

“It’s a balancing act. That’s the secret to making this music fit in *today*”: Negotiating  
Professional and Vernacular Boundaries in the Cape Breton Fiddling Tradition

by

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## **Abstract**

Originating from the music of early Gaelic immigrants, Cape Breton fiddling has been a thriving musical tradition for more than two hundred years. It eventually rose to prominence in the 1990s, receiving international recognition in the music industry. As the “Celtic boom” faded and major record labels lost interest in the tradition commercially, Cape Breton traditional musicians continued to maintain a presence in the music industry, though their careers now enjoy more modest success. All the while, Cape Breton fiddling has remained a healthy, vibrant tradition on the local level, where even the most commercially successful musicians have remained closely tied to their roots.

This thesis examines how Cape Breton traditional musicians negotiate and express their musical identities in professional and vernacular contexts. As both professional musicians and tradition bearers, they are fixtures in popular culture, as well as the local music scene, placing them at an intersection between global and local culture. While seemingly fairly homogenous, Cape Breton fiddling is rich and varied tradition, and musicians relate to it in myriad ways. This plurality and intersubjectivity of what is considered to be “legitimate” culture is evident as the boundaries of tradition are drawn and change according to context. Musicians engage with, and critically evaluate cultural discourses surrounding the tradition which are influenced by power, cultural capital, social group, ethnicity, and region.

These discourses and representations of the tradition are sometimes upheld or even celebrated, while at other times, they may be challenged or subverted. One’s musical identity is not necessarily expressed verbally, but is performed and demonstrated musically. Repertoire and musical arrangements can be profoundly meaningful,

representing a musician's cultural values. The decisions of how to frame oneself within the tradition influences how musicians relate to each other socially and professionally, potentially having profound effects on issues such as intellectual property rights. In addition, audio technology plays a significant role in how the tradition is presented, understood, and experienced. Commercial recordings embrace socially constructed notions of "liveness," while live performances rely on amplification practices that connect musicians to global popular culture while simultaneously upholding local musical aesthetics.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction: Context and Approach**

When I first began my doctoral research project, I knew relatively little about what I wanted to write, save for that I wanted to examine Cape Breton fiddling in a way that was different from what I had read up to that point. I had often found something missing in other studies on the topic. Although they were factually accurate, I rarely found them to be representative of my own personal experiences with the tradition. The history of the music is certainly very important and has been well-documented. However, I wanted to provide a more modern, contemporary perspective. For myself, and the other Cape Breton traditional musicians I played with, this was a world as much about recording studios, music festivals, and PA systems as it was about dances, house parties, and milling frolics.

Although I had played Cape Breton traditional music for much of my life, it was not until I was enrolled in my master's degree in jazz guitar performance in Louisville, Kentucky (University of Louisville), that I became interested in pursuing formal academic study of the tradition. Despite the fact my entire university background had been in jazz, my performance opportunities (both in Kentucky and Cape Breton) were overwhelmingly related to traditional Cape Breton or Irish music. It was in Louisville's Irish session scene that I first evaluated Cape Breton fiddling from a critical perspective.

Shortly after arriving in Kentucky, I looked for a context in which I could play recreationally. There was no Scottish music scene to speak of in the area, and knowing full well that a Cape Breton musical background did not prepare me well for bluegrass or old-time music, I sought out the local Irish sessions. "I know plenty of Irish tunes from

my Cape Breton repertoire, so it shouldn't be *that* different," I thought naïvely. I immediately realized how wrong I was. While the music was indeed very similar superficially, I initially struggled to make sense of many things: instrumentation, repertoire, general performance practice, groove, and even session etiquette. It was a strange feeling to be making music in a way that was intimately familiar, yet so oddly alien to me. At times, my intuitive musical reactions were borderline obnoxious for the setting; I was a bull in a china shop. Alternatively, I found accompaniment techniques that were normally considered inappropriate in Cape Breton to be well-suited to an Irish session.

It was this sharp contrast that demonstrated to me for the first time what it meant to belong to the Cape Breton fiddling scene. By being an outsider in another traditional music scene, I understood that much of what I had taken for granted and considered to be "normal," was representative of Cape Breton fiddling in particular. When I returned from Kentucky, I saw my own tradition in an entirely different light. After considering several different topics for my doctoral research, I eventually chose one that best represented the issues at play in the current Cape Breton fiddling tradition.

### **Scope and Objectives**

This thesis examines Cape Breton fiddling as a multi-faceted musical tradition. A music with a rich history, it is a tradition closely linked to family, local community and region, and is actively preserved through tune books, audio recordings (both commercial and amateur), and oral histories. In some ways, this deep respect and reverence for the tradition can manifest itself in highly conservative performance practices; yet, like any

living tradition, change and innovation are nonetheless present. In addition to such local, “traditional” incarnations of the music, Cape Breton fiddling is also at the forefront of popular culture, as a feature of tourism marketing and the commercial music industry. Cape Breton traditional musicians function as professionals, entertainers, and tradition bearers and must negotiate their musical identity in relation to the local, grassroots Cape Breton music scene, as well as the larger music industry.

My central research interest is to examine the changing performance practices and economic contexts of Cape Breton fiddling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In doing so, my research challenges prior homogenous views of Cape Breton fiddling, by focusing on shifting definitions of social obligation and individual rights, as well as the increasingly important role of audio technology as an ideologically charged subject. More broadly, this research is a discussion of the relationships between individuals and groups, making the interplay between structure and agency of key importance. Although the tradition is often associated with Scottish traditional music and Gaelic identity, there is a degree of contestation over how Cape Breton fiddling is defined and understood. The multiple interpretations of the tradition vary among individuals, and according to social groups. As such, the nature of Cape Breton fiddling can change significantly, being influenced by things such as worldview, region, ethnicity, and commercialization.

These issues reveal cultural and economic tensions that affect Cape Breton traditional musicians, and bring to mind questions that I hope to answer through my research. How is the tradition defined within different contexts, and by whom? Subsequently, how do these interpretations and definitions of the tradition compare and contrast with existing discourses on Cape Breton history and identity? What aspects of

the tradition are deemed most significant, and how are they informed by power and cultural capital within different social groups? In what ways have the professionalization and commodification of Cape Breton fiddling affected the tradition? Finally, how is Cape Breton fiddling presented and interpreted in commercial recordings and live performances?

### **Methodology**

As a researcher, I had a considerable amount of insider knowledge. I have played Cape Breton traditional music on the guitar since my mid-teens, both as a lead player and accompanist. I have played the fiddle on and off since the age of nine, and although I am a competent player, I still consider the guitar to be my main instrument. Over the years, I played square dances, pubs, and the occasional music festival. In addition to live performances, I have also worked on several commercial, studio recordings as a producer, arranger, and session musician. From this experience, I have come to know musicians across the island. Some are close friends and others are merely acquaintances. When I began my fieldwork, I already had a thorough knowledge of the tradition and Cape Breton as a whole; I had a pre-existing relationship with many of my early participants, so I was able to move directly to interviews. In most cases, these early interviews were not only helpful in and of themselves, but led to me securing valuable connections with other future participants.

In these ways I was an insider, but in others, I was still an outsider to the scene. Although I considered Cape Breton to be my home and spent time there on a regular basis, I had not lived there full-time since I was eighteen. Not being a permanent fixture

in the traditional music scene as an adult meant that my social circle was relatively small in relation to the Cape Breton traditional music scene as a whole. I knew some musicians extremely well, but in other contexts, I was completely unknown. Occasionally, I relied on the help of my musician friends to make contact with new potential participants. As my fieldwork progressed and I interviewed those to whom I had the most direct access, I increasingly found myself approaching potential participants who were entirely unfamiliar.

My insider status had a significant influence on how I understood and conducted my research. As a member of the Cape Breton traditional music scene, I had an intuitive understanding of issues such as performance practice and the social context of the tradition. Being a guitarist, I have become particularly attuned to musical structure, harmony, and other aspects of accompaniment. Although I chose not to present my personal lived experience as data in and of itself, it guided my research through preliminary questions and inferences which I explored and corroborated in my interviews and musical analysis. Many of my interviews were unstructured and collaborative in nature, as my participants and I pondered ways to describe powerful, deeply emic aspects of the tradition in more precise, etic language.

As with any ethnographer, I have biases. I argue throughout this thesis that the way musicians relate to the tradition is connected to issues such as social group or cultural capital, and this true for me as well. My position within the local music scene undoubtedly influenced how I interpreted my data and who I included as participants in this study. This was something that I remained aware of throughout my research and writing, as I strove to approach my work with an open mind, representing the tradition

and its practitioners in a fair and balanced manner. I chose not to write through an autoethnographic or self-reflexive lens; although a valid method of inquiry, I felt that it would detract from the broad interplay of discourses and worldviews that I address in my research. Whenever possible, I represented my participants present their thoughts in their own words, making use of extended, direct quotes.

The participants I chose represent a cross-section of some of the musicians in Cape Breton's traditional music scene. Dictated in part by who was available while I was doing my fieldwork, I interviewed musicians from different backgrounds and from all over the island. The majority of my participants are between the ages of eighteen and 35, though there are certainly people who fall outside this age range. This, to some extent, was intentional – I felt that this age group, as the most recent generation of tradition bearers and professional musicians, related to the tradition differently from past generations.

Tradition, however, is something that develops and changes over time; to understand a tradition in its current state, one cannot ignore previous generations of tradition bearers. Although I did interview several older tradition bearers for the sake of historical context, there are a significant number of other tradition bearers that have previously been interviewed at length by other researchers (MacGillivray 1988, 1997; Doherty 1996; Feintuch 2004; 2010; Caplan 2006; Graham 2006). As such, I relied on these interviews by earlier scholars as material to augment my own fieldwork. In addition to avoiding redundancies in Cape Breton fiddling scholarship, it is noteworthy that almost half of my participants had never been interviewed by social scientists, and including them in my research has been a particularly valuable endeavour. With a finite number of



tradition bearers in a relatively small musical community, introducing such a significant amount of entirely new data to the research of Cape Breton fiddling has provided me with insights that have been previously inaccessible to scholars. This has allowed me to approach topics from new perspectives and to explore subjects that have remained until now, virtually untouched.

Beginning my preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2010, I conducted the majority of my fieldwork during an intensive period from June to September 2011. I returned to Cape Breton for short field trips (usually about two weeks at a time) during key points in the season such as the Celtic Colours International Festival for follow-up research. In addition to ethnographic interviews, I conducted a significant amount of participant observation at various square dances, concerts, sessions, and house parties where I took part both as audience member and performer. I also spent four intensive days conducting studio ethnography at Sonic Temple and Soundpark recording studios in Halifax and Sydney, respectively.

Participant observation was a defining part of my fieldwork. I began playing more violin, and at some points in my research used it as my main instrument (as opposed to the guitar). Playing music, both alone and with others was particularly important. It allowed me to identify and study issues relating to performance practice, as well as meet other musicians. Music often served as an ice-breaker; it was a conversation starter, and perhaps most importantly, it was a way for me to demonstrate to prospective participants that I had a solid understanding of the tradition. Although my playing did not speak directly to the nature of my research, it was often a way for me to earn the trust and respect of my participants. I played as often as possible, with whoever was available to do

so. The conversations that music making inspired at dances and sessions, although not formally referenced in this thesis, were particularly influential in helping me formulate my thoughts in relation to my work.

In addition to my fieldwork, the musical transcription and analysis of various compositions and piano accompaniments has also been a substantial part of my research. I have transcribed significantly more than what is included in this thesis and its appendices, but have chosen to feature only the most pertinent examples. The bulk of these transcriptions have been part of my ongoing work as a research assistant for Dr. Christopher MacDonald at Cape Breton University, which began in August 2011. As an ethnomusicologist studying the history of Cape Breton piano accompaniment, his research is clearly related to my own, and I have transcribed multiple selections from over twenty different pianists for him. While these transcriptions have been primarily for his use, they have provided me with a firm understanding of piano accompaniment in the tradition. Dr. MacDonald has generously given permission to use appropriate selections of these transcriptions in my work.

