local revivals.

### **The work of Cairdeas na bhFidilí**

The ‘revival’ in County Donegal of a local style and repertoire was the first of these movements to be initiated successfully. Here, a multi-pronged approach was adopted. The transmission of the tradition was core – a number of (typically older) exponents of the local traditions were encouraged to come out of their kitchens to play and to pass on the tunes and styles to the younger generations. This was supported by an active programme of documentation through research, recording and publication. The voluntary organization which spearheaded this activity was Cairdeas na bhFidilí; having recently celebrated its twenty-fifth year it continues to thrive and excel in its delivery of its remit:

To strengthen Donegal fiddle music at its roots,  
To improve standards of fiddle playing,  
To promote participation in all aspects of Donegal fiddle music, and  
To encourage the transmission of the Donegal style and repertoire.

Its fiddle week in Glencolumbcille in south-west Donegal – one of the few summer schools in Ireland devoted to a single instrument – is a key event on the traditional music calendar as is its annual Fiddlers Meeting in Glenties each October. Cairdeas is also responsible for an ongoing body of publications in print and recorded media, a comprehensive list of which is available from their website.<sup>14</sup> The early work of Cairdeas na bhFidlíirí coincided with various other traditional music-related initiatives in County Donegal. Allen Feldman and Eamonn O'Doherty's book, *The Northern Fiddler*, published in 1979, had as its focus a number of fiddle players from Counties Donegal and Tyrone and was an attempt 'to revalidate regional music for both the younger generations of Donegal and Tyrone and for the wider public sphere of Irish traditional music players and audiences.'<sup>15</sup> It strove to achieve this through documenting the repertoire, social history of the music and its associated folklore, along with biographical detail of the featured musicians. At another level, the band Altan, with its focus on the instrumental and song traditions of north-west Donegal, was formed in the mid-1980s and existed in parallel with Cairdeas, promoting and creating access to the repertoire of one specific region of the county at local, national and at international levels. In 1994, Scoil Gheimhridh Frankie Kennedy (the Frankie Kennedy School) was established in Gaath Dobhair, in memory of the Altan founder and flute player and to continue his huge contribution to Irish music, especially to the music and song of County Donegal. Within a period of little more than a decade, Donegal and its vibrant music tradition was suddenly catapulted into the limelight through a diverse and exciting number of independent projects that had, as their primary goals, preserving and/or promoting various aspects of specific local traditions.

### **The problem with labels**

In dealing with regional styles, 'the obvious problem lies in the dichotomy between the perception of style and the reality of performance'.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, within the Irish tradition, it is much more common for musicians to align themselves with a regional style than to be seen directly emulating a particular individual. Regional labels have also proved useful as a tool with which to drive home the ideologies of groups or organizations with a noble cause such as preservation or revival of traditional music. Anderson and Gale note:

During times of conflict, when a group feels threatened, cultural production processes which are normally submerged from view and operate at a deep level, rise closer to the surface. At such times people highlight cultural assumptions in order to frame arguments against their 'adversaries' in a process of foregrounding.<sup>17</sup>

This conscious approach, defined as 'foregrounding', was introduced in the context of the Cape Breton fiddle tradition in eastern Canada when, in the 1990s, Scottish fiddle music enthusiasts, led by such figures as Alasdair Fraser and Hamish

Moore (albeit independently) engaged in a very active crusade to re-introduce the music of Cape Breton Island to Scotland. Cape Breton music has its roots in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and has maintained strong links with that tradition since its relocation to the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the quest to bring this music back home, the enthusiasts wholeheartedly proclaimed the authenticity of the Cape Breton sound and its unbroken link with the past – blatantly choosing to ignore the many new features which had shaped the music in its new home over the course of the twentieth century and created what was undeniably a distinctive Cape Breton voice.<sup>18</sup>

The process of foregrounding is also in evidence in the revival of the ‘Donegal style’, where the generic label of Donegal was adopted to refer to what was indeed the music of only a small geographic portion of the county. The reality, of course, is that ‘quite often, a particular performance happens to get collected or transcribed first, possibly because [...] particular regions had been declared geographical centers of cultural authenticity.’<sup>19</sup> Again, this is not peculiar to the Donegal situation. In Shetland, as Peter Cooke notes, the late Tom Anderson

preserved much that would have been lost and aroused interest especially among youngsters [...] He concentrated on one style, a good style, but there were other styles that were just as good, and these have been smothered and remained undeveloped.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Feldman and O’Doherty, the ‘Donegal’ they concentrated on includes the region from Glenties southwards towards Kilcar and Glencolmcille; with Cairdeas na bhFidléirí, ‘Donegal’ encompasses primarily the same geographic areas. That activities should focus in this particular part of the county is no surprise; this region certainly had the greatest proliferation of fiddlers including great players such as Con Cassidy (1909–1994), Francie and Mickey ‘Dearg’ Byrne (1903–1987; 1899–1980), James Byrne (1946–2008) and John Doherty (1895–1980) – probably the most influential of the local fiddlers. Doherty, a travelling fiddler and tinsmith, was certainly one of the most accessible of the local musicians, having been recorded by Alan Lomax in 1951, Peter Kennedy in 1953 and by the Irish Folklore Commission in 1957, as well as by RTE on several occasions.

Certainly, the need to assert the value of the music being played in the county was evident in response to the ‘legion of commentators who wrote it off with great authority.’<sup>21</sup> Indeed, right across Donegal, a rich music tradition was in place – in no way was there a situation where a tradition had to be created or ‘invented.’<sup>22</sup> ‘Donegal’ as a label was convenient and instantly recognisable. It was, however, in this particular context, a misnomer; by rights it needed to be qualified; but, of course, to do so would have immediately given the impression of diluting the cause – of almost apologizing for it. And so, the ‘Donegal style’, as a label supposedly encapsulating all of the fiddle playing in the county, has stayed and remained unchallenged.

A positive outcome of any mission of foregrounding is that, once the groundwork has been done, the position can relax and gradually a more realistic picture can emerge. The fact is that Donegal, in its vastness, accommodated a number of more localized styles other than those in the south-west extremities of the county. Other regions more recently acknowledged for their rich and unique fiddle traditions are the north-west, the north, Inishowen, the east, central Donegal, and the south and south west.<sup>23</sup> It has been suggested that in Donegal, 'the notion of the greater beauty and enrichment through diversity was inherently understood.'<sup>24</sup> While this was perhaps not evident in the first twenty years of the revival period, it is certainly more accepted these days, although the diversity has not yet been fully explored. This leads me to the core issue of my paper, which is to uncover another strand – indeed, another multi-faceted strand – of the fiddle music tradition of County Donegal, that of the Inishowen peninsula in the north-eastern reaches of the county. An exploratory survey of the musical practices and practitioners of this area will serve to underline the points made concerning the inherent weaknesses in a blanket label which, although technically accurate – in that Inishowen is, most definitely, situated geographically within County Donegal – does not fully encompass the richness and diversity of musical style and repertoire that exists in reality.

I should note at this point that I am a fiddle player, born and bred in Inishowen who is, to a certain extent, peripheral to the fold – in Donegal at least – of 'Donegal fiddlers'. While for me it is very simple: I am a fiddle player from Donegal who is interested in and influenced by Scottish and Cape Breton as well as Irish styles. Others over the years have made quite complicated work of trying to categorize me and my music, but that is a discussion for another day. For this paper, the 'Inishowen' section is informed by years of personal contact with many of the players mentioned along with dedicated fieldwork conducted in 2003–2005 while compiling a biography of one of the local master fiddlers.



**Figure 2** Map of Inishowen

### **An overview of traditional music in Inishowen**

In south-west Donegal they say that, in the past, every house had a fiddle. In Inishowen too, the fiddle was popular, although maybe not quite as much so as elsewhere in the county. Indeed, at certain times, instruments such as the melodeon were actually more commonly found than the fiddle. There was also quite a body of flute and piccolo players in certain pockets of the region and marching bands were a regular feature. Inishowen was also known for having a vibrant song tradition which included a caoining<sup>25</sup> tradition and an English-language ballad tradition. The latter, which continues to thrive, has been well documented by Jimmy McBride<sup>26</sup> among others and is celebrated annually at the Inishowen Singers' Circle weekend festival.

Music-making happened in peoples' homes or barns and little or no excuse was needed to get a musical occasion underway. Charles McGlinchey, born in 1861, and whose memoirs were collected and published by Patrick Kavanagh in *The Last of the Name*, recalls:

The people long ago had gatherings for a night's scutching or cloving of lint. There would be twenty or thirty at a gathering. They did the work in the barn or some outhouse, and other times in the kitchen. They had a dance after the work was done. Someone would be got to play the fiddle, or two or three women would lilt. They had gatherings too for making quilts.<sup>27</sup>

Later, such occasions were referred to simply as 'Big Nights'. The word would get out locally and people would walk for miles to wherever the music and dancing was taking place. 'The Big Night would go on until seven o'clock in the morning and then they would all go to Mass [in the morning].'<sup>28</sup> The gathering of the harvest would be a popular time for a Big Night. Weddings were another great opportunity for music and celebration. 'Bottling nights' – where everyone would bring a bottle to share – took place to celebrate the return from honeymoon of the newly-weds (from exotic locations such as Moville, on the far side of the peninsula). In those locations where the Big Night would be taking place, the road to the house was always lit with bonfires or battles. Heatherberry Sunday in July was another occasion for music-making, where girls and boys would meet at the spring well (Suil-A Tobar) near the top of Slieve Snaght. Weekly fairs and special events, such as the Gooseberry Fair in Buncrana (held in late July), were also popular times for music and dancing.

For the Big Nights, all the furniture (or what small amounts they had) was cleared out of the house to make room for the dancing. Planks of wood were set up along the wall to provide seating. One fiddler recalled an old door being set over the bed in the kitchen to create a stage for him – and to keep him out of harm's way for when the dancing became overly enthusiastic. The music would generally be provided by a solitary melodeon or fiddle; it was at least the 1920s before there is documented evidence of two or more players performing together. The dances popular in the area included the 'Lancers', 'Highlands', 'Four-Hand Reel', 'Military

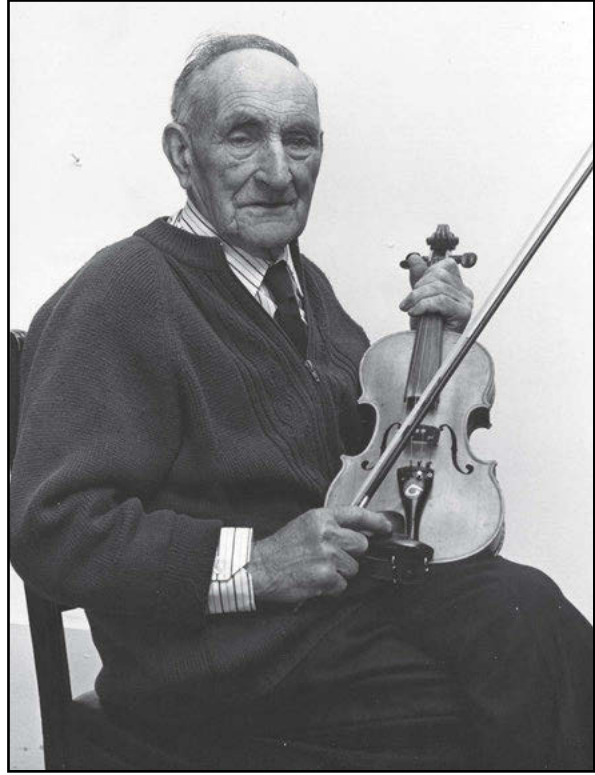
Two-Step', 'Barn Dance', 'Haymakers' Jig', 'Lannigan's Ball', 'Maggie Pickins', 'Shoe the Donkey', the 'Polka Round' (a 2-hand dance similar to what the Fletts had identified in Scotland c.1844 and described as a circle dance),<sup>29</sup> the 'Pin Polka'<sup>30</sup> and the 'Cripple Dance'.<sup>31</sup> Other dances included old-fashioned waltzes termed 'Versovienna' and 'Veleta'. The dances would have been interspersed with solo items such as songs (ballads), recitations and step-dances (generally hornpipes performed by the men). Right up until the mid-twentieth century there is nothing to suggest that the fiddle or melodeon was played for anything other than to dance to. Ceili Bands became popular from the 1950s onwards with the Crana Ceili Band and the Clonmany Ceili Band being two of the best known in the area. Competitions, such as the annual Carndonagh Feis, also became important platforms for music-making as the century progressed.

While scholars such as Nic Suibhne<sup>32</sup> and MacAoidh<sup>33</sup> have conducted research into the music traditions in Inishowen throughout the twentieth century, little is widely known about local players active before this. Recent research carried out has yielded a number of names from this era – interestingly several of them female – and providing evidence that various instruments were played, including fiddle, pipes, melodeon, and harp. Tom Gordon, from around the Merville area in the eastern part of the peninsula, for instance, played the pipes in the late 1800s; Dan O'Doherty from Cluainte played the harp; early fiddlers of note included Neil McColgan, a formidable player, referred to by McGlinchey as the best in his day. He was a blind fiddler from Ballyliffen who made his living playing music on the boat from Derry to Merville and on the Scotch boats (boats travelling between Derry and Scotland). Coming from a musical family, McColgan was also a noted singer and would play the fiddle to accompany his own songs.<sup>34</sup> Another blind fiddler was Paddy 'the Slithers' McDonald from Merville who played at the quayside where the Scotch boats landed in Derry. Honoria Galwey (1830–1924), daughter of the Rector in Merville, who documented music from fiddlers and pipers in the area, collected the tune 'The Pigeon on the Gate' from Paddy 'the Slithers' in 1849. She passed her music collection on to Sir Charles Stanford, Alfred Percival Graves, and Plunkett Greene in London and some of her work was published in a collection *Old Irish Croonauns and Other Tunes* by Boosey and Company (1910).<sup>35</sup> Billy Andy Porter was another fiddler from Gaddyduff. A popular fiddler for Big Nights, he also used to play the fiddle along with the local choir when Fr William O'Donnell was the curate in the parish between 1841 and 1868.

### **Pat Mulhern**

A primary link between the older tradition in Inishowen and the music which is thriving there today is a fiddler by the name of Pat Mulhern who lived in Fallask some miles outside Buncrana town. He was born on St Patrick's Day, 1900 and died in 1997. Pat learned to play the fiddle by listening to local players around the area such as Paddy 'the Slithers' McDonald, Johnny Graham, James McLaughlin (his uncle), Neil and Pat McKinney, Johnnie O'Donnell, and Jimmy Durnian. In his early days

he played a lot for dancers, firstly in houses (his own parents' home was a popular ceildh house) and later in halls along with other fiddlers and accordion players such as Joe McLaughlin from the nearby townland of Ballmagan. As traditional dancing and Big Nights gradually died out in the 1950s and 1960s, his repertoire became increasingly a listening one. He gained some national recognition as an accomplished player and was afforded the opportunity to perform on national radio from both the Dublin and Athlone transmitters and for the BBC in Belfast. Pat was hugely interested in Scottish music; indeed, he had visited the Stirling area on a number of occasions but, interestingly, did not meet any Scottish fiddlers.



**Figure 3** Pat Mulhern

He would, however, learn tunes from listening to musicians such as accordionist, Jimmy Shand, on the radio; Scottish music was available in three half-hour slots on the radio weekly, whereas Irish music was much more elusive on air. He was also interested in printed collections and avidly studied a range of books from the O'Neill's collections to classical violin tutors. In his later years, he became aware of the music of the Sligo greats, Michael Coleman and Paddy Killoran, whose music would have also had some influence on him.

Pat was known for his extensive and varied repertoire derived from a range of sources, both aural and literate. Equally, his style was regarded as being quite distinctive. His command of the instrument was noteworthy as was his ability to move into the higher positions with the greatest of ease:

Pat had a very staccato style and he had great rhythm; he had a great swing with his tunes. He wouldn't have used a lot of ornamentation [...] and he bowed quite a lot. There was great cadence in his music and it was never in a hurry.<sup>36</sup>



In his description of Pat's playing style, Dinny McLaughlin, a former pupil, highlights one of the characteristics of his sound which was notably different from that of fiddle players in other parts of Donegal. This concerns the spaces between the notes – what McLaughlin refers to as 'cadence' – and which lends itself to a style that is quite sparse, lyrical and with a 'swing' to it that shows marked contrasts between the accented and non-accented notes of a phrase.



**Figure 4** Seamus Grant

### **Seamus Grant**

Further north in the peninsula another prominent fiddle player was Seamus Grant (1934–2005). His mother played the fiddle and his father played the single row melodeon; both were heavily involved in music-making in the parish of Clonmany. Seamus played at house dances from the age of fifteen until these began to die out in the 1950s. He was a founder member of the Clonmany Ceili Band which was popular until around 1970. Like Pat, Seamus would have been influenced both by the local style and by music he heard from Scotland on the radio,

through recordings and from printed collections. William C. Honeyman's book, *The Young Violinist and Duet Book*, for example, was a favourite, as was the music of James Scott Skinner. His wife's father, White Dan, a noted fiddler, singer and dancer was a great source of tunes for him. White Dan had gone to Scotland every harvest and Seamus recalls that 'part of his baggage was a hundredweight bag with the bow of his fiddle sticking out of the top of it.'<sup>37</sup> He also recalls travelling musicians such as McGinley, Gallagher, and McDonald visiting the area, and notes that the famous Doherty fiddlers were chased out, not for their fiddling, but for sheep stealing.<sup>38</sup>

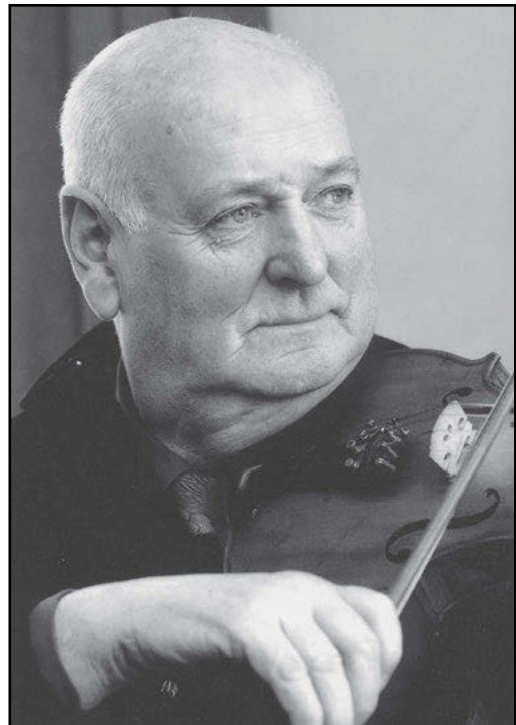
Seamus had a repertoire that consisted of both dance tunes and listening tunes. Nic Suibhne, in her 1989 dissertation, provides an interesting comparison between his repertoire and that of Francie Mooney of Gaoth Dobhair. As part of his store of dance tunes Seamus played lancers, schottishes, hornpipes, polkas, and various named dances such as 'Maggie Pickins', 'Shoe the Donkey' and 'Kitty O'Connor'. His 'listening tunes' included highlands, strathspeys, airs, marches, jigs, and reels. A CD of Seamus's music is due to be released in 2010 and the tunes included demonstrate just how eclectic a repertoire he amassed. Standard Irish jigs and reels sit comfortably alongside hornpipes, waltzes, barn dances, polkas, airs and exhibition tunes, strathspeys and highlands sourced from Inishowen to Canada to

Scotland and to Shetland. An avid collector of music, Seamus had an impressive collection of books and tapes, both commercial and home-made. I recall one visit with Seamus where he was being introduced to Cape Breton piano player, Ryan MacNeil.<sup>39</sup> In anticipation of the visit, Seamus had dug out a collection of VHS recordings he had made from various television programmes over the years and featuring some of his favourite Canadian players and tunes – all of which he had added to his repertoire. As it turned out, the players in question were Ryan's own siblings, members of the well-known Cape Breton group, the Barra MacNeils. With an instant bond – and a common repertoire – Ryan went on to provide the piano accompaniment for Seamus in the recording of his only commercial CD, which he recorded just weeks before his death.

Seamus's style is quite rhythmic and dotted, similar in some respects to that of Pat Mulhern, yet quite distinctive in its strength of tone. A lyrical player, he has quite a measured touch to his phrases and this space between the notes is further emphasized through a clarity of the melodic line which is uncluttered by (although not entirely devoid of) left-hand ornamentation.

### **Dinny McLaughlin**

Dinny McLaughlin was born in 1935 in Shandrum, near Buncrana and is considered these days as the great master of fiddling in Inishowen (see Figure 5). Taught by Pat Mulhern, Dinny went on to devote his own life to the teaching of both music and dance, and the continuity and vitality of the tradition around the peninsula is testimony to his huge success in this area. In terms of his style and repertoire, Dinny brings yet another dimension to the local tradition. This again underlines the reality that a regional style, when examined more closely, disintegrates into a set of unique individual sounds. Dinny's influences ranged from Pat Mulhern who taught him, to other local fiddlers he was exposed to while growing up, and to commercial recordings of fiddlers from Michael Coleman



**Figure 5** Dinny McLaughlin

and James Morrison to Andy McGann and Sean Maguire, whose flamboyant style made a huge impression on him. In terms of repertoire and style, Dinny has little in common with the so-called 'Donegal style', although technically he is, absolutely,

a Donegal fiddler by virtue of geographic positioning. His repertoire consists of standard Irish tune types (mainly jigs, reels, hornpipes, airs, waltzes, and planxties) and his own compositions, of which there are approximately fifty, consisting of jigs, reels, hornpipes, airs, waltzes, and planxties (see Figure 6). In terms of style, Dinny has what could be described as a smooth, lyrical yet rhythmic sound. He uses a combination of single bow strokes and slurs with an emphasis on the up-bow in places (in marked contrast to the more equal division of accent between up- and



**Figure 6** 'The Inishowen Waltz', composed by Dinny McLaughlin

down-bows favoured by players such as John Doherty). He uses a range of left- and right-hand ornaments – especially the roll, single grace note and bowed treble – although none of these excessively. Notably, Dinny's personality is wholly reflected in his playing which might be subdued and reflective one minute and bursting with exuberance and flamboyance the next.

Dinny has been responsible for passing the tradition on to the next generation of players from around Inishowen, many of whom have gone on to forge international reputations as fiddle players. Interestingly, in the spirit of what the Inishowen tradition is all about, all of these players have quite distinct and individual musical

voices. While the basics were instilled in all of these players, so too was the sense of self and of self discovery that is as – or indeed more – important to traditional music than is confirming to a norm, be it a local, regional or national style. Nowhere was this celebration of diversity at a local level more evident than at the Ar Ais Arís Traditional Arts Festivals, held in Bunrana in 2006, 2007, and 2008. From Dinny McLaughlin to P. V. O'Donnell to Ciaran Tourish, the uniqueness of each local fiddler was apparent. The Inishowen Music Project, which has been in existence for a decade and which was established in order to maintain, develop and promote the music traditions in the area, employs Roisin McGrory as its primary fiddle teacher. Roisin, a former pupil of Dinny McLaughlin, was also mentored by James Byrne from Glencolumcille as part of Cairdeas na bhFidléirí's programme of activities; today the tunes and styles she brings to her numerous students are representative of both Inishowen and south-west Donegal. Fintan Vallely has made the observation that, as musicians, each of us ends up with 'the style reflective of the variety of paths by which we came upon our music'.<sup>40</sup> For generations of musicians in Inishowen this has indeed been the reality.

### Conclusion

A survey of the Inishowen style demonstrates the inherent weaknesses of the concept of regional styles when examined from the inside out, that is taking an analysis of the repertoire and style of a number of individual players from a select geographical region as the starting point. In terms of the so-called 'Donegal style', it is clear that the label does not embrace the totality of fiddle practices in the region. Furthermore, a simple re-addressing of the boundaries is not even an option; simply ensuring that Inishowen be added into the mix does not eliminate the issue. For what we have seen in Inishowen is the reality that, even in a specific and contained geographic region, often the individual voice is what emerges as the strongest feature. The notion of regional style is defined by a shared space and musical experience with the result being a mosaic of individual re-interpretations of those commonalities rather than a unified and homogenous sound; a celebration of personal diversities rather than the creation of another defined strand of the Irish tradition.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Caoimhín MacAoidh, *Between the Jigs and the Reels: The Donegal Fiddle Tradition* (Ireland: Drumlin Publications, 1994), p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> From the early historical period the county of Donegal was dominated by two branches of the Uí Néill dynasty, Cinéal Eoghain, 'the kindred of Eoghan' and Cinéal Conaill, 'the kindred of Conall'. Both Eoghan and Conall were sons of 'Niall of the nine hostages' (Naoighiallach), ancestor of the Uí Néill, who was reputedly king of Tara in the fourth century. These two principal branches were first mentioned in the Annals of Ulster in 563. Cinéal Eoghain established their headquarters at Aileach in Inishowen expanding into Derry and Tyrone from the mid-sixth century. From the tenth century, the wider territory became known as Tír Eoghain – the land of Eoghan. The name of the original territory, Inis Eoghain (the island of Eoghan), is first recorded in the eighth century. Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig, 'Placenames and

Early Settlement in County Donegal' in *Donegal: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. by William Nolan, Liam Roynane, & Mairead Dunlevy (Dublin: Geography Publications, [1995]), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Caoimhín MacAoidh, 'Donegal: A Voice in the Wilderness or the Voice of Reason?' in *The Local Accent: Selected Proceedings from BLAS, The Local Accent Conference*, ed. by T. Smith, M. Ó Súilleabháin (Folk Music Society of Ireland and Irish World Music Centre, Ireland, 1997), pp. 67–72 (p. 68).

<sup>4</sup> Allen Feldman, 'Music of the Border: The Northern Fiddler Project, Media Provenance and the Nationalization of Irish Music', in *Radharc*, 3 (2002), 97–122 (p.105).

<sup>5</sup> 'Blas' is the Irish Gaelic word for taste, flavour and accent.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Dowling, 'Rambling in the Field of Modern Identity: Some Speculations on Irish Traditional Music', *Radharc*, 5–7 (2004–2006), 107–34 (p. 129).

<sup>7</sup> Niall Keegan, 'The Verbal Context of Regional Style in Traditional Irish Music' in *The Local Accent*, ed. by Smith & Ó Súilleabháin, pp. 116–22 (p. 121).

<sup>8</sup> Dowling, p. 130.

<sup>9</sup> Feldman, 'Music of the Border', p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> Feldman, 'Music of the Border', p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> Sean Corcoran, 'Concepts of Regionalism in Irish Traditional Music' in *The Local Accent*, ed. by Smith & Ó Súilleabháin, pp. 25–30 (p. 27).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Corcoran, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> See [www.donegalfiddlemusic.ie](http://www.donegalfiddlemusic.ie) [accessed 1 February 2010].

<sup>15</sup> Feldman, 'Music of the Border', p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> Keegan, 'The Verbal Context' in *The Local Accent*, ed. by Smith & Ó Súilleabháin (1997), pp. 116–22 (p. 116).

<sup>17</sup> Kay Anderson and Fay Gale, *Inventing Places: Studies in Cultural Geography* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire; [New York]: Wiley/Halstead, 1992), p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> A distinctive piano accompaniment plus new compositions from Cape Breton composers contributed to creating a new voice in Scottish music that was uniquely Cape Breton. Elizabeth Doherty, 'The Paradox of the Periphery: Evolution of the Cape Breton Fiddle Style c.1928–1995' (PhD dissertation, University of Limerick, 1996), p. 318.

<sup>19</sup> Feldman, 'Music of the Border', p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Cooke, 'Cultural Greyout or Survival of the Species? – "The Threat"', in *The Local Accent*, ed. by Smith & Ó Súilleabháin (1997), pp. 9–24 (p. 18).

<sup>21</sup> MacAoidh, 'Donegal' in *The Local Accent*, ed. by Smith & Ó Súilleabháin (1997), pp. 67–72 (p. 68).

<sup>22</sup> Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> MacAoidh, *Between the Jigs and the Reels*, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> MacAoidh, 'Donegal' in *The Local Accent*, ed. by Smith & Ó Súilleabháin (1997), pp. 67–72 (p. 68).

<sup>25</sup> Caoining took place at wakes and involved the singing of a lament over the body of the deceased. In Inishowen the caoining was performed by relatives of the deceased and as each of these arrived he/she stood over the corpse and chanted praise of the dead and sorrow at the death. Damhnait Nic Suibhne, 'The Donegal Fiddle Tradition: An Ethnographic Perspective' in *Donegal*, ed. by Nolan, Roynane, & Dunlevy, pp. 713–42 (p. 729).

<sup>26</sup> Jimmy McBride, *The Flower of Dunaff Hill and more Traditional Songs Sung in Inishowen* (Buncrana: Crana, 1988) and Jimmy McBride and Jim McFarland, *My Parents Reared Me Tenderly and Other Traditional Songs Sung in Inishowen* (Buncrana: Doherty, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> Charles McGlinchey, *The Last of the Name* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1986), p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Liz Doherty, *Dinny McLaughlin: A Life of Music, Song and Dance in Inishowen* (County Donegal: Druid Publications, 2005), p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> J. F. and T. M. Flett, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> 'It was done by a number of people [...] any number of people could dance it [...] couples. It was done in a circle around the floor and there was one extra person standing in the middle of the ring, and when the music stopped they all changed partners and it was up to the odd man out to grab a partner. But there was chaos during the change over. The tune that they played for that was called the "pin polka"'. Seamus Grant, in Damhnait Nic Suibhne, 'Links Between Donegal and Scottish Fiddling' (undergraduate thesis, University College, Cork, 1989), [unpaginated].

