

Passing the bow: a Canada-Scotland panel on personal experiences of teaching and learning traditional fiddling

Anne Lederman (Convenor), Claire White, James Alexander and Cameron Baggins

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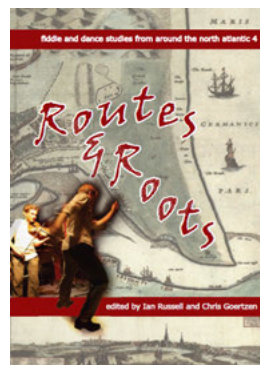
Routes and Roots

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 4

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About the authors:

Anne Lederman is a performer, composer, fiddle teacher and researcher, and formerly Associate Professor of Music at York University in Toronto. She is especially known for her work with Aboriginal fiddle traditions in Manitoba. Currently she runs a teaching programme for Canadian fiddle styles at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto.

Claire White, a Shetlander, learned fiddle with Dr Tom Anderson and played as a member of Shetland's Young Heritage in Europe, New Zealand, the USA, and Canada. She now performs in music duo Blyde Lasses and ceilidh bands Danse McCabre and Jing Bang. An experienced tutor, she has taught in the UK and USA. By day, she works for BBC Scotland.

James Alexander is a leading exponent and teacher of Scots Fiddle. He adjudicates at most major Scots Music Festivals and is a presenter of master classes and workshops. James leads the Fochabers Fiddlers, a group of around 35 young fiddlers with an energetic approach to Scottish music. He is an examiner for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Cameron Baggins teaches violin/fiddle for the Manitoba Conservatory of Music and Arts, and since 1998, has headed a fiddle programme for the Frontier School Division in Manitoba. The Frontier Fiddle programme teaches between 1500 and 2000 children throughout the province each year, and employs ten full-time teachers. It is the only programme of its kind in Canada.

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ANNE LEDERMAN (CONVENOR), CLAIRE WHITE,
JAMES ALEXANDER, CAMERON BAGGINS

The Panel

Shetlander Claire White learned the fiddle with Dr Tom Anderson from the age of seven and played as a member of Shetland's Young Heritage in Europe, New Zealand, the USA, and Canada. She is now based in Aberdeen and plays in Shetland music duo Blyde Lasses and ceilidh bands Danse McCabre and Jing Bang. An experienced tutor, she has taught at summer schools in the UK and USA. By day, she is employed by BBC Scotland.

James Alexander lives in Spey Bay in Moray and is widely acknowledged as a leading exponent and teacher of Scots Fiddle. He adjudicates at most major Scots Music competitions, including the National Mod and the prestigious Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship at Blair Castle. In the early 1980s James formed the Fochabers Fiddlers, a group of approximately thirty-five young fiddlers with an energetic approach to Scottish and Celtic music, who have done nine North American and four European tours. He was syllabus coordinator and adviser to the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama's Scots Music graded exam project, and currently serves as an examiner both for graded exams and BA degree exams. In recent years, he has been involved with the University of Aberdeen's Elphinstone Institute and was part of the planning team for the first NAFCO in 2001. James also records as a soloist for two of Scotland's main record companies and is in demand as a session musician and producer.

As a classical violin teacher, Cameron Baggins first became inspired to teach and organize young fiddlers after hearing some of them try out their competition tunes for him during their lessons in Brandon, Manitoba. This led to the Fantasy Fiddlers group in Brandon, and later the Forty Fiddling Fanatics in Winnipeg. When it became clear there were no significant music education opportunities for

children in northern Manitoba, he launched two pilot projects through the Frontier School Division in 1998. These fiddling classes were instantly popular and led to rapid expansion. At the time of writing, Cameron co-ordinates the Frontier Fiddling Program throughout the province in 35 schools, employing approximately 10 teachers.

Canadian fiddler, composer, teacher and researcher, Anne Lederman is based in Toronto, Canada. Currently she performs solo, with the trio Eh?!, with Njacko Backo and Kalimba Kalimba, and with Muddy York, and is a former member of the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band among others. She is known especially for her research into Aboriginal fiddle traditions in Canada and has written a two-person play about her work, *Spirit of the Narrows*.¹ Anne teaches traditional fiddling in Toronto at the World Music Centre of the Royal Conservatory of Music, and at workshops, camps and festivals throughout Canada and internationally. Anne has developed her own progressive teaching method, *Tamarack'er Down: A Guide to Celtic-Canadian Fiddling Through Rhythm*,² based on developing a solid technique for Canadian folk fiddling from beginning to advanced levels.