The overall framework of this study has changed as my research progressed. Initially, I planned to use three separate regional case studies to explore how musical style and historical narratives differed among ethnic groups. The first case study would be of the Mabou area of Inverness County, a rural area comprised largely of people with Scottish ancestry, and often closely associated with that dance tradition. The second case study was to be in the Cheticamp area of northern Inverness County, a region that is physically separate due its location at the foot of the Cape Breton Highlands, and boasts of a sizable Acadian population. I planned my last case study to be based in urban, post-

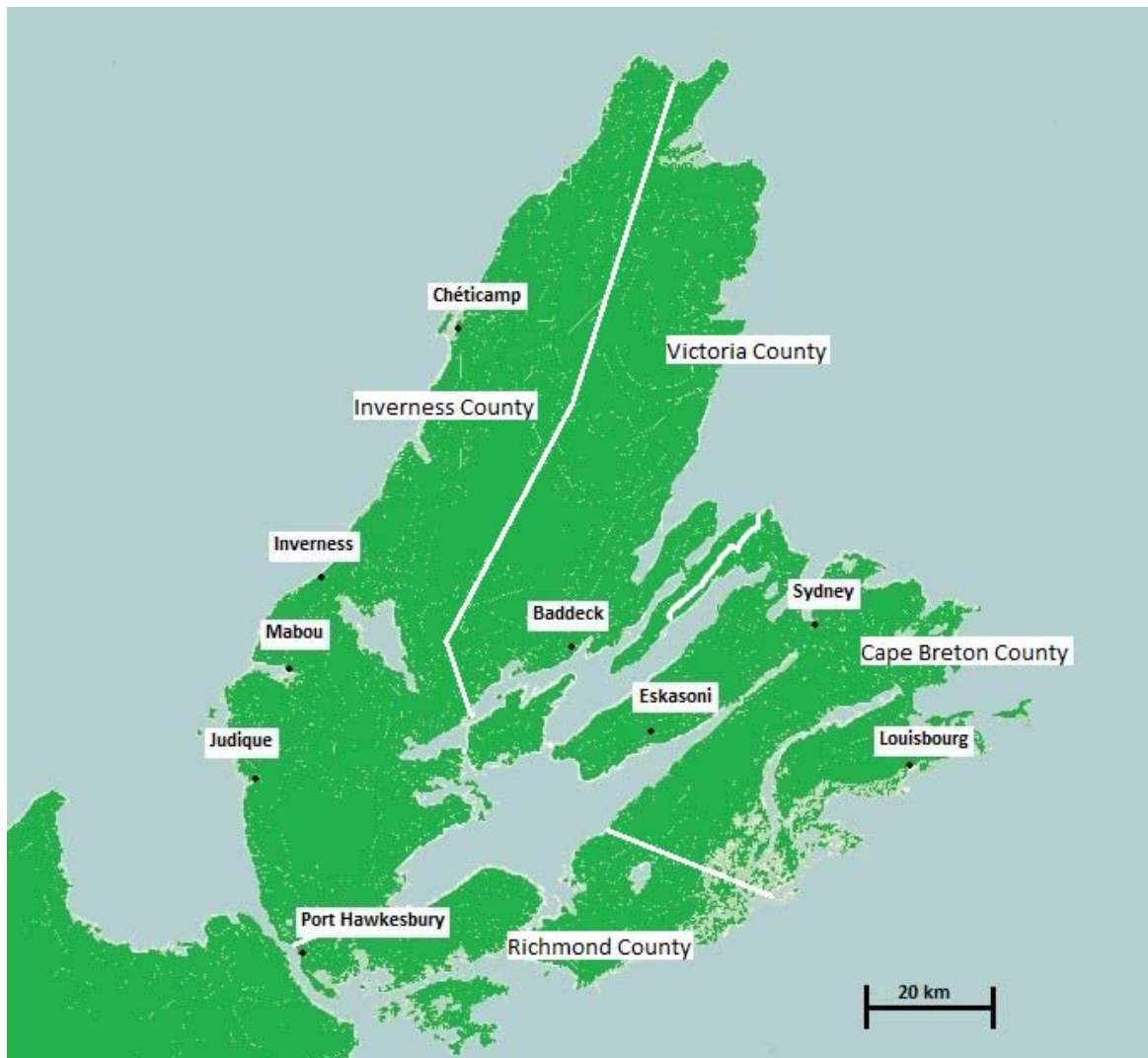
industrial Sydney and the surrounding area. In contrast to Mabou and Cheticamp, the Sydney area is relatively diverse ethnically, and influenced significantly by Irish musical traditions.

Each region is associated with a different fiddling style, ethnic background, and even landscape. I intended to use these examples to demonstrate three distinct, yet equally valid, contrasting interpretations of Cape Breton fiddling. Informed by structuralism and at least some degree of quantitative fieldwork, I expected my results to be somewhat predictable and fairly organized. However, it was not long before I realized that the story that I sought was not so simple or easy to categorize.

Although I quickly began to unearth a number of contrasting explanations of Cape Breton fiddling, I became increasingly aware of how inaccurate my assumptions had been. My understanding of the socio-cultural structure was correct, but there seemed to be so many exceptions and outliers, that I could find no significant correlation between musicians' attitudes and their demographics, be they region, ethnicity, age, or otherwise. Moreover, this was not a haphazard mishmash of confused ideas about tradition; my participants were consistently very knowledgeable of the tradition and offered nuanced insights on the multiplicity of meanings the tradition has for them and others. With little to no consensus on what even defined the tradition, I was able to determine that Cape Breton fiddling is a music that is indeed contested. It was a reminder that culture is something that can have a life of its own and is not always predictable. It was also evident that this was a tradition that had become markedly different from what it had been in previous generations.

With participants' responses not defined by any formal structure, I found that it was precisely this lack of organization that was significant. After all, people are individuals; they can think for themselves and form their own opinions. The multiplicity of meanings and intersubjectivity associated with the tradition almost seemed like a bad academic joke: a desire for structuralism butting against a post-modern lens. This juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory theoretical frameworks, however, can make for a stronger and more flexible academic analysis. Structural analysis offers an effective means of addressing the socio-cultural context and its influence on individuals, but tends to frame individuals as powerless, without agency, at the mercy of the social processes which control the world in which they live. Conversely, post-modern theory allows for the flexibility to analyze highly specific relationships between individuals, yet can be broad and disorganized, not committing to direct conclusions. Neither is completely adequate in isolation, but each framework offers a perspective that better contextualizes the other.

Broadly speaking, this has become a study that is framed by the interplay between structure and agency. Cape Breton musicians are part of a complex social structure influenced by globalization, cultural capital, and power. That having been said, I would be remiss not to consider musicians as artists, whose music, while undoubtedly part of certain social processes, is also a product of self-expression, and the foundation for even the most basic conception of artistic expression is individual agency. Musicians have their own individual tastes, and values, and actively choose which group(s) to align themselves with. Such decisions can place a musician as an innovator, who is deliberately challenging the status quo, or conversely, someone who does not value tradition.



**Figure #1: Map of Cape Breton Island<sup>1</sup>**

### **Key Participants**

It is not necessary or feasible to introduce all of the individuals who were involved in my research; however, it is worthwhile to introduce several key participants who have significantly influenced the writing of this thesis. The following musicians have been

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<sup>1</sup> This map was created from data and content derived from © OpenStreetMap contributors (data: ODbL 1.0; content: CC BY-SA 2.0). For more information, please refer to: <http://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright>

integral to my research; most of them are quoted at length throughout my thesis. I will introduce other participants in my thesis as required.

Jason Roach (b. 1983) of Cheticamp was the first participant I interviewed when I began my fieldwork. He is a close friend of mine whom I first met while we were both completing our undergraduate degrees in jazz performance at St. Francis Xavier University. Since then, we have played together semi-regularly in a variety of settings over the past ten years, both live and in the recording studio. In addition to being easily accessible to me personally, he is in high demand as a traditional pianist locally and abroad. Known for his aggressive style and inventive use of harmony, he is influenced by his mentor, Cape Breton piano great, Maybelle Chisholm McQueen, and the American jazz pianist, Thelonius Monk. He is the first-call accompanist for many Cape Breton fiddlers today, as well as a member of Cape Breton instrumental group, Còig, and the trad-rock group, Sprag Session (formerly known as the Colin Grant Band).

Colin Grant (b. 1984) is originally from Toronto, but moved to Sydney, Cape Breton in his early teens. After beginning the violin study via The Suzuki Method of music pedagogy, Grant took lessons from Cape Breton fiddler Sandy MacIntyre, and multi-instrumentalist, Allie Bennett. Regarded by many as one of the most significant young fiddlers in Cape Breton today, he is a well-rounded musician who has played in contexts ranging from dinner theatre (*Lyrics and Laughter*), to the traditional Acadian band Blou, to the indie-rock band, The Tom Fun Orchestra. In addition to his solo career, he is currently a member of Còig, and Sprag Session.

I was introduced to Grant through Jason Roach, though we were little more than acquaintances when I first interviewed him. Since then, we have had many in-depth

discussions about Cape Breton fiddling and the music industry in general. One of my most influential participants, Grant has been directly involved with my research on a personal level. He and his other bandmates generously allowed me to observe while Sprag Session recorded and mixed their debut recording, and he has regularly offered me insightful feedback on conference papers I have presented related to my research. I even remember one occasion when he called me from his cell phone on his way home from a gig to offer me observations that he thought would be useful to me. Needless to say, such input has shaped this thesis immeasurably.

Chrissy Crowley (b. 1990) is a fiddler from Margaree, Cape Breton, who began her music career shortly after she began playing, making her first studio recording at the age of fifteen. She has an active solo career and is also a member of Còig. Crowley's family, sometimes known as the "Chisholms of Margaree," is highly respected within the Cape Breton traditional music community, and includes prominent tradition bearers such as: Angus Chisholm, Crowley's grandfather Archie Neil Chisholm, Cameron Chisholm, and Maybelle Chisholm-McQueen. I have also known Crowley personally and professionally for approximately ten years, and have played on her second studio recording, *The Departure* (2010).

Glenn Graham (b. 1974) is a fiddler and step-dancer from Judique, Cape Breton, who was most active in the music industry between the years of 1996 and 2007. During this time, he played solo and as a duo with his cousin Rodney MacDonald (fiddler and former Nova Scotia Premier 2006 – 2009), and his music has been featured on the hit television shows, *Dawson's Creek* and *Party of Five*. Related to the "Beatons of Mabou," his extended family includes renowned musicians such as well-respected fiddler and

composer Donald Angus Beaton and his wife, pianist Mary Elizabeth Beaton; their sons well-respected pianist Joey Beaton and fiddler and influential composer Kinnon; and fiddler Andrea Beaton. Now less musically active on a professional level, Graham is a scholar who specializes in Cape Breton Gaelic culture and traditions. He received his M.A. in Atlantic Canadian Studies at St. Mary's University, and is currently pursuing is Ph.D. in Political Science at Dalhousie University.

J. P. Cormier (b. 1969) is the nephew of respected Cheticamp fiddler, Joe Cormier. A virtuosic multi-instrumentalist, Cormier is best-known for his skills on the guitar, fiddle, mandolin, five-string banjo, and as a singer-songwriter. He was profoundly influenced by Cape Breton fiddling as well as old-time and bluegrass music, and earlier in his career he spent roughly a decade working as a session musician in Nashville, Tennessee. Throughout his career he has worked with world-class musicians such as Stompin' Tom Connors, Waylon Jennings, Earl Scruggs, and Bill Monroe. Cormier now lives in Nova Scotia, where, in addition to his successful solo career, he works as a producer and runs his own recording studio.

Kimberley Fraser (b. 1982) is a fiddler, pianist, and step-dancer from North Sydney, Cape Breton, well-versed in Irish and Cape Breton fiddling traditions. She studied jazz piano performance and Celtic Studies at St. Francis Xavier University and has earned a violin performance degree at the Berkelee College of music in Boston. She is a performer who is active on an international level, but she is also highly-regarded as a music teacher, and a sought-after instructor for private lessons and music workshops.



## **Theoretical Framework**

Although much discourse about the Cape Breton fiddling tradition centers on Scottishness, the Gaelic language, and Inverness County, this is merely one perspective. Cultural backgrounds and regional biases inform the way the history of Cape Breton fiddling has been constructed, and how people engage with or challenge such beliefs. What I am attempting to show is that the dominant history of Cape Breton fiddling cannot be understood as entirely neutral. To this end, no alternative to this established historical narrative is neutral either, my own research included. As Michel de Certeau discusses, the writing of history is a subjective process; a history is shaped by the institutions that write it, cultural biases, and methodology (1988). From a post-modern perspective, there is not one history of Cape Breton, but many histories, each revealing different values of those who have written or told it. All of these histories have validity, but none of them are complete in and of themselves. By approaching history in this manner, we can see that there are complex regional and ethnic discourses that take place, some explicit and others hidden. Some of my participants relate to the dominant historical narratives of Cape Breton, while others embrace alternative narratives.

De Certeau's argument dovetails with the work of Michel Foucault, as a considerable amount of Foucault's work is dedicated to discussion of the subjective nature of truth, and how discourse is shaped by power relations. In the context of Cape Breton fiddling, this means discussions of history and what constitutes an "ideal" fiddler cannot be interpreted as neutral or transparent communication. Some discourses represent opinions that are established by powerful individuals, groups, or regions in prominent positions within the fiddling community, and reflect their interests and biases. Other

discourses communicate the interests of individuals or groups who held less influence within the musical community.

While I do discuss power relations, this does not mean that these relations are static, nor that they take the form of dominating, public displays. Foucault explains,

Power relations are extremely widespread in human relationships. Now, this means not that political power is everywhere, but that there is in human relationships a whole range of power relations that may come into play among individuals, within families, in pedagogical relationships, political life, and so on. (1994: 283)

In this way, our worldview and the manner in which we interact with each other affect the sometimes malleable nature of knowledge and truth. He elaborates,

The idea that there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints or coercive effects, seems utopian to me. This is precisely a failure to see that power relations are not something that is bad in itself, that we have to break free of. I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the *ethos*, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible. (1994: 298)

My intent is to demonstrate the plurality present in Cape Breton culture and reveal the underlying issues that may be taken for granted, yet shape individuals' beliefs and ideas about the fiddling tradition. It is possible that not all of my participants may agree with my analysis, however, the opinions held by my participants were not unanimous in regard to place, age, lineage, or ethnicity. This important fact speaks to the contested nature of the fiddling tradition and how it is represented.

Taken a step further, these multiple, competing dialogues of Cape Breton and its various sub-regions can be related to folklorist Mary Hufford's work in Appalachia

(2003). Hufford analyzes how the geography of the Appalachians is shaped by competing economic and socio-cultural perspectives. From one perspective, Appalachia's mountainous landscape makes the area virtually useless due to its inability to support large, commercial agriculture; invasive mountaintop removal mining is construed as a way to make use of otherwise useless land that is not contributing to the economy. A competing understanding of the area notes that it does indeed have extremely rich, fertile soil, and while unsuitable for mass agriculture, it is actually ideal for an important cash crop, ginseng. As such, these two competing notions of region exist simultaneously, each based on differing understandings of economics, landscape, and culture. Powerful outsiders see the region as a place to be exploited for financial gain, while locals who are intimately familiar with the land value it in a very different way. Both conceptions of the region have merit, but are each influenced by the values and biases held by the actors involved.

In Cape Breton history and fiddling, however, competing discourses and power relations are not between an outside hegemon asserting its power over marginalized insiders as in Appalachia, but are more fluid, and found within various social and cultural groups at the grassroots level. For this reason, I have chosen to analyze these interactions using sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital. Bourdieu contends that considering capital as something that is exclusively economic is misleading and limited; in an effort to address this shortcoming, he offers that cultural and social capital are ways in which power and socio-cultural currency can be accumulated in a way that is separate, though perhaps at least indirectly related to economics (1986).