<sup>31</sup> 'This was a popular dance at the "Big Nights" in Inis Eoghain and involved what we could call sitting on what we would call our "hunkers" [...] that's in a squatting position and keep time to music [...] It was performed by two men and was competitive. The tune played in Inis Eoghain for it is a local version of the well known reel "The Swallow's Tail."' See Seamus Grant, in Suibhne, 'Links Between Donegal and Scottish Fiddling', [unpaginated].

<sup>32</sup> Nic Suibhne, 'Links Between Donegal and Scottish'; Nic Suibhne, 'The Donegal Fiddle Tradition', in Donegal, eds Nolan, Roynane, & Dunlevy, pp. 713–42.

<sup>33</sup> MacAoidh, 'Between the Jigs and the Reels'; 'Donegal: A Voice in the Wilderness or the Voice of Reason?' in *The Local Accent*, eds Smith & Ó Súilleabháin, pp. 67–72.

<sup>34</sup> McGlinchey, pp. 137–38.

<sup>35</sup> Tunes found in the Galwey collection include: 'Hudy Macan's Galoppe', 'The Pigeon on the Gate', 'Shaun Mac-a-Vicar', 'Easter Snow', and 'Rocking the Cradle'.

<sup>36</sup> Liz Doherty, *Dinny McLaughlin*, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> Nic Suibhne, 'Links Between Donegal and Scottish Fiddling', [unpaginated].

<sup>38</sup> Nic Suibhne, 'Links Between Donegal and Scottish Fiddling', [unpaginated].

<sup>39</sup> Ryan MacNeil is a talented piano player from Sydney Mines, Cape Breton, who is a member of the renowned group, the Barra MacNeils, alongside his siblings Sheumas, Kyle, Stuart, Lucy, and Boyd. Ryan is a long-time friend of the author and has performed and recorded with her. He was in the Inishowen area rehearsing for a series of gigs when he was introduced to Seamus Grant.

<sup>40</sup> Fintan Vallely, 'The Migrant, the Tourist, the Voyeur, the Leprechaun', in *The Local Accent*, ed. by Smith and Ó Súilleabháin, pp. 107–15 (p. 107).

## The Galician fiddle style

ALFONSO FRANCO VÁZQUEZ

In providing an overview of such a specific music style as the Galician fiddle, it is important to include a brief introduction to the history of the country itself in order to understand the origins of this music, which has incorporated throughout the centuries the influences of significant events, as usually happens in traditional genres. In this case, we are dealing with a repertoire passed on from one generation to the next by blind fiddlers/ballad singers which remained almost unchanged until the beginning of the twentieth century, when new rhythms brought from overseas by returning emigrants were incorporated. Out of this the old fiddlers created and maintained a vernacular dance music tradition until the second half of the last century, before new generations of fiddlers took up the instrument with the coming of the modern folk music revival.

### **Introduction**

On the western periphery of Europe, and at the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula facing the Atlantic Ocean, lies the country of Galicia. Its coast, where we can find the continent's highest cliffs, is also characterized by the *rías* (or large estuaries), where the sea, indenting inland, flows by fishing villages and fine beaches. Fishing, agriculture, and cattle-raising are the main sources of income. Green valleys and meadows, next to fast flowing rivers and surrounded by mountains, are outstanding features of this country where, until the beginning of the twentieth century, ninety percent of Galician population lived in a rural environment.

The ancient city Santiago de Compostela is the administrative capital of Galicia. Other important cities include La Coruña, Vigo, and Pontevedra on the coast, and Lugo and Ourense inland. Throughout the rural area of Galicia, the distance between towns is not great. The Galician culture is the result of the fusion between diverse cultures whose origins date from the Bronze Age. There are numerous remains of Celtic settlements spread all over Galicia, most of which are still hidden under the earth. The Celtic civilization thrived until the arrival of the Romans, who conquered Galicia for its rich mineral reserves. With the passing of time, it became a

province of the Roman Empire called 'Gallaecia', but never really lost its own culture and traditions.

At the beginning of the fifth century, with the fall of the Roman Empire, Galicia was invaded by Germanic tribes, and the Suebi took over. This was a northern Germanic people who, before the arrival of the Visigoths in the Iberian Peninsula, had already occupied the North West, establishing a relatively stable monarchy. It was at this point that a primitive Galician kingdom including not only Galicia itself, but also the whole of northern Portugal, came into existence; it was an area in which the Suebi easily adapted to the customs and traditions of the native people.

After the Islamic Moors' invasion in the eighth century (711 CE), there followed a long era in the Spanish history in which, during eight centuries, the northern Christian kingdoms progressively re-conquered Arab-occupied territories. This process came to an end in 1492, with the retrieval of the kingdom of Granada.

One very important historical point in the history of Galicia was the discovery of the tomb of Saint James the Apostle in the place named, henceforward, Santiago de Compostela (literally Saint James in the Field of the Star).<sup>1</sup> Santiago became a religious pilgrimage centre. Since then from all over Europe people would travel along the Way of Saint James, a pathway which became a cultural highway and along which Romanic art and the lyrics of troubadours would spread. The fact that Santiago became a religious centre contributed to the preservation of its cultural identity against the centralism of Castile. This pilgrimage route was thus an important way for European culture to spread through Galicia, but it also served to cause the remains of Celtic Galicia to fade.

The sea is an essential part of the spirit of the Galician people; the Atlantic Ocean often being present in the lyrics of the troubadours, who enjoyed great fame and success between the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century in the north west of the peninsula. Johán de Cangas, Mendiño, and Martín Codax, troubadours from the *ria* of Vigo, sang in praise of the ocean under the patronage of the exultant Santiago de Compostela court. This is a period of Galician history in which we find such prestigious figures as Archbishop Gelmirez or Master Mateo – the sculptor of the Pórtico da Gloria, (lit. the Portico of Glory). The discovery of America in 1492, the location of Galicia on the North West coast of the peninsula, and the importance of Galician emigration to South American countries during the last two centuries are of such historical importance that they must also be taken into account.

### **Influences**

This brief historical introduction serves as a starting point to understand the principal influences which have inspired and formed the traditional music of the north west of the Iberian Peninsula.

The music of the Galician people is the fruit of a mixture of very diverse cultures and includes connections with other Celtic countries and regions, including Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, and Ireland. Also, bonds with northern Portugal



are self evident, as much for the language, which is very similar to Galician, as for the music and typical traditional instruments. Both cultures have a wide range of percussion instruments and bagpipes.

The north west of the peninsula shows the result of multiple pre-Roman, Greco-Roman, and Germanic influences, which approached Galicia from all sides, by sea and over land. Although the Moors did not remain in Galicia in a permanent sense, throughout the duration of their occupation in Spain there was contact, and Arab and Mediterranean influences crept in through the centre and South of the country. In addition, Jewish settlements are easily recognizable in towns around Galicia, where Jews remained until their expulsion in the times of the so-called Catholic Monarchs (Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon) around the middle of the sixteenth century.

Contact with other European countries was, for the most part through the Way of Saint James. Referring to the pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela, Pablo Briones writes:

Nearly everyone eventually arrives at the end of their pilgrimage, the Portico of the Glory, awaited by twenty-four elderly musicians carved from stone and playing fiddles, trumpets, psalteries, violas [...] and the organistrum, the predecessor of the hurdy-gurdy, which presides over the keystone of the arch of the musicians and was the favoured instrument of the blind storyteller-singers who would travel along the pathway [...] The songs which they sang were of great spontaneity and reflect, without doubt, the atmosphere of that era. As the pilgrims came and went, they also would bring their own personal songs and these would have been incorporated into the repertoire of traditional Galician music.<sup>2</sup>

The great number of pilgrims coming from so many different countries, and singing their own songs, contributed to create a favourable atmosphere for the development of every kind of music; either lyrics sung by the troubadours and collected in *cancioneros* (song books) or aurally transmitted folk music, which is the focus of this paper.<sup>3</sup> A. López Ferreiro in *Historia de la Santa A. M. Iglesia de Santiago de Compostela* describes this atmosphere and the influence of the pilgrims on the popular music of Galicia.<sup>4</sup> And he describes, based on the *Codex Calixtinus*, how pilgrims performed their arrival rites by celebrating in the cathedral that night.

It gives a deep and pleasing impression to see the choirs of pilgrims around St James's altar. The Germans stand along one side, the French along another, and they are all gathered in groups with lit candles in their hands. [...] Each one celebrates with his countrymen singing religious canticles to the sound of zithers, lyres, tympani, flutes, syrinxes, shawms, harps, viols, British or Gallic roues, psalteries or other instruments.<sup>5</sup>

Later on, referring to the feasts and the continuous celebrations in the cathedral – ‘with such diverse gathering of people from unknown parts and with all those extremely varied musics, hymns and songs sometimes performed in different languages’ – López Ferreiro highlights the great importance of ‘this pilgrimage singing and making the airs and hymns of so many and such distant nations resound under the vaults of the basilica of Compostela’, which in his opinion left an influence on many Galician musical forms.<sup>6</sup> He also gathered the names of many troubadours of the period and mentions the most important *Cancioneros* and their authors, stressing the influence which Santiago may have had on them.<sup>7</sup>

Galicia is well known for the number of emigrants who travelled to Latin America, especially Argentina, Cuba, and Venezuela. On their return, Galicians brought back with them the richness of the music of these cultures and this introduction of styles and rhythms from the New World provided an essential part of what makes up today’s traditional music in Galicia, including dances such as the rumba and songs such as *Habaneras* and *Corridos*.<sup>8</sup>

### **Traditional music in Galicia**

If one had to choose an instrument that best represented the traditional music of Galicia it would have to be percussion and, to be more precise, a small tambourine called the *pandeireta*. As an accompaniment to the voice, the *pandeireta* together with scallop shells, larger cymbal-less tambourines (*pandeiro*), side drums, or a wooden equivalent of the Irish bones, among others, have been employed, mostly by women, and have always been an effective way of livening up local celebrations and traditional festivals.<sup>9</sup>

The Galician *gaita*, a bagpipe with two or three drones, has always been the emblem of Galician music and through it Galicia has become well known in other countries. Traditionally the pipes are played alone or as a duo with clarinet or another bagpipe but not, until the end of the twentieth century, were large groups of pipers formed. The *requinta* is a wooden flute similar to that of the Irish but with a higher register, and, due to its shrill tone, it is ideal to be played along with the pipes. The diatonic accordion was incorporated into traditional music at the end of the nineteenth century largely replacing pipes, fiddles, and hurdy-gurdies for its completeness as an instrument and its capacity to accompany itself.

The hurdy-gurdy has followed a similar path to the fiddle. After becoming one of the most highly respected instruments of the palaces and courts, it became the lowest – the instrument of the vagabonds and beggars. Just when it was at the point of disappearing, around the middle of the last century, Faustino Santalices gave this instrument the recognition that it deserved and now the hurdy-gurdy is widely played and enjoyed throughout Galicia.<sup>10</sup>

### **The ancient fiddle in Galicia**

The fiddle in Galicia, in comparison to other European countries, is not an instrument widely found in families passing from father to son. Nor was it the main instrument

in carrying the tune in popular dances, where the tambourine and the songs would be the life and soul of the party. For the most part, the fiddle was played by characters that fulfilled a fundamental role in society (mostly in rural life, but also in larger villages): the blind singers of *coplas*.<sup>11</sup> D. Caseiro and C. Castro describe the lives of these blind musicians:

In past times the blind lived in miserable conditions and extreme oppression. In the middle ages some organizations were formed to help them, but during hundreds of years their only way of surviving would be by begging or reciting prayers, and a small handful of them in certain handicrafts. Oral tradition bears witness to the attitude with which these people were subjected through explicit sayings, such as '*Cegos, pegas e choias, dou ao diaño esta tres xoias*' (the blind, magpies and crows, three jewels I send to the devil). Some blind men became professional travelling musicians, walking dust roads and being led and guided by their family or the local people. When they had no family members to accompany them the locals would take them to the nearest village or town where another person would then take care of them. They would travel from door to door earning a little here and there: stopping in each place for two or three days, playing a few pieces of music in return for a crust of bread and sometimes travelling with a donkey which would carry their load.<sup>12</sup>

Caseiro and Castro outline the social role played by these blind musicians:

Blessed with extraordinary memories, they would carry an extensive repertoire of pieces which varied according to the talent and sensitivity of each individual. Without books or newspapers, without radio or television, they were the only chroniclers of the rural world. Their songs included accounts of the everyday rural life. The melody of the music would be formed around the lyrics because the message, the text that was to be conveyed, was of most importance. Some consider these songs, and those sung by muleteers, to be derived, with small modifications, from ancestral *alalás*, a form of free-rhythm song which is the most authentic and beautiful sung Galician music, expressing emotions and melancholy.<sup>13</sup>

These fiddlers, as well as the hurdy-gurdy players, had a key role in carrying around news and crime stories. At a time in which the central media of communication available in cities was limited to the newspaper, and of a limited use for a mostly illiterate population, story-telling singing blind men were highly valued, despite belonging to the lowest stratum of society, in many cases making a living by begging. In addition to this function of spreading news, they were also a link in the transmission of the oral tradition. Most of them learned to play the fiddle at a very young age, being in many cases blind from birth or as a result of diseases during their childhood. Usually, they were instructed by another blind person from a neighbouring area, who took them and taught them so that they could earn their living with music. Once their training was considered complete, the young fiddlers

began working, normally with the help of a guide, often a relative, who helped them and sometimes accompanied them on percussion (see Figure 1). This pattern is found in the lives of most of the fiddlers about whom information was available when preparing this paper.



**Figure 1** Dolores Gómez: 'Blind' of Paredo and her husband.

*Photograph by Bene Castroverde, 1874/1971*

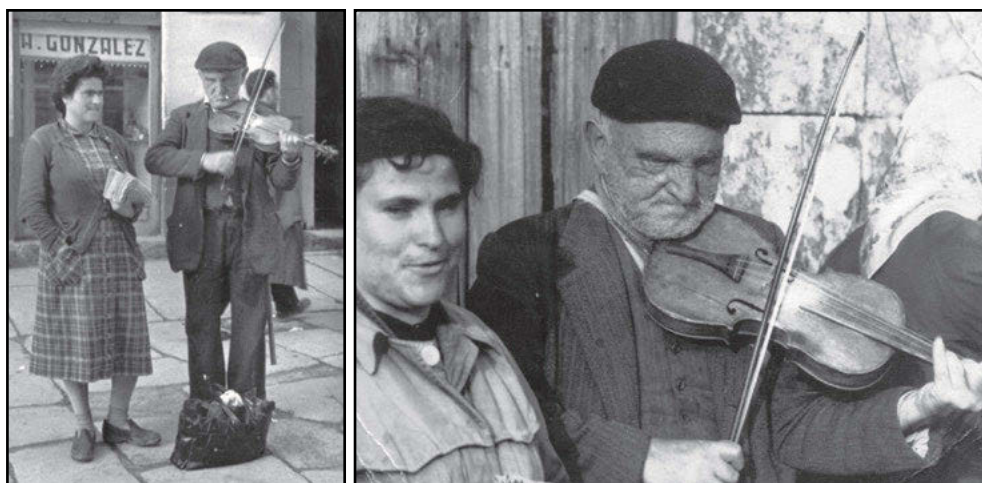
Each fiddler had an area of work, extending over their shire and the neighbouring ones, but they would also travel longer distances to fairs and open-air festivals, establishing routes and staying away from their homes for weeks. Normally, they stayed overnight in the area where they performed, lodging in the house of a local family or, sometimes, in the stable with the cattle.

These blind musicians, who in some cases only pretended to be so, sang at road crossings and other places where people gathered, such as the gates of churches. Sometimes they went from house to house offering their music in exchange for money or food. As earlier noted, they were frequently seen at the Holy Gate of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Pablo Briones describes them and their activities as follows:

The musicians and blind singers, who mostly were humble homeless waifs, lived in intense solitude and followed the fashions and tastes of those that travelled the pathway and those who enjoyed their recitations in the town squares and castles. Even in the low moments of the pilgrimage, they continued loyally performing to the call of the Apostle; we see them beside the Holy Gate in Jubilee years singing their 'cantigas' and ballads.<sup>14</sup>

They were also very popular for their ability to improvise a series of quatrains referring to a member of the audience, after being informed of details of the latter's

life by someone else. The same melody could be used for different lyrics, as it was the text that mattered. In order to illustrate the events told, some of the blind musicians' guides, or *moinantes*, displayed a large piece of cardboard or fabric, called *maltrañas*, with pictures of the story. While the fiddler played and sang, the assistant pointed at each of the successive scenes with a long stick. After the performance was finished, a cap was passed around to collect money from the audience. The use of a cardboard or sheet with pictures, which could be considered a sort of a primitive comic strip, continued until the musicians found a more effective system, thanks to the printing press. By the end of the nineteenth century, they began ordering copies of their songs from local printers, which they would sell, thereby increasing their income.<sup>15</sup> The lyrics were usually commissioned from poets, who wrote the songs after the musicians told them the story they wanted to narrate. Later on, the local printer provided them items they could sell for a living (see Figures 2 and 3).



**Figures 2 and 3** Antonio Lexide: 'Blind' of Viloalle with his daughter, Sabina, who is selling printed lyrics. *Moncho Garcia Collection, Mondoñedo, 1895/1976*

These printed lyrics became very popular, and people bought those they liked the most in order to remember them and sing them later at local feasts and other traditional events where singing was common, or at communal gatherings for flax threshing or spinning. The copies were made on the lowest-grade coloured paper, in order to keep the costs as low as possible, and they included a picture and a large headline at the beginning, comparable to those in newspapers. Spelling mistakes were common, as were errors in metrics, but this kind of literature has, nevertheless, a special charm of its own. Many of these printed copies, sometimes bound with a piece of string, have been preserved, and collections have been published which allow us to read the dramatic events of the past recorded in this 'folk newspaper library'. They are interesting and valuable, not only from an ethnographic point of view, but also, for instance, they help us to see the similarities between what

people wanted to hear in the nineteenth century and what we can find in prime-time television shows nowadays.<sup>16</sup>

Although, as earlier noted, most of these musicians were instructed by an older blind fiddler, in certain cases, particularly in areas around the main cities, some were sent to the music school to learn the basics of the instrument. Classical technique was probably abandoned very soon by the fiddlers, who had to adapt their repertoire to the tastes of their audience. This way, if asked to play for dancing accompanied by percussion instruments, they would have to exert a greater pressure on the bow, with the resulting harsher sound. Apart from that, as they often used the fiddle to back up their voice, some rested it on their chest instead of holding it between their chin and their shoulder, thereby leaving the head free to sing and make gestures more easily.

The non-tempered intonation used when singing, typical of some traditional songs, and described by Dorothe Schubarth as archaic, forces the singer to use a non-standard scale, in order to adapt to the voice, resulting in a deviation from 'academically correct' norms.<sup>17</sup> This can be heard in her recordings of Florencio dos Vilares, which accompanies volume VI of her songbook.<sup>18</sup>

The musical aesthetics were immersed in a rural environment where singing and the bagpipes had a privileged place, and the fiddlers had to adapt their technique to the ornaments and grace notes of the pipes and the melodic cadences of the singers. Although, unfortunately, no recording of a traditional fiddler playing together with other musicians has been preserved, we can assume that, as they often performed accompanied by tambourines and other traditional percussion instruments, they incorporated into their technique those bowings which best suited the rhythmic cadence of the accompaniment.

In recent years the Galician multi-instrumentalist, Pancho Álvarez, has played a pivotal role in reviving the traditional music of the blind fiddlers of Galicia. He focused on the last of the traditional fiddlers, Florencio dos Vilares, and included some of the tunes which had made him so famous in his district including 'A filla de Bartolo', 'A gaita de Cristobo', and 'Tres casamentos nun día'. For this project, Álvarez carried out thorough research on Florencio's life and work, and he strived to imitate his characteristic playing.

Álvarez demonstrates that in some cases the vibrato was fast and energetic, and the use of a vibrato trill of less than a half-tone was common. Between phrases in the song, in order to take some time and remember the lyrics of the next verse, he shows how they frequently played rolls and extended trills. His solo CD compilation *Pancho Álvarez: Florencio, O Cego dos Vilares*, draws on the music of Florencio dos Vilares. In the liner notes of this CD, Xosé Luís Rivas, a musician from Galicia recalls his memories of the blind musicians whom he saw perform many years ago:

I dealed [*sic*] with some blinds [blind men] that have practiced [*sic*] singing in fairs and pilgrimages, and I learned to appreciate their 'castrapo' (a jumble of Spanish and Galician words), their bare poetry, although deep and full of popular understanding, the other culture, the other life, and

above all, the melodies, the semi-guttural songs, the art of attracting and keeping the attention of the people who sang and played the violin, with their grace notes and mordents with Baroque scent, of exhibition, the spreading of famous events, the exaggeration of the lyrics.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to singing and playing, these remarkable characters also had to amuse their audience, and they incorporated into their melodies all kinds of sound effects. With their fiddle, they simulated cock crows, donkey brays, dog barks, the creaking of a badly-greased cart axle, and other locally-familiar sounds. Moreover, they illustrated by these means the different situations they were singing about, with sighs, moans, and other humorous vocalizations, thus getting more attention to the plot of the story.

### **Repertoire of the blind fiddlers**

The songs performed by the blind musicians included many different kinds of stories: events in neighbouring villages, lovers' fights, historical ballads, and injustices. As dramatic and gruesome stories were much appreciated, they spoke of murders and other crimes with a high dose of morbid fascination, much in the style of some of today's modern television dramas and news. As Xosé Luís Rivas and Baldomero Iglesias observe:

They narrate, with enviable skill, sexual and extreme aggressions, crimes of passion, lives of people sentenced to death, famous events, incests, love stories, adventures, stories of prisoners, miracles, stories of saints (who are often addressed and asked for forgiveness at the beginning), legends, rumours, stories about priests and housekeepers, feats of courageous men and women, fantastic tales, local stories full of realism and caricatures of famous and remarkable characters.<sup>20</sup>

The repertoire of the blind musicians was quite varied. In addition to the above mentioned songs and stories, they also performed traditional dances, such as *muiñeiras* or *jotas*, and *agarrados*, that is, tunes used to dance cheek to cheek, such as *pasodobles*, mazurkas or waltzes. They regularly incorporated such dances as tangos, rumbas, foxtrots, and *cumbias*, brought by returned immigrants from overseas. All kinds of melodies could be played, and no aesthetical preconception made them reject any tune. Well into the twentieth century, military service, the Civil War, and the railway increased people's mobility, such that melodies were constantly brought from other parts of Spain, leading to a cultural exchange between the different areas. As a result, the fiddlers' repertoires included many songs in Spanish. Later in the century, due to the presence of the radio in the homes, and to the strong competition from modern dance bands, traditional open-air dances became less common. Along with this, work opportunities for fiddlers and hurdy-gurdy players disappeared. In this context, fiddlers turned to playing various tunes they learned from the radio

or from modern bands, and they could be frequently heard performing Spanish light music, such as *cuplés*, in a desperate attempt to keep afloat in an unequal battle against modernity.

### The legacy of the blind fiddlers of Galicia

As I discuss below, such efforts to both preserve and revive this music, emerged out of a rediscovery of Galician traditional music in the 1970s and 1980s. This rediscovery, although linked to both the North American and European folk revivals, was born avoiding any connection with the political folk movement promoted by Franco's government.

Although the Galician blind fiddlers no longer perform, not since the 1970s, through the efforts of Pancho Álvarez and other Galician musicians, their music has been at the heart of the Galician folk revival movement. Through this recent interest, a small sample of their music has appeared in Galician song books. *Cancionero musical de Galicia de Casto Sampedro Folgar*, published in 1982, contains a number of tunes and songs originally performed by the blind musicians.<sup>21</sup> These include,



**Figure 4** Florencio López: 'Blind' of Vilares. *Vasquez Collection, A Fonsagrada, 1914/1986*

among others, twelve romance songs, two songs the blind musicians would perform at the Holy Gate of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, as well as four songs in dialogue and seventeen blind songs. Torner and Bal y Gay's collection<sup>22</sup> contains nineteen additional blind songs. Schubarth and Santamarina's *Cancioneiro Popular Galego*, includes several songs and recordings from the blind fiddler Florencio (1914–1986, see Figure 4), who came from the little village of Vilares.<sup>23</sup> Florencio del Vilares provided key information about the blind fiddlers' style. There are only a few testimonies about how the blind fiddlers played. Florencio was interviewed by Pablo Quintana,<sup>24</sup> Xosé Luís Rivas and Baldomero Iglesias,<sup>25</sup> and Dorothe Schubarth,<sup>26</sup> as well as by Galician Television. José Díaz Pin, a neighbour, recorded one hour of Florencio with his domestic camera.

In an interview with Christian Moll of *Folkworld* in 1998, Pancho Álvarez commented:

This blind guy – Florencio – was the last one, and it is the only one that they have recorded. There were lots of blind musicians on the fairs, but this was the only one they have recorded. So it's the only reference we have. The style of the fiddle – it sounds in our ears a bit Arabic, a bit like in Eastern Europe. It's very



wild, it's a bit like when you listen to the travellers in England and Scotland; it's very fiery. When Sean Keane of the Chieftains listened to the recording of Florencio it reminded him of the old style in Clare.<sup>27</sup>

As far as publicly available audio recordings are concerned, we only know, so far, of those of Florencio dos Vilares, Eladio de Alxide, and Andrés da Revolta. A CD devoted to Florencio released by Pablo Quintana in the *Recolleita* series is the only record of an old traditional fiddler published to date. Apart from that, two of the tune books have companion recordings: musicologist Dorothé Schubarth's and the two volumes of Luís Rivas and Baldomero Iglesias.<sup>28</sup>

Some recordings exist by classical violinists. Among them, we can highlight those by Manuel Quiroga of Pontevedra (1899–1988). Quiroga recorded such traditional tunes as 'Alborada', and 'Muiñeira', which he adapted himself in a style similar to that of the great master Pablo Sarasate, who, incidentally, also had a famous composition based on a traditional *muiñeira* from Monterrei.

### **The revival of traditional fiddle music**

The origins of modern Galician folk music (as opposed to the rural tradition) can be traced back to the 1970s. During the late 1960s and 1970s many other cultures, including Britain, the United States, and Canada, were similarly searching for their musical roots. This interest in traditional music arose at the same time as General Francisco Franco's dictatorship crumbled, following his death in 1975. Franco had come to power in 1939, just prior to the commencement of World War II and during his long regime, he tried in vain to unify the folklore of the Spanish State. There was a policy to emphasize common cultural characteristics and eradicate all aspects of cultural manifestations which could be taken to symbolize the identity of a particular region. For example, as *jotas* could be found throughout Spain, they came to be adopted as a national Spanish dance. Galician traditional gatherings called *fiadeiros*, where it was customary to sing and dance, all but disappeared due to the pressure of the clergy and restrictions imposed by the government on meetings at night. Fortunately, Galicia was a very mountainous land with poor roads, such that these mandates did not reach the most remote rural areas, which remained shielded, and so it was possible to preserve examples of this archaic music. As elsewhere in the country, Galicia reacted against all things Spanish, such that, when the dictatorship gave way to the current constitutional monarchy, Galician musicians looked for something to set them apart from the rest of Spain, and they found it in the old Celticism already in vogue in the late nineteenth century and in the first third of the twentieth century. Galician musicians turned their attentions to such countries as Ireland, and Brittany who were in the midst of their own folk revivals.<sup>29</sup>

Galician musicians found parallels with their own music. Two of them, Rodrigo Romaní and Antón Seoane, were enthusiasts for the instruments and sounds of the Middle Ages. They made it their mission to track down hurdy-gurdies, *citolas*, and *freixolés* and to find those who made and owned these instruments. As a result of

their work, the record *Milladoiro* was released in 1978.<sup>30</sup> Galician musicians perceived many things in common with musicians in other European regions: the 'Celtic' origins, a green and rainy landscape, an economy based on agriculture and fishing, and a music which Galicians insisted on finding very similar to their own. In this way, and, moreover, noting that *muiñeiras* resembled Irish jigs and that our repertoire also included numerous polkas, we decided at that time that we were as Celtic as the Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny cartoon characters, Asterix and Obelix, and we blindly surrendered to the mythical King Breogán. While enthusiastically embracing Celticism, musicians purposefully rejected *jotas*, rumbas, fandangos, *foliadas*, and other local material which reminded them of Franco's Spanish regime. From our musical heritage, only polkas, *pasacorredoiras*, *muiñeiras*, guild dances, *alboradas*, and *alalás* were used, and re-interpreted within the new Celtic universe. Interestingly, all these dances have a binary or duple rhythm, except for *alalás*, which are free-rhythm songs, and all triple time tunes were left out. One exception is the band Fuxan os Ventos from Lugo,<sup>31</sup> who used music obtained from old musicians during collecting trips (the so-called '*recolleitas*') and included some *foliadas* in their first recordings; due to their proximity to rural music, this band kept outside mainstream Celticism.