Introduction

In most areas of Europe and North America, folk fiddle pedagogy is a product of the last forty years, a child of the various revival movements that have occurred in that time. Within these few short years, hundreds of camps, classes, lessons, and workshops devoted to folk fiddling for adults and young people have developed in virtually every district of North America, Great Britain, and Ireland, as well as many other countries around the world. Given that most of the musical traditions involved have little or no history of formal teaching, the methods used in these new situations are various and sometimes contradictory. Many teachers are working largely in isolation from others, inventing their own systems without reference to other models. Moreover, because of the short-term nature of much of the teaching (camps and workshops), there is often no assessment of long-term results.

NAFCo 2010 modestly instigated what is likely to become an ongoing discourse at the conference – a panel presentation and dialogue on 'Passing the Bow', the dissemination of folk fiddle traditions in the twenty-first century. It is to be hoped that through presentations and discussions of this type, fiddle teachers from many countries will benefit from an exchange of information on many subjects: the history and development of various programmes, their curricula, aims, methods, and results.

We began by bringing together four player/teachers from both sides of the Atlantic to talk about their work, two from Scotland and two from Canada. While the current offerings are largely 'reports from the field', as is appropriate at this early stage, many questions are raised. For example, how do we best give students both a good musical and technical foundation on their instruments, as well as a feel for the rhythmic and aural nature of the tradition(s) involved? Is the establishment of standardized curricula, and examinations based on those curricula (as is being

instituted in various parts of Scotland), a useful approach in all traditions? Through these fiddle-based programmes, are students learning what they need in order to go on to post-secondary programmes in music, if that is their chosen career path? What musical and psychological effects are these teaching programmes having on the students? What effects are they having on the traditions themselves? How do we measure success? Hopefully, the future will yield insights into these and many more questions yet to be asked.

The Shetland Fiddle Renaissance: The Experience of One Pupil of the Late Dr Tom Anderson

Claire White

I was very fortunate to be a pupil of the late Dr Tom Anderson from 1985 until his death in 1991, and a member of his showcase group, 'Shetland's Young Heritage', from 1988 until 2006. I intend to tell you about the life and work of my fiddle teacher and his contribution to the thriving contemporary Shetland fiddle scene.

Dr Tom Anderson, or 'Tammy', as he was better known, was born in 1910 into a musical family in the north of Shetland in a remote yet beautiful place called Eshaness. He moved to Lerwick (current population approximately 22,000), in the 1930s to work as an insurance salesman before serving in the RAF in India during World War II. Whilst in India, he was inspired by the importance that traditional music had in the lives of ordinary people and resolved that on his return to Shetland he would make it his mission to collect and record traditional fiddle music. Moreover, he came under the influence of the English folk music collector, Patrick Shuldham-Shaw.³ Tom Anderson's job as an insurance salesman and his passion for sound recording converged after the war, allowing him to travel throughout rural Shetland gathering tunes from elderly and isolated fiddlers on an early reel-to-reel Baird recording device. Over the course of his lifetime, he gathered between 500 and 600 seven-inch reels of material from crofters and fishermen throughout the islands.⁴

In 1960, Tom Anderson was asked to assemble a group of fiddlers to perform at a Shetland 'Hamefarin' ('Homecoming') event. He brought together forty fiddlers, picked out a common repertoire, and the exciting new sound of massed fiddles in Shetland was born. Amongst the ranks was fourteen-year-old Aly Bain, who was younger than most of his fellow members. Whilst the 1950s and 1960s were dark days for Shetland fiddle playing, as islanders hung up their instruments and turned on their radios and jukeboxes, Aly Bain bucked the trend. From the age of twelve up until eighteen years he studied with Tom Anderson, whom he credits with setting him off in the right musical direction.⁵

What is Dr Anderson's legacy? Moving on from his most famous student, we come to his considerable teaching work in Shetland schools and beyond, and his contribution to the Shetland fiddle renaissance which is still in evidence today. In the early 1970s, he campaigned to have traditional Shetland fiddle music taught in schools. He boldly approached a sympathetic Director of Education, John H. Spence,

demanding that his wish be granted and it was. Tom Anderson was the obvious choice as the first fiddle tutor. So, after retiring from his employment in insurance, he travelled across Shetland, including the outer isles of Yell and Unst, teaching tunes which he had recorded and, by this time, transcribed.

