

Routes and Roots

Ian Russell and Chris Goertzen

Excerpted from:

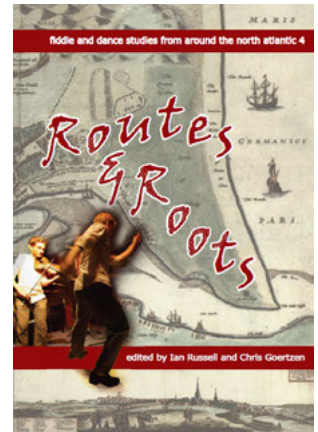
Routes and roots

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 4

Edited by Ian Russell and Chris Goertzen

First published in 2012 by The Elphinstone
Institute, University of Aberdeen, MacRobert
Building, King's College, Aberdeen, AB24 5UA

ISBN 0-9545682-7-3



About the authors:

Ian Russell is Director of the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen. His research is focused on the traditional culture of North-East Scotland, including singing traditions, instrumental traditions, and local craft skills. He has also conducted extensive fieldwork in the English Pennines, especially into Christmascarolling. He was the convenor of NAFCo in 2001, 2006, and 2010.

Chris Goertzen, who teaches at the University of Southern Mississippi, is the author of *Fiddling for Norway: Revival and Identity* (1997), *Southern Fiddlers and Fiddle Contests* (2008), and *Made in Mexico: Tradition, Tourism, and Political Ferment in Oaxaca* (2010), and co-author of *Alice Person: Good Medicine and Good Music* (2009). He is now studying the history of American fiddle styles.

Copyright © 2012 the Elphinstone Institute and the contributors

While copyright in the volume as a whole is vested in the Elphinstone Institute, copyright in individual contributions remains with the contributors. The moral rights of the contributors to be identified as the authors of their work have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



1

Routes and roots

IAN RUSSELL and CHRIS GOERTZEN

This volume, the fourth in our series of selected papers that have resulted from the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention, represents the pick of the crop from the Aberdeen meeting, 14–18 July 2010, on the theme of ‘Routes and Routes’. This well-trodden postmodern theme was chosen to encourage presenters to focus on the ways in which music and dance items or repertoires with local roots have been transformed, through passage along transnational routes and through time, in countries and communities that border or access the North Atlantic. Contributors explored the interrelatedness of fiddle and dance traditions and how they are or have been changed by processes of globalisation as well as complementary processes of self-conscious localization. Some of the topics also addressed in this volume include: historical influences and voices of change; the importance of place and how this relates to identity; the nature of performance and the role of the individual; innovation and virtuosity; socialisation and competition; the interplay of dance and music; and the natures of performance styles and of transmission.

The title of this collection deliberately inverts the customary order of the two thematic terms to suggest a different relative weighting, informed by the writing of James Clifford.¹ As a conceptual starting point, ‘roots’ may be interpreted as dwelling, belonging, and attachment to place, suggesting fixity, whereas ‘routes’ encompasses travel, migration, and displacement, implying movement. These terms are not, however, dichotomous, but rather denote emphases within the roiling spectrum of human experience. Clifford argues: ‘Stasis and purity are asserted – creatively and violently against historical forces of movement and contamination.’² Within the several subjects of our volume such ideas resonate, whether it be in the Irishness of session music in St. John’s, the Englishness of contra dancing in New England, or the Scottishness of dance music in Cape Breton. Where does purity end and hybridisation start? When can revivalism be said to have succeeded? When and how does a *new* authenticity coalesce?

Clifford also observes that, traditionally, ‘Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes.’³ He then proceeds to conjecture if matters were ever really that simple, which certainly reflects our growing understanding of the interactions of fiddle and dance traditions, whether we approach the issues as folklorists, ethnomusicologists, or ethnochoreologists. Are our collective life experiences or cultural traditions formed

from the start by routes of encounter and migration, and moulded by movements, ever fluid and dynamic? Are our roots, in fact, better understood as routes? The point is that musical identity, manifested in repertoire, style, performance, context, meaning, and function, is as much a product of cultural encounters and experiences outside of group or community life as it reflects 'trueness' to tradition and individual creativity within it. If we take this proposition further, it is not difficult to see that the musical identities of our antecedents in a tradition – the so-called 'tradition bearers' – were shaped by similar dynamics according to the relative ascendancy of insider/outsider variables, and that conceptualising a given tradition must incorporate a careful appraisal of such forces.