### **Present day folk fiddlers in Galicia**

The presence of the fiddle in this first stage of the modern Galician folk music revival was quite limited.<sup>32</sup> In 1979, the pioneering folk band Milladoiro, released *A Galicia de Maeloc*. It featured a fine violinist called Laura Quintillán.<sup>33</sup> In 1984, the band Na Lúa arrived on the folk scene and we find what we consider to be the first genuine modern fiddler striving for a folk performing style.<sup>34</sup> Together with Pancho Álvarez mentioned above, the other great fiddler of the late twentieth century is Quim Farinha, who has performed with the bands Fia na Roca<sup>35</sup> and Dhais. Since 1997, he has also played in Berrogüetto, together with Anxo Pintos, a great multi-instrumentalist and master of Galician hurdy-gurdy.<sup>36</sup> Javier Cedrón was the fiddler in the band Luar na Lubre,<sup>37</sup> and he has also taken part as a fiddler in Nova Galega de Danza,<sup>38</sup> a contemporary dance project based on traditional music. Harry C. is the current fiddler in Milladoiro, his only band, a position he has held since 1999, after the departure of classical violinist Antonio Seijo.

Most of the present-day Galician fiddlers are based in the South. Since 1996, the fiddle has been taught at the Traditional Music School of Vigo (now called e-Trad).<sup>39</sup> In the beginning, it was taught by Quim Farinha, but he left in 1998 and was replaced by the current teacher and author of this paper, Alfonso Franco. This pioneering school specializes in the teaching of traditional and folk music in this country and it has become the principal institution for the preservation, dissemination, and performance of Galician music. It has links with many of the most influential Galician artists.

As a result of classes for music ensembles in this school, in 2001 an orchestra was created with traditional and folk instruments. After the success of their initial performances, this orchestra, Sondeseu, has become increasingly established.<sup>40</sup> The

group has toured in Ireland, Portugal, and France, and has played in major venues in Spain. They have released three records so far and are often asked to play in special shows on television. Sondeseu is backed by a Foundation of the same name, which is the promoter of the future Vigo-based European Network of Folk Orchestras. Sondeseu's fiddle section is directed by the author, and includes or has included among its ranks an important part of the new generation of Galician fiddlers, such as Vigo-born and self-taught Begoña Riobó,<sup>41</sup> for several years a member of Carlos Núñez's band, with which she has performed all over the world and whose 2004 live DVD showcases her talent.

Alfonso Merino<sup>42</sup> is a young fiddler who began playing folk music at an early age. He is a founder member of Bulla Timpánica and also of the band of the harper, Roi Casal.<sup>43</sup> He and Begoña Riobó are currently the principal young musicians playing in the Galician style. Together with other fiddle students, these are some of the musicians linked to e-Trad who, with their different musical projects, will, over the next few years, make the Galician fiddle internationally known as a unique style honouring the legacy of the blind fiddlers of our country.

The Galician fiddle was on the brink of disappearing. Florencio from Vilares was the last representative of the old fiddlers, but fortunately he lived long enough to connect with a new generation of musicians, though much remains to be done. The number of fiddlers in Galicia is only about fifty, and professionals do not exceed a dozen. However, the presence of the instrument is increasing: the main folk bands and soloists include fiddlers; they are now common in pub sessions and, what is more important, playing *jotas*, *muiñeiras*, *pasodobles*, and *rumbas*, not just Irish music, as used to be the case. Today the Galician fiddle is taught at three schools, and fiddle workshops for classical violinists are becoming increasingly frequent. It would not make sense to expect Galician fiddling to be limited to a repetition of songs and stories in the old style, but we should aim to play the tunes as they did, respecting the groove, tempo, and rhythm of the dances, and, in the end, getting people to dance to our instrument.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Manuel M. Murguía, *Historia de Galicia* (Lugo: Soto Freire, 1865), vol. I.

<sup>2</sup> Pablo Arribas Briones, 'Ciegos, juglares y animadores del camino', trans. by Francisco Taboas [www.ibermutuamur.es/camino\\_santiago/camino/juglares.htm](http://www.ibermutuamur.es/camino_santiago/camino/juglares.htm) [accessed 20 February 2009].

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel González Rodríguez, *Así canta Galicia: Cancionero popular gallego* (Ourense: La Región, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> Antonio López Ferreiro, *Historia de la Santa A. M. Iglesia de Santiago* (Santiago de Compostela: Imp. del Seminario conciliar central, 1902), vol. V.

<sup>5</sup> Ferreiro, V, pp. 95–96.

<sup>6</sup> Ferreiro, V, pp. 368–69.

<sup>7</sup> Ferreiro, V, pp. 369–81.

<sup>8</sup> Luís Costa, 'Las rumbas olvidadas: tr`ansculturalidad y etnicización en la música popular gallega', *Revista Transcultural de Música*, 8 (2004) [www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans8/costa.htm](http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans8/costa.htm) [accessed 20 February 2009].

- <sup>9</sup> See José Inzenga, *Cantos y bailes de Galicia* (Ourense: Difusora de Letras, Artes e Ideas S.L, 2005).
- <sup>10</sup> Faustino Santalices (1877–1960) is considered to be the most important researcher of the hurdy-gurdy in Spain in the first half of the twentieth century. See Antón Seoane, *Faustino Santalices* (Vigo: Ir Indo Edicións: 2000); see also [gl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faustino\\_Santalices](http://gl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faustino_Santalices) [accessed 2 June 2010].
- <sup>11</sup> See Joaquín Díaz, *Las coplas del ciego* (Valladolid: Fundación Siglo, 2002).
- <sup>12</sup> Delfín Caseiro and Castor Castro, 'O cego da Gándara', in *Lethes: Taboas Cadernos culturais da Limia* (Ourense: Centro da cultura popular da Limia, 2006), p. 15. Many other cultures also accommodated blind musicians, for example, Japan. See Ingrid Fritsch, 'Blind Female Musicians on the Road: The Social Organization of "Goze" in Japan', *Chime Journal*, 5 (Spring 1992), 58–64.
- <sup>13</sup> Caseiro and Castro, p. 16.
- <sup>14</sup> Briones, 'Ciegos...'. See also Luís Costa, *As orixes das cantigas: Contexto historiográfico* (A Coruña: Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza, 1998).
- <sup>15</sup> Compare the broadside ballad trade in the UK, see Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad: A Study in Origins and Meaning* (London: H. Jenkins, 1962).
- <sup>16</sup> A collection of printed lyrics, photographed by Alberto Bouzón, can be accessed on the website Portal do Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial de Galicia, devoted to the Galician intangible cultural heritage, see [ronsel.uvigo.es/index.php?option=com\\_rsgallery2&Itemid=30&gid=8](http://ronsel.uvigo.es/index.php?option=com_rsgallery2&Itemid=30&gid=8) [accessed 2 June 2010].
- <sup>17</sup> Dorothe Schubarth and Antón Santamarina, *Cancioneiro Popular Galego*, 7 vols (La Coruña: Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza, 1984–1995), VI, 265.
- <sup>18</sup> Schubarth and Santamarina, VI, 'Melodies'.
- <sup>19</sup> Xosé Luís Rivas, 'Florencio, O Cego dos Vilares', in booklet accompanying CD, *Pancho Álvarez: Florencio, O Cego dos Vilares*, Boa Music, CD A0100377916-0101, Madrid, 1998.
- <sup>20</sup> Rivas Cruz and Iglesias Dobarrio, II, 12.
- <sup>21</sup> José Filgueira Valverde, *Introducción y notas ilíográficas: Cancionero musical de Galicia de Casto Sampedro Folgar*, facsimile edn (A Coruña: Fundación Barrié de la Maza, 1982).
- <sup>22</sup> Eduardo Martínez Torner and Jesús Bal y Gay, *Cancionero Gallego*, facsimile of 1973 edn, new introduction by Carlos Villanueva (Vigo: Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza, 2007)
- <sup>23</sup> Schubarth and Santamarina, VI, 'Melodies'.
- <sup>24</sup> See Rivas, Florencio, *O Cego dos Vilares*, accompanying booklet.
- <sup>25</sup> See Rivas Cruz and Iglesias Dobarrio.
- <sup>26</sup> Schubarth spent five years researching the traditional music of Galicia leading to the seminal volume, *Cancionero Galego*, in which she includes and discusses many of Florencio's songs and tunes.
- <sup>27</sup> Christian Moll, 'Blind Fiddlers on the Fairs: Pancho Álvarez revives this Galician Tradition', review of CD, *Pancho Álvarez: Florencio, O Cego dos Vilares*, in *FolkWorld*, [folkworld.de/12/e/pancho.html](http://folkworld.de/12/e/pancho.html) [accessed 5 February 2009].
- <sup>28</sup> Schubarth and Santamarina, accompanying CD. See also Rivas Cruz and Iglesias Dobarrio, *Cantos, Coplas e Romances de Cego* (Lugo: Ophiusa, 1998; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2000), 2 accompanying CDs.
- <sup>29</sup> See Xoán Manuel Estévez, *Un novo estilo para a música galega: O nacemento da música folk* (Santiago de Compostela: Museo do Pobo Galego, 1998).
- <sup>30</sup> Anton Seoane and Rodrigo Romani, *Milladoiro*, Ed. Ruada LP, 1978, from website of Milladoiro: [www.milladoiro.com/WebEng/bio/bio.html](http://www.milladoiro.com/WebEng/bio/bio.html) [accessed 2 June 2010].

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<sup>31</sup> This group were the first to record a blind song in 1976. The leaders were Xosé Luís Rivas and Baldomero Iglesias, who twenty years later published the most important Galician book about blind fiddlers, see Rivas and Iglesias Dobarrio, *Cantos, Coplas e Romances de Cego* (Lugo: Ophiusa, 1998; 2nd edn, 2000), 2 accompanying CDs.

<sup>32</sup> Alfonso Franco, *O Violín na música Folk: Galicia 1975–2004* (Santiago: the author, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> See [www.milladoiro.com/WebEng/bio/bio.html](http://www.milladoiro.com/WebEng/bio/bio.html) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>34</sup> See [www.myspace.com/naluafolk#ixzz0rA4pLsLg](http://www.myspace.com/naluafolk#ixzz0rA4pLsLg) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>35</sup> See [www.fianaroca.com/en/web/historia.php](http://www.fianaroca.com/en/web/historia.php) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>36</sup> See [www.berroguetto.com/en\\_US/home/](http://www.berroguetto.com/en_US/home/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>37</sup> See [www.luarnalubre.com/](http://www.luarnalubre.com/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>38</sup> See [www.novagalededanza.com/](http://www.novagalededanza.com/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>39</sup> See [e-tradvigo.blogspot.com/](http://e-tradvigo.blogspot.com/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>40</sup> See [www.sondeseu.org/](http://www.sondeseu.org/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>41</sup> See [www.myspace.com/riobogz](http://www.myspace.com/riobogz) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>42</sup> See [www.myspace.com/fonsomerino](http://www.myspace.com/fonsomerino) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>43</sup> See [www.roicasal.com/eng/index.php](http://www.roicasal.com/eng/index.php) [accessed 2 June 2010].

## ‘Putting the dirt back in’: an investigation of step dancing in Scotland

MATS MELIN

In 2005, I undertook an investigation into percussive step dancing in Scotland. As this is a relatively recent style of dance on the Scottish traditional dance scene, I wondered whether the current ‘revival’, as it was labelled, was linked to a revival of an indigenous Scottish dance form or not.<sup>1</sup> I concluded that percussive step dancing was in fact a revival of a particular form of Scottishness or ‘essence’ recognised in step dancing in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, a region of Canada which contains a substantial Scottish population. In recent years, the Cape Breton percussive dance form has attracted a certain sector of the Scottish-based dance community, who were aiming to re-introduce it to Scotland. Characteristically it is a dance form free from association-based rules and regulations, and a form that, it was felt, had not been refined and watered down. Simplistically, it was seen at the time in Scotland as a dance form that could have been part of the current dance traditions, if it had not been pushed into the background by other forms of dance that the Scottish social context came to favour. In short the dirt was being put back into the dancing again and the dance form was labelled ‘Scottish’ step dancing.

This paper will concentrate on a few of the aspects of why Cape Breton step dancing was introduced to a modern Scottish dance audience in the 1990s and if, or to what level, it has impacted on today’s Scottish dance traditions.

### **A brief overview of Scottish and Cape Breton traditional dance traditions**

In 1990, traditional dancing in Scotland encompassed two main forms: Highland dancing (athletic solo and group dances), governed by organisations, taught mainly through dancing schools, and seen in public, usually at competitive events organised by the national dance organisations and Scottish country dancing (social figure dances). The main division was in the specific performance location: that is, either as part of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society’s events, or else at independently-run dance events. The primary distinction between Highland dancing and Scottish country dancing is how much attention is paid to the ‘correct’ performance of steps and figures. Some of the key aesthetic criteria for these two dance forms are lightness, flow, elegance, and a particular level of technical excellence. Furthermore,

the vernacular dance scene consists of 'old time' dancing or 'ceilidh' dancing, as it is also called, depending on context, geographical area, and age range of the dancers. Stylistic and music preferences, for these mainly couple and group dances, differ from one part of the country to another. At the periphery of this dance landscape, other styles exist; for example, 'Hebridean' dancing in the Western Isles, and dances particular to the Orkney and Shetland Isles. In the main, the dance traditions are kept alive in village halls and other larger venues, such as hotels, town halls and community centres.

In the first half of the eighteenth century some twenty thousand, predominantly Gaelic-speaking, Catholic Scottish Highlanders settled in Cape Breton Island. They were displaced owing to the British economic depression, the declining kelp industry, and the clearances in which a large number of the crofting population of the Scottish Highlands and Islands were removed from their lands. In Cape Breton they settled alongside the indigenous population and descendants of earlier French and English settlers. Because of the absence of large estates or plantations on the island and the wide availability of land, the Scots immigrants settled in straggling lines of dispersed farms and for the most part these farm communities were isolated. Moreover, immigrant family and kinship groups settled together.<sup>2</sup>

Distance, forest, rough terrain, and a lack of roads hindered communication and prevented the intermingling of settlers that was common on many frontiers. There was little pressure on the French-speaking Acadians and the Gaelic-speaking Scots to conform to the Standard English of the Loyalists. A good deal of orally transmitted folk culture was maintained.<sup>3</sup>

By 1871, the population of Cape Breton was seventy-five thousand of which fifty thousand were of Scottish origin, thus 'outnumbering by two to one the descendants of Acadian, Irish, and Loyalist families who had settled in Cape Breton before 1800. In large part, Cape Breton had become a Scottish island.'<sup>4</sup>

In Cape Breton, the vernacular dance tradition lives predominantly in the village halls. Here square sets, locally transformed versions of quadrilles introduced from mainland Canada and the USA, are the only form of social dancing, often interspersed with performances of solo step dancing. Many halls also have an outdoor dancing area for summer time dancing. Solo step dancing, Scotch Fours (Reels), and square sets all feature at local indoor and outdoor festivals and concerts, where they often co-exist with displays of Highland and Scottish country dancing. The latter two dance forms now exist around the Island, but are not the predominant forms of dancing, and their aesthetic appearance is the same as in Scotland. The vernacular square sets and step dancing are aesthetically more grounded and good percussive dancers are said to be 'close-to-the-floor', 'neat', 'light', and 'musical.' Step dancing is passed on both informally in the home as well as taught in public classes in the community. Square sets are mainly learnt in village halls as they are being danced. As in Scotland, Highland and Scottish country dancing is learnt through

dancing schools and dance clubs, and, according to Frank Rhodes, both types were introduced to the island about 1939.<sup>5</sup> Many of the dances and dance forms, described by Rhodes as observed and remembered by descendants of Scottish settlers in 1957, are no longer practised.<sup>6</sup>

While this investigation focused on the step dancing which originated in the communities of Cape Breton Island, which have predominantly, but not exclusively, Scottish heritage as their influence, there was an awareness that other styles of step dancing occur elsewhere in North America. Margaret Bennett, for example, discusses in detail step dancing in a Scots Gaelic community in Codroy Valley, Newfoundland, and mentions step dancing in other parts of Canada.<sup>7</sup> Dancer Hugh Bigney refers to step dancing traditions on mainland Nova Scotia as part of his Scottish heritage,<sup>8</sup> and Johanne Devlin Trew notes that the Scots in Ottawa Valley in Ontario had their own dance traditions, which were separate from the predominantly Irish-influenced step dance tradition of the area.<sup>9</sup> There are also Scottish and French-Acadian-influenced step dance traditions in, for example, Prince Edward Island.<sup>10</sup>

Although this investigation did not examine the level of possible Irish or French dance influence on the step dance tradition of Cape Breton, Colin Quigley's research into step dancing of the Irish tradition found in Newfoundland describes similar aesthetics to those of Cape Breton Island.<sup>11</sup>

### **The (re-)appearance of step dancing in Scotland**

In the early 1990s, some Scottish dancers and musicians initially 'discovered' Cape Breton style step dancing either when visiting (primarily) Cape Breton Island in Maritime east-coast Canada, or when attending workshops in Scotland where Cape Breton musicians and dancers had been invited to share their tradition. A relatively small number of individuals living in Scotland subsequently took a great interest in the Cape Breton style of step dancing and music from that point in time. Selected historical and cultural links between Cape Breton and the Scottish Highlands were explored and advocated from the very beginning of this process by those involved in reviving step dancing and popularising the Cape Breton style of playing music.

The interaction between Cape Breton and Scottish music is discussed and analysed by Liz Doherty,<sup>12</sup> and in particular the interest in Cape Breton musical style shown by Scottish musicians, though also the strong feelings within the Scottish music community towards the Cape Breton style dance. Doherty discusses the many phases of Cape Breton musicians visiting Scotland, as well as the interaction between the Cape Breton and Scottish musicians during the same research period I investigated for step dancing. Similar to my own findings, Doherty observes that Cape Breton music and dance tradition has, in its own context, had a different development from Scottish tradition. Other contributions have been made to it, a fact that was largely overlooked or not emphasised by the Scottish interest group.

In 1994 I conducted a case study of Cape Breton step dancer, Harvey Beaton. This research provided a platform for illustrating the Cape Breton dance context. It highlighted both the relationship between Cape Breton dancing and dancing in



Scotland, but it also revealed the differences in context. As the study also showed, the Scottish 'revival' emphasised certain aspects of the Cape Breton tradition, whereas others were paid less attention.<sup>13</sup> Based on this work, in 2005, I queried whether the interest in this style of percussive step dancing was a revival. For my research I examined the process in terms of the theory for music revivals presented by Tamara E. Livingston.<sup>14</sup> Livingston's article presents a model for a descriptive framework for music revivals. As the awareness of step dancing is closely interlinked with what is argued as a revival of 'Cape Breton' (Cape Breton here equates to 'older') style fiddle and bagpipe playing for step dancing in Scotland, I felt the model was suitable for analysing this process. The processes described by Livingston for music revivals closely mirror those I saw happening in the dance field, although other aspects she presents seem not to apply to the step dance revival in question. In summary, Livingston's general descriptive framework attempts to illustrate:

a coming together, a convergence of various circumstances and personal motivations centring on the fascination and emulation of a music culturally and historically distanced from the present. Music revivals are a product of both specific historical circumstances as well as general intellectual and social trends.<sup>15</sup>

Livingston sees revivals as existing in a continuum, where some endure for long periods of time while others never come through the planning stage. She discusses the causes of a revival's breakdown and the fact that the revival often serves as a catalyst for other cultural expressions 'stimulating new sounds, new textures, and new repertoires'.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Livingston discusses the tendency of revivals to react against modernity (where mass culture is considered a hallmark), while at the same time being a product of it – 'they partake in the discourse of modernity even as they set themselves in opposition to certain manifestations of modernity'.<sup>17</sup>

The vernacular form of step dancing I investigated is, as a tradition, 'a work-in-progress' as Spalding and Woodside defined it,<sup>18</sup> or is 'transforming' as, for example, Rosenberg, Atkinson, Handler and Linnekin, Nilsson, and Feintuch describe.<sup>19</sup> The dance traditions in each cultural context (Scotland and Cape Breton) had evolved and were influenced differently; thus they underwent divergent transformations to each other. By extension, the transformation of Cape Breton step dancing has continued since being promoted in Scotland.

I concluded that what was actually being revived by this interest group was the Scottish 'essence of a tradition'. By taking the transformed 'Cape Breton' style of step dancing and bringing it back to Scotland, this 'essence' of the form came to represent what scattered memories recalled of some form of percussive step dance tradition in Scotland. To my knowledge, no step dancing of an extemporary nature found or remembered in Scotland has been restored to current use.<sup>20</sup> I would argue

that all manifestations of step dancing current in Scotland use only Cape Breton motifs as their core material.

With the 'Cape Breton' steps, however, come all those influences of maritime Canadian culture that had transformed the step dance tradition there over the past 200 years, and this fact has to be recognised.

### **'An essence of Scottishness'**

So, what constitutes this *essence* that was recognised? The revival of step dancing in Scotland is closely linked to the 'discovery' of the Cape Breton style of fiddle playing and piping in the 1980s when two respected Scots musicians, fiddler Alasdair Fraser and piper Hamish Moore, both independently fell in love with the music of Cape Breton.

I interviewed Alasdair Fraser in January 2005 when he discussed growing up in a Scotland where his mother tongue, Scots, was discouraged, where the cultural self esteem – his own and the country's – was low in his opinion. Playing his fiddle around Scotland in many different venues, he started questioning why the fiddle music was played in certain ways, and was it the right way. He felt disillusioned by what he saw as a lack of general interest in finding the roots of Scottish music and dance. He tried to find his musical heroes in Scotland as he felt the only 'way to learn a traditional art form is to identify your heroes and corner them, copy them and then develop your own style out of that'.<sup>21</sup> His frustration with the lack of fluidity in the traditional music scene in the late 1970s was apparent. In the Highlands, he said, the scene was not healthy at all and there were only a handful of indigenous fiddlers around, for example Angus Grant Senior and Farquhar MacCreath. Against this backdrop Alasdair Fraser travelled to Cape Breton in 1981 and 'found the fluency in the culture of Cape Breton that I wanted in my own culture'.<sup>22</sup> He found people whom he felt expressed joy in their own traditions and had a depth of cultural awareness.<sup>23</sup>

Hamish Moore's discovery of Cape Breton music is similar in many ways to Alasdair Fraser's story. Hamish shunned the competitive piping scene and experimented with jazz as he looked for something that would resonate 'in his heart and soul'.<sup>24</sup> Hamish Moore's musical epiphany occurred after hearing for the first time Buddy MacMaster and Maybelle Chisholm playing Cape Breton fiddle tunes in Philadelphia in 1987 – many of which were old Highland pipe tunes, but not easily recognisable. He began collecting fiddle tapes and visited Cape Breton in the early 1990s. There he met old-time piper Alec Currie, who played tunes on the pipes with the same step-dance rhythm that fiddlers like Buddy played on the fiddle. Hamish immediately saw the importance of Cape Breton as a link to the old Highland music that he felt had been changed beyond recognition in Scotland due to political circumstances and external (European) influences, something he said Cape Breton was spared. He became a passionate promoter of this new 'old' style of music, both in Scotland and in Cape Breton, where he was hired during the summer to teach at St Ann's Gaelic College.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the music of Cape Breton, they felt, had more fluidity and drive. They perceived at the time that it had more 'dirt' in it than Scottish music had. From their perspective, Scottish music and dance had been refined, and the traditions had been restrained by outside forces such as associations and governing bodies.<sup>26</sup> According to their view, the Scots had lost a certain part of the pride and interest in the roots of the traditions.<sup>27</sup>

In the early 1990s, both Fraser and Moore became important as facilitators of access to Cape Breton music and step dance in Scotland. Alasdair Fraser invited Cape Breton fiddler Buddy MacMaster and step dancer Harvey Beaton to teach at his Summer School held at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic College in the Isle of Skye.<sup>28</sup> In the mid 1990s, Hamish Moore established a summer school, Ceòlas, which provided and continues to provide a place to learn and share music (piping and fiddling), Gaelic song, and step dance in the Gaelic speaking environment of South Uist, with a significant involvement of Cape Breton musicians and dancers, for example, Willie Fraser, Mary Janet MacDonald, Alexander MacDonnell, Mairi Rankin, Kinnon Beaton, and Joe Peter MacLean.

Fraser and Moore were not the first to carry out such exchanges. As Doherty's research shows, Cape Breton musicians have been coming to Scotland since World War II and, in the 1960s and 1970s, several of them toured, performing their music around the country. The BBC also recorded and broadcasted their music.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, Fraser and Moore's 'discovery' of Cape Breton culture in the late 1980s was not entirely accidental at this point in time. The broader arena in which thoughts regarding Scottish identities are negotiated is summarised by, for example, Jonathan Dembling.<sup>30</sup> The key points were the failure of the 1979 referendum on home rule, and the following eighteen years of Conservative Party government from Westminster, which led to an increased nationalistic slant, or at least a more self-conscious shaping of the arts and culture in Scotland. In the period leading up to Devolution and the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 'a great deal of thinking and discussion about what it means to be Scottish in the twenty-first century' ensued.<sup>31</sup>

As Doherty has however pointed out based on her study of Cape Bretoners and their music, 'there is an ongoing pride in their ancestry, in their Scottish roots, but now Cape Breton is their land'.<sup>32</sup> While Scottish fiddlers such as Fraser and Moore may perceive of the Cape Breton tradition as a 'window' on the Scottish music and dance tradition of the past for historical reasons, Cape Breton fiddling is its own entity:

Tempo, ornamentation, differing attitudes to 'correctness' and the 'flavour', the loss of high bass, bowing styles, expanding technical prowess, all of these are aspects of the fiddle tradition which have been subjected to change certainly since the 1920s if not before. When Alasdair Fraser, Hamish Moore, Mairi Campbell, and others saw in Cape Breton something of Scotland past they were not wrong. When Hector MacAndrew told Winston 'Scotty' Fitzgerald that his

fiddle playing was 'very close to the truth' neither was he wrong. However, the typical Cape Breton fiddler at the beginning of the twenty-first century cannot be held up as simply an uncontaminated replica of the eighteenth-century Scottish fiddler. Rather the Cape Breton contribution to that tradition should be recognised and celebrated for what it is.<sup>33</sup>

As Doherty illustrates, both the context for fiddling and the ethnic mix in Cape Breton, has resulted in a transformation that is separate from Scottish fiddling. Looking specifically at the dance, it was felt by the Scottish enthusiasts that the step dancing represented something of an older Scottish dance form. This is exemplified by dancer Maggie Moore (then wife of piper Hamish Moore), who commented: 'Perhaps also there is a feeling deep in many of us that this dancing actually belongs here, and that we belong to it!'.<sup>34</sup> This sums up the desire at the time to find similarities and to authenticate the dance form as a Scottish one. While analysing the data of my investigation it became clear that this sentiment was not only as a result of a few individuals' journey of discovery, but it was set in the wider context of issues of Scottish identity and the lack of confidence in themselves, as discussed by Carol Craig.<sup>35</sup>

The identity issue in Scotland was reflected from the outset of step dancing appearing on the Scottish dance scene, in the debates on the origin of this vernacular dance form, its level of Scottishness, and whether it should be referred to as 'Scottish', 'Cape Breton', or just 'step dancing'. As percussive step dance was fairly unfamiliar as part of Scottish dancing in the 1990s many dancers equated the style with Irish dancing, when first seeing it, often relating it to *Riverdance*. In doing so they reflected the thoughts put forward by Cape Breton scholar Sheldon MacInnes;<sup>36</sup> whereas others, notably Margaret Bennett and James MacDonald-Reid argued for Scottish roots, claiming step dancing never died out in Scotland.<sup>37</sup> The term 'Scottish' step dancing was introduced at this point and is still used to some extent. It is the counter-flow of music and step dance style from what is seen as the Scottish diaspora to Scotland that makes this process both interesting and problematical. It was at this point that several of those involved in the process began using the word 'revival'.<sup>38</sup>

### **The impact of step dancing on the Scottish dance scene**

My investigation showed that only a handful of those who initially attended the step dance workshops in Scotland were aware of a percussive dance tradition of some description in the Scottish past. Most were dancers who were curious to try something new. Only a handful of these people took in the totality of the introduced tradition by travelling to Cape Breton to experience the dance scene there.

Some, maybe most, were fascinated by the percussive and improvisational nature of the dance form on Cape Breton. As they discovered, it is at odds with the current established structured and regulated existing dance forms in Scotland, which allow for little or no improvisation or musical interpretation. To most practitioners, the Cape Breton percussive dance tradition became just another fun hobby. A few

dancers, including myself, alongside Frank McConnell, Caroline Reagh, and Sandra Robertson as well as others, began teaching it professionally.