Dr Anderson's approach to getting his message across was multi-dimensional. For example, he formed a group of young fiddlers to play at a local beauty pageant in 1981, called 'Tammy's Peerie Angels' (because they were all girls, not because they were necessarily angelic!). In 1983 this evolved into a more formal ambassadorial group called 'Shetland's Young Heritage' which performed domestically and internationally at numerous concerts and events under his strict leadership.

In 1981, Tom Anderson also helped establish the first Shetland Folk Festival, a now world-famous event. One year later, he helped create the Young Fiddler of the Year competition, which became an eagerly anticipated date for the growing number of under-sixteen-year-old players who were now learning with Tom. Moreover, very quickly, he encouraged his own pupils to become teachers themselves. I vividly remember him saying, 'It's not your tradition to hold onto, you must pass it on'. I became a teacher at the age of fourteen, working every Saturday at the local community centre and in my home after school to share tunes as they had been passed down to me.

From 1978 onwards, Tom Anderson was also teaching summer schools at Stirling University, from which he was awarded an honorary PhD in 1981 to supplement the MBE (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) for services to music, which he had been given a few years earlier (1977).⁶ The Stirling summer schools, which attracted international students, were great fun for him, and the source of inspiration for new tunes, such as 'The Lazy Deuk' and 'The Erratic Washing Machine'. This annual gathering of top fiddle tutors from all over Scotland, including Aonghas Grant, Ian Powrie, and Alastair Hardie, became a platform for the developing profile of Tom Anderson's work. I remember vividly the excitement of participating in my first summer school in the tenth anniversary year, aged ten, being enthralled by performing in the beautiful Airthrey Castle and listening to music from Jean Redpath and others echoing around the wooden rooms.

Tom's teaching method was simple and engaging. The classroom full of eager students arranged themselves in rows behind Tom's piano and listened as he performed the tunes on violin at full speed. They then pieced together the tunes gradually from manuscript on their fiddles, until Tom was able to accompany them with rousing piano chords. Tom also used this method in one-to-one lessons throughout the year, with the added ingredient of confronting and repeating tricky phrases and techniques. Each pupil was expected to practise regularly before the following week's 20–30 minute lesson and have their tune(s) almost up to performance speed.⁷

By this time Tom Anderson's reputation was well established nationwide, so much so that BBC Scotland dedicated thirty minutes of prime-time television to a documentary celebrating his life's work on the occasion of his eightieth birthday

in 1990. Introduced by well-known Scottish journalist, Magnus Magnusson, and featuring contributions from many of Tom's closest musical friends, it was, sadly, to be his swansong and, in 1991, he died from ill-health.

But the end of Tom Anderson's life did not mark an end to his life's work. Shetland's Young Heritage continued where he left off, performing and promoting traditional music world-wide. There was a visit to the Middle East Technical University in Turkey in 1992, followed by a five-week 'Dream Tour' of the USA in 1993, which Tom Anderson had always hoped the group would one day undertake. A first album, *Visions*, was recorded to coincide with the trip, and the group gradually began to develop its sound to give it a more contemporary feel whilst staying true to its traditional roots. Further trips to Indonesia, Canada, Norway, and New Zealand followed, plus another album, *Bridging the Gap*, in 1997.⁸

Meanwhile, the Shetland fiddle scene as a whole was gaining momentum. Shetland Islands Council continued and extended fiddle tuition in schools as established by Tom. Currently there are more traditional fiddle teachers than classical violin teachers in Shetland schools. The energy and commitment which these staff members bring to their teaching has led to a proliferation of extra-curricular fiddle groups and bands which perform both domestically and internationally, and are breeding grounds for world-class talent. Bands such as Fiddler's Bid, featuring Chris Stout, and Filksa, featuring Jenna Reid, grew up in the 1990s, cutting loose from traditional music confines and bringing the tradition which Tom Anderson had revitalised to new audiences. Another of his best-known pupils was also establishing a musical career for herself throughout the 1990s; Catriona Macdonald, a founding member of Shetland's Young Heritage, has been a constant exponent of Tom Anderson's work and, amongst her many musical talents, skilfully re-interprets his archive recordings for new listeners.⁹ Back home in Shetland these musical role models, to name but a few, are inspiring a whole new generation of fiddlers to greater technical standards, standards which I am sure Tom Anderson himself could never have anticipated.