As such, Bourdieu uses a three-part system based on economic, social, and cultural capital to analyze power and class relations in France. Economic capital is consistent with the traditional use of the term, referring to an individual's financial assets and the power associated with them. Social capital represents one's political ties within a group, acknowledging that having strong social connections, either inherited or otherwise, can be highly significant. Lastly, cultural capital is the knowledge, skills, and overall cultural "literacy" that one holds. In many cases, this is closely linked to education, which can be formal, institutional education, or conversely, the implicit, intuitive cultural knowledge one accumulates. Bourdieu examines how these different types of capital can be exchanged and converted for power and status, demonstrating that class is not a static monolith, but rather, a complex of interrelated assets, strategies, and techniques.

In his classic book, *Distinction* (2010 [1984]), Bourdieu discusses how different groups (in Bourdieu's case, primarily different social classes), distinguish themselves from each other through what aspects of culture are considered to be "legitimate." To some, a particular food or music might be thought of as unpretentious, while to others, it may be thought of as barbarous and uncouth. On the other hand, an opera performance could be considered engaging and exciting to some, while appear boring and pretentious to others. Bourdieu's work, however, is focused specifically on French culture, and as a result, he has found social class to be one of the most important factors in determining taste.

In Cape Breton one's regional affiliation can be important, and being from an area known for producing talented musicians could be a source of cultural capital. Or in another circumstance, one may acquire significant social capital by belonging to a well-

known musical family. It must be noted, however, that as I am discussing the plurality and heterogeneity of the tradition, cultural and social capital are context dependent; being a native Gaelic speaker or spending significant time in Scotland may hold substantial currency in certain social circles, but may fall short among fiddlers who are more closely aligned with Irish fiddling traditions.

That having been said, I cannot ignore the influence of structuralism in my study. Structural analysis is often the basis, albeit implicit, for many other contemporary theoretical frameworks such as semiotics and hegemony theory. There are, indeed, structural elements that have to do with social groups, hierarchies, age, region, ethnicity, and symbolism that play key roles in Cape Breton fiddling. For instance, Cape Breton fiddling is a symbol of regional identity as a whole, yet on a post-modern level, how Cape Breton fiddling itself is defined can be ambiguous or unstable. As such, I used a largely structural approach to address overall cultural context, while simultaneously using a post-modern perspective to discuss how actors functioned within that structural framework. Contextual factors may not necessarily determine the actions of an individual, but considering whether one's actions relate to these structures in conventional or atypical ways can be highly significant.

This intersection between structure and agency, I believe, is where valuable cultural processes occur. While somewhat relevant on a grand scale, the focus of my doctoral research is the nature of Cape Breton fiddling, specifically, and not the structure versus agency debate. To that end, scholars have established that structure and agency need not be considered incompatible opposites, but, rather, are interdependent (Archer 1982, 1995, 2003, 2007; Bourdieu 1986; Giddens 1991; Kemp 2010). However,

discussing broader, socio-cultural structures offers balance to my research, and allows me to acknowledge the importance of earlier historical studies of Cape Breton fiddling without undermining their contributions to the subject.

### **Overview and Chapter Breakdowns**

My second chapter will provide further background on the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, discussing it as a style, as well as its roots and place in the island's history. In addition to the predominant histories of Cape Breton, I include critiques of these well-established historical discourses. As such, I explore alternative histories that serve as counter-narratives to the region's discourses of romantic Scottish identity. The chapter ends with a literature review of significant scholars who have been influential to my research in areas such as contested identity, cultural capital, Gaelic culture, and Celticism.

The third chapter further develops the socio-cultural context in which the Cape Breton fiddling tradition is situated. I will examine different definitions of the tradition, as well as contrasting historical discourses of ethnicity and region among tradition bearers. This analysis will be framed by theories of cultural capital and power negotiation to address the fluid and changing nature of how the tradition is conceptualized. The chapter includes a case study on the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts, detailing a heated debate that arose in December 2011 regarding proposed curriculum changes at the institution. The discussion surrounding these curriculum changes revealed division in understandings of Scottish identity, where Gaelic traditions such as step-dance and traditional Cape Breton piping are placed in opposition to "invented" traditions such as Highland dance and competitive, military-style piping.

The focus of Chapter Four will be musicological analysis. By relying on extensive musical transcription of compositions and piano accompaniment, I will consider stylistic differences between “traditional” and “contemporary” Cape Breton fiddling. Along with ethnographic interviews from my fieldwork, I will deconstruct the meaning of composition, accompaniment, and arranging techniques for my participants. Moreover, I will explore how performers determine what is or is not stylistically appropriate for different performance contexts. Such decisions of repertoire and style are not only subjective, but must be negotiated by all the musicians involved in the performance. The power dynamics between fiddler and piano accompanist will be discussed.

Chapter Five will address an entirely different aspect of composition: ownership. Investigating compositions from the perspective of intellectual property, I will demonstrate how fiddle tunes can exist either as gift or commodity. This commodification (or lack thereof) of compositions is particularly relevant to how mechanical royalties are negotiated between traditional musicians. As a system designed for popular music, the current methods for collecting and calculating royalties are largely deemed to be inadequate for many traditional musicians. I will detail how Cape Breton musicians negotiate and interpret copyright law to be more appropriate for their own music.

The sixth chapter will be the first of two case studies on audio technology. Beginning with a discussion of discourses broadly associated with audio technology, I will explore the role amplification has played in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. Although amplified performances have been common in Cape Breton for decades, today’s amplification methods are relatively standardized. As such, the violin pickups currently used, and the sound they produce have become an important part of the regional

soundscape. I will consider these violin pickups as a symbol of Cape Breton fiddling through an analysis of timbre and participants' opinions on current amplification practices.

The seventh chapter will be a case study of aesthetics of “liveness” in Cape Breton fiddle recordings. Although having a live sound is highly valued, liveness is a fluid concept that is portrayed in different, sometimes contradictory ways. Liveness can be heard in a lo-fi, homemade recording of a party, as well as in a hyper-realistic studio recording that consciously constructs a live aesthetic. The decision of how to mic or equalize an instrument and whether to include extra-musical sounds in the final mix can have profound symbolic meaning. Analyzing these decisions surrounding the representation of Cape Breton fiddling on audio recordings allows us to access the ways in which musicians conceptualize the tradition, and their own playing in the abstract context of the studio imagination, a place not bound by finite time or space.

Each chapter will examine, in different contexts, the ways in which the boundaries of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition are expressed and negotiated. Beginning with cultural politics and performance practice, then moving to more emic aspects of Cape Breton traditional music, I will explore cultural identity shaped by globalization. Both the micro and the macro are equally significant, and it is the intersection between the individual and the group, as well as the global and the local, that is at the heart of my participants' music and worldviews.



## Chapter 2

### Historical Background and Literature Review

First settled by the Mi'kmaq, Europeans began visiting Cape Breton Island in 1497 with the arrival of John Cabot (Morgan 2008).<sup>2</sup> The area quickly earned a reputation for its abundance of fish, attracting the Portuguese, Spanish, English, and French in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the island was in French possession, but at this point Cape Breton was of relatively little interest to them. In 1713, it became a point of strategic importance in their war against the English, and the French established the fortress of Louisbourg, marking the beginning of the colonial era in earnest. In addition to the French, Louisbourg and the area around Sydney became the site of numerous Irish settlements in the mid-to-late 1700s (MacKenzie 1999).

Although the French had a presence in the region from very early on and there was certainly a music scene in Louisbourg during its heyday (Donavan 2002), it is unclear if these early French musicians contributed directly to what would later become the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. However, Irish music thrived in specific pockets of the island, a fact corroborated by the respectable portion of the Cape Breton fiddle repertoire comprised of Irish tunes. The Irish and French at this time often lived in close proximity and intermarriage was common. As such, it is possible that the French were involved in early instrumental music in Cape Breton, via these Irish influences.

Despite any early fiddling traditions in the area, the foundation of the current tradition is the music transplanted by the significant number of Scottish immigrants that

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<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the Vikings came to Cape Breton long before Cabot, but no archaeological evidence of this has been found.

came to Cape Breton. After the Battle of Culloden in 1745 and the subsequent collapse of the clan system in Scotland, immigrants from the Hebrides and Highlands began to arrive in Cape Breton, some forced off their land during the Highland Clearances, and others by choice.<sup>3</sup> Cape Breton became a popular destination for Scottish immigrants and this influx of Scots continued up until the 1850s. Although a significant number of these immigrants were poor farmers who were eager to own their own land (many of whom were musicians), middle class fiddlers and pipes who now lacked the patronage of their chiefs within the clan system also came to Cape Breton at this time (Shears 2008). The influence Scottish traditional music has had on Cape Breton fiddling can be clearly seen not only in the instruments played (violin and bagpipes), but in the repertoire, which prominently features many Scottish compositions, most notably strathspeys, a uniquely Scottish tune type.<sup>4</sup>

Although Cape Breton fiddling has its roots in Scottish and Irish traditional music, today it has its own identity separate from its European counterparts. There is now a substantial amount of the contemporary Cape Breton fiddling repertoire that was composed in Cape Breton, and the music as a whole has followed a different course of development from its antecedents. For instance, the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Scotland was a time known as the Golden Age of Scottish fiddling, which was profoundly influenced by Western Classical music and upper class Lowland and English romanticizations of Highland culture, and can be seen in the work of composers such as

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<sup>3</sup> For information on the Highland Clearances and Scottish immigration to North America, see Prebble (1963) and Dunn (1953).

<sup>4</sup> While it is accurate that strathspeys are widely recognized as being Scottish in origin, they are also played in the Donegal region of Northern Ireland due to migration to and from Scotland in the area.

Neil Gow, Robert MacIntosh, and William Marshall. This is also true for the military-style bagpiping and Highland dance traditions that came to prominence during this time, which are sometimes labelled as “invented” traditions, due to their romanticized and potentially tenuous connection to Gaelic traditions in Scotland. Historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger have referred to traditions that are consciously created, yet maintain a believed connection with an ancient past as “invented.” (1983). Although the term is useful for making distinctions with regard to continuity and origin, it also implies a judgement of value and authenticity, downplaying the meaning a tradition may have for an individual or group.

Compositions from this period of Scottish music are now part of the Cape Breton fiddle repertoire, but this occurred almost entirely from tune book collections that eventually made their way to North America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, making any direct contact with Scottish fiddling from this era virtually nonexistent. The Cape Breton fiddling tradition was relatively self-contained until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when out-migration to New England for work was common. Boston was a centre for Irish traditional music at the time, and Cape Breton musicians living in Boston often spent significant time with these musicians and returned to Cape Breton with new tunes and influences.

By the 1970s, after several decades as a thriving music, the tradition’s popularity began to wane. The CBC documentary, *Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* (1971) was significant in that it was the first work to suggest that the tradition was in decline. Atlantic Canadian studies scholar Marie Thompson maintains that documentary maker Ron MacInnis was highly biased in his interpretation of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition;

regardless of what insiders to the fiddling tradition told him, he remained convinced that there were very few younger players left (2006). While this interpretation is certainly exaggerated, the tradition was in fact in a state of decline, with fewer younger fiddlers playing than in the past, likely due in part to the fact that the fiddlers who were currently playing were in their prime, allowing up and coming fiddlers little access to public performances.

What followed in the wake of the documentary is well known to Cape Breton traditional musicians – Frank MacInnis, Father Eugene Morris and Father John Angus Rankin put together a committee (The Cape Breton Fiddler's Association) to organize the famous fiddling festival of 1973 in Glendale, which drew 130 fiddlers and 10,000 audience members. The most significant portion of this event was the mass fiddler finale that included 102 fiddlers. This was the highlight of the show for many, and was symbolic of the vibrancy of the tradition. The Glendale festival became the inspiration for a full-scale Cape Breton fiddling revival, with a significant number of youth picking up the violin for the first time.

In the 1990s, Cape Breton fiddling, and Celtic music as a whole, received substantial attention within the international music industry (Taylor 1997). Although the tradition had previously enjoyed modest commercial success on a local and regional level, during the 1990s major record labels became interested in the tradition, bringing fiddlers unprecedented exposure and professional opportunities. Bands such as The Barra

MacNeils and The Rankin Family,<sup>5</sup> who featured instrumental Cape Breton music in a band setting, were enormously popular at this time. The Barra MacNeils and The Rankin Family were primarily vocal, song-based groups, but it is noteworthy that all members of the Barra MacNeils are highly accomplished instrumental musicians, and the Rankins prominently featured John Morris Rankin and often toured with Howie MacDonald.<sup>6</sup>

Purely instrumental acts were also brought to the stage. Natalie MacMaster led bands of various sizes, eventually expanding to a full rock band. Cape Breton fiddling was the focus of her repertoire, but she also explored other fiddle styles such as old-time, bluegrass, Texas fiddling, and Irish fiddling. Ashley MacIsaac's album, *Hi, how are you today?* (1995) also took Cape Breton fiddling outside of its traditional setting, combining it with a grunge / rock band). The album was well-received commercially, and reached double-platinum status in Canada.

Until recently, there was little opportunity to make a living as a musician, and music making generally occurred during social and leisure time. In the past, the music served as an opportunity to socialize, possibly make some supplemental income and obtain a few drinks. Even celebrated fiddlers such as Buddy MacMaster<sup>7</sup> and Winston Fitzgerald,<sup>8</sup> who played extensively throughout the island, held full-time day jobs. Today,

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<sup>5</sup> Although officially named "The Rankin Family," the group was colloquially known simply as "The Rankins." Their fifth studio album, *Uprooted* (1998), was their only album to use the former as the band name.