The historical link between the music and dance, and between the Highland-Cape Breton connection and the Gaelic language, (plus the fact that the two main summer schools were both situated in the Gaelic speaking environments of South Uist and the Gaelic College in Skye), slanted the cultural link more towards the Highlands than any other part of Scotland. Scots who settled in Cape Breton came from many parts of Scotland but predominantly they were Gaelic speaking Highlanders.<sup>39</sup> An interesting observation is, therefore, that many of the individuals, who were the driving forces behind the revival, were themselves neither from the Highlands nor Gaelic speakers, including myself, Alasdair Fraser, and Hamish Moore.

Since the early 1990s, Fèisean nan Gàidheal has played a key role in promoting step dancing in Scotland. This primarily Highland-based organisation mainly promotes music, song, and dance with a strong emphasis on the Gaelic traditions.<sup>40</sup> Within this context, the perceived connection between the Gaelic language and step dancing has therefore been emphasised. As a result, youngsters growing up within the Fèisean environment see Cape Breton style step dancing as part of their culture, and when older, will in turn teach it to the next generation. Fèisean nan Gàidheal is the only organisation presently promoting the teaching of step dancing around Scotland. Although other organisations such as the Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust, and local councils and community music and dance groups, have run series of classes and workshops in step dance over the years, most projects have been of short duration.<sup>41</sup>

Performing groups such as the Scottish Step Dance Company and Dannsa emerged in 1998 and 2000 respectively, and performed their interpretation of the tradition. They have taught workshops for a number of years, gathering a small following of enthusiasts. Dannsa is still active to some extent but concentrates more on facilitating workshops and short projects. This organization sometimes invites Cape Breton musicians and dancers to collaborate on projects around Scotland. An annual dance festival, Strathspé Away, was established by Dannsa in 2003 to celebrate many dance forms. Step dancing is very much at its core, and this is still running.

The situation in 2008 is that a few small groups of enthusiasts around Scotland meet regularly to step dance in a class or informally in the house. By my estimations they number less than a hundred people. None of these initiatives have had any greater impact on the general perception of what is the Scottish dance tradition. The established organisations for Scottish country dancing and competitive Highland dancing<sup>42</sup> have largely ignored or dismissed the idea that Cape Breton based step dancing forms part of the Scottish dance tradition, even though individual members of these organisations have taken an interest in the dance form.<sup>43</sup>

At least two attempts have been made by the governing Highland dance associations to write down the steps, standardise and publish the dance form, so as

to make it conform to medal test syllabi. Neither of these efforts seems to have been successful in gaining any greater interest in the dance form.<sup>44</sup> One can speculate that the reason for the lack of uptake by the practitioners of these organisations is possibly the inherent improvisational nature of step dancing. Improvisation is very much in opposition to the other structured or set order forms of dance promoted by the organisations. In short, the musicality and dance skill involved in step dancing is very different to that encouraged by these regulating organisations.

As step dancing is a percussive dance form, a common view of the public is that it must be Irish. Even though my own research indicates memories of some sort of percussive step dancing around the whole of Scotland,<sup>45</sup> it has, on the whole, been forgotten in favour of ceilidh or 'old time' couple dancing, Scottish country and Highland dancing.

As of 2008, step dancing in Scotland, lives marginalised at grass roots level on the Scottish dance scene. No performing groups are currently touring and only summer schools and scattered workshops at festivals and wintertime lessons organised by a few community-based groups keep the dance form going. It seems that the fundamental difference in social context between Cape Breton and Scotland, and the difference in musical connectivity with dance in each place, are two of the main factors in this lack of engagement in the dance form. There is also a general apprehension by the public in engaging with anything that is not instantly familiar to them and which also looks complicated. There are glimmers of engagement, as when seven Cape Breton Square Sets took to the floor during the 2008 Ceòlas summer school in South Uist to the fiddle music of Glenn Graham accompanied by Harvey Beaton on the piano (both from Cape Breton Island). However, these are isolated and consciously constructed occasions, rather than naturally happening dance activities. To my knowledge, these kinds of occasions have only happened at events where Cape Bretoners have been present.

### **Some positive results of step dancing entering the Scottish dance scene**

Some of the positive outcomes in relation to step dancing in Scotland that have emerged since the 1990s are increased funding opportunities, greater awareness of music, song, and dance connectivity, interest in dance research, and cultural exchanges between Scotland and Cape Breton Island.

In a ten year period from the mid 1990s the Scottish Arts Council and other arts funding became available for traditional dancing and in particular step dancing.<sup>46</sup> Most of the local council-based 'Traditional Dance Artist in Residence' schemes set up during this period, involved step dancing to some extent.<sup>47</sup> It seems that the improvisational nature of the dance form and its potential to engage with other dance and art forms attracted the funding bodies. Moreover, it provided at the same time a link with traditional dance. That many of the step dancers involved are also prominent contemporary dancers was probably a contributing factor too. Performance groups such as Dannsa were awarded a number of grants to explore the links between Gaelic song and dance, and to develop new ways of performing and

combining traditional dance forms. The connecting tissue in all these projects was step dancing. At present, however, very little funding seems forthcoming toward traditional dance of any form in Scotland.<sup>48</sup>

At an early stage the link between Gaelic *puirt-a-beul* (mouth music) singing and step dancing was explored.<sup>49</sup> It often required an adjustment to the way the singers sang their *puirts* to accommodate the flow of the dance and many singers learnt to dance to understand the connection better. Many dancers took up an instrument, mainly fiddle, to better understand the music to which they were dancing. For them, this resulted in an increased engagement in the interconnection between music, song, and dance.

Another aspect of the increased awareness of percussive step dance among the core group of dancers was that some individuals started questioning the interpretation of some of the source material, particularly regarding some of the light soft-shoe solo dances regulated by the established organisations for Scottish country and Highland dancing. Alternative interpretations, giving the dances a more percussive nature than previously advocated, was, and still is being explored for sources such as Peacock, Hill, and Dancie Reid.<sup>50</sup> These re-interpretations may so far have had a minimal impact on the traditional dance scene as a whole, but it is important to note their existence.

Increased interest in the cultures of both sides of the Atlantic has resulted in many Scots and Cape Bretoners travelling to experience each others' culture. In 2008 the Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association toured Scotland and a good number of Scots attended the Scots Gaelic Research Conference in Antigonish in July of the same year.

So when Alasdair Fraser talks about 'putting the dirt back in' the music, he no doubt also sums up what a lot of step dancers feel when they are dancing:

When you have the dirt in there – grace notes, connective tissue between notes, ways of entering and leaving notes, like emotional buttons – and play in a rhythmic way, it goes deeper [...] a swingly thing going on and it is scary good.<sup>51</sup>

In 2005, I perceived the challenge for the future of step dancing in Scotland to be how to make 'the dirt' enter and become accepted on the Scottish social dance scene. In 2008, it is still no nearer becoming a generally recognised part of the Scottish dance scene. Whether the Cape Breton connection will become more widely known still remains to be seen, and regardless of what it is being labelled, it continues to be nurtured among a fairly small group of enthusiasts, but I believe it is there to stay.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mats Melin, ' "Putting the dirt back in": An Investigation of Step Dancing in Scotland' (unpublished master's dissertation, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, 2005). The term 'dirt' is used by Cape Breton fiddlers when they refer to the bowing and fingering style of Cape Breton island; see Burt Feintuch, 'The Conditions for Cape Breton

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Fiddle Music: The Social and Economic Setting of a Regional Landscape', *Ethnomusicology*, 48, no. 1 (2004), 75–104 (p. 76). Both Hamish Moore and Alasdair Fraser used this term when talking about the musical sound of Cape Breton Island (personal conversations with both in 1998 and 2005 respectively).

<sup>2</sup> S. J. Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography* (Montreal, London: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 31–47.

<sup>3</sup> Hornsby, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Hornsby, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Rhodes, 'Dancing in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia', in *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, ed. by J. F. Flett and T. M. Flett (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1964; repr. 1985), pp. 267–85; repr.edn (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), pp. 185–211.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See Margaret Bennett, *The Last Stronghold. The Scottish Gaelic Traditions of Newfoundland* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books, 1989); Margaret Bennett, 'Step–Dancing: Why We Must Learn from Past Mistakes', *West Highland Free Press*, 14 October 1994; Margaret Bennett, *Oatmeal and Catechism: Scottish Gaelic Settlers in Quebec* (Edinburgh: John Donald; Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1998; revd edn, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Hugh Bigney, email correspondence, 16 April 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Johanne Devlin Trew, personal communication, University of Limerick, 24 February 2005; Johanne Devlin Trew, 'Music, Place and Community: Culture and Irish Heritage in the Ottawa Valley' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Limerick, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Mylene Ouellette and Brent Chiasson, personal communication, Limerick, 29 April 2005. Ouellette and Chiasson are musicians and dancers from Prince Edward Island.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Quigley, *Close to the Floor: Folk Dance in Newfoundland* (St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> See Elizabeth Anne Doherty, 'The Paradox of the Periphery: Evolution of the Cape Breton Fiddle Tradition c.1928–1995' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Limerick, 1996); Liz Doherty, 'Bringing It All Back Home? Issues Surrounding Cape Breton Fiddle Music in Scotland', in *Play It Like It Is: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic*, ed. by Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger, Occasional Publications 5 (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2006), pp. 102–109.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey Beaton, 'My Thoughts on Step–Dancing', ed. by Mats Melin (Dartmouth, NS, Canada, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Tamara E. Livingston, 'Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory', *Ethnomusicology*, 43 (1999), 66–85.

<sup>15</sup> Livingston, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Livingston, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> Livingston, p. 81. For a fuller discussion, see Melin (2005), pp. 9–10.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Eike Spalding, and Jane Harris Woodside, eds, *Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America's Southeast and Beyond* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 249.

<sup>19</sup> Neil V. Rosenberg, ed., *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 1–25 and 194–202; David Atkinson, 'Revival: Genuine or Spurious?', in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival, and Re–Creation*, ed. by Ian Russell and David Atkinson, Occasional Publications 3 (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2004), pp. 144–62; Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, 'Tradition, Genuine or



Spurious', *Journal of American Folklore*, 97, no. 385 (1984), 273–90; Mats Nilsson, 'Den Tidlösa Traditionen', in *Brottningar Med Begrepp*, ed. by Birgitta Skarin–Frykman and Helene Brembeck (Gothenburg: Etnologiska Föreningen i Sverige, 1997); Burt Feintuch, 'Musical Revival as Musical Transformation', in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, ed. by Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 183–93. See also Burt Feintuch, 'The Conditions for Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Social and Economic Setting of a Regional Soundscape', *Ethnomusicology*, 48 (2004), 73–104. See also Melin (2005), pp. 48–49.

<sup>20</sup> Nobody is referring to steps as having been danced by, for example, Sheila Mackay from Fife, but origins of steps are always referred to as being from Cape Breton sources, hence 'Donald Angus Beaton's step', 'a Jean MacNeil step', and so forth. Some of these same steps when they are being passed on by Scottish teachers are becoming known by the Scottish teachers' names. The original link with the source can thus become forgotten.

<sup>21</sup> Alasdair Fraser, interview by the author, Glasgow, 16 January 2005.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> See Melin (2005), p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Melin (2005), p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Hamish Moore, 'In Tune with Tradition', *Am Braighe*, Queensville, Nova Scotia, Fall, p. 10; Margaret Bennett, 'Step–dancing: Why we must learn from past mistakes' *West Highland Free Press*, Broadford, Isle of Skye, 14 October 1994; reproduced at [www.siliconglen.com/Scotland/10\\_3.html](http://www.siliconglen.com/Scotland/10_3.html) [accessed 10 May 2010].

<sup>26</sup> Melin (2005), pp. 17–21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> For Buddy MacMaster, see Alistair MacGillivray, *The Cape Breton Fiddler* (Cape Breton: Sea–cape Music, 1997), pp. 150–51. For Harvey Beaton, see Alistair MacGillivray, *A Cape Breton Ceilidh* (Cape Breton: Sea–cape Music, 1988), pp. 32–34.

<sup>29</sup> Doherty, 'Bringing It All Back Home?', p. 104; Allister MacGillivray, *The Cape Breton Fiddler* (Marion Bridge, Cape Breton Island: College of Cape Breton Press, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Dembling, 'You Play It as You Would Sing It: Cape Breton Scottishness and the Means of Cultural Production', in *Transatlantic Scots*, ed. by Celeste R. Ray (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Dembling, 'You Play It as You Would Sing It', p. 183.

<sup>32</sup> Doherty, 'Bringing It All Back Home?', p. 103.

<sup>33</sup> Doherty, 'Bringing It All Back Home?', p. 108.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Moore, 'Scotland's Dances: Cape Breton Step Dance', in *1994 Conference on the Diversity of the Scottish Traditions of Dance* (Stirling: Scottish Arts Council, 1994), p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> Carol Craig, *The Scots' Crisis of Confidence* (Edinburgh: Big Thinking, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Sheldon Macinnes, *Cape Breton Step–dance: An Irish or Scottish Tradition* (Cork, NS: Cork Cape Breton Festival, 1994); reproduced at [www.siliconglen.com/celtfaq/3\\_2.html](http://www.siliconglen.com/celtfaq/3_2.html) [accessed 10 May 2010].

<sup>37</sup> Bennett, 'Step–dancing'; and James MacDonald–Reid, 'Stepdancing did not die out in Scotland', *West Highland Free Press*, Broadford, Isle of Skye, 20 July 1994.

<sup>38</sup> Moore, 'Scotland's Dances', pp. 17–21; Bennett, 'Step–Dancing'; Frances MacEachen, 'Hamish Moore: In Tune with Tradition', *Am Braighe* (2002), p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> J. L. MacDougall, *History of Inverness County, Nova Scotia* (privately printed, 1922); George S. Emmerson, *A Social History of Scottish Dance: Ane Celestial Recreation* (Montreal and London: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1972), pp. 158–59, 224; W. Stanford Reid, *The Scottish*

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*Tradition in Canada: A History of Canada's Peoples* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 106–107; Stephen Hornsby, *Nineteenth-Century Cape Breton: A Historical Geography* (Montreal, Buffalo: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 30–47; Rhodes, 'Dancing in Cape Breton Island'; Lucille H. Campey, *Ater the Hector: The Scottish Pioneers o Nova Scotia and Cape Breton 1773–1852* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> See Fèisean nan Gàidheal website [www.feisean.org](http://www.feisean.org) [accessed 1 March 2010].

<sup>41</sup> An exception is the Scottish Culture and Traditions Association in Aberdeen (SC&T), which has held step dancing classes for over ten years.

<sup>42</sup> These are the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society [www.rscds.org](http://www.rscds.org); the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dancing [www.sobhd.net](http://www.sobhd.net); and the Scottish Official Highland Dancing Association [www.sohda.org.uk](http://www.sohda.org.uk) [all accessed 1 March 2010].

<sup>43</sup> Gareth and Deryck Mitchelson, see [www.celticspiritdance.com](http://www.celticspiritdance.com) [accessed 10 May 2010]. <sup>44</sup> Melin (2005), p. 38. For example, see United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing (UKAPTD) and British Association of Teachers of Dancing (BATD).

<sup>45</sup> Throughout my fifteen years as a professional dancer and researcher in Scotland, I came across a number of people who could directly or indirectly remember some form of percussive dancing being done in different parts of Scotland. For example, dance teacher Sheila MacKay in Fife, Jock Gordon in Kinaldie, Angus, and Fearchar Macneil in Isle of Barra, could all step dance at one point in time, and A. K. Robertson could remember seeing Shetland dancers 'scruffle'. A good number of people I encountered had heard stories of people 'step-dancing' but their image of what it was varied a great deal. Some sources in the Western Isles, who had relatives in Canada for example, drew parallels of what they saw there, when visiting, to what their parents generation either did or talked about being the dance tradition at the time. A more thorough outline of my recollections is in the process of being written.

<sup>46</sup> Scottish Arts Council, 'Annual Report and Accounts' [www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/information/publications/annualreportsandplans.aspx](http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/information/publications/annualreportsandplans.aspx) [accessed 1 March 2010].

<sup>47</sup> The 'Traditional Dance Artist in Residence' reports for the local councils of Shetland, Sutherland and Inverness (both Highland Region), Angus, Perth and Kinross, Western Isles, and Fife in the period 1995–2004 all state that step-dancing was part of each of these projects. I was personally involved in all these projects.

<sup>48</sup> By 2005 Scottish Local Councils and the Scottish Arts Council offered little assistance for any traditional dance projects involving step dance or any other kinds of traditional dancing, as funding criteria were changing at the time.

<sup>49</sup> See Mats Melin, 'Step Dancing Seminar and Workshop, Dingwall, 5–6 April 1997' (Dingwall: Highland Council, Inverness, 1997); Mats Melin, 'Step Dance Teacher Training Weekend, Kingussie, 20–22 March 1998' (Kingussie: Highland Council, Inverness, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Francis Peacock, *Sketches Relative to the History and Theory but More Especially to the Practice and Art of Dancing* (Aberdeen: Angus, 1805); Frederick Hill, 'Frederick Hill's Book of Quadrilles & Country Dance &C &C, March 22nd, 1841', manuscript privately owned (1841); John Reid, 'Solo Dances', MS (1935), in 'Papers relating to Bobby Watson (1914–1997), Highland and Scottish Country Dancing Teacher, Adjudicator', University of Aberdeen, Special Libraries and Archives, MS 3650.

<sup>51</sup> Alasdair Fraser, interview by author, Glasgow, 16 January 2005.

## The devil's instrument revisited: Prince Edward Island as a case study

KEN PERLMAN

During the heyday of community dance-fiddling, elaborate stereotypes depicting fiddlers as lazy, drunken 'ne'er do wells' grew up in many Celtic and North American fiddling cultures. And yet, according both to first-hand accounts and the secondary literature, these same fiddlers provided a service that was essential to the social and material lives of their communities. Using Prince Edward Island (PEI) in eastern Canada as a case-study, I will explore the contradiction between these two disparate images.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, when twentieth-century technology and social organization became established in rural PEI, people had a pretty clear set of ideas concerning the fiddler's role in the community, or district. Dances were the most common expression of district social life. And whenever there was a dance in the offing, it was the fiddler's duty to make himself available to play.

The most common community dance was the house party, as described by Neil MacCannell of Lorne Valley:

The house parties were usually during the winter in the slacker times. And people usually travelled from up to a distance of three or four miles, in horses and sleighs, in snowstorms, usually. The fiddler usually came in a horse and sleigh, too, and his fiddle would be so cold and full of frost, he'd have to warm it up over the old kitchen stove before he could even play it. He'd start playing, and the people would get up and dance. Pick their partner. The men would be on the floor first and when the music started, then the ladies would come up and join their partners. They were all ages, even from teenage up to eighties, some of them.<sup>2</sup>

When house parties were held during the growing season they were often associated with a frolic, or bee: a family needing to plough the fields, dig potatoes, or carry out some other labour-intensive activity would invite all able-bodied members of the community in to help. Once the task was completed, as Archie Stewart of Milltown

Cross observes, 'They'd have a little shakedown in the evening, any excuse to have a dance back then'.<sup>3</sup>

Then there were the old-time weddings, where guests could look forward to generous meals, plentiful drink, and an opportunity to engage in virtually continuous square-dancing from afternoon until at least the early hours of the morning. Many such occasions were notoriously long-lasting. As Emmett Hughes of Dromore points out, 'A wedding was anywhere from the afternoon to daylight in the morning. They went clean through the night and sometimes the second day along with it'.<sup>4</sup>

In lieu of collecting taxes or tithes, most churches or districts would appoint a committee to organize various benefit events. As a result, there would be church or school picnics in summer, indoor socials in winter, and schoolhouse or hall dances year-round. At nearly all such events, the opportunity to dance square sets was offered as a major incentive for attending. Local fiddlers were expected to be on hand for all such dances and to donate their services free of charge.

In addition to providing the music for dances, many fiddlers were also on call whenever their neighbours simply felt the urge to hear music. For example, households with a number of fiddlers in residence often served both as local gathering places and as informal community centres. Similarly, fiddlers going about their daily routines would often be accosted by neighbours looking to be entertained. As fiddler Wilfred Gotell of Georgetown describes it:

They used to call our old place the halfway house. A couple guys together, and have a bottle, then 'Let's go up to Wilfred's!' Of course they'd come in and have a few drinks, and they'd want to hear the music and the fiddle. So it would end up to be a party there that night. And many's the time that happened.<sup>5</sup>

The fiddler's crucial role in community life is put into perspective by Archie Stewart:

One thing boy, you were always welcome. I heard an old fellow saying one time, the three most important people in the district. The minister was first, the school teacher was next, and the fiddler was next. That was the three most important people in the town. The minister or the clergyman whichever it happened to be, and the school teacher, and the fiddler. Couldn't have a wedding without the fiddler!<sup>6</sup>

Although it would be reasonable to assume from their centrality in community life that fiddlers as a class would generally have basked in the high esteem of their neighbours, paradoxically this was often far from the case. In fact, the same individuals, whose talents were quickly sought out when a house party was in the offing, might otherwise be regarded as persons of dubious character, who were prone to neglect such real community duties as farm chores and child-rearing

in favour of an activity regarded by most as merely an amusement. John Cousins of Bloomfield puts it this way:

There was a belief here that if a man ever became a fiddler, in order to be a good fiddler, you couldn't be any good for anything else. First of all, it implied an addiction to the instrument. And young fellows, once they started playing it they'd spend all their time playing the fiddle, and do nothing else. You were done for. You would never be a success in life; that was it. That was a strongly held belief.<sup>7</sup>

Stories abound, which Islanders take much glee in recounting, focusing on the lack of responsibility to home and hearth shown by fiddlers intent on playing their instruments. The following two stories, for example, involve a fiddler from the western PEI district of Milburn named Guy Boulter. The first is from Ervan Sonier of Summerside:

This was a true story, I think. I remember Guy Boulter, a terrific fiddler from up west. And they were going to get Guy. So this afternoon somebody's there with some 'shine. 'Come on Guy, we're goin' to have a party.' So he takes off. Now the woman's at the door and she yells, 'Guy,' she said, 'You're leaving with the fiddle again?' 'Yes.' And she said, 'You know there's not a stick of wood cut about the place?' 'Christ, woman!' he said, 'I'm taking the fiddle, not the axe.' So it was a bad instrument. I'd have to say it was a bad instrument.<sup>8</sup>

John Cousins, on the other hand, tells this story:

Guy would go to cut grain. Now, in order to cut grain, you had to haul a binder. A binder was the heaviest piece of machinery that was on the farm for horses to haul. Anyway, Guy Boulter would be out cuttin' grain, and a tune would be goin' through his head. He'd be thinking of this tune. It'd get to him so bad, that he'd get off the binder, he would drive to the barn, he would unhitch the horses, and he would put them in the barn. And he would sit down and play that tune on the fiddle. He couldn't stop himself.<sup>9</sup>

Cousins also tells another story that goes so far as to blame the decline and disappearance of an entire community on fiddling:

Rock Barra is now a deserted community. There's nobody there. You drive along and I don't know if there's a farm there or not. But someone attributed the demise of this community to the fact that there was too many good fiddlers. They just never did anything else but play the fiddle, and they were useless.<sup>10</sup>

Although there was much evidence of a superficial nature that supports such stereotypes, they effectively conceal an unfortunate set of social arrangements. In essence, powerful pressures and demands placed on fiddlers by both church

and community often guided them inexorably along the path to work-neglect and alcoholism.

One major component of fiddling's negative image is the notion that an obsession with playing drains a person's energies and distracts him from real work. If a fiddler's energies were often drained, however, the real culprit was not so much an obsession with fiddling as it was the virtually continual demands for fiddling services placed on him by church and community. In turn, this burden was supported by a tightly knit web of beliefs and attitudes. For example, not only did fiddlers have to provide music on demand, but there was a strong implication that they had to keep on playing as long as the neighbours wished to go on dancing or listening. As Rita Morrison notes, 'If they came, they'd play all night, and everybody kind of expected that, that they'd play all night; they'd never get tired of playing, they'd just play.'<sup>11</sup> What's more, fiddlers were generally expected to offer their music without demanding recompense. There were two basic principles at work here: one secular, the other religious.

Firstly, playing for a district dance was seen as an expression of neighbourliness. If one farmer had to harvest potatoes, the neighbours dropped everything and helped out. If someone took sick, the neighbours helped with the chores; if someone wanted to put up a new barn, the neighbours pitched in, and so on. In the same vein, local fiddlers were relied upon to provide music whenever it was required, and regardless of how they might have felt about the matter.

Secondly, musical talent was viewed as a gift from God, and all those so gifted were said to have a distinct duty to share that talent with both church and community. Reverend Faber MacDonald (b. 1932, Little Pond, King County), for example, describes how this last idea was central to many an Island sermon.

I used to talk about the social nature of the gift. See, the gifts, God's gifts, are given to us not for ourselves. They're entrusted to us for everybody. And the human person, when he engages himself or herself in the delivering or the giving of himself through his gift, he matures and grows.<sup>12</sup>

In practice, all too often this notion of sharing was also taken a step further, to the point where this gift was to be shared without hesitation, without recompense, and with little regard for the fiddler's own welfare.

Fiddlers played for house parties, frolics, showers, weddings and other community dances. They appeared at fund-raisers that financed church, school, and other local projects. They were also continually on call whenever neighbours simply had the whim to hear music. Fiddlers had to fulfil these musical responsibilities day in and day out, often in disregard of their own needs, interests, state of mind, and general health. In other words, the role of community fiddler on PEI had many aspects in common with what is generally regarded as an occupation in Western culture.

As far as Island church and community were concerned, however, fiddling was not a job, but merely an amusement, deserving of neither special recognition nor financial returns. The fiddler may have been the third most important person in the district, but he generally went unpaid unless the neighbours out of the kindness of their hearts tossed him a few coins after an hours-long dance. The upshot here was that most fiddlers were essentially working two jobs, but getting economic returns for only one.

Even more problematic in this regard was that the aforementioned network of sharing and community obligations went only one way. In other words, the fiddler had numerous obligations to church and community, but they acknowledged none toward him that stemmed from his music making. The neighbours did not see it as their duty to help a fiddler with chores on the day following a late-night house party, nor did local clergymen send along representatives to lighten a fiddler's burden on the days following a benefit dance. As far as the neighbours were concerned, if the fiddler's work was done poorly or not at all, it was his laziness or poor moral character that was at fault, not the system. Reverend MacDonald sums up the basic problem as follows:

That brings up another consideration in terms of the gift, you see. Like [with] everything else, a certain perversion can set in and did set in. In a lot of instances the community began to think they owned the fiddler. So, just as the individual fiddler himself can lose sight of the fact that his gift is not exclusively for himself, the community can have the same kind of possessiveness. And the community has a responsibility to insure that the gift remains a gift and not a possession. Maybe the church and community would use the fiddler to promote their cause, whatever the cause might be. He was key to an event that was going to raise money to build something, a church building or some social building. And maybe the Church, and maybe society could certainly bear some responsibility for a lack of awareness, of not cultivating an awareness of who this guy was for us.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, as Archie Stewart implies, many fiddlers found themselves chafing under the pressures generated by their neighbours' unrelenting stream of demands:

If you played the first four nights of the week, and a good friend come along and said, 'Look, I'm having a house party Friday night, will you come and play?' Now what are you gonna say? You can't just say, 'No, I won't do it for you.' And that was another thing. If you played for one fellow, then the other fellow'd say, 'Well you played for him, why aren't you playin' for me?' You kind o' get trapped into the thing you know. It got pretty tiresome at times.<sup>14</sup>

If under these conditions fiddlers began systematically to neglect their farming or fishing, who could blame them? Reverend MacDonald describes the dynamic as follows:

He's worn out. It took a lot of stamina. Some of them had to travel long distances to play at a place, you know – the horse and sleigh in the winter, the horse and wagon in the summer – in the summer times they'd have to travel eight or ten miles to play, play all night, drive back, and then to have to do their work next day. So there was quite a price to pay from their part. People expected a lot from this man, you know. And any individual who feels used and exploited will feel a lot of pain after a while, and degraded, no matter who he is. And then eventually he has to get some way to still that pain, or he has to find ways to continue to be able to produce when he doesn't even feel like producing anymore. And so then you get into the more rum for the fiddler syndrome, see? That was the expression, 'more rum for the fiddler,' and many of them got trapped in that. That's the shadow side of the story.<sup>15</sup>

To sum up, in their image of him as lazy 'no-gooder', many Islanders failed to understand that the fiddler was actually very busy indeed helping to entertain his neighbours. And if these same neighbours truly believed that providing music was indeed pastime and not work, they conveniently ignored their own complicity in both creating music-events, and in demanding that fiddlers play for them.

It may well be asked how such a lop-sided social role could evolve in a society whose prime principle was reciprocity. Just why was fiddling not considered work, and why did the act of fiddling not serve as a unit of currency in the exchange of obligations? At least part of the answer here may well lie in certain church teachings that have in various eras placed fiddling and social dancing in league with the devil, or otherwise beyond the moral pale.