This story closes at a very healthy point in Shetland's musical trajectory. The music industry, and especially fiddle music, makes a sizeable contribution to the Shetland economy. Countless pupils are taught traditional fiddle music in Shetland schools and the standard of musicianship at the annual Young Fiddler of the Year competition has, arguably, never been higher. Much of the credit for that success is owed to Dr Anderson.

Personally, I feel that the key to Tom Anderson's success lies in his comprehensive approach to his life's mission. The continuity of his commitment to fiddle playing throughout his lifetime was crucial, and the energy (sometimes impatience) with which he single-mindedly pursued his visionary goal is awe-inspiring. His instinct to make his message heard through recording, performing, publishing, teaching, and broadcasting simultaneously, all with characteristic wit, charm, and occasional ferocity, won the day.

Original copies of Tom Anderson's extensive musical archive are now stored in a bank vault but the recordings can be heard at the Shetland Archives.¹⁰ Fragile tapes that once rattled along bumpy rural roads in the back of his car now travel the world at the speed of light as digital sound files, keeping this age-old culture alive and kicking. I think he would be very proud.

It's Cool to Play Fiddle

James Alexander

I teach violin in Fochabers, Scotland. I generally start pupils at around eight years of age after a musical aptitude test. Lessons are partly delivered through the school group teaching system (up to four in a group) or one-on-one for those pupils who are becoming more advanced and possibly looking at a career in music. I teach pupils to read notation mainly, but also encourage learning and playing by ear, particularly where I detect ability in this area. In the early stages of tuition I establish a general grounding in technique so that pupils have the option and ability to tackle different styles of music. I lean heavily on Paul Rolland's work,¹¹ and introduce technical practice according to the pieces being played and the skills required therein.

For those pupils who want to specialise in traditional fiddle, I introduce them to ornamentation and specific bowing styles used within the idiom. Since there are different ways of ornamenting traditional tunes, depending somewhat on regional or personal variations,¹² I encourage students to listen to other exponents and experiment in that area. Thereafter, I advise students on how to select repertoire, from building sets of tunes for recitals or competitions to dance sets suitable for ceilidhs. I encourage students to study the traditional music of the eighteenth century up until present day in the hope that they will appreciate the richness of repertoire spanning that period.

I am often asked why a village like Fochabers and its small satellite villages have a constant flow of budding young fiddlers and traditional musicians. Fochabers has approximately 1500 residents and the nearby rural area and small villages amount to a further 800 people or so. About 15% of the population is between 9 and 18 years old, somewhat fewer than 400 young people. Of that group, perhaps 25% (a hundred or so) play fiddle.

This trend was set in the early 1980s with the creation of a group known as the Fochabers Fiddlers. This group became so successful that now it is hard to satisfy the demand for fiddle tuition. My current practice consists of using experienced pupils to teach younger players. Not only does this ensure that additional tuition is provided but it reminds and reinforces these young teachers of the benefits of good technique, as well as allowing me some control and oversight of the teaching quality. However, the question remains: why is there such demand, given that, in the 1980s, we had great difficulty inspiring young fiddlers to continue playing, especially during the transition from primary to secondary school education (11 or 12 years and upwards). A number of things happened around that time which turned this situation around:

1. The group went on a performance trip to Shetland in 1988 where we linked up with Tom Anderson, and where students saw how 'normal' it was to play fiddle at all ages.
2. Since I had always been interested in experimenting with other musical styles, both as a player and arranger, I started introducing different chord choices, different accompaniment rhythms and styles, and different ensemble instruments, including drum kit, bass guitar, acoustic and electric guitar, and keyboard (experimenting with sounds other than piano). I found that young people were immediately interested and, indeed, enthused at being part of a musical ensemble using traditional melodies (some hundreds of years old, some new), but presenting them in a more contemporary way. This meant they were part of something they were proud to let their peers see and hear.
3. Being able to professionally record CDs and DVDs has added to the 'cool' aspect of being in a group like this, as has the use of 'on fiddle' microphones to allow the drummer to play without fear of drowning out fiddles.
4. The group has toured extensively, where the accepting, and indeed, enthusiastic reception for our music in North America and Europe has played a large part in encouraging interest.