<sup>6</sup> John Morris Rankin (1959 – 2000) and Howie MacDonald (b. 1965) were both accomplished on the fiddle and piano, and are regarded as two of the finest Cape Breton traditional musicians of their generation.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Alan "Buddy" MacMaster (1924 – 2014) is one of the most highly-respected fiddlers in the tradition. Among other accolades, he received an honorary doctorate from St. Francis Xavier University in 1995 and the Order of Canada in 2000 for his contribution to Canadian culture.

<sup>8</sup> Winston Fitzgerald (1914 – 1988) was a virtuosic and highly influential fiddler from White Point, Cape Breton. In addition to being an active dance player, he played with Hank Snow and made numerous television appearances.

making a living as a full-time musician is a possibility, though, not without its challenges, and tradition bearers often “express concern about skewed economic expectations” of many up-and-coming fiddlers (Feintuch 1994: 90). Cape Breton fiddling continues to be an important part of the Nova Scotia music scene. The tradition’s prominence makes it a key aspect of tourism marketing, and is often seen as a symbol of the regional identity (Lavengood 2008).

### **A Brief Explanation of the Cape Breton Fiddle Style**

Aside from differences in repertoire, the piano accompaniment and overall aesthetics of the tradition are what mark Cape Breton fiddling as unique. In its current form, Cape Breton fiddling is primarily a duo performance tradition centred on a fiddler and piano accompanist, though a guitar accompanist may also be present. The Cape Breton piano style is a relatively recent addition to the tradition, rising to prominence in the 1930s. The style has undergone significant changes over the years, but now consistently features walking bass lines constructed in octaves and perfect fifths (chromatic approach tones are common), and syncopated chords in the right hand.

As a whole, Cape Breton fiddling is typically described as aggressive and energetic. The distinctive tone and articulation of a Cape Breton fiddler are a result of the various bowing techniques that are employed. Most notes are played with individual bow strokes, though slurs are incorporated according to individual style. Bow pressure is varied from one stroke to the next (or even within the bow stroke) and may not necessarily be described as smooth and flowing. Moreover, the majority of ornamentation in Cape Breton fiddling is done with the bow, as opposed to the left hand. For example,

the same notes that an Irish fiddler may ornament with a “roll” (a cluster of grace notes similar to a “turn” in Western Classical music) would be where Cape Breton fiddlers usually place a “cut” (a bowed triplet with three notes of the same pitch). The combination of these features creates a percussive, driving sound that is characteristic of the tradition.<sup>9</sup>

There are also several other more subtle aspects of performance practice that are important to the Cape Breton fiddle style. First, there is very little melodic improvisation done by the fiddler. Bowing and ornamentation may be improvised and change from one performance of a tune to the next, but the melody of a tune is often reproduced note for note. “Correctness” is highly valued in the tradition, and this fixity of melody is a palpable example of that. In some cases, the appropriate setting for a tune may be the version found in a popular tune book, but in others, the “correct” version of a tune may be the way a particularly influential fiddler played the tune on a recording.

Key changes, while common and even expected in some fiddling traditions, are relatively uncommon. Tunes are played in medleys (each tune is played twice through), but usually every tune in the medley is based on the same tonic note, though the scale may change. So, a group of tunes played in A may alternate between A Ionian, A Dorian, A Aeolian, and A Mixolydian. Occasionally, a tune may change tonics to the relative major or minor (e.g., A minor to C major, or D major to B minor), but this is not the norm. In this way, key changes are most often expressed in subtle ways through the contrast between different modes. Abrupt key changes to unrelated key centres (like those

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed explanation of bowing and ornamentation in Cape Breton fiddling, see *Dungreen Collection: Cape Breton Violin* (1996), by Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg.

commonly found throughout Irish fiddling), do occur, but are used very sparingly, and are used to stand out as highly dramatic points in a medley.

Lastly, the tempo at which a fiddler plays is an important part of performance practice in Cape Breton fiddling. Some fiddling traditions use tempo as a means of creating excitement and playing extremely fast is a valued trait, and in others, there is a wide range of acceptable tempos. In Cape Breton, fiddlers play at a moderately fast tempo, but taking care not to play *too* quickly.<sup>10</sup> In fact, playing too fast can be an indicator of an inexperienced or out-of-practice fiddler and elicits considerable criticism. These conventions of tempo could be due in part to the connection between fiddling and dance; tempos that are too fast or too slow can be difficult to dance to. Virtuosity is demonstrated in Cape Breton fiddling not by playing at fast speeds, but through intricate passages, ornamentation and stamina. That having been said, it is noteworthy that tempos have increased in recent decades, a change that is greeted with dismay by some tradition bearers (Doherty 1996; Graham 2006).

Musical change is an ongoing concern for many tradition bearers. Although active preservation and nostalgia are associated with many traditions, the attitudes held by many Cape Breton fiddlers are often rather conservative. Ethnomusicologist Liz Doherty addressed the topic of musical change in Cape Breton in her doctoral thesis (1996). The issue of change, Doherty argues, is one of great significance in Cape Breton fiddling: “The current pre-occupation of the Cape Breton musical community is with the changing

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<sup>10</sup> Fiddlers often play reels at approximately ♩ = 105-115 bpm and jigs ♪ = 130 bpm.



Cape Breton fiddler. Change, as perceived in this context, impinges upon all aspects of musical activity” (1996: 288).

Despite the fact that Cape Bretoners maintain that musical change is a recent development in Cape Breton fiddling, Doherty clearly demonstrates that the tradition has undergone numerous changes and developments since 1928.<sup>11</sup> She writes,

The common misconception in Cape Breton is that the rapid change, and hence the impending death of the Cape Breton fiddler as we know him / her, is a symptom of the 1990s. Certainly since the start of this decade there have been many advances in all aspects of the music tradition, most involving its exposure to rapidly expanding audiences. [...] Nevertheless, to associate drastic change with such a short time span merely highlights a reluctance to accept the fact that change is a reality which has affected Cape Breton for many decades, that the changing Cape Breton fiddler is not a recent phenomenon. (Doherty 1996: 380)

It is evident that not all beliefs held by musicians about the tradition are necessarily accurate. Nonetheless, that does not mean that these beliefs and understanding of the tradition do not have cultural significance.

There are several regional sub-styles that are discussed by Cape Breton fiddlers. It is believed that many communities have developed subtly different styles of playing, though these regional distinctions are widely acknowledged as being less prevalent today. Notable styles are associated with the Mabou Coal Mines, Washabuck, Glendale, and North Sydney areas, to name a few (Doherty 1996; Graham 2006). As audio recordings became more readily available and travel throughout the island became easier, individual influences and mentors expanded well beyond any one fiddler’s home community

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<sup>11</sup> Doherty uses 1928 as the first year of her study due to the availability of audio recordings of Cape Breton fiddlers. The discussion of musical change previous to this date therefore lacks sufficient empirical evidence and would be largely speculative.

There is also what is referred to as a “Gaelic” fiddling style in Cape Breton. Known for its rougher, less-“polished” aesthetic, it is thought to imitate vocal inflections and traditional piping ornamentation. This style is generally thought of as a much older fiddling style, one that may have even originated in Scotland. The distinction between this older, Gaelic style and smoother, “modern” playing is subjective, and opinions on the topic are not always consistent. However, it is noteworthy that historian Barry Shears has documented an historical distinction between “Gaelic” piping style in Cape Breton and the military-style piping tradition that is more often seen today (2008). Describing the fiddle style as “Gaelic” has both to do with the fact that it is thought to have originated among Gaelic speaking, Scottish immigrants (i.e., Gaels), and that it is believed to have a connection with the Gaelic language itself. Several scholars have addressed this connection between Cape Breton fiddling and the Gaelic language (Shaw 1993; Doherty 1996; Sparling 2003; Feintuch 2004; Graham 2006; Falzett 2010), yet there has been no consensus or definitive conclusions on the subject.

Although often explained in terms of time-feel and rhythm, there is a lack of specificity in quantifying such claims. For instance, Celticist John Shaw has analyzed the Gaelic language in relation to melody in the context of text-setting for Gaelic song, but this work cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the Cape Breton fiddling style (1992-93). Gaelic-style fiddling is said to have the same rhythm and accents as the Gaelic language, but this is a difficult claim to assess from an etic standpoint, as it refers to subtle differences in time and articulation that are not easily represented in Western musical notation.

The discussion of the Gaelic language as it relates to musical aesthetics (and by extension, the belief thereof) has been considerably more fruitful (Sparling 2003; Falzett 2010) as aesthetics and belief need not be stated in measurable terms. However, there is not a unified consensus even within the musical community of the Gaelic language's role in the fiddling tradition, or what does or does not constitute Gaelic-style fiddling. As a sometimes controversial topic that is articulated inconsistently by tradition bearers themselves, the connection between the Gaelic language and Cape Breton fiddling is an area of research that can present challenges in framing for scholars.

### **Defining Cape Breton Fiddling**

Even defining the tradition itself can be a source of contestation. In truth, there are a number of different definitions of the nature of Cape Breton fiddling and the boundaries of the tradition. Some define the fiddling tradition in terms of ethnicity, as Scottish, or perhaps as a borrowed version thereof. Some consider it a new product of Cape Breton. Others define the tradition in terms of the Gaelic language, which associates the music with a very specific type of song tradition and Scottishness. The fiddling tradition is sometimes defined as primarily a dance tradition, relating it to function and performance context. Scottish, Gaelic, and dance definitions are not necessarily at odds with each other; however, they each make subtle distinctions of group, region, ethnicity, and cultural capital. The complexity of such labelling and categorizations is discussed by Doherty, who writes, "Ambiguity arises as the Scottish fiddler evolves into the Cape Breton fiddler, and as Scottish music evolves into a Cape Breton music. Is the label Cape Breton merely a geographic one, or does it imply an underlying musical and cultural

significance?” (1996: 50). Labels such as Scottish or Cape Breton can mean different things to different people.

All of these definitions have legitimacy, revealing the amount of diversity found within the tradition. As such, all of these perspectives demonstrate significant aspects of the tradition. Cape Breton fiddling is a multi-ethnic tradition but is particularly influenced by the island’s Scottish heritage. In some contexts, the bagpipes, Gaelic language, and dance tradition may be particularly influential. By choosing one definition of Cape Breton fiddling over another, musicians mark themselves as belonging to specific sub-styles and social group(s).

### **Economic Realities of Contemporary Cape Breton Fiddling**

Economics play an important role in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. On the local level, even hobby musicians are typically paid for public performances, and more broadly, professional musicians rely on such income to make a living. Many musicians in the Cape Breton traditional music scene work as part-time or semi-professional musicians and engage with the commercial music industry in some capacity. A relatively small music scene, Cape Breton traditional music produces substantial numbers of performers and recording artists, though few musicians enjoy long-term commercial success. Like in other musical genres, a music career in Cape Breton fiddling can be unpredictable. Even Ashley MacIsaac, a symbol of the success that can be achieved by a Cape Breton fiddler, filed for bankruptcy in April 2000. Regardless of one’s musical genre, a career in the music industry can be surprisingly unstable.

Many traditional musicians in the area begin playing at a young age (roughly five to ten years old), and become proficient players by their mid-to-late teens, playing gigs on a local basis. By their early twenties, musicians who are still actively performing begin to reach professional status, often releasing their first commercial recordings. For those who are enrolled in post-secondary education, these early stages of their career commonly serve as a summer job, making music full-time, albeit seasonal work initially.

The core of the local Cape Breton traditional music scene is largely comprised of early career musicians, who are roughly between the ages of eighteen and 35. This remains relatively consistent over time, as the number of performers who choose to pursue a full-time, professional music career beyond their late twenties declines significantly. While the number of professional musicians who continue into their thirties is significantly fewer, they are, in most cases, well-established career musicians who may play more internationally than locally. As artists move on to other professions or shift away from the local scene, they are replaced by new cohorts of younger, up-and-coming musicians.

I believe that it is no coincidence that what is now a standard career progression parallels the early professional experiences of Ashley MacIsaac and Natalie MacMaster. Although today most individuals' commercial success is considerably more modest, MacIsaac and MacMaster have served as models of what is possible for current Cape Breton musicians to do within the music industry and how to do so. It is certainly possible that their careers are also related to the emergence of formalized music lessons in the Cape Breton fiddle revival as discussed by Virginia Garrison (1985). The transition to regular local, or even national gigs may occur earlier than some music genres, and in

many cases can be more economically viable, at least initially. Getting a start in the Cape Breton traditional music scene is relatively easy in a number of ways. By being associated with the tradition early on in life, most individuals are well-known to the musical community by the time they would be hired to perform publicly. With a fairly small but supportive and loyal audience base (particularly for young musicians new to the scene), short term success is not as difficult as sustaining such early momentum long term.

As with any occupation, Cape Breton traditional musicians face specific challenges and must develop strategies and skills to deal with such issues. They need to make ends meet economically, yet are also faced with issues surrounding how they represent and contextualize themselves, the tradition, and their region. Folklorist Burt Feintuch frames Cape Breton as a region that is economically underdeveloped and subject to significant out-migration, but also able to maintain a healthy social existence through traditional dance and performance practices. He notes that few fiddlers are able to support themselves by their fiddling, and often require another job, or even several different seasonal jobs to be employed year-round (2004).

This is a significant point for two reasons. First, it identifies the highly seasonal nature of local work as a fiddler due to the importance of tourism. Second, it frames fiddling as a part-time endeavour in many situations. Although several of my participants do indeed work as full-time musicians, the majority have at least a part-time occupation in addition to their musical endeavours. None of my participants earn their income from any one particular musical venture, but through a number of smaller opportunities. For example, Cape Breton musicians may have a solo career in which they act as the headliner for a tour (which in itself may include both local and international

performances), and also as a supporting musician in other projects, a studio session musician (perhaps on multiple instruments), teacher (private lessons), composer, and producer.