The composite activity of collectors, teachers, scholars, composers, and cultural revivalists of folk and traditional music at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century was a massive quest to reconnect with the roots of their nation's musical 'soul' by documenting and cultivating repertoires that otherwise might have been lost. But roots quickly became routes – the music was not just memorialized, but also appropriated, mediated, and reinterpreted. It was taken from country to town, from a vernacular context to the world of polite society, from the self-taught to the educated, from oral transmission to musical score, from periphery to centre. But we also see a cyclical movement in that the collected music might be repatriated to and reconnected with the communities from which it had been 'taken', through, for example, formal education. In this volume, Lisa Morrissey discusses how Patrick Weston Joyce gathered and published folk songs and tunes from Limerick and contiguous counties in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Ireland. In a nicely complementary essay, Colette Moloney examines how a collector in much the same territory but belonging to the next generation, Frank Roche, assembled and published tunes, and also helped repatriate them through his energetic and influential teaching. At about this same time, English fiddler John Robbins was seeking out melodies associated with the venerable morris dance in connection with a revival and rather free re-invention of that tradition by the Shakespearean Bidford Morris Dancers, promoted by romantic revivalist, Ernest Richard D'Arcy Ferris. Elaine Bradtke relates that history with reference to the field recordings of James Madison Carpenter, and studies the new set of tunes through comparison with alternative versions.

In the later twentieth and early twenty-first century, much of the recognition previously granted to the collectors of folk music has shifted to the traditional musicians themselves through awards and titles, such as the National Endowment for the Arts 'National Heritage Fellowships' in the USA⁴ or the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity as promoted by UNESCO.⁵ This healthy shift has been facilitated by the availability of recordings and other media, plus the influence of festivals of traditional music. The role of individual tradition bearers has been brought to the fore; a number of studies have sought to document their identities not simply as artists but also as influential members of their communities who integrate the sounds and social functions of their music into community life.

Indeed, Gregory Hansen's discussion of Florida fiddler Richard Seaman focuses not on Seaman as a musician, but rather on how the pranks and tall tales, that he links with tunes, express communicative norms and wider patterns of local culture.

In our next section, writers contribute to our knowledge of performance style, virtuosity, and artistry. In the early 1900s, when Béla Bartók⁶ and Percy Grainger,⁷ struggled with the technology of the Edison Phonograph, as James Madison Carpenter did later with the Dictaphone,⁸ to record and transcribe traditional music, they cannot have imagined the sophisticated audio and music writing computer software that allows contemporary ethnomusicologists to represent, analyse, and detail individual fiddle performance with such elegance. Not only can such tools allow for an insight into the intricacies of a soloist's virtuosity and the motifs and markers that make up a style, but they enable, for example, a clearer understanding of the role of double stopping styles and part playing in ensembles. Discussions of fiddling from three very different environments and representing remarkably different playing techniques appear here. Gaila Kirdienė meticulously documents fiddlers' usage of several drone techniques in various regions of Lithuania through history. In recent times, younger fiddlers have revived these techniques in the service of novelty, virtuosity, and overall excitement. Chris Goertzen analyses techniques of melodic variation characteristic of the best modern Texas contest fiddling. He finds that delicately-nuanced choices made within that elaborate practice reveal what fiddlers consider to be the most important features of given seminal melodies. Emma Nixon parsed recordings of Scottish fiddle workshops in order to discover how ornaments and bowing patterns were explained, demonstrated, or taught through various combinations of pedagogical techniques. Each of these studies might have been possible in earlier decades, but advances in technology in terms of ease of collecting and fidelity of the recordings make doing such work much more efficient and thus much more likely to take place.

As with our fiddle traditions, travel along geographic and conceptual routes has shaped the associated dance traditions, whether they concern solo or couple dancing. Practices have moved both westwards and eastwards across the North Atlantic, and, more generally, away from and back towards cultural gravitational centres. For example, Lesley Ham finds that New England fiddling could be better understood through the study of contra dances and associated tunes held at the Grange hall in Greenfield, Massachusetts. Just as the dancing has become trickier and faster in revival, the body of tunes, already eclectic in source, has grown through the addition of new compositions. Both dance and music are now being disseminated from this influential centre, gradually creating a healthy new tradition. Mats Melin demonstrates that Cape Breton step dance, while sharing a common ancestry with Scottish Highland dance, not only became distinct from it but maintained a percussive style of performance that has since been reintroduced into Scottish solo dance tradition. And Catherine Foley discusses the dynamics of the MA in Irish Traditional Dance Performance programme at the University of Limerick, a course of study she founded and leads. In that programme, students learn more about their

very modern identities as dancers by studying Irish step dance from all angles – in short, how this local-became-global practice may be simultaneously maintained and challenged in an atmosphere of profound respect for the tradition.