There were two major currents of thought behind church opposition to dance-playing in general and fiddling in particular. The first is an offshoot of the belief that musical talent, music memory, and even music composition can derive in whole or part from denizens of the spirit world, such as sprites or fairies. All too often, such relatively benign pagan relics were literally demonized by the Church in an effort to enforce religious hegemony. The second principle, stated in secular terms, is as follows: by transporting participants to an emotional plane that transcends ordinary social and psychological restrictions, activities such as fiddling and dancing place themselves in league with the dark forces of human nature, personified in the figure of the devil. In turn, both these notions fed off a variant of the secular stereotype described above, that both dancing and playing dance music are not only distracting and addictive, but also inherently subversive to the social fabric.<sup>16</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century a current of religious revivalism coursed through Great Britain, Ireland, and North America, bringing with it a powerful climate of repression directed towards both dance musicians and social dancing. Since the fiddle was the dominant dance-accompaniment instrument in these regions, most anti-music proscriptions were aimed squarely at fiddlers and their instruments. In Scotland, for example, as David Johnson observes, 'There are many horrifying stories from this period of ministers ordering public bonfires of fiddles, excommunicating farmers for holding barn-dances on their premises, and so reducing the demand for



fiddles that the instruments had to be sold off at auctions at nominal prices'.<sup>17</sup> As Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin notes, in Ireland, a number of parishes banned dancing of all kinds, thereby sending many local fiddlers and pipers to the workhouse, while some priests 'scoured the countryside hunting for courting couples and purging fiddlers from crossroads dances'.<sup>18</sup> As Ian McKinnon also points out, on Cape Breton Island, a number of Catholic and Protestant clergymen 'held to the puritanical view that pipes and fiddles were instruments of the devil'.<sup>19</sup> The most notorious of these was Father Kenneth MacDonald, priest of the Mabou-West Lake Ainslie Parish from 1865 to 1894, who at one point 'had all the pipes and fiddles [in the area] gathered up and burned'.<sup>20</sup> Similar stories of fiddles abandoned or broken up as proof of religious conversion, fiddlers caught up by religious fervour cutting off their own fingertips, and fiddlers expelled from congregations or ostracized from local social life if they refused to give up their art, also emanate from nearly all regions of the American South.<sup>21</sup>

Prince Edward Island also experienced its own Christian revival during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and there too zealots among the clergy spread the message connecting fiddling, dance, and the infernal. That these teachings bore at least some fruit is evidenced by one Kings County man, who notes in his memoirs that he 'got the impression that a fiddle was a wicked instrument, that it had as many devils as the man of Gadara'.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, a Queens County woman was so sure of the connection between fiddling and the devil that several pranksters during a house party convinced her that an infernal visitation was in progress by merely stopping the flue and directing smoke into the kitchen. According to one account, an exorcism had to be performed before she would once again consent to enter that dwelling.<sup>23</sup>

Dancing of any kind was forbidden in certain communities, and in some cases, the destruction of a musical instrument served as a rite of passage for those who wished to declare a newfound piety. The following two accounts of this phenomenon both originate from south-eastern Queens County. The 'Mr Macdonald' cited below is Reverend Donald McDonald (1783–1867), the Scottish-born founder of the McDonaldites congregations and probably the most prominent exponent of Christian Revival on the Island.

When Angus Joiner (McLeod) [...] became a convert of Mr Macdonald [sic], he was admonished by him to put aside the violin he loved to play 'as belonging to the flesh'. Angus took it out and destroyed it with an axe.<sup>24</sup>

Sir Andrew MacPhail relates the following incident:

Musical instruments were not held in favour. One young man who performed very well on the bagpipes abandoned the practice at the time of his conversion: and to prove his sincerity destroyed the instrument which he had made with his own hands.<sup>25</sup>

This crusade against musicians and musical instruments had for the most part subsided on the Island by the end of the nineteenth century, but remnants persisted for generations. Eddy Arsenault of St Chrysostom, Prince County, for example, recalls that local priests spoke out against music and dance when he was a boy in the 1920s, and that when he took up the instrument at age fifteen on some level he felt himself 'the worst sinner'.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Archie Stewart reports that during the same period, 'there'd [still] be a certain amount of old ladies in the district who didn't believe in dancin' and drinkin' and they'd be kickin' up a row'.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, although strictures against music-playing eventually relaxed in south-eastern Queens County, those aimed at dancing remained in force for the devout for decades longer. Danny MacLean of Eldon notes, for example, that his grandfather Lauchy MacLean was a good fiddler but 'he wouldn't play at no [dance] parties; he just didn't believe in parties because we were kind o' religious people'.<sup>28</sup>

As the years passed, the grip of the church on Island music and dance continued to weaken. In some Acadian districts in Prince County, for example, square dancing would still be forbidden on Sundays, but even that stricture could sometimes be relaxed with permission from the curé.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Margaret Ross MacKinnon (b. Flat River) reports that although secular music-playing was still banned on Sundays in south-eastern Queens County until well into the 1960s, Angus Leslie MacLean 'used to go down to the [music] room and devise schemes to play his tunes [so] that nobody would hear'.<sup>30</sup>

Although the complex of attitudes painting fiddling as evil had lost much of its virulence on the Island by the lifetimes of the fiddlers interviewed for this project, vestiges were undoubtedly lurking in the background, ready to amplify any negative impressions about the art and its practitioners that the public might otherwise entertain. In this atmosphere, the sharing of musical gifts was probably regarded as an opportunity by which fiddlers might partially redeem themselves from the sin of playing. Such an opportunity would then be seen as its own reward, making further recognition or recompense unnecessary.

As an aside, by the 1920s, the Catholic Church in general and most mainstream Protestant denominations in Ireland and elsewhere began to view fiddle music and dance as potential buffers against the spread of new, far more dangerous musical threats such as jazz, blues, and the sexually provocative styles of dancing that came in their wake.<sup>31</sup> This may explain why the same institutions that branded the fiddle as the devil's instrument and fiddlers as the devil's minions, have in more recent generations stressed the notion of fiddling as God's gift. It certainly explains why after 1930 so many clergymen became involved as leaders of fiddling revival movements.

The tales of all-too-universal human foibles cited earlier may bring a knowing smile to the lips today, but it is nevertheless true that on PEI, many fiddlers suffered severely because of their generally disreputable image. If, in the long run, a fiddler faltered in his economic tasks, the neighbours – completely oblivious to their own role in the matter – merely nodded sagely and pointed to yet another example of

the pitfalls attached to fiddle-addiction. Even when a fiddler's fortunes were clearly declining, the neighbours would continue to ply him with liquor at house parties while ridiculing his drunkenness, keep him up late providing music while deriding his irresponsibility, and get to brawling over trifles while assuming that he was somehow to blame for this, as well. As Prince Edward Island began to modernize, and communities discovered alternative forms of entertainment and fund-raising, most locals were all too ready to cast the fiddler off like an old shoe, and to brand him, among his other faults, as being completely irrelevant in the modern era.

To sum up, those Prince Edward Islanders who once dismissed district fiddlers as lazy good-for-nothings were completely missing the point. After all, most fiddlers worked full time at fishing or farming, and then worked still more to entertain their neighbours during the latter's leisure hours. And, due to a peculiar blind-spot in an otherwise smooth-working system of reciprocity, fiddlers got little credit and virtually nothing in return for their extra efforts. The upshot was that by middle age the average fiddler on Prince Edward Island was very likely struggling to muster sufficient energy to fulfil his varied obligations. As is often the case with pernicious stereotyping, it was all too easy for the fiddlers' neighbours to ignore both the dynamics of this dysfunctional system and their own role in setting those dynamics in motion.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Most of the Prince Edward Islanders quoted in this paper are fiddlers, accompanists, or traditional-music enthusiasts who were interviewed by the author as part of a project conducted during the summers of 1991 and 1992 for the Earthwatch Organization of Watertown, Massachusetts. Follow-up interviewing projects were conducted in August 1999 (self-financed) and in October – December 2006 (sponsored by the Canadian Museum of Civilization of Gatineau, Québec). In 2007, all audio and visual materials were donated to the CMC, where they are housed alongside the 2006 collection under accession AV2007-33. Since 2008, I have been working with the museum to create a website devoted to audio and video excerpts from these various projects. This website, whose working title is 'Bowling Down Home: Traditional Fiddling on Prince Edward Island' is scheduled to go on line in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Neil MacCannell, personal interview, 5 August 1991, Prince Edward Island Fiddling Project, Accession #AV2007s33, interview #AIII-07, Canadian Museum of Civilization.

<sup>3</sup> Archie Stewart, personal interview, 8 August 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Emmett Hughes, personal interview, 8 August 1991, PEI Fiddling Project, Accession #AV2007-33, Interview #AIII-09, CMC.

<sup>5</sup> Wilfred Gotell, personal interview, 3 August 1992, PEI Fiddling Project, Accession #AV2007-33, Interview #A92III-07, CMC.

<sup>6</sup> Archie Stewart, personal interview, 9 August 1991, PEI Fiddling Project, Accession #AV2007-33, Interview #AIII-10, CMC.

<sup>7</sup> John Cousins, personal interview, 19 August 1991, PEI Fiddling Project, Accession #AV2007-33, Interview #AIV-05, CMC.

<sup>8</sup> Ervan Sonier, personal interview, 25 August 1991, PEI Fiddling Project, Accession #AV2007-33, Interview #AIV-16, CMC.

<sup>9</sup> John Cousins, personal interview, 19 August 1991.

<sup>10</sup> John Cousins, personal interview, 19 August 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Rita Morrison, personal interview, 20 August 1991, PEI Fiddling Project, Accession #AV2007-33, Interview #A92IV-07, CMC.

<sup>12</sup> Reverend Faber MacDonald, personal interview, 20 July 1992, PEI Fiddling Project, Accession #AV2007-33, Interview #AII-08, CMC.

<sup>13</sup> Reverend Faber MacDonald, personal interview, 20 July 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Archie Stewart, personal interview, 9 August 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Reverend Faber MacDonald, personal interview, 20 July 1992.

<sup>16</sup> For a thorough discussion of both principles, see Colin Quigley, *Music from the Heart: Compositions of a Folk Fiddler* (Athens, Ga; London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 46–58. Clerical proscriptions against dancing among the common folk go back at least as far as the early Middle Ages, although the message gained new strength following the Reformation (1517–c.1590). Calvinist sects in particular – such as Presbyterianism and its offshoots – stressed avoiding aspects of life that might serve to stimulate the senses, and thereby distract the individual from establishing a personal relationship with God.

<sup>17</sup> David Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music in the Eighteenth Century: A Music Collection and Historical Study* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984), p. 213.

<sup>18</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *A Pocket History of Traditional Irish Music* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1998), p. 78. See also Nicolas Carolan, *A Harvest Saved: Francis O'Neill and Irish Music in Chicago* (Cork: Ossian, 1997), pp. 24–25.

<sup>19</sup> Ian Francis McKinnon, 'Fiddling to Fortune: The Role of Commercial Recordings Made by Cape Breton Fiddlers in the Fiddle Music Tradition of Cape Breton Island' (unpublished master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1989), pp. 24–25.

<sup>20</sup> McKinnon, pp. 24–25. See also Charles W. Dunn, *Highland Settler: A Portrait of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953, repr. edn 1968), p. 54. According to some scholars, the current flowering of Cape Breton fiddling began just after Father MacDonald departed this mortal vale.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, A.W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee* (quoted in 'The First Tennessee State Champion Fiddler,' *Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddle Association Newsletter*, 2 December 1968), pp. 465–66; Gerald Milnes, *Play of a Fiddle: Traditional Music, Dance, and Folklore in West Virginia* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), pp. 69–72; Joyce Cauthen, *With Fiddle and Well Rosined Bow: Old-Time Fiddling in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), pp. 204, 210; and Richard Nevell, *A Time to Dance: American Country Dancing from Hornpipes to Hash* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1977), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> [Harry Mellick], *Timothy's Boyhood: or, Pioneer Country Life on PEI* (Kentville, NS: Kentville Publishing, 1933), p. 90. Copy in Roberts Library Archive (University of PEI).

<sup>23</sup> Dan Casey, 'A P. E. I. Hallowe'en Story,' *Prince Edward Island Magazine*, December 1900, pp. 316–21 (pp. 320–21).

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm A. MacQueen, *Skye Pioneers and The Island* (Winnipeg: Stovel, 1929), p. 84. For an overview of McDonald's career, see David Weale, 'The Time is Come!: Millenarianism in Colonial PEI,' *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region*, 7, no. 1 (1977), 35–39.

<sup>25</sup> Sir Andrew MacPhail, *The Master's Wife* (Montreal, 1939; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), p. 149.

<sup>26</sup> Eddy Arseneault, personal interview, 5 August 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Archie Stewart, personal interview, 8 August 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Danny MacLean, personal interview, 21 August 1992, PEI Fiddling Project: Accession #AV2007-33, Interview #A92-IV-10, CMC.

<sup>29</sup> Georges Arsenault, personal interview, 13 August 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Ross MacKinnon, personal interview, 10 August 1999.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Ó hAllmhuráin, pp. 111–13. There is another precedent here, described in Simonne Voyer, *La Danse Traditionnelle dans l'est du Canada* (Québec: Les Presses de L'Université Laval, 1986), pp. 38–39. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Catholic Church in Québec, concerned about the effects of waltzes and other couple dances, began to actively encourage longways country-dances and quadrilles among the rural population (which they had hitherto bitterly opposed).

## Texas contest fiddling: moving the focus of contrast and change to inner variations

CHRIS GOERTZEN

Texas fiddling, the youngest of widespread North American fiddle styles, is set apart from older styles by the systematic and pervasive practice of melodic variation that made the style especially apt for fiddle contests. In a compelling symbiosis, as fiddle contests became the main public venue for traditional fiddling in the United States, Texas fiddling spread through most of the country, and diversified to a modest extent. Melodic variation remains at the centre of its appeal. In fact, this aspect of the style is so critical that audiences at contests do not mind if they hear the same pieces over and over; the variations make the performances different enough to savour individually.

All good Texas fiddlers know the same couple of dozen tunes well; the central repertoire is surprisingly small in number of tunes, but nevertheless rich in total musical content. Fiddlers agree on roughly how to play the initial presentations of the two main strains of any tune, and they also agree on the main procedures fuelling their shared exuberant and detailed variation technique. In that technique, there is a complicated balance between a nested pair of broad understandings – first, concerning how variation proceeds for all core tunes and second, typical variation behaviour for the specific tune in question – and freedoms taken with those norms to express regional, personal, and spur-of-the-moment takes on any tune. I will focus in this article on one representative performance, ‘Dusty Miller’, as played by Wes Westmoreland III during the 2006 Texas State Fiddle Contest (see overleaf). The reader may wish at this point to play through the transcription that fills the next two pages, or perhaps to listen to multiple performances of the tune on CDs or on the internet. While several tunes in the broader North Atlantic fiddle world bear the title ‘Dusty Miller’, all performances going by that name that I have heard at modern American fiddle contests are of this same tune.

The main two strains, labelled A and B in the transcription, are the original ones, in fact the only ones in the earliest recording of this ‘Dusty Miller’, by a Capt. M. J. Bonner, made in 1925 in Houston for Victor.<sup>1</sup> As in most fiddle tunes most places, Westmoreland’s ‘Dusty Miller’ centres on the tune’s classic two strains whose incipits contrast in range, these two strings referred to by insiders in the North

Atlantic fiddle world variously as ‘high and low’, ‘coarse and fine’, and so forth. Most common Texas tunes have an additional strain (or two or three). In fact, several Texas fiddlers have told me that given breakdowns are their favourites *because* they have ‘lots of parts to them’. ‘Dusty Miller’, which ranks high on all Texas fiddlers’ list of favourites, begins with an A strain that starts quite high, with a first lick entirely on the e string. Because it is especially high, I added an underlined H to its name in the analytical table, so that its successive manifestations are called A1H, A2H, and so on. The complementary B strain is very low, with a first lick on the g string, so that passes through it are labelled B1L, B2L, and so on (thus, the underlining means ‘very’). I called the new, C strain L, or low, although it is in the middle of the fiddle’s first position tessitura in initial range. Lastly, in this and most performances there is another new strain closely allied to that C strain, but positioned an octave up, thus with an added H with an arrow pointing up in the table (C11H↑, C12H↑, etc.).

Just as performances in *older* southern American fiddle styles are made up of alternating strains in pairs, so are these Texas performances in large part, just more strains, and with elaborated notions of symmetry. The form is no longer simply AABBAABBAABB until a real or imagined dance is done. These contest pieces, shaped for the stage, and thus for an attentive audience, outline dramatic arcs. Thus, we hear presentations of strains (in pairs), subsequent paired runs through them that are modified to be bolder and bolder, and finally, in many cases, clear returns to the opening gestures.

I experimented with characterizing prominent gestures in this ‘Dusty Miller’, focusing on how those gestures change when revisited. Since each 8-measure strain consists of two 4-measure phrases, I chose to reduce the signature measures, the first and fifth ones of each strain, to a symbol or so each. Those are what appear in the analytical table (see appendix 1), symbols standing for the beginnings of the two phrases of each strain. I tried to see how *few* symbols would suffice, hoping that assigning these to given melodic gesture types could streamline the process of comparing performances.

The table includes reductions of four performances of ‘Dusty Miller’: the transcribed one from the 2006 Texas State Fiddle Championship played by Wes Westmoreland, another played by him in the same venue two years earlier, one by Jimmie Don Bates, and one by Ricky Turpin. (Reductions of two performances of a very different tune, ‘Sally Johnson’, as played by Turpin and by Westmoreland, appear in appendix 2). All of these performances are from the Texas State Fiddle Contest (formal title: Texas State Championship Fiddlers’ Frolics), from 2002 through to 2006. All three fiddlers are in their forties and have been or are now professional fiddlers/fiddle teachers, all have won this contest several times, and all are enshrined in the Fiddlers’ Frolics Hall of Fame.<sup>2</sup> All three men play this tune at some point in nearly every contest they enter. I selected the versions to transcribe or analyse based on the quality of my recordings, that is, other versions were ruled out due to crowd noise or other sonic blips obscuring bits of melody. These performance are all solidly representative, in part because these three musicians are eager and careful students

of the history of Texas fiddling, and, in a symmetrical factor, that younger fiddlers avidly model themselves on these champions. In short, all four performances are fully 'in' the tradition.

Within each column on the table, I left some boxes blank in order to get the diagrams of the various performances to line up nicely. That was required because the fiddlers follow approximately the same formal plan for a given tune, but only approximately. I stretched each performance with a few blank boxes to make the parallels as easy to see as possible. For instance, all three fiddlers play the A strain of 'Dusty Miller' twice, then the B strain twice, but only Bates plays the C strain 3 times, so I extended the neighbouring diagrams with an empty box each so that the return to A within three of the performances was lined up horizontally. While the forms of the performances vary, all start with A (twice), and follow that pair with B (twice), then C (at least twice). The path to C↑ varies, but all performances do get there in time, and all revisit strains A, B, and C before finishing.

Now to the individual symbols employed in the table. Strain A1 of Westmoreland's 2006 performance starts syncopated, which I represented with the appropriate note values: ♪ ♩ ♪. When the beginning of the phrase rolls around again in measure 5, the syncopated half-measure yields to an extended conjunct rise in triplets. To mark that substitution, I reached into my computer's modest storehouse of symbols and found a rising arrow (↗). Strain A2 starts with that same triplet run, then the middle of the strain contains a dyad including a note lower than any previously played, a dyad from which the line leaps up in mid-measure to rejoin the contour as played already thrice. To mark that second substitution, I found an elongated S (∫). The bottom of the ∫ represents the low notes starting at measure 13, the body of the ∫ the leap up, then the top portrays the gesture continuing at the same high pitch level as in the three previous phrases. The ∫ and the ↗ thus stand for related gestures. Both are meant to intensify the opening lick by combining an expanded range with *some* new rhythm: the ∫ thins the original rhythm, while the ↗ thickens that rhythm. Both revisions add impetus, one through inserting a small bit of suspense, the other through increasing activity.

The other two main techniques that intensify such measures on their returns are similarly complementary: one thins, one thickens. These two techniques tend to enter a given performance of this and other tunes in the repertoire a little later than the ∫ and ↗ pair. Look in the transcription at the beginning of B2 (versus that place in B1), then check the corresponding spots in the table. I call this moment a stretch or hold, and represent it with a double-ended empty arrow (↔; a tapeworm segment?) Such gestures can clarify harmony, but that is not their main purpose. They are really about creating suspense, gathering breath before all hell breaks loose again, much like a sprinter settling into the blocks, poised to take off.

The corresponding *dense* gesture is when a measure fills with eighth notes – see B1, measure 5. In the tables, I represent each such moment with two pairs of eighth notes. This happens frequently. It is not arrestingly dramatic, but maintains a high energy level. My other, somewhat less-used symbols match up with gestures



*Crossing Over: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3*

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Dusty Miller' in G major (one sharp). The score is organized into several systems, each containing one or more staves of music. The systems are labeled with letters and numbers in boxes: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, C1, C2, and A3. The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Some measures contain triplets, indicated by a '3' over the notes. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format, typical of a printed musical manuscript.

**Figure 1** 'Dusty Miller', as played by Wes Westmoreland III (Texas, 2006)

GOERTZEN *Texas contest fiddling*

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Texas contest fiddling" by Goertzen. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It consists of ten staves of music. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Several measures are marked with boxed letters and numbers: A4, B3, B4, C3, C4, and A5. There are also triplets indicated by a '3' over a group of notes. The music concludes with a double bar line and a final chord.

that, while far from rare, are not as common as those already described. Converging arrows ( $\rightrightarrows$ ) mark glissandos, slides many of which are unison-achieving double stops, like right at the beginning of C1, where an open-string  $\underline{a}$  is played at the same time as is a glissando from  $g^\#$  on the d string up to that  $\underline{a}$ , creating a modal node, a common way that fiddlers in the South accent important pitches. That same spot is also a stretch, so I put a stretch arrow *and* a converging arrow in the table; could we call that a squeeze? Another combination symbol marking a special effect is the rising arrow plus paired eighth notes. That stands for what I call that an explosion, a pile of triplet arpeggios featuring rapid string crossings back and forth through all four strings, filling a measure. Bates has one of those in his B1, second half; there are more of these later in his performance and some occur in Turpin's rendition. Lastly, but critically, when a player replicates most or all of an earlier measure – something done sparingly – I represented that with a curled arrow ( $\cup$ ); all three players did such *rounding* near the ends of their performances.

Westmoreland's 2006 'Dusty Miller' starts with the syncopated figure which leads off most performances of that tune, a motif suggesting that rhythm will be a prominent topic in the performance. This turns out to be true. Remember the rising arrow in measure 5, the replication of that arrow starting A2, the tall S in A2, measure 5. B growls and stretches through 2 strains. C concentrates on the squeeze. Then, we have a rhythmically busy pair of high C strains. The point is to do something familiar, but in third position, a tessitura, where dense rhythms are favoured. Nevertheless, the second half of each of these strains starts with a stretch recalling that beginning B2, and thus offering a bit of closure.

We are now at the halfway point in the performance, with eight strains behind us and eight to go. We return to strain A in incarnation A3, which takes up where we had left off in the second half of A2, that is, featuring a dramatic  $\int$ , although commencing with a shorter note value. The second half covers about the same tessitura, but now broken into eighth notes. Strain A4 then begins with the  $\nearrow$  found in the middle of A1 and the beginning of A2, followed by a second half starting with continuous eighth notes, exactly as in A3. In A3 and A4, the performer seems to be consolidating earlier gestures, but at the same time seeking out a somewhat busier total effect than seen in A1 and A2. The same combination of reminding and slightly intensifying holds in the next two strains: essentially the same gesture opens B3 as had B1, but it is now just a little denser rhythmically, and the same comparison holds for the beginning measures of B4 and B2. At this point in the first half of the performance, we heard strain C twice, and then strain C $\uparrow$  twice. Now, in the second half, the formal device of recalling but intensifying at the same time is performed ruthlessly, by simply omitting the C strain, and letting the much more vivid C $\uparrow$  stand for both. But was this enough of the C strain?

More often than not, performances in this style end with a run or two through the A strain, with some sort of systematic rounding taking place through both the general factor of returning to the opening strain and also precisely how the return to A is shaped. This happens in three of the four performances of 'Dusty

Miller' represented. In Westmoreland's 2006 performance, A5 reaffirms the striking importance of the gesture  $\int$  in this version of the tune by starting by aping A3, then taking an even bigger leap to begin the second half of the strain. Something remarkable happens in A6. As in A4, Westmoreland begin with the gesture  $\nearrow$ . But the second half is both rounding and a considerable surprise: he ends with the gesture that started both C11 and C12. Just before A returned for this final pair of strains, we had been left with a truncated C section, expecting more of some kind of C strain, and here it is. The entire effect of A6 – quite a grand effect – is that A6 takes the listener back to A, but also encapsulates the entire progress of the performance.

I have about a dozen recordings of Wes Westmoreland playing this tune at this same contest from 2001 through to 2008 (a fiddler may play a given tune only once at this contest during a given year, but Wes and several other expert and generous fiddlers often play hits like this during the guitar accompaniment competition bracket, that is, they play the tune while the guitarist backing them is judged). All of these performances are somewhat similar, but no more so than the 2006 and 2004 versions (the latter diagrammed next to the 2006 version in this article, and transcribed elsewhere).<sup>3</sup> Westmoreland's 2004 performance emphasizes the gesture  $\nearrow$  a little less from the start, and retains the opening syncopated gesture quite a bit more than in the 2006 version. Strain A returns before we ever hear the C1 strain, and there is comparatively more emphasis on C than on C1, and more emphasis on the A strain overall, with symmetries and cumulative rounding concentrated in A6. The 2004 version is no less compelling than the one he played in 2006; it is just a moderately different exploration of the possibilities of the tune.

These are two very tight, logical, and dramatic forms of a fine tune. How do Westmoreland's versions relate to the thousands of other performances of 'Dusty Miller'? In terms of big regional divisions in Texas-derived contest styles, I will briefly mention the two main style offshoots, one in the Tennessee Valley and the other in the Northwest USA. Some of the champions in the Tennessee Valley, such as Daniel Carwile and Sharon Bounds, play breakdowns in general and 'Dusty Miller' in particular, much as do our three Texans. But their waltzes are more lyrical, and they play less swing; that is where the regional style difference lies. But other prominent fiddlers in the Tennessee Valley, like Joel Whittinghill and Roy Crawford, show various bluegrass influences in a substantial fraction of their breakdown performances.

In the Northwest, the sphere of influence of the giant annual contest in Weiser, Idaho, most 'Dusty Millers' are less detailed in form, and fiddlers show comparatively little interest in rhythmic bite and rhythm-punctuated shaping of form. The main factor to consider is how the typical contest format has influenced style. At the contest in Weiser and in satellite contests, fiddlers are required to fit three tunes into four minutes. That leaves very little time for melodic variation, and, in such a compressed space, less inclination to do anything dramatic. At the same time, more players here than in Texas have some classical violin training. The overall effect is that contest performances in Weiser and its sphere of influence are shorter

and, in a literal way, *sweeter*: that is, a relatively strong bridge to the classical violin world is marked through timbre (less presence of the aggressive-sounding higher upper partials), through patterns of intonation that are closer to those characteristic of art music, and in general technical fluency.

Last, I will return to Texas and to the personal level, to contrasting the versions of 'Dusty Miller' played by our three Texans. An outsider who heard the four performances shown in the diagrams would immediately notice the many commonalities; lots of fiddlers in other styles and plenty of audience members (and academics) attuned to those older styles say that 'contest fiddling is all alike'. But this dismissal is a common symptom of simple lack of familiarity. Every fiddle style with which I have analysed clearly constitutes an intimate world, one relatively opaque to outsiders but filled with variety for aficionados. Certainly, Texas audiences find these players to be very, very different. Jimmie Don Bates gets away with taking the most chances formally and with rhythmic variety, as you see in the chart, and with especially aggressive and percussive accents (an aspect I did not transcribe or show in a diagram). The casual measured brutality of his fiddling is real in-your-face music. Ricky Turpin is as subtle and suave as any Texas fiddler could aspire to be. It is clear in Appendix 1 how often a symbol follows itself or alternates with another: he is exploring subtle changes within repeating broad structures, changes smaller than the table picks up. Wes balances testosterone and elegance, and has especially systematic long-range plans within his performances, like the gradual departures and clean closure seen in both diagrammed versions of his versions of 'Dusty Miller'. At the contest in Weiser, one attempt to judge fairly is to have the judges unable to *see* the contestants, who thus are purportedly anonymous. Whether or not that really works in the cases of the best players in Weiser, such an attempt at even-handedness-through-anonymity could not be claimed to serve that purpose in Texas. All of the judges are themselves former or current champions, and they can easily identify other top Texas fiddlers' playing within twenty or thirty seconds.