Filling the void left by the now defunct coal and steel industries, tourism has become an increasingly important, albeit seasonal component of the Cape Breton economy, and is an essential part of how Cape Breton traditional musicians make a living. With little work for musicians on the island throughout much of the year, the summer brings tourists and a substantial demand for music. The highly seasonal nature of the tradition is highlighted by the fact that the majority of traditional music venues on the island, like most dance halls, are open only during the summer. This is particularly noteworthy when one considers that square dances are deemed by many to be the lifeblood of the fiddling tradition. In a sense, it is the presence of tourists that allows locals to perform and engage with their own traditions in this manner.

On a local level, summer tourism creates a high demand for traditional music, attracting spectators and musicians alike. As such, Cape Breton fiddling functions both as a marketing tool and a cultural production consumed by locals and tourists. This places traditional musicians at an intersection between tourists and provincial government offices who promote and fund tourism. Musicians must appeal to tourists, satisfy government expectations, yet represent themselves and the tradition in a way that meets their own needs. Power, economics, and representation are negotiated and informed by notions of art and authenticity.

Local gigs such as square dances, staged concerts, and performances in pubs are not as lucrative as other performances at international festivals, but have the possibility of

being quite frequent, and have therefore become intimately tied to the life of working musicians. In addition, these performances are well-attended by locals, and by facilitating continuity, are fundamental to the tradition on a historical and vernacular level. The tourism season in Cape Breton begins in June and extends until the Celtic Colours International Festival in October, which features many local musicians as well as high-profile international acts.

Tourists are welcomed, but not without some reservation. They are essential to the economy and traditional music scene, but also create competition for local space (like at a pub or dance hall) where year-round residents share their community with seasonal visitors. This tension, however, is veiled; tourists are not dealt with in an unpleasant manner, but interaction can take on a subtle, polite, but distanced quality. These colliding worlds musicians must constantly be negotiated during local performances. When asked if they altered how they played for tourist audiences, most of my participants insisted that they remained true to their notions of tradition, and performed the same regardless of who was in their audience. That having been said, some acknowledged that they (or others musicians) may change their repertoire slightly for the purposes of CD sales.

### **Critiquing Histories of Cape Breton**

Scholars such as historian Robert Morgan (2008) and anthropologist Sam Migliore (1999) discuss essentialism in representing the island, particularly in industrial Cape Breton, which has been home to a wide variety of immigrant groups, including, but not limited to, Ukranian, Polish, Italian, Newfoundland and African Canadian communities. Migliore explains that Cape Breton is



often is presented to tourists (and people in general) as a Scottish haven within Canada... the image of Cape Breton this representation creates tends to mask and devalue the contributions of the Mi'kmaq (as Cape Breton's First Nation) and that of later arrivals (such as the Acadian, Afro-Caribbean, Irish, Italian, Lebanese, South Asian, Ukrainian, and many others) to the social and cultural fabric of the island. Cape Breton's cultural heritage is much more complex than the tourist packages could ever reveal. (1999: 11)

Furthermore, Morgan documents the widespread mining industry in the early 1900s, demonstrating that coal mining was an important industry in rural areas like Inverness County, a region that is now celebrated for its pristine, untouched, rural beauty (2008).

The focus on Scottishness and romantic anti-modernism is clearly connected with the way Nova Scotia was represented in connection with tourism from the 1930s to 1950s. Historian Ian McKay credits Premier Angus A. MacDonald, along with folk revivals in handicrafts and song for creating a romanticized, "tartanized," Scottish identity for Nova Scotia (1994). As McKay points out, the depiction of Nova Scotia as a rural, idyllic Scottish province was inaccurate; in addition to having industrialized, urban areas, according to a 1921 census, the dominant ethnicity was not Scottish, but English. Moreover, Prince Edward Island and Ontario also had significantly larger Scottish populations at this time (McKay 1992:8). Sociologist James Overton similarly connects an idealized "folk" to rural, pre-industrial life, an idea dating back to the 1800s.

Romantic sentimentality about nature and those close to nature is part of a widespread ideological ensemble in capitalist society. It grows out of an opposition to technical progress and disruption and harks back to what is seen as a simple, more stable, more human past based on the small producer and non-capitalist forms of production. This is a powerful ideology, informing all our hopes, dreams and fears. It pervades the media and literature of all kinds. It, to some extent, acts as an antidote to the unpleasantness of capitalist development and it often has reactionary associations, although this is not always true. [...] So today certain areas tend to be glorified as "natural" or "pre-capitalist" refuges where we can get away from it all and rediscover ourselves. In the face of

capitalism's ever more ruthless pillaging, the ideology of nature works to mystify and mask these effects. (Overton 1996: 122)

While Overton writes about the manner in which Newfoundland has been contextualized, the comment is relevant to a variety of other contexts. This type of romanticization is not unique to Nova Scotia, and occurs in many regions such as the Appalachians. This framing of the Appalachians as a romanticized, rural enclave of authentic folk culture is addressed by Mary Hufford. She offers, "Conjured in tourist destinations throughout the region, Appalachia occupies a time and space 'other' to America" (2003:161).

Nova Scotia's idealized Scottish identity may be somewhat more accurate in Cape Breton, as Scottish heritage is more dominant than in the rest of the province, but it is still inaccurate to view the area as homogeneous. In a 2006 census by Statistics Canada, approximately 40% of Cape Bretoners marked their heritage as Scottish, while English, Irish and French backgrounds were all very close to 20%. It should be noted, however, that these ethnic categories are not exclusive, and respondents frequently included multiple ethnicities. Also of interest is the fact that the second largest category is the non-specific, all inclusive "Canadian" category, totalling at about 35% (Statistics Canada 2006). It is apparent that although Scottish heritage is indeed pervasive, Cape Breton ethnic identity is not simplistic or monolithic.

Cape Breton fiddling undoubtedly has its roots in Scottish culture, however, Cape Breton fiddling is not merely an unchanged, transplanted version of its Scottish counterpart. The contributions of Irish, Acadian and Mi'kmaq musicians to the tradition are often downplayed (Hennesey 2008: 9). Historical narratives of Cape Breton fiddling are often depicted as an idealized pre-Clearance past, a connection to the Gaelic language,

authenticity, and preservation due to isolation and lack of external influences. Such histories can take on moralistic tones, stressing the necessity and honour in preserving tradition, and the debt we owe to our forefathers for providing us with such a rich and “authentic”<sup>12</sup> culture.

Ethnomusicologist Jessica Herdman is critical of the use of this historical narrative by scholars, viewing it as a combination of notions formed in Enlightenment Scotland and elements examined in McKay’s discussion of tartanized Nova Scotia, which has become naturalized over time:

Unfortunately, as several scholars point out, extant documentation about the musical traditions in both the eighteenth-century Scottish Highlands and nineteenth-century Cape Breton is lacking. As a result, most of these “historical” examinations have relied largely on orally-perpetuated accounts of this historical narrative. For instance, Allister MacGillvray’s deservedly acclaimed *The Cape Breton Fiddler*, upon which many later scholarly works rely for their historical understanding, shows the history of the tradition through the lens of twentieth-century informants. Taking this narrative as the definitive account of the history of Cape Breton musical culture does not acknowledge its likely transformations, through both the gradual alterations that normally occur within oral tradition, and the particular influences of the twentieth century. (Herdman 2008: 4)

In relation to ideas of a period of cultural stasis that preserved Cape Breton fiddling in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is impossible to prove or disprove such claims. As Herdman mentions above, there is little documentation from this period; save for contemporary oral accounts which are often nostalgic and sometimes factually inaccurate. Without more reliable information, performance practices of this period are left entirely to speculation. What is of importance, however, is that while geographic isolation may be a convenient and

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<sup>12</sup> I use the quotation marks to acknowledge that authenticity is a contentious topic, particularly in regard to fields such as anthropology, folklore, and ethnomusicology. Authenticity is a term that can mean many different things, but is often popularly linked to cultural stasis, something that is problematic in academia. Many scholars do not see the term as useful in regard to culture as it embeds an inherent judgement of value (Overton 1996; Bendix 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Fife 2004; Pocius 2001).

popular explanation for cultural stasis, it is an unacceptable assumption in academia. To assume that change can only occur due to external influences positions a group as unimaginative, which in turn places cultural discussions dangerously close to cultural evolution, primitivism, and colonialist Eurocentrism.

### **Position Within Existing Literature**

My research is built on the foundational work on Cape Breton traditional music by scholars such as musicologist Kate Dunlay (1986; 1996), folklorist Ian McKinnon (1989), Liz Doherty (1996), and Cape Breton fiddler and political scientist Glenn Graham (2006). While each of these studies are valuable in that they have provided extensive historical backgrounds and established the cultural context for the tradition, the overall focus of my study lies beyond the social history documented by these works. As such, I have relied on these scholars to form a base on which to develop my analysis, drawing on them to supply specific details or sometimes further developing their tangential observations.

Dunlay's master's thesis (1986), which was later published in the form of a tune book (1996), represents some of the first musicological study of Cape Breton fiddling. In addition to musicological analysis, it also briefly discusses the larger socio-cultural context for the tradition. Through extensive musical transcription, Dunlay identifies the series of ornamental, technical, and aesthetic characteristics that are present in Cape Breton fiddle performance practice.

McKinnon's study of commercial audio recordings in Cape Breton fiddling documents many issues surrounding fiddlers in the recording industry. With particular focus on the rise and fall of the Celtic, Rodeo, and Banff record labels and subsequent

shift towards self-produced recordings, he discusses the growing sense of professionalism among fiddlers. It is noteworthy that McKinnon offers an analysis of commercial recordings not only as a commodity, but addresses other non-economic functions they satisfy, such as a means for learning and disseminating repertoire, or increasing one's social status.

Doherty's doctoral thesis (1996) was the first significant ethnomusicological study of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. Focusing on musical change in the tradition since 1928, Doherty uses a combination of musical transcription and ethnographic research to detail a longitudinal historical study of stylistic change within the tradition. She demonstrates that contrary to popular belief, musical change is not a recent development in the tradition, and has been a part of the tradition since the earliest audio recordings of Cape Breton fiddling. Doherty's work has been important to my research in establishing a broad historical background of the tradition, particularly in relation to the overall social climate of the tradition and attitudes of musicians.

With Dunlay, McKinnon, and Doherty laying the foundation for the academic knowledge base regarding the socio-cultural history of Cape Breton fiddling, scholars began to further investigate identity, social change, and representational issues associated with the tradition. Glenn Graham's master's thesis (2004), later published as a book (2006), examines the influence of the Gaelic language on Cape Breton fiddling. He maintains that the Scottish Cape Breton fiddling tradition has been shaped by Gaelic song, as well as Gaelic-style piping and step-dance. Graham contends that an older, Gaelic fiddling style can be learned and reproduced by fiddlers who are not Gaelic speakers. In fact, Graham asserts that this older Gaelic style is still relatively common

today in players who are both young and old, despite Gaelic's continuing decline.

Concerns of cultural loss were common among his participants, who voiced worries that overt changes to traditional practices could lead to cultural erosion. Graham counters such ideas by proposing that it is cultural change that has allowed the tradition to stay current as long as it has. These fears are common within folk music circles, but it is clear from the extent that his participants are preoccupied with such issues and that the Cape Breton fiddling tradition exists in a highly conservative context.

A number of scholars in recent years have begun to consider Cape Breton culture not as homogenous, but a diverse place of contested identity and competing power relations. Migliore, clearly influenced by the work of McKay (1992; 1994), carefully underscores the multi-ethnic history of industrial Cape Breton that is silenced by the overwhelming tartanization the province experiences (1999). Feintuch identified regional and political competition between rural and industrial areas of Cape Breton, though these power relations were discussed mostly as a means to establish the contemporary cultural context in which the music is performed (2004).

Geographer Adrian Ivakhiv developed Feintuch's assertions of contested Cape Breton identity, using the Celtic Colours International Festival as a case study of the negotiation of regional and cultural identity (2005). Ivakhiv similarly demonstrates the ways in which various social groups each have different, competing interests, both political, and economic, in how Cape Breton is represented. He frames festivals as a point of interaction between competing groups: those involved in the festival from a business perspective are trying to make money; locals are concerned with issues of identity and

representation; while people attending the event are looking for what they may interpret as authenticity.

In the case of Celtic Colours, Ivakhiv argues that the entire festival is staged around Cape Breton's autumn foliage, and the festival's name explicitly ethnicizes the island's geography and frames the island as ethnically homogenous. The particular term "Celtic" is one that is viewed critically by local Gaelic activists. In their opinion, the festival implies a connection to Gaelic, but does not contribute to the needs of the Gaelic community. Although Ivakhiv effectively discusses the cultural politics and power negotiation of the Cape Breton traditional music scene, his study is one specific example of contested identity as it relates to geography and the Celtic Colours festival; his analysis does not attempt to examine such contested identity in Cape Breton in a broader context. It becomes increasingly evident that the scholarship of Feintuch and Ivakhiv offers valuable insights, that when aligned with the historical and socio-cultural attitudes discussed by McKinnon, Doherty, and Graham, reveal that there is a great deal at play in Cape Breton fiddling.

Although this scholarship on Cape Breton fiddling has certainly been influential, my thesis has been profoundly affected by research that examines how the boundaries and expression of traditional musics are negotiated within a contemporary context. As such, issues relevant to power, cultural capital, and the maintenance of social groups have been truly important to my work.

Ethnomusicologist Heather Sparling's thesis deals with the Cape Breton Gaelic community (including native speakers, learners and activists), demonstrating that even such a small, specific group is bound by internal politics and power relations (2006). In

this context, disputes arise in regard to what is deemed as “legitimate” Gaelic culture and how it should be represented. Sparling employs Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital to interpret the negotiation of Gaelic song genre and repertoire within the community. She writes,

Not all genres are created equal. I have just defined genres as socially contested categories created through discourse and linked to social characteristics such as social status, as is the case with Gaelic songs in Cape Breton. People contest genres because there is something to be gained (or lost) in having authority to assert their socially accepted (“legitimate”) definitions. (2006: 156)

Sparling asserts that this contestation can be linked with different actors within the Gaelic community having varying educational backgrounds and habitus, thereby affecting social status, as well as opinions on different genres of Gaelic song.