The final section in this anthology focuses on transmission and performance today. Playing tunes in these early years of the twenty-first century can simultaneously assert new and older aspects of identity, pass by or return to traditional functions, and sound both familiar and surprising. Samantha Breslin sifted the geographic associations of fiddle tunes played in Newfoundland, finding that repertoires commonly played in sessions included both tunes thought of as Newfoundland melodies (though it was understood that many of these hailed from Ireland) and quite a few tunes more recently imported from Ireland and referred to as Irish. The analysis gives an insight into how a sense of place and identity can influence and affect local fiddle styles over a comparatively short period of time. Pat Ballantyne found that current Scottish piping, though consisting mostly of tunes with an explicit historical association with dance genres, has adopted slower tempi due to being generously packed with ornaments to accommodate the aesthetics of competition. Scottish step dance has slowed, too, but still requires a steady pulse, often hard to elicit from ornate modern piping – the music's routes have parted it from its roots. However, some piping is being readjusted to fit its historical function of dance accompaniment. Chris Stone listened to contemporary Scottish fiddler Aidan O'Rourke performing with the band Lau. In most cases, in audibly modern fiddle ensemble performances, the fiddle remains wedded to traditional style; the new sounds consist of harmonic, timbral, and rhythmic aspects of the accompaniments. But here, the fiddler takes up the challenge of musical innovation breaking out of the mould of rigid eight or sixteen bar phrases.

The last entry in this volume is a panel of four short, very different contributions concerning aspects of teaching fiddling. Claire White traces the career and legacy of fiddler and pedagogue Dr Tom Anderson, the key figure in the renaissance of Shetland fiddling. James Alexander explains the nuts of bolts of his fiddle teaching in Fochabers, Scotland, emphasizing how youngsters are inspired to take up the fiddle and to persist in this demanding pursuit. Cameron Baggins describes cultivating a far-flung fiddle environment among First Nations and Métis communities in rural Manitoba, Canada. Finally, the leader of the panel, Anne Lederman, explains how she uses rhythm as the starting point in teaching the diverse styles that make up Canadian fiddling.

Scholars, professional and amateur performers, and enthusiasts who know and love fiddling and associated dancing worry less than they used to that their cherished fiddle and dance traditions are in danger of 'dying out'. As we come to understand the past better through recent scholarship such as that contained in this volume, simplistic romanticism yields to more nuanced understanding – 'roots' have always been lively and multifarious, quite intertwined with 'routes'. We have come to realize that potentially worrisome changes that we witness often echo earlier

transformations. Indeed, there seems to be no end to the ways routes and roots can mesh in modern incarnations of traditional fiddling and dancing.

Notes

¹ James Clifford, *Routes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

² Clifford, p. 7.

³ Clifford, p. 3.

⁴ See <http://www.folkways.si.edu/explore_folkways/heritage.aspx> [accessed 10 March 2012].

⁵ See <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00103>> [accessed 10 March 2012].

⁶ See, for example, Sylvia Parker, 'Béla Bartók's Arab Music Research and Composition', *Studia Musicologica*, 49, nos 3–4 (2008), 407–58.

⁷ Michael Yates, 'Percy Grainger and the Impact of the Phonograph', *Folk Music Journal*, 4 (1982), 265–75.

⁸ Julia C. Bishop, 'The Tunes of the English and Scottish Ballads in the James Madison Carpenter Collection', *Folk Music Journal*, 7 (1998), 450–70.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the authors for their contributions; the participants in the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention 2010 conference for providing a forum for the ideas developed in the book; the peer reviewers for their thoughtful comments; Thomas A. McKean for typesetting and cover design; Carley Williams for drawing up the bibliography; David Atkinson for compiling the index; and, finally, the Elphinstone Institute and the University of Aberdeen for giving the volume an imprint.