Further evidence of the success of the group is seen at Speyfest – a celebration of Celtic music and arts held annually in Fochabers, where some of the world's finest bands perform. Last year, a survey was conducted to gather information to help develop the marketing of the festival. Festival goers were interviewed about a range of subjects and the majority said that their favourite act was the Fochabers Fiddlers. Given that a large proportion of the 6,000 people attending the festival are local, there may have been a partisan element, but it is hugely significant that 'it's cool to play fiddle' in Fochabers.

I am also told by group members that they enjoy the rapport and camaraderie which goes along with being part of the group. In conclusion, whilst there is much to recommend the traditional way of accompanying these great traditional melodies, there is always room for different interpretations. We have to keep an open mind so that these tunes will continue to be played in some form. We have to be accepting of different approaches and styles; no single method should be promoted to the exclusion of all others. Whilst it is important that historical, regional and personal styles are nurtured so that future generations can see and learn about them, it is also important that we, as teachers and performers, educate young traditional musicians as broadly as possible. Therefore, while we should teach the traditional styles and the repertoire of great Scottish composers, having acquired that knowledge, students should be encouraged to evolve and develop as musicians in their own way. Hopefully, one day, they will leave their own mark on this rich, diverse tradition.

The Frontier Fiddlers: Celebrating Achievement in a Time of Vulnerable Traditions

Cameron Baggins

Manitoba, Canada, has a fiddle tradition that traces back over 300 years through the fur trade. First Nations and Métis peoples acquired fiddles, tunes, and styles, both from the French to the east and from the Scots to the north, then blended and adapted them according to their own aesthetic.¹³ From anecdotal accounts, this fiddle tradition became vital to the social fabric, becoming the mainstay at weekly Saturday night dances, weddings, and other celebrations; the fiddler was highly respected and necessary. However, in recent generations, with the advent of radio, television, hockey, and bingo, dances have retreated in social importance and fiddle music has consequently languished. By the 1980s, only a few elders were playing 'the old tunes', and there were very few young people taking up the instrument.¹⁴ Instead, as guitars became more available, country and rock music gained popularity.

In 1995, Blaine Klippenstein, a young school principal in the tiny village of Sherridan, Manitoba, decided to learn to fiddle with his fourteen students. Fiddle practice became the first class of the day. However, it soon became clear to him that he needed some help. At the annual Festival du Voyageur in Winnipeg, he saw me performing with a group of Winnipeg students and invited me to Sherridan to work with his pupils. Over the next two weeks, they were organized into a performing group which undertook a tour of three concerts around the Pas, Manitoba. It was evident to me from this small beginning that young people were inspired to play the fiddle, and that it brought them happiness both to embrace the disciplined process of mastering an instrument and to share the music in their communities.

A few years later, I initiated fiddle programmes in two more schools in the Frontier School Division (the education authority that covers much of rural Manitoba, largely consisting of Aboriginal students). These projects met with such success that other instructors were hired and fiddle programmes began to spread throughout the Division. This has led to our current situation in which the Frontier School Division provides regular instruction in 35 communities to approximately 2000 students. In addition to mini-workshops and special events in various areas of the province, each spring up to 500 students travel by van, bus, train, or plane for a final weekend of concerts and workshops with guest fiddlers from across the country. Students have an opportunity to perform what they have learned for their peers and for the host community, and enjoy new opportunities for playing with each other and the visiting fiddlers. As a whole, the Frontier Program has led, in a dozen years or so, to a renaissance of fiddling in both old and new styles throughout Manitoba. We now have as teachers three graduates from the programme. Moreover, inspired by our success, other School Divisions and social agencies such as the Manitoba Métis Federation have initiated programmes of their own.

However, school-based programmes vary significantly from the solitary practice of the traditional fiddler in these communities in several ways:

1. Whereas fiddlers in the past learned entirely by ear, our students are taught in small groups through the use of tablature, i.e., horizontal lines representing the four strings of the fiddle with fingerings read from left to right. Bowing slurs are marked above the fingerings. This system encourages ear learning almost without the students realizing it. They have something to follow in front of them, while hearing and repeating back the phrases of the tune played by the teacher. Note reading is generally introduced at a somewhat later stage.
2. The use of tablature and playing in groups results in standardization of the tune settings, in contrast with the highly personal styles of older fiddlers in these areas.
3. The traditional repertoire of these communities is supplemented by music from a variety of styles – ‘Old time’ Canadian, French-Canadian, Cape Breton, Irish, and Bluegrass, for example.
4. Since everyone is encouraged to participate, there are a large number of girls developing a strong interest, unlike in the past when males were dominant and females were discouraged from playing.
5. Because this is a communal form of study, social connections are a part of the music right from the beginning. The opportunities for travel between communities to special events, such as workshops, fiddle camps, and performances, further enhances social networking. This is especially important to youth living in these remote, and sometimes isolated, communities.