These politics of definition are determined by cultural capital: they are “socially contested categories created through discourse and linked to social characteristics such as social status” (Sparling 2006: 156). Not only are such categorizations of tradition contested, but they are also part of fluid power negotiations. Sparling writes,

Each Cape Breton Scottish descendant has multiple subjectivities which exert different pressures and inclinations. There is power in declaring that the Gaelic language is essential to the Cape Breton fiddle style, and there is power in refuting that belief. There is power in differentiating oneself by speaking Gaelic and power in dismissing Gaelic as irrelevant to contemporary society. There is thus a macro-dialectic between the Cape Breton Gaelic community and dominant Anglo-Canada, and there is a micro-dialectic between individuals within the community. These dynamic dialectic relationships, in which power is always shifting and constantly being exercised, is what gives the Cape Breton Gaelic community and each individual Cape Bretoner a sense of their identity. It is also why it is so difficult to articulate. (2006: 44)

Although the specific social groups and genre categorization differ in relation to the fiddling tradition, aspects of the fiddling tradition are contested in similar ways.



Sparling's application of Bourdieu's theories is extremely effective in describing and deconstructing the discourse and power negotiation found within Cape Breton traditional music. Sparling employs Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, but posits that in a Cape Breton context, social class is relatively uniform, and therefore not a key factor in determining social interaction and power (2006: 172). I have used this as a model for my own work; however, despite some similarities and shared community members, the Cape Breton fiddling scene is distinct and separate from the Gaelic community in a number of ways. The Gaelic community is a fairly small, relatively uniform group, concentrated largely in central Cape Breton. The Cape Breton fiddle scene, while not without its ties to the Gaelic community, is much larger, dispersed throughout the island, and represents a more diverse cross-section of individuals. In addition, the Gaelic language is in a very vulnerable state.<sup>13</sup> The delicate condition of the Gaelic language makes it the topic of political interest, with Gaelic activism playing a prominent role in the community. Although Cape Breton fiddling may be broadly associated with Gaelic activism in some contexts, the tradition as a whole is not surrounded by such political activism, making a significant distinction in how these two communities relate to their respective traditions.

While cultural capital plays a substantial role in power and status within a group and can be influential in how tradition is negotiated, ethnomusicologist Sherry Johnson's

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<sup>13</sup> The Office of Gaelic Affairs estimates there are roughly 2000 Gaelic speakers in Nova Scotia, though according to recent Statistics Canada data collected in 2011, there were 300 respondents who listed "Gaelic languages" as a mother tongue (80 respondents were in Cape Breton) (Census of Population, Statistics Canada 2011), and a total of 1275 (635 respondents were in Cape Breton) (National Household Survey, Statistics Canada 2011) respondents who listed a "Gaelic language" as a non-official language which they could speak well enough to have a conversation in. The number of individuals who can have a conversation in Gaelic is likely higher, as the National Household Survey (the source of this data) reports a global non-response rate of 28.2% in Nova Scotia, and between 27% and 44.2% in Cape Breton areas.

thesis on the old-time fiddle contest circuit in Ontario demonstrates that notions of tradition are often fluid, and actively manipulated through repertoire and style (2006). In doing so, a fiddler's musical choices serve as markers of generation and class. By navigating these issues, fiddle contest participants engage in discourses that associate their playing with a "traditional" past, as well as an innovative present. Not only are such negotiations relevant to a fiddler's identity, but status and significant amounts of prize money can also be at stake in such fiddling competitions.

The expression of identity and tradition through musical performance is a key aspect of my research, yet Johnson's work has substantial differences from my own. Most notably, fiddling contests are not popular in Cape Breton. As fiddling is regarded as a music of community and entertainment, such overt competition is discouraged within the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. Moreover, Johnson's research is not simply about old-time fiddling, but about an institution: fiddle contests. With explicit rules, structure, and individuals designated with the authority to officially approve or disapprove of a performance (i.e., judges), the politics at play in old-time fiddling contests take on a remarkably different character from those of Cape Breton fiddling. A similar game of negotiating identity, status, and authority takes place in an unofficial context in Cape Breton, but it is precisely this lack of formalization and stability in Cape Breton fiddling that I am exploring.

The fluid nature of tradition, the ways in which identity is asserted through music, and the careful negotiation between tradition and innovation is also discussed by ethnomusicologist Meghan Forsyth in her thesis on the performance and representation of identity in the Acadian fiddling tradition of Prince Edward Island (2010). By analyzing

performances that take place on the most grassroots level as well as the most polished professional music of the music industry, Forsyth argues that these two extremes, though opposites in a sense, are closely related and interdependent. She examines the ways the bands Barachois<sup>14</sup> and Vishtèn<sup>15</sup> represent their Acadian identity on the international stage. Barachois, focused on the iconic Acadian kitchen party, create a somewhat folksy, informal, and semi-private performance brought into the public arena. Vishtèn, on the other hand, represent themselves in a more modern light, drawing influences from other francophone and Celtic music, performing with a tight, meticulously arranged, cosmopolitan aesthetic. For both musical groups, their Acadian identity is integral to their music, but each relies on very different notions of Acadianness to do so.

The fiddling of Prince Edward Island as a whole has a great deal in common with Cape Breton fiddling. Geographically close and settled by the same ethnic groups as Cape Breton, the Prince Edward Island Fiddler's Association even consciously modelled themselves on the Cape Breton Fiddler's Association after the Cape Breton fiddle revival (Hornby 1983). The most significant difference between Forsyth's research and my own is found in our participants. Acadians in Prince Edward Island (much like in Cape Breton) are a minority, within a larger Scottish ethnicity and fiddling tradition. Although my Acadian participants have provided particularly important insights, in Cape Breton, Acadian fiddlers do not have their own separate fiddling tradition to the same extent as

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<sup>14</sup> Barachois were a successful four-piece band from Prince Edward Island who played Acadian traditional music from the mid-1990s to 2003. They produced three commercial recordings, the first of which *Barachois* (1996) was awarded Best Francophone Recording at the 1997 East Coast Music Awards.

<sup>15</sup> Vishtèn are an Acadian traditional band with Emmanuelle and Pastelle Leblanc, and Pascal Miousse from Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands, respectively. They have recorded four albums to date. Their most recent recording, *Mōsaik* (2013) was awarded Francophone Recording of the Year 2013 East Coast Music Awards.

the Acadians of Prince Edward Island, and my research deals more broadly with Cape Breton fiddling as a whole. As such, Acadian identity is not a prominent theme in my work. I examine Cape Breton regional identity as a whole within the context of a Scottish ethnic majority, an important distinction that clearly distinguishes the dynamics and cultural politics from Acadian fiddling on Prince Edward Island.

That having been said, Forsyth aptly describes the fluid nature of the international folk and Celtic music scene not only in relation to marketing, but also the globalized musical influences and exchanges that occur between musicians. Celtic music is a genre that is not as straightforward as it initially appears. It may be understood to be the traditional music of “Celtic” regions, but it is a music that is subject to flexible, ambiguous definitions, and a series of more complex cultural processes (Stokes and Bohlman 2003). Anthropologist Malcolm Chapman discusses the fact that there is a distinction between the international Celtic scene and what actually happens within the vernacular group of people who live in a Celtic region (1994). In this way, the Celtic movement has become an entirely separate, globalized version of the grass roots traditions that it celebrates. Chapman notes a number of important characteristics of Celticism, describing it as an idea that is defined in opposition to a more dominant group, existing on the periphery. Moreover, Chapman acknowledges the fact that romanticism plays an important role in Celticism, and works to glorify the exotic other that is created.

Celtic music scholar Scott Reiss expands upon Chapman’s ideas, applying them specifically to Irish traditional music. He posits Celtic music and Irish traditional music as being two separate, but interrelated categories (2003). Irish traditional music, on one hand, is based on local traditional music, highly socialized, and performed at pub sessions

and home gatherings. Celtic music is distinct in that it exists exclusively as a commodity and is part of a virtual community. Celtic music does not differentiate between nationality or place, and often includes groups that reject the category altogether. It refers to a vague, exotic place that exists in the imagination. Overall, Reiss acknowledges that Celtic music is based on traditional musics with real communities; the production of Celtic music is indicative of traditional musicians creating their own musical worlds and exerting agency on global markets.

Following this logic, Celtic music can serve as a way for musicians to reconstruct local identity in a global context. Many Scots feel a need for a re-definition of local identity because of the history of “invented” and appropriated Highland traditions; ethnomusicologist Lisa Davenport Jenkins frames Celtic music as being part of the global music industry, and in this way, a part of international relationships (2004). As a product of globalization, Celtic music can be seen as homogenous because of a certain predictability of Celtic music products as a whole, but also celebrating difference, which attracts a large audience. In this way, Celtic music is regarded as both exotic and accessible; the Celts have a mysterious quality to them, but they are not too unfamiliar, because they are associated with Western Europe. Jenkins views the world music industry as having empowered Celtic musicians and allowed them to assert their identity on a global level.

Celtic music and the performance opportunities that are associated with it create an international circuit of festivals, theatres and workshops, and as such, Celtic musicians can be seen as belonging to a transnational Celtic music community (Lavengood 2008). In this way, they are part of what popular music scholar Will Straw would refer to as a

“scene.” He describes a scene as a group that is formed around a cultural activity, and often (but not necessarily) is associated with a location or region (2004: 412). Although Straw’s conception of a scene is somewhat broad, it is an idea that is extremely malleable; a scene could be highly localized, or exist on an international level. Cultural studies scholars Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennett refine Straw’s framework to define scenes on the local, translocal, and virtual level (2004).

The Cape Breton fiddling tradition can be understood as a cross-section of both the international (or translocal) Celtic music scene, and the local Cape Breton music scene; while both scenes are distinct, they have numerous members in common. Cape Breton fiddling’s place in popular culture is significant to my research and the international Celtic scene is closely linked to globalized, popular culture. Aspects of culture are “indigenized” (Appadurai 1996: 32) as musicians consume and appropriate globalized culture, assigning deep local significance to it. This process is perhaps most accurately described as “glocalization,” a term used by sociologist Roland Robertson to provide a nuanced description of contemporary globalization (1995). Instead of polarized notions of the global and local, Robertson construes globality and locality as overlapping categories in which homogenization and heterogenization occur simultaneously.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Setting the Scene: Cultural Capital, Ethnicity, and Region**

The Cape Breton fiddling tradition is subject to debate and contestation among musicians and audience members. While such debate and lack of consensus on a variety of issues has been mentioned and sometimes discussed tangentially by scholars (McKinnon 1989; Doherty 1996; Feintuch 2004; Ivakhiv 2005; Graham 2006), it is a topic worthy of further investigation. I do not wish to frame the tradition as one of rivalries and petty infighting; on the contrary, the community is tight-knit and supportive. While not the norm, these examples of contestation provide a clearer picture of what is and is not accepted within a given context, by whom, and why. Considering how these differences affect the tradition underscores the diversity of opinions and performance practices found within the tradition, and allows access to a better understanding of the contingencies that affect how musical meaning is constructed. Further, these varying opinions, discourses, and performance practices provide insight into how boundaries of social groups are created and maintained. This lack of total consensus is not uncommon within communities, and should not be interpreted as problematic. As I demonstrate through this thesis, this diversity of opinion within the Cape Breton fiddling community is not due to fragmentation and disconnect, but is an inevitable part of a continually changing, living tradition.

In this chapter, I investigate the polyphony of discourses surrounding how musicians define and relate to Cape Breton fiddling in regard to ethnicity, region, and the Gaelic language. Each of these issues is addressed in a separate section. Every musician has his or her own unique biases and privileges certain aspects of the tradition as more

“legitimate” than others. These varying perspectives take on symbolic value, defining cultural capital in different contexts and marking the boundaries of social groups. What is considered “legitimate,” and who has the power to determine such cultural legitimacy is of tremendous importance to the actors involved in the musical community. Opinions on the music’s relationship to dance or the Gaelic language, for instance, can profoundly affect how one conceptualizes or defines the tradition, and create connections with like-minded individuals.

Moreover, a player who holds substantial cultural capital for their dance-style performances may not have the same currency in a formal concert setting. The fluid nature of cultural capital within the Cape Breton fiddling scene not only relates to musicians, but to their audience. Audience taste and preferences (something that can at times be closely related to regional aesthetics) can similarly affect whether a player is accepted in a specific context. In this chapter, I will address these issues in a case study of the Cape Breton Gaelic College of Arts and Crafts. In December 2011, there was a flurry of discussion regarding potential program changes at the Gaelic College, which would allegedly remove certain “invented” traditions such as Highland dance and military style Highland piping, thereby favouring more “authentically” Gaelic and Cape Breton traditions. The controversy and debate that these potential changes inspired underscores the contested nature of Cape Breton traditional music, and the ways in which the power of defining tradition is negotiated.



### **The Struggle for “Legitimacy”**

Power and cultural capital are integral to understanding the Cape Breton fiddling scene. They are part of processes that define the tradition and mark boundaries of social groups. An individual’s performance style or beliefs about the tradition can align them with like-minded groups or musicians and place others in opposition. There are a number of different aspects of the tradition that, while relatively indisputable, can be interpreted differently from one individual to the next. One of the most important influences has been the music of Scottish, Gaelic-speaking immigrants. The tradition is also associated with dance and bagpipes, and has grown to encompass a number of regional sub-styles of fiddling.

Feintuch identifies a degree of contestation in the definition of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition and contrasting tastes in which “legitimacy” is framed in binaries. He comments, “Where some see continuity, others see old ways disintegrating as the music expands. Some see artistic growth and invention; others declaim that the music is deteriorating as it manifests contemporary musical ideas. No one seems to disagree, though, with the premise that the music is more robust than ever” (2004: 74). It is evident that there can be very different opinions of what does and does not belong in the tradition. This can also be related to the work of ethnomusicologist Stephanie Conn, whose doctoral thesis addresses the plural and intersubjective nature of Gaelic singing traditions in Cape Breton, demonstrating the significance of personal experience and worldview in the construction of musical meaning (2012).