How broadly useful might such a system of analysis be? I 'road-tested' the system by trying it out on samples of other common Texas tunes, including 'Sally Goodin', 'Sally Johnson', 'Leather Britches', 'Billy in the Low Ground', and others. The system worked without significant modification for some. It did not help at all with 'Sally Goodin', which builds power during performance through carefully paced mostly incremental but occasionally more abrupt changes. This is oddly similar to a *hardingfele* variation technique.<sup>4</sup> A few of the more typically-behaving Texas tunes responded less well than 'Dusty Miller' to this rhythm-oriented set of symbols. Those were tunes that are more evenly dense, whose identity has presented in initial strains and explored thereafter in performance, focuses less on rhythm than on details of contour. For instance, the pair of reductions of 'Sally Johnson' given in the final table (ppendix 2) suggests that that tune might not be as interesting as 'Dusty Miller'. That simply is not so. If I had begun my search for a method with which to analyze melodic variation in Texas fiddling with 'Sally Johnson', a tune nearly as common, and about as old as 'Dusty Miller', I probably would have assembled












a differently-focused set of symbols. Each tune has its own mood and favoured procedures, often suggested by *something* in the older two strains, but worked out most thoroughly during the course of variation. It is easy to think of Texas fiddling as a specialized corner of jazz, but the behaviour of the common tunes also invites comparison with the Indian raga or Middle Eastern maqam systems: the signature Texas fiddle tunes have melodies that generate small acoustic and emotive worlds, worlds that are similar but never identical.

This seems so far so good. But why do the two versions of ‘Sally Johnson’ diagrammed in that final table look more different from each other than do any pairs among the diagrammed versions of ‘Dusty Miller’? I also studied (but did not transcribe for this article) a performance of ‘Sally Johnson’ by Bates. It was about as similar to Turpin’s version as one might expect after studying the various ‘Dusty Millers’. Actually, Wes Westmoreland’s version of ‘Sally Johnson’ is the odd one. It starts with what is now usually the B strain, and omits a customary strain, the high A strain appearing in the middle of Turpin’s performance and of most modern performances. That is the key: the word ‘modern’. It turns out that Westmoreland, who has an especially strong sense of history, is paralleling – not copying, but paying a detailed homage to – seminal Texas fiddler Eck Robertson’s recording of ‘Sally Johnson’ from 1922 (the same year Eck recorded his famous, amazingly rich ‘Sally Goodin’).<sup>5</sup> In nearly a century since then, ‘Sally Goodin’ has not changed much as it has passed through hundreds of other fiddlers’ hands, but Eck’s other tunes have, as Texas fiddling has built substantially on the variation technique pioneered early in the twentieth century. If you know Wes Westmoreland’s ‘Dusty Miller’, you have got a fair notion of how modern Texas fiddle variation technique works, but if you compare it with his deliberately antiquated ‘Sally Johnson’, then you also have a sense of change in this style, change focused in the variation technique, change whose next fruits we can eagerly anticipate.

**Appendix 1** How phrases start (and are modified) in performances of ‘Dusty Miller’

Wes, in 2006	Wes, in 2004	Bates	Turpin
A1H	A1H	A1H	A1H
A2H	A2H	A2H	A2H
B1L	B1L	B1L	B1L
B2L	B2L	B2L	B2L
C1L	C1L	C1L	C1L
C2L	C2L	C2L	C2L
		C3L	
	A3H	A3H	A3H
	A4H		A4H
		B3L	
		B4L	
C1↑H↑	C1↑H↑	C1↑H↑	C1↑H↑
C1↑2H↑	C1↑2H↑	C1↑2H↑	C1↑2H↑
A3H		A4H	A5H
A4H		A5H	A6H
B3L	B3L	B5L	B3L
B4L	B4L	B6L	B4L
C1↑3H↑	C3L	C4L	C3L
C1↑4H↑	C4L	C5L	C4L
A5H	A5H		A7H
A6H	A6H		A8H

*Key to abbreviations in table*

-  phrase begins with a syncopated figure;  phrase begins with that rhythm
-  phrase starts lower than before (usually with a low  or chord at the beginning of the figure); then jumps up and continues at the higher level of the original figure
-  phrase starts lower then before, then swoops up (often inc. triplets) to rejoin original
-  held note(s); replace start of phrase, offer rhythmic contrast and emphasize harmony
-  figure includes prominent slide (often to unison) or emphasizes a conjunct half step
-  phrase starts with a measure full of eighth notes, perhaps more than in original form
-  measure filled with rapid string-crossing arpeggios in triplets
-  these two effects combined; a stretched figure including a glissando
-  phrase starts with a motto employed earlier, suggesting a rounding of the form

**Figure 2** How phrases start (and are later modified) in performances of ‘Dusty Miller’

**Appendix 2** How phrases start (and are modified) in performances of ‘Sally Johnson’

Turpin		Westmoreland	
		B1L	♪ ♪, ♪ ♪
		B2L	♪ ♪, ⇔
A1H	♪ ♪, ♪ ♪	A1H	♪, ♪ ♪
A2H	♪, ♪ ♪	A2H	♪, ⇔
B1L	♪ ♪, ♪	B3L	♪ ♪, ♪ ♪
B2L	⇔, ♪ ♪	B4L	♪, ♪ ♪
A3H	♪, ♪ ♪		
A4H	♪, ♪ ♪		
B3L	⇔, ♪ ♪	B5L	⇔, ♪ ♪
B4L	⇔, ♪ ♪	B6L	⇔, ♪ ♪
A↑1H↑	⇔, ♪ ♪		
A↑2H↑	♪ ♪, ⇔		
C1L	⇔, ♪ ♪	C1L	⇔, ♪
C2L	⇔, ♪ ♪	C2L	⇔, ♪
B5L	♪ ♪, ♪	B7L	↗, ♪ ♪
		B8L	⇔, ♪ ♪
A6H	♪, ♪ ♪	A3H	♪ ♪ ♪, ♪ ♪
A7H	♪, ♪ ♪	A4H	♪ ♪, ♪ ♪
		A5H	♪ ♪, ♪ ♪
B6L	⇔, ♪ ♪		

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Victor 19699; the fiddler’s full name was Moses J. Bonner. My thanks to Paul Wells for a copy of this recording.

<sup>2</sup> For more biographical details, search ‘Fiddlers’ Frolics Hall of Fame’ online and click on the appropriate photographs, [fiddlersfrolics.org/HOF/index.htm](http://fiddlersfrolics.org/HOF/index.htm) [accessed 20 May 2009]. Sound files are attached to most Hall of Fame inductees’ web pages at the official site, though none of these recordings are of ‘Dusty Miller’.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Goertzen, *Southern Fiddlers and Fiddle Contests* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), pp. 104-05.

<sup>4</sup> Melodic variation technique on the *hardingfele* (often anglicized as ‘Hardanger fiddle’) does not present a tidy picture, in part due to differences in how it works in different regions of western Norway. The most detailed exploration of this published in English is in Pandora Hopkins, *Aural Thinking in Norway* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1986). See also transcription of a *hardingfele* in Chris Goertzen, *Fiddling for Norway: Revival and Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 289–91.

<sup>5</sup> See Eck Robertson, ‘Sally Gooden’, *Internet Archive*, [www.archive.org/details/Sallygooden](http://www.archive.org/details/Sallygooden) [accessed 20 May 2009].



## The exported Cape Breton fiddler: a hermeneutic study of the meaning of Cape Breton fiddle music outside Cape Breton

GREGORY J. DORCHAK

The aim of this essay is to demonstrate why the ideas of ‘understanding’, ‘agency’, and related concepts are important for researching folk communities. The hermeneutical concept of understanding is strongly tied to the rhetorical notion of agency. Both understanding and agency allow insight into the structure of a community that exists apart from its practices. In the case of Cape Breton fiddle music, looking at how those who call themselves ‘Cape Breton musicians’, might take part in the same practice, yet their understanding of that practice, and of their own role within the community, might be drastically different. This essay shows how multiple communities of Cape Breton musicians exist, each understanding the music quite differently. Comparing the Cape Breton fiddle music communities that exist on both Cape Breton Island and Boston, Massachusetts, this essay shows that the rhetorical notion of agency, and how musicians understand their own roles within a community, is of vital importance to the overall sustainability of the community.

### **Hermeneutics**

Firstly, it is important to explain my own notion of hermeneutics as agency and my own notion of understanding. There are several competing meanings for the term hermeneutics. These differences arise from the many theorists who approach the discussion, including Heidegger, Husserl, Ricoeur, and Dilthey. I approach hermeneutics theoretically rooted in Heidegger’s project of fundamental ontology, which analyzes the question ‘What does it mean to be?’.<sup>1</sup> Heidegger lays out the possibility of hermeneutics, and of the question of ‘Being’ in general, however, it is Gadamer’s work within *Truth and Method* that critically examines the ramifications of Heidegger’s ontology upon the human sciences.<sup>2</sup>

From a hermeneutic perspective, all experience exists through our understanding of it. A being ‘understands itself’ – and that means also its being in the world – ontologically in terms of those being and their being, which it itself is not, but which it encounters within its world.<sup>3</sup> As humans, we have an understanding of everything that surrounds us. It is important to make a distinction between the terms ‘understanding’ and ‘comprehension’. Everything we experience within the

world, we understand in a certain way. You may have no knowledge of calculus, yet when you look at a calculus problem you still understand it. You might perceive it as a jumble of strange, confounding numbers. You might not comprehend it, but despite this lack of comprehension, understanding still occurs. For Heidegger, this means that understanding is 'Being' itself. As beings, we can only exist in a state of understanding. How we understand the world determines how we conceive of our possibilities for what it means to be within the world.

Simply stated, we can only exist in the world as opposed to a 'vacuum' independent of any world. Therefore our possibilities are always understood from the fact that we are being – in the world. The world we exist in contains paradigms of traditions that precede us. These traditions give us the tools we use to judge our surroundings. When we understand an object, we do so based on how our traditions tell us to use that object. This gives the object meaning for us. To understand an object is to understand the object's meaning. Traditions are the only means we possess that allow us to understand something and make it meaningful.<sup>4</sup>

For example, a television news reporter may be watching the news. He is watching the same feed as his non-reporter friend. They see the same stories and hear the same words; empirically they experience the same entity, but they interpret the object very differently, because it has disparate uses for each of them. The news means something completely different for these two individuals because they belong to contrasting traditions, and possess distinct tools of understanding this object. The traditions we are born into are created prior to our existence. Understanding is therefore a historical process unfolding and reconstituting itself as praxis over time for both a being and a community. This distinction illustrates the phenomena of understanding that the hermeneutical question seeks to discover.

With tradition as the lens through which we gain understanding, then that understanding exists on a horizon in front of us. Our horizon is the range of possible significances gained through the tradition.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the horizon of understanding exists in a state of flux, since both tradition, and our understanding of it changes over time. This state of flux means that the understanding of possibilities changes for the being in question, and so too does the understanding of the moment. The horizon is limited to what tradition presents us, yet it is always open. There is always something that can appear upon the horizon that did not previously exist there – a new possibility that time presents to us. The more we test our prejudices to the events of time, the more chances for the horizon to move.<sup>6</sup> It is hermeneutics' task to discover the edges of the horizon and the possibilities that it provides.<sup>7</sup>

How this applies to my own project is as follows: when looking at Cape Breton fiddle music, rather than having concern for stylistic nuances that distinguish musicians, my hermeneutic approach is concerned with how musicians understand the performance of their music. From this perspective, two musicians could sound exactly alike in every way, yet their understanding of the performance of that music could differ greatly. This difference, and the implications it has upon community, is what I wish to investigate.

### **Cape Breton understanding of music**

An article I have written in a previous volume of this series sets out to demonstrate the elements of how Cape Bretoners understand their music;<sup>8</sup> to sum up, Cape Bretoners understand their music's primary function as dance music. As Burt Feintuch has eloquently stated, the music is a 'dance music, first and foremost'.<sup>9</sup> The dance is at the heart of the everydayness of the music – and while in Cape Breton, you might encounter Cape Breton fiddle music in a more formal concert setting; this formal setting of the music is not perceived as the 'everyday'. For example, every night during the summer months, square dances take place on the island. This is the everyday encounter with the music, and informs it. The dance is the driving force behind the rhythm of the music. The stylistic elements that make Cape Breton music unique are a result of the need to perform for dances. As a result, for the most part, each note will require its own bow stroke. Embellishments that would disrupt the rhythm, such as slides and rolls, are not found in the music.

This is also a tradition that, on a whole, values an individual sense of style, rather than judging the music by a homogenized standard. Many fiddlers, in conversation, cite this as the reason that fiddle competitions on the island are actually devalued. Although such events have been attempted in the past, they were not popular simply because competitions forced a standardized sense of judgement to which the locals simply did not respond. This value of individualization has allowed the community to respond and adapt to an element of newness introduced over the years. This can be seen in the innovations that fiddlers such as Winston 'Scotty' Fitzgerald introduced into the community, as well as the success of many innovative accompanists, such as the impact that John Morris Rankin had on the piano style of the island. Many within the community take pride in their ability to close their eyes, and through hearing only the fiddle and piano, identify who is performing. This individualized sense of style has been the driving force behind the evolution of a Cape Breton fiddle style.

### **Boston understanding of Cape Breton music**

To show how understanding within a community can differ within a tradition, one has to look no further than the community centred around Cape Breton music within Boston. There is a strong link between Cape Breton and Boston. During the 1920s and 1930s, many Cape Bretoners migrated to 'The Boston States' looking for work. These migrated Cape Bretoners kept many of their traditions with them, and maintained a strong relationship to the island. Often they would return to the island during the summer months, and it was commonplace for the youth to be at home in both locations. This relationship between Boston and Cape Breton helped to foster the popularity of Cape Breton music within Boston.

There are two very different demographics of people who identify themselves as Cape Breton fiddle players within Boston. The first kind of musician has no family ties or relationship to the island itself. Rather, they have learned of the style through recordings, the internet, or through attending concert halls, or festivals. Cape Breton

musicians such as Natalie MacMaster are popular within Boston, performing with the Boston Pops, and selling out large capacity venues. This popularity of the music makes it easily accessible for the musician who enjoys the music but has no knowledge of the community.

The Boston-born Cape Breton fiddler who has no direct ties to the island understands the music simply from the aspects of performance. Essentially, this strips the music from any form of understanding tied to community. There is no sense of 'everydayness' related to the music. In Cape Breton, lessons supplement only the technical aspects of learning the instrument, the music is already understood by the Cape Breton-born musician in the context of the dances and the community. For this Boston-born Cape Breton musician, the technical notion of performing the instrument is the totality of understanding. There is no equivalent communal aspect for this musician that supplements the performance aspects. The most important distinction in understanding, which reveals the differences lying below stylistic elements, is in the context of the music: that is, music as performance as opposed to music as part of everyday community.

In this situation, where understanding of the tradition is limited to stylistic elements, all historical contexts are also stripped away. Therefore the presentation of tradition is immediately reduced to that of a static product, rather than as a dynamic process. To put this into perspective, understanding Cape Breton music from a historical perspective means that a person understands the impact of individuals who have shaped the music. Ashley MacIsaac, Winston 'Scotty' Fitzgerald, John Morris Rankin, Buddy MacMaster, and Donald Angus Beaton are all examples of musicians who have had a significant impact in shaping the current state of Cape Breton music.<sup>10</sup> Each is known for their own unique elements contributed to the music. Buddy MacMaster sounds nothing like Donald Angus Beaton who sounds nothing like Winston Fitzgerald and so on. A Cape Breton-born fiddler would not be able to separate these tradition bearers from their understanding of the music. To the Boston-born Cape Breton fiddle player who only understands the music from recordings, the more commercially successful musicians, such as Natalie MacMaster or Ashley MacIsaac, become the sole face of Cape Breton music. The non-commercial fiddlers, such as Willie Kennedy and Alex Francis MacKay, who stylistically are very influential on Cape Breton, would largely be ignored off the island.<sup>11</sup> On the island, community members understand the many varieties of styles within Cape Breton music; such as Mabou Coal Mines style, or the Washabuck style. These nuances are not understood outside of the island; instead the music is seen more as a homogenised static Cape Breton style.

The second type of Boston-born Cape Breton fiddler has family ties to Cape Breton island, and still maintains a relationship to the community there. This kind of musician understands the importance of the dance and its tie to the music. However, in Boston, the Cape Breton square dance is not an everyday occurrence. More likely, it is an event that might occur once a month at most. Therefore, rather

than experiencing the music as part of the everyday, it is understood as a special occurrence.

One other phenomenological occurrence of this 'family-tied-Boston-Cape Breton Fiddler' (for lack of a better term) that distinguishes them from the Cape Breton-born musician is an exiled sense of self. By this I mean that this musician finds their tradition rooted in a place where they do not live, and so they are stuck in a liminal situation of not necessarily feeling home in either location. The music that they perform is rooted elsewhere. It is not rooted in their own Boston homes, but on Cape Breton. This geo-existential sense of always being away from their home is not experienced by the Cape Breton fiddler living on Cape Breton. There is little need for a Cape Breton fiddler living in Cape Breton to emphasize their 'Cape Breton-ness'.

Looking at this, the notion of agency becomes an important factor within how the two musicians (Boston and Cape Breton) understand themselves. A Boston-born Cape Breton fiddle player, because he or she is not from the island, does not feel that within this exiled role, he or she can impact or influence Cape Breton music. This is an important distinction of understanding. It points to a current one-way relationship to the Boston-born musician. They are to learn the Cape Breton style, rather than impact it. It is a mimetic notion of understanding. It points to the individual being a product of a tradition, rather than an active member within a traditional community.

However, when you consider that one of the most influential composers and innovators of Cape Breton music, Jerry Holland, was born in the Boston area, you can see that this development within the understanding of Boston-born Cape Breton musicians is relatively recent.<sup>12</sup> One factor that influenced this change of understanding of agency lies within access to the venue itself. While Jerry Holland lived in Boston, Cape Breton dances were relatively frequent. When Jerry was young, he performed at these dances, as did such local fiddlers as Bill Lamey, Angus Chisholm, and John Campbell. Cape Breton piano players living in Boston such as Doug MacPhee were also common place at these dances. However, the frequency of the dances dwindled dramatically in the last thirty years, and eventually the only musicians, who would be asked to perform at the two remaining venues, Watertown's Canadian American Club, and Waltham's French American Victory Club, were Cape Breton born. The migration of musicians from Cape Breton to Boston dwindled, and Boston was not producing many Cape Breton fiddlers. However, the ones they did produce, such as Doug Lamey (grandson of Bill Lamey), while strong musicians, were not asked to perform for the dances.<sup>13</sup> There was not a lack of Boston based Cape Breton musicians required to conduct a dance, as both accompanist such as Janine Randall, and fiddlers were present. However, in order for the event to be held, a Cape Breton musician visiting from the island was a pre-requisite.

This notion of agency can also be seen in how workshop courses in Cape Breton style fiddling are conducted. A Boston-born Cape Breton fiddler, when teaching a lesson, might explain 'this is how a Cape Bretoner would play this'. A Cape Breton-born fiddler, possessing agency and a confident sense of their own

individual style and its place within the larger community, when teaching, might explain, 'this is how I would play this'. It is a subtle distinction that exhibits the teacher's perception of self within the context of the tradition. The Cape Breton-born player is more apt to place themselves as a member of the community whose own individual style actually matters.

Taking regional fiddle styles into consideration, the Boston-born Cape Breton players are also seen as the 'Celtic' minority of the area. In Boston, the Irish music scene is a dominating presence, with Irish sessions held every night within the area, at multiple venues. Since venues for Cape Breton performers are at a minimum, the Irish music scene is the closest available alternative. It is not unlikely to see a Boston-born Cape Breton fiddle player sitting in on a local Irish session. However, this friendship comes with some caveats – most notably in the tune selection that a Cape Breton musician would perform within the session. There are many shared tunes that Cape Bretoners have absorbed from the Irish tradition, and vice versa. A Cape Breton performer sitting in these Boston Irish sessions would be limited to these tunes. This excludes almost all strathspeys, as well as some of the more recent Cape Breton compositions. Therefore, within this setting, the Cape Bretoner would always perceive themselves as the 'guest'. They might feel welcome, yet they are always 'other'.

### **Contingency and agency**

In 1972, a CBC documentary, *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*, caused much controversy within the music community on the island.<sup>14</sup> The thesis of the film was that the youth were not taking up the fiddle. Therefore, if the youth stop learning the music, eventually no one will play the music. Most of the controversy over this film came from the idea that it was overly critical of the Cape Breton music tradition as a whole. In response, the community formed a festival to prove that the tradition was alive and strong. The goal was to put a concert together with over 100 Cape Breton fiddlers on the stage. Within a few months, they achieved this goal, to them, proving that the tradition was not vanishing. However, of the 100 fiddlers on the stage, only a small group were under the age of twenty-five, in a way, proving the true thesis of the film, that the youth were not actively engaging with the tradition.<sup>15</sup>

Despite disagreeing with the film's premise in words, the community's actions in response acknowledged the need for a push to integrate the youth. Where once the music was learned informally, usually from a family member, formalized group classes began. The island's dances, becoming more and more scarce, were rekindled. In a short time, during the 1970s and 1980s, the island's youth took up the instrument in droves. The actions of the Cape Bretoners addressed the need to re-integrate the youth into the community, and succeeded in adopting change.

Although these changes have been readily adopted in Cape Breton, the Boston Cape Breton scene has not adapted as successfully, such that the youth in the community have not been as well integrated. One only has to look at the demographics of the attendance of Cape Breton dances at the Canadian American

Club to see that a person in their forties might be amongst the youngest in attendance. The youth who do attend the dances generally self-identify more as members of the Boston Scottish fiddle community who appreciate Cape Breton music, as opposed to the Boston Cape Breton community. A central problem to this inability to adapt is the limited access to venues. Since there are only two realistic venues for the Cape Breton community in the Boston area, the Canadian American Club and the French American Victory Club, the community as a whole is at the mercy of the venues' management. There has been very little turnover of the leadership at the Canadian American Club in the past thirty years. Any proposed event that attempts to cater to the youth requires approval from their board of directors. The foremost concern for the board, however, is economic viability and catering to their current clientele. The members of the board are not concerned about recruiting a younger clientele in the interest of sustaining community. Hence, the occasional dance performed by a visiting Cape Breton fiddler is seen as drawing a larger crowd. In turn this kind of event provides more economic incentive than a regular dance by the Boston-born fiddlers, who would tend to draw less of a crowd, but cater to the youth as opposed to the established older members.

The lack of change within the Boston Cape Breton community is tied to the rhetorical notion of agency. Two central topics of importance within rhetorical studies are the notion of an individual's power within society and the development of epistemology within a community. Foremost of these conceptions is the notion that an individual can have influence within the community to which he or she belongs. The self-perception of this power to influence others is this person's rhetorical agency. Here, the self-perception of this power exists within the 'horizon of possibilities' that hermeneutic research seeks to unveil. Rhetorician Michael Leff has commented on the link between tradition and agency:

In place of the isolated self of modernity (or the alienated self of some versions of post-modernity), tradition constitutes the self through social interaction and as part of an ongoing historical development. Both the individual agent and the tradition achieve and change identity through a reciprocal circulation of influence. Inclusion within a tradition shapes the individual self but also, and as a direct result of submitting to the mores and practices of the community, the individual gains the power to shape tradition. Moreover, the agents who succeed in effecting change in tradition also change their self-conception since individual and affiliative identities never lose connection with one another.<sup>16</sup>

Here Leff points to the notion that traditional communities are essentially shaped by individuals who exercise agency. Cape Breton Island's musical history can be read as a long list of such individuals who demonstrate the power of agency. In contrast, the Boston Cape Breton community has stopped facilitating the development of this agency.

An argument about a chicken and egg comes to mind when discussing agency and its relation to a sustainable community. Fostering agency within community

members is essential in order to maintain a sustainable community. Yet, only a sustainable community seems to produce agency within its members. However, a theme overarching both agency and tradition is the notion of a physical place. A healthy public sphere requires a place for the community members to gather and act as a community. Venue access is essential. The Boston Cape Breton community is restricted to only the two venues. Any argument that access is not restricted at the Canadian American Club overlooks the fact that local musicians are essentially restricted to the role of audience member, rather than musician. A healthy traditional music community is predicated on the fact that its members who are musicians develop a sense of agency. The musicians within the Boston community, without the access to a venue where they can perform as musicians, are prevented from developing this sense of influence within the community.

### **Implications**

The Cape Breton musical community responded to the contingency of the crisis of the lack of youth in the 1970s. The pedagogy of the tradition drastically changed. Formal classes became the foundation of learning the music. Venues sprung up all over the island, from dances in halls to performances in pubs, concerts, and festivals. These changes opened access of the community to the youth. The plethora of venues, as well as participation within them, developed and fostered agency amongst the youth in the community. They saw themselves as members of a community, rather than products of it. These changes occurred, but they might not have. One only needs to look at the Boston Cape Breton community to see the affects of what could have happened in Cape Breton. Without a push to integrate the youth into the Boston Cape Breton community, membership of the community has changed relatively little over the past thirty years. The restricted nature of one venue, and, in turn its own restricted notion of roles for community members, does little to develop a sense of agency for those within the community.

Implicit in this, the notion of understanding can be seen as a further distinction between Cape Breton-born fiddlers and the Boston-born Cape Breton musicians. Although these two categories of musician are stylistically the same, how they understand tradition itself is quite different. The innovation that has occurred, and is still occurring in Cape Breton over the years, through, for example, Winston Fitzgerald, John Morris Rankin, Dan R. MacDonald, and Mary Jessie Gillis, shows that the Cape Breton-born musician is able to adapt to newness within the community, and that the community fosters agency within the individual. The community as a whole has the ability to embrace certain changes within it. This points to a conception of tradition as something that is participated in. The Boston-born Cape Breton community does not hold this same notion of adaptability – instead conceiving of the tradition as a mimetic reproduction of what occurs on Cape Breton. This paradigm of thought conceives of tradition in a materialistic manner, rather than with focus on sustainable community.



It is important for studies of tradition to see ‘understanding’ itself as an object of study separate from the history of events or topical elements of style. What the practice of tradition means to the participant reveals more about the community as a whole than simply looking at the practice would not reveal. Within Cape Breton music, understanding reveals the musician’s relationship with tradition and community that solely looking at stylistic elements would not reveal. Understanding the ‘understanding’ of members of the Boston-born Cape Breton community reveals explanations as to the current state of the community. It also reveals how the notion of agency, as a concept of understanding, directly relates to the health and sustainability of a community. Communities that worry about sustainability should examine how agency is being fostered within the youth. Aspects such as venue access, can be modified in order to encourage this sense of agency.

### **Postscript**

It is important to note the living history that is currently occurring within the Boston Cape Breton community. Recently, Cape Breton fiddler/piano player Kimberley Fraser moved to Boston in order to study at Berklee College of Music. This could have perhaps sparked a catalyst to reinvigorate the local activities of the Boston-based Cape Breton community. Fraser and local born Doug Lamey, along with local community support, are in the process of attempting to begin a monthly winter dance using Boston based talent. At the time of this writing, only two dances have taken place. However, their goal is to stress the consistency of the dance, rather than the necessity of the Cape Breton-born players. Therefore, the musicians at the dances will be predominantly from the local Boston community. It will be interesting to see how this change will affect the Boston Cape Breton community at large; however it takes a critical step in opening the venue to address the role of the local as a musician. This first step is a key to addressing the notion of fostering agency within the community.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> See Gadamer, pp. 265–306.

<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), pp. 143–44.

<sup>7</sup> See Gadamer, pp. 438–91.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory J. Dorchak, ‘The Formation of Authenticity within Folk Tradition: A Case Study of Cape Breton Fiddling’, in *Driving the Bow: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 2*, ed. by Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2008), pp. 153–65.

DORCHAK *The exported Cape Breton fiddler*

<sup>9</sup> Burt Feintuch, 'Revivals on the Edge: Northumbrian and Cape Breton – A Keynote', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 38 (2006), 1–17 (p. 11).

<sup>10</sup> Ashley MacIsaac, *Close to the Floor*, RCA B000007QX6, 1992; Winston Fitzgerald, *Classic Cuts*, Breton Books FWCC-cd, 1993; The Rankin Family, *North Country*, Angel Records B000002UK5, 1995; Buddy MacMaster, *Cape Breton Tradition*, Rounder Select B00008L3T5, 2003; Donald Angus Beaton, *A Musical Legacy*, Independent Production DAB4, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> While recordings exist of both Kennedy and MacKay, these musicians never produced their own albums, nor toured to promote their music. Recordings of these musicians represent the efforts made by others to collect and preserve the sound of some regionally influential fiddlers on the island, who might be more obscure off the island.

<sup>12</sup> A short biography of Holland's early life in Boston can be found in Allister MacGillivray, *The Cape Breton Fiddler* (Marion Bridge, Cape Breton Island: College of Cape Breton Press, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> Doug Lamey's website can be found at [www.douglamey.com](http://www.douglamey.com).

<sup>14</sup> Ron MacInnis, *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*, film (Halifax: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1971). For more on the *Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* controversy, see Marie Thompson, 'The Fall and Rise of the Cape Breton Fiddler: 1955–1982' (unpublished master's thesis, Saint Mary's University, Nova Scotia, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> The first Glendale Festival took place 8 July 1973 and has been held annually thereafter.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Leff, 'Tradition and Agency in Humanistic Rhetoric', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 36, no. 2 (2003), 135–47 (p. 140).