Fiddle programmes have huge benefits for young people in these, often troubled, rural communities. Many choices present themselves to youth: drugs, alcohol, and gang activities result from and further contribute to destructive behaviours, dysfunctional families, and fractured communities. The social aspect of performing and jamming together is a hugely positive force, and the regeneration of a home-grown music tradition provides some young people with better options that boost self esteem and enhance their lives. Further, although no formal studies linking music to academic performance have been conducted in the Frontier Division, my observations are that the opportunity to study music enhances students’ school experience, and develops skills that often improve scholastic achievement. As a result, more students complete their education.

Furthermore, fiddling among the youth has brought a gift back to the communities in which they live. Although the practices of square dancing and jigging have been maintained in many communities, fewer and fewer fiddlers have been available to play for them in recent years. With the success of our programme, many families and community events now enjoy live music again and are proud that their youth are carrying on this heritage, as we can see from the number of times our young fiddlers are featured in local news. Thus, fiddling also provides an important connection between the schools and community members, building trust and solidarity.

Beyond the effects on the students themselves, their families and their communities, the programme also has far-reaching ramifications for the general population in Manitoba. Our students are generating a positive image of First

Nations and Métis peoples that goes a long way towards improving relations between cultural groups. In short, they are ambassadors for their culture.

Fiddle is a Rhythm Instrument

Anne Lederman

My teaching method is based on the basic premise that we need a progressive system for teaching fiddle in Canada, from beginner to advanced, based specifically on the principles of the traditions themselves. This seems straightforward, but in a country as diverse as Canada with so many distinct styles of playing, it is anything but. Even if we can establish the important values and principles of the traditions we are working with, we are left with major questions of how we can best help students develop those techniques, over what period of time and in what sort of teaching and performing situations. Like many of us, I am sure, I have been wrestling with those questions in some form as long as I've been teaching. It helped me greatly that I had learned as an adult, and therefore have a sometimes excruciatingly clear memory of what I went through myself, trying to persuade every reluctant muscle of my body to do or not do certain things in order to get the sounds I was hearing. I went to classical teachers because that is all there was at the time, but I was always more involved with other traditions – jazz, various styles of Celtic-based North American fiddling (including Aboriginal styles), Country, Klezmer, Balkan, Greek and African musics as well as improvisation. For the purposes of this paper, I will confine myself to the 'Celtic-Canadian' traditions that form the bulk of my teaching practice.

'Celtic-Canadian' can mean many different things, and, in fact, the most common 'Celtic' style where I live (Toronto, the largest city in the country) is actually Irish, and more than one style of Irish music at that. But I want my students to look beyond the borders of their home town, to get a feel for the country as a whole, for how fiddling developed from one end to the other. I want them to understand enough about how the various Canadian styles overlap and differ that they could go anywhere in Canada and be flexible enough and musical enough to adapt to whatever the local fiddle dialect is.

While it is beyond our scope here to give a comprehensive picture of the entire Canadian fiddling landscape, I will present a bird's eye view. Looking at the older styles first (pre-recording age), we have Newfoundland in the far east (pretty much a world unto itself stylistically), Cape Breton Scottish style which extends into Prince Edward Island and other pockets of Scottish settlement, several somewhat distinct French-Canadian and Aboriginal styles (Inuit, First Nations, and Métis), and an older layer of mixed Anglo/Scottish/Irish/American repertoire that tended to dominate English-speaking areas of the country. All of these save that of Newfoundland are loosely based on Scottish tradition, but some have evolved significantly away from source.¹⁵ Further, the latter broad 'Anglo' style evolved in the twentieth-century recording age into what is now known generally as 'Old Time' music, the style of most competitions and fiddle clubs. It is a style that owes a great deal to the playing of one man who, by some quirk of fate, was the first to have a national

radio and television show starting in the early 1940s – Don Messer (originally from New Brunswick). Even further complicating this landscape are newer infusions of Irish, Scottish, American and Canadian styles into specific areas as a result of both commercialization and revival movements. Now, we could liken the whole situation to a sort of stew where we still have recognizable chunks of the original ingredients, but all of which are gradually breaking down more and more the longer it cooks.