To this end, certain individuals within the Cape Breton traditional music scene have significant influence through their cultural and social capital to define what is and is

not acceptable within the tradition. Fiddler Robert Deveau told me, “Unfortunately there is that clique, and that clannishness issue that can be good. And it can be bad. You can be shunned” (2011). In this way, stylistic, regional, or personal issues create underlying power structures that can affect the scene as a whole. Ian McKinnon acknowledges criticism and informal competition among musicians: “Though at present formal contests are not held to any extent in Cape Breton, there is ‘silent competition’ among the fiddlers. Rivalry and criticism are prevalent but most often masked” (1989: 41). This is echoed by Deveau, who continued, “One of things that I always prided myself about Cape Breton music culture is that we didn’t have competitions. Although it can be just as cut-throat and back-stabbing and shark-infested in other ways... But those [things] tend to be a little bit more underground” (2011). Both McKinnon’s and Deveau’s comments reference the fact that such power structures are indeed hidden, and may not be evident in all situations.

Some players are highly aware of such competition in the tradition, but members of the community are also highly supportive of each other. Serious disagreements between musicians are generally quite rare, as they are not seen to be to anyone’s benefit. The Cape Breton traditional music scene is quite small, and it is difficult, if not impossible to avoid fellow musicians for a substantial period of time. Having large-scale disputes with other musicians would significantly limit the extent to which one would be able to perform. Cape Breton fiddler and multi-instrumentalist J. P. Cormier is quick to acknowledge how supportive the community can be: “That’s one thing about this place – it’s *not* a competitive place. I’ve never seen that ever here. Every fiddler is on everybody else’s side. You don’t hear people bad-mouthing other players here. It’s a family. And that is rare. That is really rare. Which is a big plus” (2012).

This is a matter of discussion, however, that begins to address issues of acceptance. With power and cultural capital come legitimacy and acceptance, so musicians must align themselves with certain ideals for this acceptance and approval. This is consistent with Sparling's assertion that, "People contest genres because there is something to be gained (or lost) in having authority to assert their socially accepted ('legitimate') definitions" (2006: 156). I have found that some of my participants are keenly aware of the intersection between cultural capital and acceptance, while others may not even acknowledge such matters. However, the musicians who are aware of these issues are most often individuals who lack cultural capital in some capacity, or are trying to legitimize their playing. Musicians who are less aware of these issues (at least explicitly) not only relate to these ideas on an intuitive level, but have already established their cultural capital, perhaps through familial or other social connections.

Being accepted within the community, or more specifically, within a particular subgroup, is of tremendous importance, and something musicians are sometimes highly conscious of. That having been said, musicians who are well-established with considerable cultural capital tend to be less aware of such power-relations. As such, this issue of belonging, critique, and acceptance is something that is almost entirely unseen to some. To individuals with less cultural capital, these are issues they are keenly aware of. This could be applied to musicians who are young and trying to get established as a musician, or someone who may be othered somehow, be it by their ethnicity, region, or personal reasons. J. P. Cormier explains,

I don't think I was ever accepted totally as a Cape Breton fiddler. Because I wasn't born here. My parents are from here. And my background was such that... I had such a diverse background musically, that a lot of people still say that when

I play Cape Breton music, you can hear the Yankee in me. But that was part of my style, as is when you look at any of these other players. But on the other side of the coin, there are people who pay it no mind and they're fine with my background. But there are other players, or people, that will say, "He's a great fiddler, but he's not a Cape Breton fiddler." (2012)

In Cormier's comment, it is evident not only that power and cultural capital is context dependent, but that cultural "legitimacy" is affected by group boundaries. Such boundary marking allows for the possibility of broadly acknowledging someone's musical skill at arm's length, while simultaneously distancing them from more idealized standards of performance on which the tradition is based.

### **The History of the Gaelic College**

One such example of how musical traditions are contested in Cape Breton can be found in the cultural politics of the Cape Breton Gaelic College of Arts and Crafts. Established in 1938, the Gaelic College has raised numerous issues regarding representation of Scottish culture and Cape Breton identity. Initially, the Gaelic College focused on weaving, as well as Highland dance and competitive piping, but has expanded its programs considerably since then. While many of its original programs are still active, today, the majority of the Gaelic College's programs are related to the Gaelic language, and more contemporary, Cape Breton music and dance traditions. As a key aspect of Premier Angus A. MacDonald's tartanization of Nova Scotia, the Gaelic College's romanticization of Scottish culture and inclusion of "invented" traditions such as Highland dance have been critiqued by several scholars (see, for example, McKay 1994; Kennedy 2002; Graham 2006; Shears 2008; MacKinnon 2009).

Although tartans, kilts, bagpipes, and Highland dance are all iconic symbols of Scotland, this is an oversimplified representation of the history of the country as a whole. Historically, the Highlands and Hebrides were home to the Gaels, who were ethnically and culturally distinct from the Anglophone, Lowland regions of Scotland, which had close socio-cultural ties to the Norman-Saxons and England. Over time, the Lowlanders obtained significant political power through their cultural and political ties to England. As such, the people of the Highlands and the Hebrides were subsequently viewed as primitive, backward, and wild.

As Great Britain's colonial power asserted itself in northern Scotland through the Highland Clearances during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many Gaels were displaced, emigrating to other areas, while much of their culture was adopted and altered to fit British colonial tastes. The English aristocracy and Lowland land owners became increasingly aware of the distinctiveness of Highland culture and began to romanticize and mimic it. By injecting new, more "civilized" influences to Highland art forms such as Highland dance and piping, the originally "Gaelic" traditions have been irrecoverably changed through colonialism.

This aristocratic influence often expressed itself through various Highland societies which collected, shared, and performed traditional Gaelic culture in their meetings and social functions. Such involvement with traditional music reshaped the aesthetics of these art forms, which, in some ways, changed to fit upper-class tastes. The British upper class also took an interest in Highland dance, and created a somewhat hybridized, more stylized version of the Highland dance originally performed by the Gaels. During this time, traditional kilts and tartans were re-invented and popularized by

various merchants, creating a very different, highly romanticized representation of Highland culture than what previously existed in the region. Shears argues,

The dubious authenticity of many of these tartans did not matter and what followed was an entrepreneur's dream. As more areas of the Highlands were cleared of its inhabitants and replaced with sheep runs there was an abundance of wool, especially after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. It would appear that the owners of the woollen mills, many of which were located in the Lowlands, were more than eager to participate in the manufacture of tartans supplying kilts and other articles of "Highland costume" to meet the demands of a public fascinated with Scottish / Gaelic culture. (2008: 39)

Traditional bagpiping similarly experienced a re-orientation through colonial influences, but through the military. After being adopted by the British army, pipe and drum bands were used for marching (as opposed to traditional dance) and performance practices became increasingly standardized (Shears 2008). The newer style of kilts was further entrenched in popular culture as they were used as military uniforms for regiments such as the 78<sup>th</sup> Highlanders. Traditional fiddling aesthetics were similarly re-oriented toward upper-class tastes, and were profoundly influenced by Western Classical music traditions. As such, the cello became a common instrument for accompanying the violin for traditional music, and composition forms that made use of variations on a melodic statement in a manner similar to Western Classical composers such as J. S. Bach. The extensive use of statement and variation can be seen in the works of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century composers such as Neil and Nathaniel Gow, and Scott Skinner. One particularly prominent example is Scott Skinner's six variations on the traditional strathspey, "Tullochgorm."

These popularized, romantic versions of Highland culture became pervasive, and Highland societies prospered in Halifax, Antigonish, and Cape Breton. Shears argues that,

The men who filled the offices of many of these societies were drawn from the upper crust of society and included successful businessmen, government officials and local politicians. Other than supporting occasional Highland Games, St. Andrew's banquets and, much later, Robbie Burns dinners, there appears to be very little interest among these societies in preserving anything but the outward trappings of Scottish culture in the maritimes. (2008: 171)

Although these current popular representations of Gaelic culture may seem to be taken for granted (despite some historical inaccuracies), it is evident that the colonial, ethnic, and class differences associated with such romanticism have profoundly affected how they are interpreted by some. For instance, folklorist Richard MacKinnon explains some local reactions to the Gaelic College in its earlier years.

Some local Gaelic speakers found it difficult to understand the kind of "culture" being presented at this school. My grandfather, for example, a fluent Gaelic speaker who grew up on a rural Cape Breton farm and moved away to work in the coal mines of industrial Cape Breton as a young man, could never understand the kind of Scottish culture presented at a school. For a man who had never worn a kilt, never danced a sword dance and did not understand the vogue for tartan, this image of Scottish culture was indeed puzzling. His image of Cape Breton Scottish culture was one of working the land with a team of horses, getting the winter wood out of the woods, going into the mine at 4:30 in the morning to work the dayshift and coming home tired, dancing at the community hall to well-known fiddlers, and using his Gaelic only when conversing with his older mother, who did not understand much English, or when attempting to conceal meanings of certain words or stories from his inquisitive grandchildren. While he was puzzled by this image, he would have been aware that the image was also appearing elsewhere in his community. (2009: 169)

Shears similarly notes that the Cape Breton Gaelic community as a whole did not necessarily welcome the Gaelic College. He writes, "MacKenzie eventually alienated local members of the Gaelic community and, as the College became focused on romantic distortions of Highland culture, it was nicknamed 'The Tartan Circus' by its detractors" (2008: 174).

In several ways, the Gaelic College parallels other examples of the institutionalization of local culture such as the John Campbell Folk School. In his book, *All that is Native is Fine* (2009), David Whisnant addresses the issues that arise when outside groups institutionalize local culture. In the mid-1920s, folklorist Olive Dame Campbell opened the John Campbell Folk School in North Carolina in an effort to preserve local traditions and provide increased economic stability in the region. The folk school was modeled after similar Scandinavian institutions, teaching agricultural skills, crafts, and music; however, many of the topics taught had a tenuous connection to the region, introducing foreign aesthetics and even featuring Danish songs and dances. Whisnant writes, “Although she conceived of the folk school as rooted deeply in the local culture, it was in fact – and remained through all the years – an ‘outside force.’” (2009: 169). Despite these inconsistencies and misrepresentations, the practices of the John C. Campbell Folk School were proliferated throughout the region, and the school itself was seen as an authority on local traditions. These dynamics are also often evident in folk music revivals, which repurpose existing traditions, introducing new aesthetics and performance practices. Stemming from interests in collection and preservation, revivals create their own discourses on authenticity, origin, and authority (Rosenberg 1993).

### **The Gaelic College Programming Debate**

These critiques were addressed in a number of Gaelic College programming policies in 2011 that coincided with the term of new CEO Rodney MacDonald, and new



Director of Education and Programming, Tracey Dares MacNeil.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after beginning their terms, it was rumoured that the Gaelic College would be cutting Highland dance, Highland piping (as opposed to “traditional” Gaelic piping), and a number of other “non-Gaelic” traditions. This quickly spawned a full-blown public argument that engaged much of the Cape Breton musical community in magazines, newspaper articles, and most prominently, the online forums: What’s Going On ([www.whatsgoingon.ca](http://www.whatsgoingon.ca)), and online article comments of *The Cape Breton Post* and *The Chronicle Herald* websites.

Some supported the decision, and others vehemently opposed it, but it seemed that everyone had an opinion. On one hand, supporters of the Gaelic College argued that despite the institution’s name, much of its programming even since its inception undermined the value of local, Cape Breton Gaelic traditions. Instead, it included “invented” traditions which, while being Scottish in nature, have a tenuous connection to the Gaelic immigrant traditions many sought to preserve.

The detractors, on the other hand, argued that while the distinction between Gaelic traditions and more broadly Scottish traditions may be important, the seventy years that the Gaelic College has been in operation focused on such non-Gaelic, “invented” traditions such as military piping. If they had not initially been Cape Breton traditions, they most certainly were now. These individuals did not wish to exclude Gaelic from the college, but rather to have both aspects of Scottish culture represented. That having been said, the divide between these two groups is still ongoing, to the point that some of the

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<sup>16</sup> Tracey Dares MacNeil (b. 1972) is a well-known Cape Breton piano player who was featured on several of Natalie MacMaster’s recordings in the 1990s. She was the Director of Education and Programming at the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts from the fall of 2011 to the spring of 2013.

critics of the program changes derisively referred to the less moderate Gaelic activists as the “Gaelic Mafia” (Anonymous participant 2013).

Although this series of events and public debate may not be directly related to Cape Breton fiddling, they are connected in a broader sense because they are both part of the Cape Breton traditional music scene. Cape Breton fiddlers were vocal in the debate not only because they had a relationship with the Gaelic College and its instructors, but also due to the fact that the discussion mirrored concerns relevant to the fiddling tradition. Moreover, some potential administrative decisions may have privileged Cape Breton fiddling over other art forms, labelling them as Gaelic and more worthy of funding.

It is not my intention to judge or even to unravel the “truth” regarding such rumours, but rather to analyze the discussion that arose from them. As such, it is noteworthy that although the discussion revolved around the Gaelic College, as an institution, the Gaelic College did not engage in this debate. In a CBC Radio interview on December 13, 2011, Maureen Carroll, the Chair of the Gaelic College Board of Governors explained,

I think the response has been magnificent, and [filled with] emotion. There’s a lot of memories and a lot of good things happened, but it’s also interesting to note that it developed into its own forum. And that’s the beauty of social media, also. It developed into a discussion forum, back and forth, where, although we [The Gaelic College] didn’t participate, we certainly got a lot of input and knowledge on what people are thinking. (Maureen Carroll, CBC Radio 2011)

As I have demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the Cape Breton traditional music scene is constantly engaged in negotiating what is culturally acceptable and significant, though this most often takes subtle, nuanced forms. This particular case, however, is highly significant for scholarly study, as it makes explicit the negotiation of such cultural

legitimacy within the Cape Breton traditional music scene. In the end, the Gaelic College did not make the significant changes that had been expected and debated. Highland dance is still taught, though piping has taken a less-competitive focus.