Ethnomusichoreology? Ethnochoreomusic?<sup>1</sup>

KARIN ERIKSSON and MATS NILSSON

Music and dance are intimately linked in western countries. A great deal of music is intended for dancing while there are few dances, if any, that do not require some form of music. Here, we work on the presumption that on a number of occasions, music and dance are used simultaneously and function jointly in various ways. The material we study is Swedish traditional folk music and dance, and we focus mainly on dances and tunes that have been documented, played, and danced from 1800 to the present day. In this repertory we find dances and tunes such as the often rather fast 3/4 time *polska* and the *engelska* (English country dance), where several of the melodies can also be found in different versions elsewhere, for example, in the British Isles.<sup>2</sup>

We limit ourselves to traditional/folk music and dance in order to be able to focus on this earlier repertory with roots in European peasant society and its usage up to our own time. The repertory we thereby omit in this context is what has come to be called popular music with its adherent dance: the music and dance with strong links to the USA, which was much in favour from around 1920 and, to begin with, went under the name of jazz.

This article is part of our mutual attempt to link the research into music and dance with a view to discover *whether* this can be done, in what way it can be done and what type of questions which then become interesting for further study. At the moment we are focusing on the metric level as that seems to be an important link between music and dance. After an introductory discussion on demarcations, we develop our thoughts on dance beat and musical beat. We suggest that in our material it is the 'beat' which provides the significant point of intersection in the encounter between dance and music.

Traditional music and dance were documented and collected in Sweden mainly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The sources are, in other words, a crucial reason why we limit our studies to the period between 1800 and 2000. It is also interesting to note that mainly from 1900 onwards, the older sources and the practice exist simultaneously, while the possibilities of sound recording and later videoing further improve the source situation.

In the repertory that has been documented from the nineteenth-century peasant society music and dance to present times, there are several dances with two and three beats to the bar with associated music, for example *polskor*, *engelskor*, waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, schottisches, and so forth. On the music side, there are also some ceremonial types of tunes, such as bridal marches and meal-time music, so called *skänklåtar* (literally 'buffet tunes'), and tunes likely to have derived from songs. Large parts of the musical repertory are, however, linked to dance, even though these tunes are frequently played today in social contexts and on the stage without there being any dancing. The converse – dance without music – is not, however, present in the documented material.

By way of introduction, we can therefore state that dance in Sweden most commonly implies movement to music. The converse is, nevertheless, not always the case. What today's performers of Swedish traditional folk music mean when speaking about dance music is often music that can be danced to, or that has been danced to, even if they play it as concert music 'simply' to be listened to.

In our studies, and in our own performance, we have seen that it is possible for several different relationships to exist between music and dance. Although the focus here is on 'the meeting in the metre', it is still worth touching on some of the other interconnections.

Besides this elementary encounter in the metre, we see primarily four links between music and dance. Music and dance can meet on a general and discursive level, as in this text. It can also be a matter of the meeting between musicians and dancers when the former play music to which the latter dance, and this occurs in the same place at the same time. Another form of meeting between music and dance is when the music that is being danced to has been previously recorded (playback). When music and dance are presented simultaneously on the stage there is, besides the relationship between them, also an audience partaking of the performance. In addition to these four, we identify a fifth specific variant: dance music that is performed as concert music without dancers, for an audience.

These statements lead into our all-embracing thought that there ought to be links between research into music and research into dance and thereby between ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology, links as yet unexploited.

### **Terminology or terms as problems**

How dancers and musicians – but also we researchers – term music and dances respectively proved early on to be an exemplification of the problem with the relationship between dance and music, but also a way of illustrating what had come to be called the emic–etic problem. Emic refers to what the dancers and musicians themselves call things and etic to the analytic perspective added by the researcher.<sup>3</sup> This problem may be said to emanate from the idea that in an ideal case, the name of the dance and the name of the music and the current term for them all concur – what we might call ideal types. But the problem of terminology arises when we turn to the source material and to the dancers and musicians, and observe what they

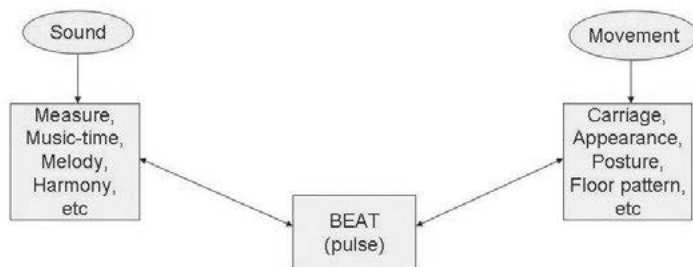
play, dance, and how they name what they do. It is then not uncommon to find that the way a dance and/or a tune is designated may differ between both musicians and dancers and between the way a music analysis and a dance analysis will categorise the music and the dance respectively. The musicologists may call what is being played a mazurka, while the choreologists may categorise it as a polka, and, if asked, the performers will call what they are doing a 'rump quiver'.

Besides emic and etic terms, which differ and can in some way be related to the music and dance repertory in Sweden, our collaboration has also drawn our attention to the fact that with our different starting points, we put different meanings to the same concept, even within scientific discourse. First of all, there are several words originating from the music side that are used to describe dance. Some examples are: tempo, rhythm, beat, time, metre, and phrase. These concepts are used by both performers and researchers, but their meanings may vary. Several of the concepts, which are somehow used to describe dance, can consequently be traced back to corresponding musical concepts.

In addition to these joint concepts, there are musical concepts, which are not at all, or at least not to any great extent, used to describe dance, for example, harmony, melody, bar, and tonality. The latter, in particular, has been the focus within Swedish traditional folk music research for a long time, but is of less importance for dance research.<sup>4</sup> It is, on the other hand, difficult to find dance words which are used about music. One exception is possibly the term 'dance music/dance tune', which is often used even in the context of a pure concert and not a matter of playing for dancing. Certain words, which dancers and dance researchers use on the other hand, have no real meaning for music and musicology, such as step, spring or *svikt*,<sup>5</sup> dance repeat, balance, formation, and couple.

### Meeting in the beat

In the introductory phase of our collaboration, we had many discussions around what we call 'things' and what meanings we award them. This, together with a wish to study one of the many relationships between music and dance, which transpired in our discussions, has caused us to feel a need to draw nearer to 'the sound' and 'the movement,' and to try to find a common terminology. Our hypothesis about the relationship is illustrated in Figure 1:



**Figure 1** Let's meet in the beat

## ERIKSSON and NILSSON Ethnomusichoreology? Ethnochoreomusic?

In the figure the dance music (sound) and the music dance (movement) meet in the beat. Music, as well as dance, are to our minds culturally organised forms of expression: what is defined as music and dance respectively depends on who does the defining and in what context. For western art music there exists among performers, composers, and researchers a well-established terminology for describing the music. Parts of this terminology are used to describe other genres as well, such as traditional folk music and popular music. Consequently, the terminology has had to be adapted so as to better correspond to the music it describes; it has also, for the same reason, had concepts added to it, which have often been lifted from the music genre being described.

Swedish traditional folk music is, to a large extent, described in the same terminology as western art music. Researchers into traditional folk music frequently use such words as tempo, measure, bar, beat, pitch, range, and so forth. In dance music, it is primarily the metric construction of the tunes which is of interest for study, as that is central for enabling listeners and dancers to perceive what type of tune that is being played. Words such as beat and metre, or even bar and tempo are used and mean something to both musicians and dancers. But, do they mean the same thing for sound as for movement?

Dance is culturally organised movement in the same way as music is culturally organised sound. But, what is being organised is the movement of the body or bodies, and not of the sound (although the body sometimes produces sounds). These bodies move vertically and horizontally in a physical space while time passes. Of necessity, the dance, or rather the dancer, moves more in the space than the music. The clothes on the body also have a direct bearing on the movement, what the dancer is wearing (or is not wearing) has a direct effect on the movement, which does not to the same extent apply to the music.

Common for both descriptions above is that music and dance relate to time, through a beat. But music and dance do this differently. The beat is a joint platform for both music and dance and makes it possible for the two forms of expression to function together. How music and dance respectively are structured in relation to the beat is something which can be studied further. It can also provide increased knowledge about how music and dance function together, and meet in the moment.

How music and dance respectively produce the beat in different ways can, in our view, be seen as a musical metre and a dance metre, both of them emanating simultaneously from the same beat. The musical metre is created by experiencing the metric structure, which in itself is a complex combination of polyrhythms, melodic structures, rhythmic patterns, bowing (if played on string instruments), tempo and so on. The dance metre is an equally complex compound, but with components such as step, *svikt*, rotation, and tempo.

### **Conclusion**

Even though the smallest common denominator is to be found in the beat, and the metre, movement and sound do not exist in a vacuum. There are also movements and sounds 'above' the beat and the metre, involved in creating the music and the

dance. This is where the entire performance – the making of music and dance – belong in both a cultural context and where people’s experience of and feelings for the dance and the music play an important role. That is why the real, experienced meeting between our two principal terms becomes considerably more complicated than simply a matter of beat and metre, as Figure 2 illustrates:

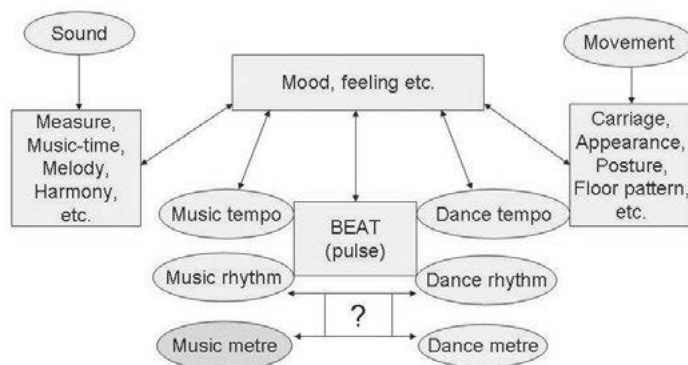


Figure 2 Let’s meet in the beat (revised)

The meeting of music and dance in the beat, and how the beat is produced in the dance music and the music dance is, as illustrated in the figure above, one of several points of intersection in a complex relationship between the two. Besides knowledge and analyses of the material level, what is needed in order better to understand how music dance and dance music work together is also, for example, knowledge of the social and historical context of which the music dance and dance music form a part. Dance and music, as well as the people who dance and play, are always part of a historical context, in exactly the same way as the ethnological research into music and dance. But in a study of the cultural context only, disregarding the very material of dance and music, a significant part of the analysis is missing, and we risk overlooking what in fact affects people, in this case the music and dance per se.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper was translated from Swedish by Eivor Cormack.

<sup>2</sup> For example, different variations of ‘Soldiers joy’.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth Pike, and Marvin Harris, eds, *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*, Frontiers of Anthropology (London: Sage, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Sven Ahlbäck, *Tonspråket i äldre svensk folkmusik* (Stockholm: Not and Bok, 1985) and Märta Ramsten (ed.), *The Polish Dance in Scandinavia and Poland*, Ethnomusicological Studies (Stockholm: Svenskt visarkiv, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> The Swedish term *svikt* refers to a soft but controlled flexing of knee and ankle joints when performing certain steps, walking and spring movements causing a particular type of springiness in the dancing.

## Fiddling with pasts: from tradition to heritage

OWE RONSTRÖM

The fiddle, or the violin, has travelled far from its birth in sixteenth-century Italy to today's globalised world. On the one hand, this instrument is a very standardized, homogenized object. On the other, it is a most diverse and varied phenomenon, an instrument approached, used, listened to, represented, and understood in so many different ways.

In this article I will first discuss the violin or fiddle as an object, before I turn to it as a phenomenon. My focus is upon the ideas and stories that fiddlers learn together with the tunes, especially about their origins, functions, meanings, and about what their music is and where it belongs. I like to think of 'folk music' as a kind of live-action role playing, based on 'old music'. What you are supposed to do may be fairly clear to most participants, but what is it all about? What kind of world is to be staged? What roles are there to distribute, and what symbols and values to manage? You have to know something about time and place, friends and enemies, social and cultural norms. You may not need all the details, but you will certainly need a basic understanding of the main issues.

Taken together, these stories, ideas, norms, and values, make up a kind of virtual reality, or 'world'. Here, I will call such worlds 'musical mindscapes',<sup>1</sup> a concept that urges us to understand phenomena like fiddles, fiddle music, and folk music, as both mental and physical – 'mind' for the former and 'scape' for the latter. Mindscapes are set up by establishing a certain perspective or gaze that makes us see a few things and overlook a whole lot more. Mindscapes are institutionalized in 'domains', or large networks of interlinked practices, ideas, artifacts, institutions and so forth.<sup>2</sup> These domains operate in different ways, with different goals, and occupy different niches in time and space. In the second section of the article I will sketch out some major changes in the musical mindscape of Northern European fiddles and traditional fiddle music in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I will take most of my examples from Sweden, but I argue that the general picture is valid for a larger part of the western world today.



## **History**

The violin, or to be more exact, the viol, was born as a low class instrument. We find it first in the hands of dance musicians in small Italian towns in the first half of the sixteenth century. Soon it was to be elevated and house-broken. With its loud voice, some even described as rude, by the mid-sixteen hundreds, it seems to have become a hit among the gentry and the nobility, replacing the old, more intimate sounding gamba family of instruments. The sixteenth century was a period of great changes in Europe, writes English historian Peter Burke.<sup>3</sup> At this time the nobles drew themselves back into ever larger and more exclusive castles. A reformation of folk culture took place, as a consequence of the catholic and protestant reformations. The result, Burke argues, was a separation between high and low culture over large parts of Europe, which forced the nobles to find new means to express and legitimize their privileges, new ways to produce difference and distinction. In a remarkably short time the violin moved into a musical mindscape rather different from where it was born; in the hands of the nobles in Italy and France it became not only a hallmark of cultivation, but also a tool for expressing a new self-consciousness, and a new individuality.<sup>4</sup>

This marks the beginning of a new era in Western musical life. From the courts and castles of Italy and France in the late sixteenth century, the violin took off on its triumphant journey to most other countries in Europe. The first violins were brought to Sweden by Queen Kristina (1626–1689, reigned 1632–1654), in an attempt to reform the Swedish court. As a child she had been taught dances of the latest fashion by a French dancing master, and when she ascended to the throne, a young woman of nineteen, she gave orders to bring musicians from France. The first six French ‘violists’ were presented to the court in 1646, and a few years later, German and French violists were to be found in the courts of other Swedish nobles. We do not know how, or by whom, the new instrument spread in Sweden, but we do know that, by 1682, in many places the fiddle had already replaced keyed harps, bagpipes, and hurdy-gurdies. In record time the fiddle had become the most beloved instrument of the Swedes, from high to low, in castle, farm houses, and simple sheds.

Out of the same object grew rather different instruments. The violin with its sweet and mellow tone, large ambitus and expressive possibilities, became the voice of the new self-assured individuality of the Swedish nobility, at that time aspiring to be the rulers of northern Europe, in one of the world’s most modern states. The fiddle, with its continuously sounding rather harsh tone and small ambitus, a remnant of the older instrument that it had replaced, became the voice of the peasantry. From early on, this instrument in Swedish became known as the *fiol* or *fela*, semantically marking the cultural difference between the classier *violin* and its cruder popular version. Also in other languages we find the same difference, for example, in German, *violine* as opposed to *fidel*/fiddle, and, in English, violin as opposed to fiddle.<sup>5</sup> In English, fiddle ‘has been relegated to colloquial usage by its more proper cousin, violin’, notes etymologist Douglas Harper.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century we find violins and fiddles, also in the hands of a growing

urban population. All over Europe violins became a constitutive part of new urban popular musics, from the Strauss waltzes of the Austrian gentry, the café music of Hungarian and Romanian gypsies, to the *gammaldans*, or old-time dance music of the Scandinavian urban working class.

### **One or three instruments?**

Today the violin/fiddle is a constituent part of at least three large, interconnected, but rather differently constructed domains, commonly known as the classical, folk, and popular, each containing a number of musical mindscapes. Clues to the degree and content of these differences we may find if we take a look into a record shop, if this is still viable in these days of record-shop extinction. To be able to do business, record dealers have to organize their records to help consumers find what they are looking for, starting from a simple assertion of common cultural knowledge, 'what we know that you know that we know'.<sup>7</sup>

To find a certain classical recording, a good starting point is the name of the composer, and when he was active.<sup>8</sup> In the classical domain, composers are distributed chronologically over a number of slots, such as 'baroque' or 'romantic'.<sup>9</sup> The domain is organized to answer the questions 'who' and 'when', which of course mirrors a master narrative of cultural history, that of divinely inspired, creative artists, organized as pearls on a string of time. In this domain the violin becomes a tool for producing individual artists/composers, and a set of time-slots in the past.

To find a jazz, pop, or rock recording, the name of the composer will be of little help. Also the popular music domain is organized to answer the question 'who', and also here we find the idea of the inspired individual artist, or group of artists. But here artist means performer, not composer.<sup>10</sup> In general, the popular music domain is uninterested in time or space. Only on a secondary level will it answer to questions about history and geography. Instruments, among them violins, are tools for producing a generic placeless present, according to the formula 'one world – one market'.

To find a folk music record, composers are principally useless, as are artists. From the very beginning folk or traditional music in Europe was cast as a collective creation of an anonymous 'folk'. From the outset, in opposition to the classical domain's foregrounding of 'who' and 'when', the folk music domain was built around 'where'. Records are filed under continent, country, and region.<sup>11</sup> Until recently, artists have been secondary, as has the component of time. In the general traditional musicscape, composers and performers are the collective 'folk', and there is but one time, a generic past.

### **A musical geography**

The idea of a traditional music, a folk music, is a result of the growing bourgeoisie's discovery of the people in the late eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> In their hands the fiddle became a tool for producing a geography of music, folk costumes, dances, and dialects, all of which spoke of unique local origins. The fiddle itself, however, was

never really nationalised or localised, not even in Sweden, where in some villages for every two villagers there were three violinists, as the saying goes. There is no such thing as a Swedish fiddle, although there certainly is something which is definable as Swedish fiddle music. Here we find the basic paradox of different productions at work – the locally distinctive becomes visible only against a common, transnational, or global background. The violin fulfils this role elegantly, being played everywhere in Europe, but everywhere in a different voice.<sup>13</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, in the eyes of the Scandinavian bourgeoisie, the fiddle had become the central symbol of all that was good about the folk and the good old days. As the instrument was hand-made, refined, old, authentic, and individual, it was praised as the true voice of the ‘folk’. It was the very antithesis of modernity, as represented by the cheap and simple factory-made accordions or guitars of the working class. This symbolic opposition has been a prominent part of the ‘folk’ mindscape ever since, especially in the Nordic countries, which is why the fiddle still is held as the number one folk instrument, albeit there is a much larger number of accordionists and guitarists.

My point is that traditional music or folk music are headlines, or to use Feintuch’s words, captions for ‘a territory of imagination’,<sup>14</sup> a ‘world’ or ‘virtual reality’. What is staged is something rather different from the past lived reality that is claimed to be represented. Then again, the idea was never really to reconstruct an authentic image of a bygone world as it once was. Rather the aim was to stage it as it ought to have been.<sup>15</sup> From such a world you should not ask for authenticity or empirical truth.

### **Local music**

Burt Feintuch, in his work on folk music in Northumberland, northwest England, writes that ‘tradition’ brings about a narrative of rural, illiterate, bagpiping shepherds and a music that is intimately bound up with place, part of the social landscape of a disappearing world characterised by collectivity, stability, and continuity. In the lived reality, however, there were few shepherds, the staged stability contrasted sharply against the many profound changes, and continuity was a result of constant revival. The music, he finds, was highly literate, the repertoire was derived almost entirely from publications, performed by educated middle and upper-class urbanites.<sup>16</sup>

In the Shetland Isles the ethnomusicologist Megan Forsyth finds a traditional musical mindscape full of references to an old-fashioned world of small homesteads in remote and isolated islands, centring around fiddles and a distinctive Shetland fiddling style, full of slurred bowings crossing over bar lines, shivers and ringing strings, rhythmic accents, and a pregnant driving quality. This world may point to a distant past, but Forsyth argues, it was created just after the Second World War by four legendary fiddlers, living and working in cities like Lerwick and Aberdeen.<sup>17</sup>

In the Shetland Isles, as in Northumberland, ‘traditional music’ is seen as naturally growing out of the landscape, producing a continuous musical geography of distinct local musics. In his work on the extensive Celtic revival, anthropologist

Malcolm Chapman, writes that ‘Celtic’ to a large extent is an idea based on local language and traditional music. The notion of a Celtic tradition leads to the local, the idea is that this music belongs to, represents, is used and loved by a local ‘folk’. It is often true, Chapman finds, that locals have an idea about ‘their’ local music, even if they can’t stand the stuff, but they seldom know anything about it, it is not their music. ‘Local’, Chapman concludes, is an idea about a local music that is not locally anchored.<sup>18</sup>

Many similar studies point out and discuss the differences between an imagined, ‘virtual’, traditional folk music mindscape and the lived realities that it depicts and represents. An instructive example from Sweden is Jan Ling and Märta Ramsten’s article on the birth of the fiddle style in the village Leksand, in Dalarna, middle Sweden.<sup>19</sup> Their argument is well illustrated by some pictures. In the first, from 1898, the ‘Västanviks stråkkapell’ (‘Västanvik string orchestra’) poses for the photographer. They are seven serious young men with fiddles in their hands, wearing black costumes and small black hats. The second, from 1902, shows the same young men, with the same instruments, now a little older – and, more importantly, in folk costumes.

What we see is a trace of a new idea about music and history, that in only a few years around the turn of the century produces a new type of folk music, locally distinctive, anchored in a new type of past. It is a music that has left the dance floors behind and entered the stage. As concert music, a new type of narrative could be spun around it, about an ancient and unique Leksand-style that had survived modernity’s disrupting and destructive forces in the hands of a small number of head-strong, powerful fiddlers. This narrative, Ling and Ramsten argue, has more to say about the modern world of the narrators than about the past. One of the founding fathers of the narrative about the ancient Leksand fiddle style was the engineer and fiddler Knis Karl Aronsson. He played a decisive role for the creation of the cultural ideology that inspired Leksand and surrounding parishes.<sup>20</sup> (He was originator of the chamber musical style, that during the 1950s, became a Leksand trade mark or brand. Under his auspices, the fiddlers in Leksand were transformed from a tourist ensemble performing printed musical arrangements to a fiddling team with archaic, locally distinctive traditions.<sup>21</sup>

My point up to here is simply that folk, or traditional music, consists of a number of closely related musical mindscapes, built on ideas from philosophers, linguists, ethnologists, and cultural historians of the late eighteenth century. These mindscapes have been institutionalized in a large domain organized according to a ‘mythical geography’<sup>22</sup> or a musical ‘geosophy’ that sets up a folk and their music as consequences of place.<sup>23</sup> The idea of a music ‘intimately bound up with place’ has from the very beginning been a constitutive element of the ‘folk’ or ‘traditional’ musical mindscape in Western Europe.<sup>24</sup> During the last few decades, however, a number of major changes have occurred in this musical mindscape and the domain built around it, especially in North Western Europe. Here I will discuss a few of them, starting with some aspects concerning who the actors are, then a few words

about festivalisation and the question of ownership and control. To conclude, I will discuss two competing ways of producing the past, that I call 'tradition and heritage', my argument being that we are now rapidly in a process of heritagisation of the folk or traditional musical mindscape.

**From knowers to doers and marketers: shifting control over folk music**

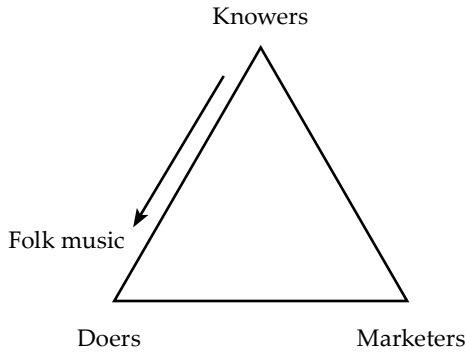
Never before have so many musical styles, genres, and forms been accessible at the same time. Never before have so many people been involved so much with music. This is true also for folk music, at least in Scandinavia. It is possible today that there are more folk fiddlers than existed throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. Also, they are better educated, have better instruments, and many of them play better than their older models and idols. Interestingly, many of these are now women. In some countries, like Sweden, among young fiddlers, men are now often outnumbered by women, which may eventually lead to men abandoning the fiddle for other instruments, such as guitars, mandolas, and saxophones.

Most of these folk fiddlers' prime motive is simply to make music, they are 'doers'. For another and much smaller category of actors, it is not doing, but knowing about music that is the goal. For 'knowers', the goal is the knowledge itself and the research involved to find answers to questions about when, where, how, and who. A third category of actors, also quite small in the field of folk music, are the 'marketers', producers, managers, salesmen, and entrepreneurs, whose prime motive is to distribute the results of the activities of doers and knowers. The goals of doers and knowers are, for marketers, more often than not a means to reach other goals. This could be, for example, to raise attention, spread messages, attract audiences, or to make money.

Doers, knowers, and marketers are three positions that actors can take in relation to any musical field.<sup>25</sup> They make up a system, an analytical model that can be used for description and analysis of processes of change in the control of, and power over, the expressive forms that make up the centre of a musical field. By applying these analytical categories to the development of folk music in Sweden, it is possible to follow two important shifts, first from knowers to doers, and then from doers to marketers.

The concept of folk music was coined in the late eighteenth century on the initiative of knowers. The content grew out of long-standing negotiations between knowers and doers. By the late 1900s, folk music had become petrified into a national symbol, and as such it survived well into the 1970s (see Figure 1). Then a new generation of young doers arose in countries such as Sweden, Norway, Finland, the British Isles, France, and Hungary, who simply took power over the definitions, in turn moving folk music from the urban salons and the national manifestations, to small clubs, dance halls, and large popular outdoor celebrations. They were many and they soon became well trained. As a result, in these countries there were more traditional musicians than ever before.

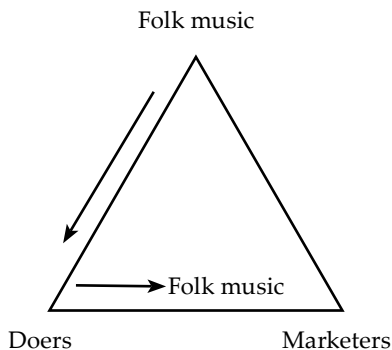
1970s



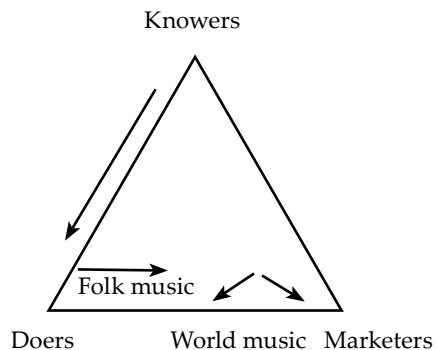
**Figure 1** Knowers, doers, and marketers in the 1970s

With the popularisation of folk music during the 1970s and 1980s, the emergence of marketers followed a new and earlier almost insignificant type of actors in the field of folk music: these were record producers, managers, festival organisers, and so on. With them came stickers, flyers, riders, posters, CD demos, all important features of a pop/rock musical format, that during the following decades would become standard in the field of folk music. In the course of only a few years, marketers took control over arenas and media central to the field. Their perspective soon came into conflict with those already established, and an immediate result was a split of the field, and the birth of a new type of folk music, in Sweden first coined 'FUP' (Folkmusik Utan Polis, or 'folk music without police'), then 'new folk music' and 'världsmusik' ('world music') (see Figures 2 and 3).

1980s



1990s



**Figures 2 and 3** Knowers, doers, and marketers in the 1980s and 1990s

A result of these shifts was a new wave of mediaization of the folk music scene, the 'process whereby local forms of music are adapted to mass media'.<sup>26</sup> The ideas about the locus of music, 'where the action is', changed. Earlier in Sweden folk musicians tended to hold that the music was located in the interaction between musicians, and between musicians and their audiences. This was institutionalized in fiddlers' gatherings, *spelmansstämmor*, and expressed through its focus on informal playing together. Recordings were seen as secondary representations of music. Today, often the opposite is true, as has since long been the case among rock and pop musicians. The prime locus of modern folk, traditional, or world music is formally controlled situations, such as festivals, studios, or rehearsal rooms. Live performances are now seen as secondary representations of recordings, or recordings still to be made. This has led to a new level of objectification of the music, not so much as 'folk' of the old days, but as artistic creations of especially gifted individuals, a bow to the old romantic notion of the composer and artist, so important in the domains of classical and popular musics.

In the field of folk music, more and more of what are considered to be the 'original' sources of folk music have become available on the internet in the form of transcriptions, MIDI files, recordings, texts and the like. Today, doers are equipped with new tools, while at the same time knowers are rapidly losing control to marketers over such important parts of the field as aesthetical evaluations and definitions of central concepts. This shift is partly a result of the impressive general growth of both doers and marketers in most fields of music in the last decades. Earlier, when music was an activity of the few, marketers were neither many nor significant. In the twentieth century, the music market has exploded creating a symbiotic relationship: that is, the more doers, the bigger market, and the bigger the market, the more marketers. Today, the number of marketers in the field of folk music is larger than ever before, and it is among the marketers that we find many of folk music's most 'burning souls'. What they are burning for is not necessarily more or better music, nor more money, but more ephemeral goods, such as raised visibility, recognition, and status for 'their' kind of music, for their country, or ethnic group, if not for their record company, artist agency or festival. Through this development, folk music has become a part of a growing world-wide 'attention economy',<sup>27</sup> which, in turn, is closely related to the new global mode of heritage production.