Keeping all this in my mind, where do we start? Is there at least something all these styles have in common, some aspects we can agree on as basic principles of traditional fiddling in Canada? The fact that most of the older styles are Scottish-based helps, but current Irish practice can provide an element of disruption, creating conflicts of technique. However, we do have one core idea above all; that the fiddle is a rhythm instrument first and foremost. Most teaching ideas and methods can be related back to that as a starting point. I do not mean to oversimplify, or to deny the melodic intricacy of the music in any way, but since, traditionally, most tunes are an expression of a particular rhythmic groove to which people dance, and since, fortunately, there are a limited number of these grooves overall, rhythm provided the unifying principle I needed.

I think of the grooves as the heart and soul of the tradition. The wealth of stylistic detail – the body/muscle work, the bowing, the left hand, the modes and arpeggio patterns, the double-stringing, the ear work – can be taught within, and as a function of these grooves. Leaving slow airs aside, I think of these grooves, in virtually all Celtic-based traditions as four groups:

1. '2/4s' – in Canada, this includes 'straight' marches (duple subdivision, not triple), polkas, 2-steps, and reels – any type of tune where the beat divides evenly into 2, then 4.
2. Jigs – single, double, or slip (triplet subdivision of the beat).
3. Waltzes – 3 beats to a 'bar', dancers step on each beat. We have two different ways of subdividing waltz metre in Canada – duple (confined mainly to Québec) and triple (the rest of the country). The latter is actually 9/8 but is almost never written that way.
4. Hornpipes, strathspeys, 12/8 marches, foxtrots, swing tunes – essentially in 12/8, in a 'long-short' pattern, with 2 main beats per bar ('1-ee and a 2-ee and a').

This is not to say that a jig, for example, always feels the same whether you are in Newfoundland, Ontario, or Nunavut, which it decidedly does not. But that can be dealt with at the appropriate stage of the learning process. First of all, I just want students to be able to feel and play the beat in the four rhythms, starting on open strings, then moving into simple tunes. Gradually, they learn to do more and more things within that beat. While, at first, we learn basic tunes drawn from all areas of the country, at a certain intermediate stage we choose a style to work with for some time in order to get the bowings, ornaments, and the basic feel and sound for that style. I think of rhythm as being like a basket that we drop the notes into, or a room, a space that affects everything that goes on within it. Another way to think of it is

that rhythms in a certain style are like characters in a play: Mr Cape Breton Jig or Miss Ontario Two-step. The voices of these characters are the voices of our culture. Those characters may have new things to say at any given moment (new melodies), but they are always who they are underneath.

The beauty of starting with rhythm and referring everything back to it is that it gets people feeling good the first time they put bow to string. In fairly short order, they can play along (albeit on one note) with more advanced players. As they put fingers on, their fingers learn to land in time to the established rhythm. As they become able to slur, or play faster, every new bow or finger pattern, including scales and arpeggios, is learned within the particular groove. We keep going back to old tunes to add in new things – bowings, ornamentation, extra notes. By the second year or so, they can start to accent on off-beats, which, in my view, is where dance grooves start to come alive.¹⁶ Students build up their tune repertoire progressively, always moving from rhythms into tunes so they can get their bow arm relaxed and get their best sound on one note before getting distracted by the fingering challenges. This way, tunes are always a function of the groove, so students learn to be freer with their fingering hand, making it easier to learn the art of variation and improvisation later on.

Of course, it is not quite that easy in practice. There is so much to think about on the violin: the two halves of your body are doing entirely different things, light here, heavy here, relax this muscle, make this one work harder. Over years of teaching, though, I gradually realized I could divide technical aspects into five basic areas:

1. The Bow
2. The Fingers
3. Scales, Modes and Arpeggios
4. Developing Rhythm
5. Developing Your Ear

Everything can be built up progressively in each of these five areas and, I believe, it is important to be working on all five areas all the time. So, not only do we need a progressive set of practice techniques for each of the five areas, but repertoire must be chosen with all five in mind, an interesting challenge.