Today, much folk and traditional music has moved closer to the domains of classical and popular music. In turn, artists and also composers have moved up several steps in the categorisation hierarchy of the record industry. As a result of the marriage between traditional musics and the popular music industry, new musical behaviours and new musical mindscapes have been produced, with traces from both these worlds. It is now possible to find individual composers and artists also in the folk music domain, and even more so in the domain of world music.

To summarize: an impressive trend in the folk music domain is the shift, first from knowers to doers, and then from doers to marketers. The knowers' loss of the monopoly over the sources has meant that they can no longer control definitions

of content, meaning, right or wrong, which has given the doers new possibilities. This can be understood as a part of a massive trend in many parts of society, nicely summarised by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as 'from the informative to the performative',<sup>28</sup> a shift from the earlier so central intellectual capacities to the sensual, emotional, and experiential. When the emotional and experiential are foregrounded, objects are transformed into instruments for the experiencing subjects, interesting as long as they produce emotional experiences. This creates a drive for raised levels of aesthetical expression, and then aesthetics, not ethics, moral or knowledge, become leading principles for evaluation.<sup>29</sup>

Taken together, these shifts – from knowers to doers and marketers, and from knowing, doing, and marketing, to the results and effects – emotional experiences, performances, profits, raised attention, and so forth – represent a new order in the power structures around the production and managing of musical knowledge that without doubt will have many consequences in the future.<sup>30</sup>

### **Festivals and festivalization**

Another pronounced trend during the last decades of the twentieth century is that festivals have increased in number. In Sweden 'fiddlers gatherings' became common during the first decades of the twentieth century, often set up as low-key and rather informal outdoor events, sometimes also as large folk feasts, attracting many thousands. After the Second World War, and up until the end of the 1960s, festivals in Sweden were mainly aimed at spreading art music to new audience groups, often in the form of local 'music weeks'. Woodstock Music and Art Fair (commonly referred to as Woodstock), held 15–18 August 1969 near Bethel, New York, became an important model for pop, rock, and jazz festivals from the late 1960s. During the following decades, festivals became steadily more numerous, in increasing numbers of places and genres, claimed by municipal policy-makers and large companies as marketing and image-strengthening tools. Carnivals spread from the 1980s, and during the most recent decade the old concert festivals and the newer carnival type have melded into large municipal 'happenings' and pop festivals, such as *kulturnatta* 'The night of Culture', the Stockholm Water Festival, and the Medieval week in Visby.<sup>31</sup> From being arenas for selected forms of music and specific audience groups, festivals developed during the 1980s into arenas for a broader public, and, during the last decade, to large popular festivals with every possible kind of music and every possible theme (for example, water, homosexuality, food, the Middle Ages, regions, cities).

Festivals can be seen as an expression of a range of important changes in society. An explanation for the increase in festivals is that they are cost-effective events for audiences, arrangers, and musicians. For small investments of time, money, and energy, the audience gains access to many different artists. For the arrangers, many different kinds of artists and groups help to spread the risks, at the same time as the total costs per artist are reduced. For musicians, festivals are a way of reaching, with a limited investment, a large audience. The increase in the



number of festivals can be seen as an expression for the market's growing demands for maximising profit and efficiency in the area of music.

The increased number and importance of festivals has given rise to a range of changes in musical behaviour that can be summarised as festivalisation. An effect of festivalisation is increased concentration on certain times and places. Because the point of festivals is to gather a lot of people, the majority take place outdoors during a couple of hectic summer months. The result is a division of musical life into two parts, a long period of production at low intensity, with small resources and low visibility and a short period of high intensity consumption, with large resources, large audiences and high visibility.

In many ways music has also been adapted to festivals, in the same way as music has been mediatised, by adaption to say, the record media, the cassette, CD or to MySpace and YouTube. Among such adaptations are the use of time and level of expression. In important ways festivals relate to ordinary concerts as television does to cinema. While concert and cinema visits are usually highly focused and formalised events, the festival crowd devote themselves not only to the music presented but also to the surrounding social interaction such as eating, small-talk, or meeting others. That is why festivals, just like television, find it difficult to capture and hold the audience's attention for longer periods, which demands increasing numbers of powerful effects. In order to break through the flood of impressions that characterise festivals, the music is often charged up by higher volumes, stronger lights, flashier and more spectacular clothes, dance, speech, as well as décor, and by an increased emphasis on new effects. Festival audiences tend to respond to the increased levels of expression and effect precisely as they do to television. By 'zapping', or channel surfing, audiences constantly shift and change between different stages and programmes, leading to a spiral of ever higher levels of expression and effect. One example is the Falun Folk Music Festival (FFF), launched in 1986. Since the mid 1980s it has become Sweden's largest folk music event, attracting more than 50,000 visitors annually.<sup>32</sup> In the beginning the FFF was designed as a 'classic' festival with a large number of concerts in different places over three and a half days. By the 1990s, the FFF had developed more in the direction of the pop music type festival where many different artists succeed one another on a few large outdoor stages. This led to an increase in the levels of effects and expression, and, in turn, to a crisis for the festival at the end of the 1990s, when the original folk music audience disappeared without any large, new audience groups to replace them.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the newcomers devoted themselves to 'zapping' between different activities to a greater extent than the original folk music audience, which led to the levels of effects and expression being raised even more.

In the words of Zygmunt Bauman, festivalisation's primary effect can be described as 'the greatest possible impression in the shortest possible time',<sup>34</sup> or as the Russian semiotician Boris Uspenskij expressed it, 'the greatest possible number of signs in the smallest possible space'.<sup>35</sup> Festivals are effective arenas for the communication of symbols and signs and can in that light be seen as expressions

of the sort of changes in the late twentieth century that are usually summarised as 'post-modern'. They create much visibility for relatively low investments, which can lead to raised attention, which in turn can give opportunities of higher status and recognition. It is not unusual for individual artists to appear at festivals as representatives of an ethnic group, a nation, an interest group, which have made folk festivals especially important potential resources for identity politics, in terms of struggles for raised status and increased recognition. Folk festivals, then, can be described as a type of arena which both expresses and produces an increased emphasis on the production of difference, and of local, regional, ethnic distinctiveness. The effectivisation and maximisation of precisely those factors that produce visibility and attention make festivals an important part of, using Michael Goldhaber's term, a new and growing 'attention economy', which is a reason why festivals are so often used by groups and institutions to raise visibility and attention capital.<sup>36</sup>

### **Local music, not from here**

According to British sociologist Anthony Giddens, we have since the late twentieth century been moving into a period in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than ever before.<sup>37</sup> Time, space and social relations, the entire social system, he argues, is uncoupled, disembedded, and lifted out of its local contexts of interaction, and restructured across unlimited areas of space and time.<sup>38</sup> 'Disembedding mechanisms', such as money and the extensive system of expertise and technology, organise a large part of today's social and material world, separate social relationships from their concrete time and place-bound contexts, and make it possible for people to interact across large distances in space and time. Much of what is usually described as post-modern 'actually concerns the experience of living in a world in which presence and absence mingle in historically novel ways'.<sup>39</sup> New communication technology creates new relations, which render all kinds of boundaries and all kind of mental geographies problematic.

This accelerating uncoupling is, at the same time, a cause and effect of increasing globalisation. An aspect of globalisation is the introduction of large-scale global structures, a sort of grand-scale motorway network, which requires large organisations, investments, stability, and continuity.<sup>40</sup> On one level, these rapidly growing motorways create extreme homogenisation, standardisation, even monopolisation. On another, they create extreme mobility and diversity. When objects, behaviours, styles, and expressive forms are carried on them, they are disconnected from their original contexts and become accessible to people in completely different places, for completely different purposes.

There are examples everywhere of how objects, expressive forms, styles, and social relations have been uncoupled from their original concrete contexts, eventually becoming accessible for use by people in other places, in other times. Cassettes, recordable CDs, and MP3 files make it possible to disconnect music from the media to which they were originally tied so that they can be copied, demediated and

reused in new and unexpected ways. This is a fundamental prerequisite for what has become known as 'world music', nicely defined by an English music critic as 'local music but not from here (whatever that is)'.<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that these also made an impact on the preconditions of traditional music. Thus this music is disembedded, uncoupled, not any more so 'bound up with place', to quote Burt Feintuch.<sup>42</sup> Irish folk music, to take just one example, has during the last decades been effectively uncoupled from Ireland and become a common global style. In Gotland, my home island in the Baltic Sea, there is a successful composer of Irish reels, jigs, and hornpipes. The musical homeland of this young man, a Gotlander, born and raised on the island, is not Ireland, to which he pays an occasional visit, but a virtual Ireland, located nowhere and thus everywhere.

Today there is more Irish folk music outside Ireland than inside; also more didgeridoos outside than in Australia. Yodelling is as popular in Tokyo as it is in the Tyrol; Swedish *nyckelharpa* is played professionally in Hungary, Netherlands, and of course in the United States. In a small town in north Germany there is even a band devoted to covers of my own band's recordings of old Gotlandic tunes.<sup>43</sup> My argument is not simply that traditional music is changing, after all, tradition has always been changing, or to put it bluntly, all tradition is change.<sup>44</sup> What I am arguing is that, as an effect of the intermingling of presence and absence in novel ways, the ideas about where traditional music comes from, the musical mindscapes of traditional music, are now quickly changing.

### **From 'tradition' to 'heritage'**

The tendencies I have outlined above are but a few of the systemic structural changes that have occurred in the folk music domain recently, changes that have moved traditional music into new territories, new musical mindscapes. On the one hand, it has moved closer to the classical and popular music domains, thereby being equipped with new formats, values, and types of musical behaviour. On the other hand, radical changes have also taken place within the traditional domain itself. One of these concerns the ideas of what kind of pasts this music stems from, and why it should be preserved. In the last section I will consider some aspects of this change, from what I call 'tradition' to 'heritage'. A generalized comparison, based on field work in Sweden, will point to some of the differences.<sup>45</sup>

In a northern-European context, 'tradition' and 'heritage' may seem like two words meaning about the same.<sup>46</sup> Certainly, they are in many ways similar: both are produced from things past – memories, experiences, historical leftovers. Both promise things in danger of disappearing – 'the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct' – a second life as exhibits of themselves, by adding value, such as pastness, exhibition, difference, and indigeneity.<sup>47</sup> They operate on the same markets and are rationalized and legitimized in much the same way.<sup>48</sup> It is nevertheless important to recognize that they are not the same and that we are dealing with two rather different modes of production, two different mindscapes of the past, anchored in different domains.

To begin with, the 'tradition' mindscape centres around the rural, the 'old peasant society' of the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, and is mainly geared towards production of locality and regionality.<sup>49</sup> 'Heritage' is predominantly urban, even when located in the countryside, and geared towards the international or transnational. Whereas 'tradition' tends to use time to produce 'topos', place, distinct localities, and is interconnected into large cultural geographies, heritage tends to use place to produce 'chronos', pasts more loosely rooted in place.

The two mindscapes operate with two rather different interfaces. Tradition produces a closed space, you cannot just move into it. Tradition works much like ethnoscapes or VIP-clubs: to enter you have to be a member, or to be invited by a member. Membership is genealogical, it comes with birth or marriage. Heritage produces a much more open space that almost anybody can move into. Instead of membership by birth or marriage, the right kind of values and wallets are necessary. Using computer language you could say that while tradition operates like Windows, with restricted access to the source codes, and with closed interfaces, heritage operates more like Linux, with open sources and interfaces.

If tradition is principally in the plural, every parish, every group of folk can have its own tradition, heritage tends to be understood in the singular, as 'our cultural heritage'. There is much less heritage, which makes it more precious and expensive. If 'tradition' produces the local, 'heritage' clearly is tied to larger units, such as the nation, Europe, or as in World Heritage, the entire world. Anybody can make a tradition, but not everybody can have or appoint heritage, which is why heritage production, to a much higher degree than tradition, is in the hands of specially approved professional experts that select what is to be preserved according to certain approved criteria. Selection is the key; the more selection, the more need for expertise. In that sense, heritage is a good example of the kind of global abstract expert systems, dependent on new forms of impersonal trust, that Giddens has described as one of the consequences of late modernity.<sup>50</sup>

Tradition brings about ownership and cultural rights: the local traditions produced are understood as belonging to the locals. Heritage tends to resist local people's claims for indigenous rights. Heritage tends to 'empty' objects and spaces, which makes them possible to refill with all kinds of owners and inhabitants. While tradition can be produced locally, the production of heritage is centralized and produces something beyond the local and regional, beyond the distinctive, the ethnic, and the multicultural. It is everybody's and therefore nobody's.

Not least important is how the two mindscapes structure feelings. Tradition tends to evoke a nostalgic, bitter-sweet modality, a longing for and mourning over lost good old days, together with commitments to honour a specific local past, often personalized as 'family roots'. Heritage is about a much more generic past that you may pay an occasional visit to without much obligation, nostalgia, or grief. It is an 'inspiring model, a spicy and mythical taleworld without attaching sorrow'.<sup>51</sup> If tradition mirrors the desires, anxieties, longings and belongings of modernity,<sup>52</sup> heritage is more of an answer to processes in a late or post-modern world that

promote play and experience, a shift from the informative to the performative in relation to the past.

### **Heritagization**

Lately, the changes in the musical mindscapes of folk or traditional music are great and impressive. As I have pointed out, in many places in Northern Europe folk music is readily accessible and folk musicians are more plentiful and better educated than ever before. Many of these do not see themselves as traditional fiddlers, as in the old Swedish *spelmän*, but as professional folk musicians, fusion artists, and world musicians.<sup>53</sup> Doers and marketers have taken control over the mindscape, knowers have been transformed from definers and controllers to mere suppliers of material. A whole new musical infrastructure has developed, from teaching institutions to festivals and clubs. The traditional music world has become one comprised of a world of managers, posters, riders, festivals, copyright issues, and record releases, all rather far from the world of the old fiddlers.

I have also argued that 'tradition' and 'heritage' are two rival and incompatible modes of producing pasts, or to put it more generally, two forms of production of the absent in the present. Both are global phenomena that are 'downloaded' locally to redefine, reformulate, and take control, over aesthetics, history, economy, and power. I also argue that folk music, and certainly north European fiddle music, is now rapidly moving from an older 'tradition' mindscape into a much more recent 'heritage' mindscape. Even when music is locally understood as 'traditional', it is today often used as 'heritage' on a global arena. This change or shift from tradition to heritage introduces new discourses and redefines concepts. It also changes our understanding of what kinds of pasts the music comes from, to whom it belongs, and what it stands for, all of which are signals of important changes in the production of collective memory and history.

This shift from tradition to heritage is deeply interconnected with globalisation. As an effect of new globalised technology, local styles are uncoupled or disembedded from their former musical mindscapes, their specific places and pasts, and made available over large spaces as 'local musics but not from here'. Freed from former understandings of 'local', specific forms of traditional music become possible to download and stage everywhere. Megan Forsyth, in her work on Shetland fiddlers, calls this 'Shetlandising': the traditional Shetland fiddling styles are boiled down to a minimum of signs, a few distinctive and highly typified stylistic traits representing the Shetlands as a whole, which makes it possible for Shetland fiddlers to play jazz, pop, rock with a Shetland touch, and for non-Shetlanders anywhere in the world to become, in a sense, Shetland fiddlers.<sup>54</sup> An obvious example is 'klezmer music', which as ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin points out, is a globalised style of recent American origins, often staged as old local 'Eastern European-Jewish'.<sup>55</sup> In *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World*, Slobin analyses klezmer as 'heritage music' along lines similar to the ones I have discussed above.<sup>56</sup> 'Heritage', Slobin notes,

today 'replaces older terms perhaps now thought of as problematic. A prominent victim is the word 'traditional'.<sup>57</sup>

When music is homogenised and spread via global motorways over large areas, problems will inevitably arise with control over ownership and use of rights. Fiddle music from Cape Breton, homogenised as typical 'Cape Bretonish', is today performed also in the United States, England, and Scandinavia.<sup>58</sup> This may eventually lead to a kind of crisis for the fiddlers in Cape Breton, when they discover that they are not in control over this 'local music, not from here', that they might not any longer fit into the model of themselves as themselves, thus becoming inauthentic.<sup>59</sup> Since traditional music and heritage music, are so often used as representations of local or ethnic identities for whole groups, regions, or nations, the tendencies I have outlined above will no doubt again turn the traditional music domain into a battleground in new and unexpected ways.<sup>60</sup>

By being heritagized, traditional music now is moved into a new domain, which makes new kinds of things possible. The changes have implications for individuals and groups, as they may get access to more musical forms to express their emotions, affections, and identities. There are implications also for the global music and tourist industries, as well as for transnational organizations, such as UNESCO with its World Heritage Lists. These global structures seem to have much to gain in terms of control over resources by promoting music as heritage. When local fiddle musics, formerly understood as 'traditional', today are transformed to 'heritage music', or even to 'World Heritage', what does this mean in terms of control over musical behaviour, over the understanding of what the music is, represents, and comes from, or over the mindscapes and domains of these musics? Embraced by such structures, what risk is there of suffocating?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mindscape is a concept, related to Mikhail Bakhtin's 'chronotope'. As Bakhtin points out, it is the chronotope that defines the genre; that is, it is by being placed in a certain chronotope, or a certain mindscape, that things like fiddles and fiddle music become meaningful. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Owe Ronström, 'Memories, Tradition, Heritage', in *Memories and Visions*, Studies in Folk Culture 4, ed. by Owe Ronström and Ulf Palmenfelt (Tartu: Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore & Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu. 2005), p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Burke, *Folklig kultur i Europa 1500–1800* (Stockholm: Författarförlaget, 1983), pp. 38–44, 302–312; first published as Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Burke, pp. 302–12.

<sup>5</sup> In English, fiddle may be used as a generic colloquial term for any bowed instrument, or more specifically for popular versions of the violin, such as 'the folk fiddle' or 'the jazz fiddle'. The etymology of 'fiddle' is disputed. It may derive from Romance languages or it may be Germanic: 'The Teutonic word bears a singular resemblance in sound to its medieval Latin synonym *vitula*, *vidula*, whence Old French *viole*, Pr. *viula*, and (by adoption from these [languages]) Italian, Spanish, Portuguese *viola*: see *viol*. The supposition that the early Romance *vidula*

was adopted independently in more than one Teutonic language would account adequately for all the Teutonic forms; on the other hand, *fiPulôn* may be an Old Teutonic word of native etymology, though no satisfactory Teutonic derivation has been found.' ('Fiddle', *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, [www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=fiddle](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=fiddle) [accessed 1 May 2010].

<sup>7</sup> Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Then maybe you look under the conductor. If you look for a solo concert by, say, Isaac Stern or Yehudi Menuhin, you might find them filed under the artist's name, but this is the exception.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music* (New York: Norton, 1960; revd edn, New York: Norton; London: J. M. Dent, 1973), which is a major reader in musicology, starts with 'The Ancient World' and then takes us through time slots such as Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Twentieth century music.

<sup>10</sup> On a secondary level you will also find records filed under styles, sometimes associated with specific times or places, such as French swing, New Orleans jazz, Chicago blues, or the big band era of the 1940s.

<sup>11</sup> In the common folk music reader, say the much read Bruno Nettl, *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), you will find continents, nations and regions, as in the record shop, which mirrors the widespread ideology of diffusionism of the so called historic-geographical school of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But you may also find, alongside the standard geographical headings, folk music organized according to 'functions'. The Swedish musicologist Jan Ling discusses music for work, dance, song, pleasure and leisure, see Jan Ling *Europas musikhistoria: Folkmusiken* (Stockholm: Akademiförlaget, 1989); trans. Linda and Robert Schenck, *A History of European Folk Music* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997). Here the 'where' is substituted for 'why', which mirrors the idea that folk music is not art music per se, but functional music, a mark of the profound influence of structural-functional ideologies in the domains of folk music and popular music around the mid twentieth century.

<sup>12</sup> Burke, pp. 17–37; Owe Ronström, 'Nationell Musik? Bondemusik? Om folkmusikbegreppet', in *Gimaint u bänskt. Folkmusikens historia på Gotland*, ed. by Maria Herlin Karnell and Kerstin Kyhlberg (Gotland: Gotlands Fornsal, 1990), pp 9–20. As a consequence of being consciously set up as the antithesis of classical music – as ancient, anonymous, collective, and non-changing – folk music incorporated important traits from the world of classical music. Included among those traits are the formats of chamber music, choir singing (i.e. Estonian, Russian, and Bulgarian folk choirs) and symphonic orchestras (i.e. the balalajka or tamburica orchestras, the Bulgarian folk orchestras, or the Swedish *spelmanslag*). Later, folk music was cast as an antithesis to the urban popular musics of the growing working class, and thereby came to incorporate traits from the popular music domain, such as small bands, a stress on virtuosity, artists, and the new and innovative.

<sup>13</sup> The paradox is elegantly expressed by the European Union slogan 'unity in diversity', adopted 4 May 2000, see [www.ena.lu/proclamation-slogan-unity-diversity-brussels-2000-020705216.html](http://www.ena.lu/proclamation-slogan-unity-diversity-brussels-2000-020705216.html) .

<sup>14</sup> Burt Feintuch, 'Revivals on the Edge: Northumberland and Cape Breton – A Key Note.' *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 38 (2006), 1–17.

- <sup>15</sup> This is a paraphrase of the core idea of The Society for Creative Anachronism, see [www.sca.org/officers/chatelain/sca-intro.html](http://www.sca.org/officers/chatelain/sca-intro.html) [accessed 1 May 2010].
- <sup>16</sup> Feintuch, p. 4.
- <sup>17</sup> Meghan C. Forsyth, 'Reinventing "Springs": Constructing Identity in the Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles', *Shima*, 1, no 2 (2007), 168–79 (p. 170).
- <sup>18</sup> Malcolm Chapman, 'Thoughts on Celtic Music', in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. by Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994), pp. 29–45 (pp. 30–31).
- <sup>19</sup> Jan Ling and Märta Ramsten, 'Tradition och förnyelse i svensk spelmanstradition: Leksandsspelet förr och nu. I', in *Musikochkultur*. ed. by Owe Ronström (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1990), pp. 211–46.
- <sup>20</sup> Ling and Ramsten, p. 212.
- <sup>21</sup> Ling and Ramsten, p. 232.
- <sup>22</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Contemporary Religion* (New York: New American Library, 1964).
- <sup>23</sup> 'Geosophy' is a notion from John Kirtland Wright that stands for metaphysically inspired world views, different from the physical geography. See John Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 17.
- <sup>24</sup> Feintuch, p. 4. This idea has never been very strong in the Americas, with some possible exceptions, such as parts of South America, the Appalachian Mountains, and eastern Canada.
- <sup>25</sup> These are analytical positions, not roles. One and the same individual can take all three positions, depending on the context of analysis.
- <sup>26</sup> Krister Malm and Roger Wallis, *Media Policy and Music Activity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 24.
- <sup>27</sup> Michael H. Goldhaber, 'The Attention Economy and the Net', *First Monday*, 2, no. 4 (7 April 1997), [firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/519/440](http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/519/440) [accessed 11 December 2009]; Michael H. Goldhaber, 'What's the Right Economics for Cyberspace?' *First Monday*, 2, no. 7 (7 July 1997), [firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/537/458](http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/537/458) [accessed 11 December 2009].
- <sup>28</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, lecture in Visby, Högskolan på Gotland, 16 March 1999.
- <sup>29</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, 'Från pilgrim till turist', *Moderna tider*, 47, no. 5 (1994), 20–34.
- <sup>30</sup> Dan Lundberg, Krister Malm, and Owe Ronström, *Musik, medier, mångkultur. Förändringar i svenska musiklandskap* (Gidlunds: Hedemora, 2000).
- <sup>31</sup> See [sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulturnatten](http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulturnatten) [accessed 1 May 2010]; [www.laserfx.com/Backstage.LaserFX.com/WaterFestival-SR/SWFintro.html](http://www.laserfx.com/Backstage.LaserFX.com/WaterFestival-SR/SWFintro.html) [accessed 1 May 2010]; [www.medeltidsveckan.se/](http://www.medeltidsveckan.se/) [accessed 1 May 2010].
- <sup>32</sup> See [sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falun\\_Folkmusik\\_Festival](http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falun_Folkmusik_Festival) [accessed 1 May 2010]; [www.dalarna.se/kulturidalarna/eng/fff.html](http://www.dalarna.se/kulturidalarna/eng/fff.html) [accessed 1 May 2010].
- <sup>33</sup> This is based on my experiences from Falun Folk Music Festival during the past fourteen years. I served as musician, producer, educator, ethnomusicologist, and member of the artistic committee.
- <sup>34</sup> Bauman, 'Från pilgrim till turist', p.20.
- <sup>35</sup> Boris Uspenskij, open lecture at Gotland University, May 1999.
- <sup>36</sup> Goldhaber, 'The Attention Economy and the Net'.
- <sup>37</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p 3.
- <sup>38</sup> Giddens, p. 21.
- <sup>39</sup> Giddens, p. 177.



<sup>40</sup> These include, for example, the telephone network, the electricity grid, the system of pipelines for the world's oil supply, the internet, cable television, satellite transmissions and so on.

<sup>41</sup> Johannes Brusila, *'Local Music, Not From Here' : The Discourse of World Music Examined Through Three Zimbabwean Case Studies: The Bhundu Boys, Virginia Mukwesha and Sanduza*. (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Feintuch, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> I met the band in Bremerförde, while touring with Gunnfjauns Kapell in north Germany in 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Barbro Klein and Mats Widbom, eds, *Swedish Folk Art: All Tradition is Change* (New York: H. N. Abrams in association with Kulturhuset, Stockholm, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> For an expanded discussion see Owe Ronström, *Kulturarvspolitik. Visby: Från sliten småstad till medeltidsiko* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> In Europe 'heritage' is a rather new word, that has been incorporated in an antiquarian discourse, first for 'old valuable buildings, monuments and sites', and later for almost anything worth preserving. Its usage differs considerably from North America. In the USA, as Slobin points out, students studying their home language at college may now be called 'heritage speakers'. This phrase would be difficult to understand if translated to European languages. Conversely, a phrase like 'I have Swedish heritage,' may be meaningful in North America, but will not be understood in a Western European context. See Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2000), p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p. 149.

<sup>48</sup> They also share a set of double references; first to something in the past that is re-enacted in the present; then to artefacts as well as behaviour; and lastly to the process of handing over things from one generation to another, as well as to the objects that are handed over.

<sup>49</sup> See Feintuch for an interesting example of tradition and the production of locality.

<sup>50</sup> Giddens, pp. 79–106.

<sup>51</sup> Lotten Gustafsson, *Den förtrollade zonen: Lekar med tid, rum och identitet under Medeltidsveckan på Gotland* (Nora: Nya Doxa, 2002), p. 181.

<sup>52</sup> Anne Eriksen, 'Den nasjonale kulturarven – en del av det modern', *Kulturella perspektiv*. 1 (1993), 16–25.

<sup>53</sup> Compare Forsyth, p. 175.

<sup>54</sup> Forsyth, pp. 174–75.

<sup>55</sup> Mark Slobin, 'Klezmer Music: An American Ethnic Genre', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 16 (1984), 34–41.

<sup>56</sup> Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move*.

<sup>57</sup> Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move*, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> See for example the impressive list of folk fiddlers from Cape Breton listed in [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music\\_of\\_Nova\\_Scotia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Nova_Scotia) [accessed 1 May 2010] and [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape\\_Breton\\_fiddling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Breton_fiddling) [accessed 1 May 2010]. A number of these, as for example Natalie MacMaster, are well-known in the folk festival circuits of Western Europe and North America.

<sup>59</sup> See Burt Feintuch, 'The Conditions for Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Social and Economic Setting of a Regional Landscape', *Ethnomusicology*, 48, no. 1 (2004), 75–104.

<sup>60</sup> One example is how some forms of Swedish folk music have recently been embraced by the Swedish Democrats, a new right-wing nationalist party, to the dismay of many young folk musicians.

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# Crossing Over

## fiddle and dance studies from around the north atlantic 3

*edited by Ian Russell and Anna Kearney Guigné*

This volume, the third in the series, is the result of the 2008 North Atlantic Fiddle Convention, held in St. John's, Newfoundland, its theme being 'Crossing Over'. Of course, there have been many 'crossings' made from the Old World to the New, but there is also the converse. Other 'crossings' considered here include those between communities and cultures, across generations, between tradition and modernity, between innovation and revival, between music and dance, and between artistic performance and academia. The study of the role of the fiddler and associated dance traditions feature, as do old and new media, performance milieu and competition networks.

The 21 selected essays cover a range of themes, from cultural politics to the aesthetics of fiddle music and dance, from the performer's creativity to the contesting forces of continuity and change. Rhythm and local accent are acknowledged as the distinguishing features of different fiddle styles.

The North Atlantic, in providing a unifying frame for these studies, is not conceived in terms of boundaries that separate and divide peoples, but rather as corridors through which cultures have flowed and continue to flow in a process of exchange and communication.

This collection of papers, both fascinating and timely, brings new insights into the field of international folk music and ethnomusicological studies, and represents the diversity of current research. It deserves to be read widely by scholars and enthusiasts alike.



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