Since, for me, traditional fiddling is about playing what you hear and not what you see, I do not use musical notation for the most part. We sing a lot, we draw tunes out in the air, and we learn how to transfer those sound shapes that we are ‘drawing’ onto the fiddle. I love reading music and cannot remember a time when I could not, but many of the rhythms of Celtic-based fiddle traditions in Canada are simply not capable of being notated accurately (or, at least, not in a way that anyone would want to try to read them). Nor can the page tell you how much bow to use or how much to stress certain notes, or even how to get the right basic sound. I do think people should read, eventually, but only after the various rhythmic ‘personalities’

have taken up permanent residence in their body; then the 'golf clubs' on the page (to quote an African musician of my acquaintance), will be assigned to the appropriate character, or hung on the wall of the right room.

Teaching from rhythm as a starting point is not a new idea, especially in traditions from other parts of the world (African, Latin, Indian, and so on), but my attempt to create a fiddle teaching method based on it, which will work for all of the various styles we think of as Canadian, is somewhat unusual. It also immediately helps demarcate the difference between learning classical violin and learning fiddle. Further, by encouraging students to always work with their ears first in a rhythmic way, they are working from a different, more intuitive part of their brain than when they are reading music. I believe that teaching this way has the potential to create better musicians, not only with good internal rhythm, but with a healthy, relaxed technique based on understanding how one's body works, with the ability to listen to other players, and adapt what one is doing to the circumstances – in short, the ability to play what one hears. From here, our students can go anywhere.

Notes

¹ *Spirit of the Narrows* began as a solo storytelling/fiddling performance, but was re-written in 2004 as a two-person theatrical event for the Blyth Theatre Festival. It premiered at the Festival on 20 July 2004 for a 5-day run and was brought back in 2005.

² Anne Lederman, *Tamarack'er Down: A Guide to Celtic-Canadian Fiddling Through Rhythm*, 'Part 1: Beginner', 'Part 2: Intermediate' (Toronto: Falcon Productions, 2011); 'Part 3: Advanced' is in progress.

³ See <www.patshaw.info/> [accessed 23 May 2011].

⁴ All of the biographical information in this presentation comes from personal conversations over years of working with Dr Tom Anderson.

⁵ In 1976, Aly Bain and Tom Anderson, accompanied by Violet Tulloch, produced a joint album, *The Silver Bow: Shetland Folk Fiddling*, Vol.1, 12-inch LP, Topic Records 12TS281.

⁶ See Tom Anderson, *Ringin' Strings* (Lerwick: Shetland Times, 1983), p. 12.

⁷ For a detailed account of the teaching methods used in schools, see Pamela Sherman Swing, 'Fiddle Teaching in Shetland Isles Schools, 1973–1985' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Texas, 1991).

⁸ Shetland's Young Heritage, *Visions*, cassette, Heritage SYH001, 1993; Shetland's Young Heritage, *Bridging the Gap*, cassette, Heritage SYH002, 1997.

⁹ Running alongside her career as an artist, Catriona Macdonald is a lecturer at Newcastle University and directs the BMus (Hons) in Folk and Traditional Music.

¹⁰ See <www.shetland-museum.org.uk/archiveCollections/> [accessed 23 May 2011].

¹¹ Paul Rolland was a Hungarian-born teacher of classical violin in the USA, who published his ideas on technique widely and helped found the American String Teachers Association. His seminal pedagogical work is *The Teaching of Action in String Playing* (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1974).

¹² The view that styles of Scottish fiddling change according to geographic region is partly a myth, in my opinion, that is, North-East style, West-Coast style, Shetland style, etc. I believe that the situation often boils down to who the well-known teachers and players were in a particular area at a particular time, and who, therefore, had influence over other learners.

¹³ See Anne Lederman, 'Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Manitoba: Origins, Structure and the Question of Syncretism', in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 8, no. 2 (1988), 205–30; rpt. in *Canadian Folk Music Journal*, 19 (1991), 40–60.

Routes & Roots: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 4

¹⁴ Anne Lederman, 'Métis Fiddling: Found or Lost', in *Actes du colloque Gabriel Dumont: histoire et identité métisses*, ed. by Denis Gagnon, Denis Combet, and Lise Gaboury-Diallo (Winnipeg: Presses universitaires de Saint-Boniface, 2009), pp. 365–75.

¹⁵ French Canadian and Aboriginal styles are known especially for their asymmetric forms and phrases.

¹⁶ In my experience, most, if not all, dance musics throughout the world have both a basic pulse that dancers 'step' to, as well as 'off-beat' accents that encourage other parts of the body to move.