A letter to the editor of the magazine *What's Going On* (December 9, 2011) that detailed the changes to the Gaelic College's programming spawned a flurry of responses on message boards, social media sites, and in the form of newspaper articles. Much of this media frenzy had been prompted by Kelly MacArthur, a longstanding Highland dance instructor at the college, who had been informed her classes and the annual dance contest she organized were to be eliminated from the Gaelic College. Upon hearing this, she went public about the proposed curriculum changes. She stated,

I questioned a couple of things, but I had *no* idea that it was going to open up like this and turn the Gaelic world upside down. I had no idea. I did not know what I was getting into. I thought I was going to get a whole bunch of little old ladies writing into the Gaelic College saying "You gotta have the Highland dance competition because it's been there for seventy years." That's what I thought was going to happen. But instead, it kind of blew up into this chain of events that went across the whole world and put me in the middle of a media storm for one and half years. That article went on Facebook at one o'clock the following day. I took my kid to music and I got home at four o'clock... and I had over 300 messages. On my phone, on my email, on my Facebook, in less than three hours. From across the world. And that continued, and continued. (Kelly MacArthur 2013)

The reactions were both private and public, and came from a variety of individuals, ranging from scholars, to musicians, to past Gaelic College attendees and teachers. The discussion was emotional and tense, with pointed insults often exchanged between posters. It seems that some individuals were largely unaware of the "inauthentic" roots of Highland dance, while the majority of those in favour of the Gaelic College's decision were concerned with addressing such problematic representations of Cape Breton and Scottish culture that the Gaelic College had presented in the past.

Regardless of the “authenticity” or historical accuracy of current representations of Highland culture, it is important to acknowledge that romanticized understanding of culture and ethnicity can still be incredibly important to an individual’s identity and worldview. In relation to this folklorist Erin Columbus Doyle wrote in her master’s thesis on the Antigonish Highland Games, “In studying the contemporary Antigonish Highland Games, I came to realize that what people *believe* to be true is often more important than what is absolutely historically correct” (2005: 152-153). In addition, identity scholar Deborah Curtis suggests that “recent conceptions of ethnicity as a dynamic and manipulatable category of experience suggest that one person’s identity is neither more nor less ‘constructed’ than the next person’s” (2000: 130). In this way, “such constructions are valid and meaningful for the individuals who engage in them” (Curtis 2000: 130).

As fiddler and academic, Glenn Graham posted in response to Kelly MacArthur’s challenge to the Gaelic College,

Kelly, I admire everyone’s passion for this. But our true Gaelic history has to be reclaimed. Changes were needed at the College since its inception. This really is about reclaiming true Cape Breton Gaelic history that had been ‘overtaken.’ What is being done is backed by solid research, both oral and written. I feel for all affected by the changes. However, we must fix the broken / misinterpreted history. This is a first step in re-establishing the long-ignored Gaelic aspects of our culture from the bottom up. The original decisions at the GC came from one who had already embraced the cultural fashions paternally purveyed by the “improvers.” Agency is our way out of a false hegemonic construction and adoption. Along with a revitalization in the language, fiddling, and dance piping among the grass roots that has been going on, this is an important act in the reclaiming process, and trumps any “Gaelic College traditions” that may have to lose prominence in that process. I humbly agree to disagree with some of the postings.

Best,

Glenn (Glenn Graham, Comment on “Letter to the editor: The end of an era at the Gaelic College,” What’s Going On 2011)

In this passage, it is evident that one interpretation of culture and tradition is privileged over others. The discourses of “reclaiming” Gaelic culture, however, can also be controversial at times. As Celticist Michael Newton posted:

It is great that Rodney [MacDonald] is NOT returning to the “roots” of the College, as they were deeply, deeply flawed, but is returning to the roots of actual Gaelic tradition. Anyone who thinks that actual Highland tradition has value – especially the traditions as uniquely preserved and developed by the Gaelic communities in Nova Scotia – should support and applaud this decision, just as we can applaud the tearing down of the Indian Residential Schools. (Comment on “Letter to the editor: The end of an era at the Gaelic College,” What’s Going On 2011)

While it may seem surprising to equate the history of Cape Breton Gaels with that of First Nations groups, this is not entirely new; it is common for Gaelic activists to compare their status to oppressed minority groups. Gaelic singer Mary Jane Lamond explains,

We’re also aware that there is some backlash against all the attention going to Gaelic. We’re feeling that now. And I don’t blame those communities – like the Black community and the Acadian community – for feeling as they do. I mean, if the Gaelic of Nova Scotia feel invisible, those people felt really invisible. It’s unfortunate. There was a poster put out a number of years back by the Black cultural center. It had a piper with a line through it, and it said, “You don’t have to be Scottish to be Nova Scotian.” So that’s the depth of the anger. (Mary Jane Lammond in Feintuch 2010: 154)

In a broader context, anthropologist Paul Basu has similarly discussed how the Highland Clearances are, by some individuals, framed in terms of genocide, with comparisons to displaced peoples such as the Jews, Native Americans, and African Americans (2007).

In essence, this is a debate over not only how tradition is defined, but who has the right to represent a group. Moreover, the debate mirrored points made by folklorists of various periods on the theorization of tradition. Folklorists Simon Bronner and Dorothy

Noyes carefully detail the folkloristic discourse of tradition among scholars, which has moved from a conception of tradition as a survival or artifact, to tradition as communication and performance (Bronner 2000; Noyes 2009). Most notably, folklorist Henry Glassie argues that tradition should be understood as a process of continuity, linking the past and future. He writes,

Change and tradition are commonly coupled, in chat and chapter titles, as antonyms. But tradition is the opposite of only one kind of change: that in which disruption is so complete that the new cannot be read as an innovative adaptation of the old. [...] If tradition is a people's creation out of their own past, its character is not stasis but continuity; its opposite is not change but oppression, the intrusion of a power that thwarts the course of development. (2003: 177)

Glassie's use of the terms "continuity" and "oppression" are relevant to both sides of the debate. Both local Gaelic traditions and their romanticized counterparts have enjoyed considerable continuity and encountered at least some form of institutionalized resistance, either in the past or present. As two sets of separate, yet interrelated traditions, the question becomes, what cultural activities and traditions are viewed as valuable and to whom?

The answers to this question mark a distinction in group. Noyes writes that groups consist of overlapping categories, what she terms "definitions of collectivity" (2003: 10). She elaborates, making a connection between social network theory and imagined community:

The community of the social imaginary coexists in a dialectical tension with the empirical world of day-to-day network contacts. The imagined community offers a focus for comparison and desire, and at the same time, is itself subject to re-visionings in the light of everyday experience. The productive tension is the complex object we denote with the word *group*. (2003: 35)

This approach to group is integral to my research, as it combines demographics, social interaction, and ideology in a flexible manner that allows for a cogent group identity in conjunction with agency and intersubjectivity.

In response to other posts on the forum, Kelly MacArthur asks, “Who decided that the past 70 years of what many call tradition at the Gaelic College is disposable?” (Comment on “Letter to the editor: The end of an era at the Gaelic College,” What’s Going On 2011). What MacArthur refers to as “tradition,” however, is interpreted very differently by others. One particular individual commented that, “This movement by the Board of Governors at the GC is a well-needed kick-in-the-arse for the progenitors of bastardized culture that have already done so much damage in Cape Breton” (Daibhidh MF, Comment on “Letter to the editor: The end of an era at the Gaelic College,” What’s Going On 2011). Again, we see that this is a discussion that relies on multiple definitions of the tradition, each with specific consequences and cultural significance.

Although the early years of the Gaelic College are commonly critiqued and often viewed as problematic, in an interview on CBC Radio, Kelly MacArthur contended,

I don’t believe that anybody can sit back and say, “That’s not what A. W. R. [MacKenzie] intended, and we’re going to say what he intended because we know.” Nobody can say that. It really doesn’t matter what he intended. The fact is, Highland dance has thrived and survived for 73 years there, and that deserves a little bit of respect. Authenticity? Well, that’s everybody’s own point of view. Culture is organic. It grows. It evolves. It begins from what people believe. Every family that attaches itself to a culture changes it to fit their climate and their economic standing at the time. I don’t think that anybody has the right to say, “This is your culture and this what you need to do,” or, “This isn’t your culture and don’t you try to say that’s your culture.” (Kelly MacArthur, CBC Radio 2011)

Above, MacArthur states that an individual or group does not have the right to define cultural traditions as whole, as some have attempted to do in the Gaelic College

programming debate. I submit that such negotiation of tradition occurs at every performance; the boundaries of acceptability and “legitimacy” are defined and reinforced on a daily basis; however, these processes are normally subtle, and intuitive, unlike the explicit, public debate surrounding the Gaelic College programming. The implicit marking of boundaries and cultural legitimacy is an important part of the Cape Breton traditional music community, and will be revisited at various points throughout this thesis.

These competing definitions of “legitimate” culture, like Cape Breton fiddling as a whole, are also entrenched in both power and region:

As a piper from Antigonish, who attended the Gaelic College in the past I am offended by the Gaelic College's new vision on two points. I believe that Antigonish and Pictou Counties are just as Scottish / Gaelic as Cape Breton. My grandparents spoke Gaelic. My entire “pedigree” is entirely of Scottish ancestry. Is the Gaelic history of our counties completely irrelevant? Does my area of Nova Scotia care less about its history and holding onto culture? Why isn't it referred to as the Gaelic culture of Nova Scotian Gaels? It seems rather exclusive. I'm a piper, and I've taught many students from Cape Breton. Is their playing more “Cape Breton” style than mine? Yes, I do compete both as a soloist and with a grade one pipe band,<sup>17</sup> but I also can play for dancers whether they dance step or highland. I am baffled, insulted, hurt, and enraged. (Heather Gillis, Comment on “Letter to the editor: The end of an era at the Gaelic College,” What's Going On 2011)

This discussion of region parallels some of the comments of my participants, who connect region and cultural capital. Kelly MacArthur contextualizes this regional competition within dance. She asserts that particular areas of Cape Breton may be thought of as “owning” tradition:

I live on the Island, but to many in “certain” areas – because I live on “the other side of the Island” (as was actually stated to me at a Celtic Colours event I danced a few years back), I am not respected as a Step Dancer! Shocking to me since I did

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<sup>17</sup> Grade one is the highest-rating a pipe band can achieve.



all my Step Dancing with people from “the other side” of the Island and never took a step in Sydney! It’s a lose, lose battle, really. (Comment on “Letter to the editor: The end of an era at the Gaelic College,” What’s Going On 2011)

Not only are there power structures associated with region within Cape Breton traditional music, but cultural capital and cultural “legitimacy” can vary significantly according to context. MacArthur elaborates,

And I am 100% Gael. My dad’s family are straight, through emigration, from Scotland. I come from six generations of Gaelic speaking people, right down to my father. My father’s parents spoke Gaelic in their house till he was ten years old, and no English. They sang, they danced... Pure Gaels. My father grew up in Inverness. He moved to New Waterford to work in the mines with his family. Pure Gaels. 100% on both sides – MacDonalds, and MacArthurs... and my grandmother is a Beaton. <laughs> From Mabou Coal Mines and Blackstone, my grandfather and my grandmother. Pure 100% Gaels. So, who are they to tell me that I’m not Gaelic enough? And some of these people have no Gaelic in their background at all. None. Not one bit. And they tell *me*, what I do [isn’t Gaelic enough]. (Kelly MacArthur 2013)

It is evident that what does or does not constitute Gaelic culture, tradition, or what is culturally valuable is subject to significant debate.

Michael Newton, although publicly supportive of the Gaelic College’s programming decisions, is also careful to contextualize how he feels the boundaries of Gaelic culture should be drawn.

I also want to emphasize that step-dance is not somehow inherently “more Gaelic” in its essence than Highland dance: it simply went through a phase of being revised, embraced and performed by a Gaelic-speaking community. There is no inherent reason why that did not or could not happen to “Highland dance” as well, given the right conditions. In fact, we could say that about any other expressive art forms: hip-hop, tango, Bulgarian round dances, etc. It is merely by their being adopted by and integrated within the wider body of Gaelic tradition that they become Gaelic art forms. [...] Highland dance could be re-Gaelicized, if there was sufficient interest and investment in the effort. The reality now is simply that it is almost exclusively an athletic activity done by non-Gaels in non-Gaelic performance contexts. (2012)

According to Newton, Gaelic culture is defined by the language itself, clearly categorizing native speakers as being more tied to their roots than Anglophones who are bearers of other Gaelic traditions. More generally, however, he argues that Gaelic culture should be understood not in terms of “authenticity,” or pre-colonial Gaelic life, but in regard to the meaning and relevance traditions have to a particular group. In this case, the group in question is native Gaelic speakers.

### **Competition as a Non-Gaelic Construct**

In addition to the issue of “Gaelicness” and colonial influences on tradition, the other key aspect to this debate was the role that competition played in Highland dance and competitive piping and drumming. In an interview on CBC Radio, Maureen Carroll explained,

It’s one of those discussions like any other that comes to the table, and people are emotional, and it’s part of the culture. There are two sides, and some people feel very strongly about non-competition, and others think that competition is healthy, so until we’ve had that discussion as a board [the Gaelic College Board of Directors], we haven’t really taken a stand on it. (Maureen Carroll CBC Radio, 2011)

Indeed, formal competition is considered by many to be outside the boundaries of traditional Gaelic culture. Kelly MacArthur offers, “Just because we [Highland dancers] compete, we’re not Gaelic enough for them... But yet, the guitar is... or the mandolin, or the banjo” (2013).<sup>18</sup>

Fiddling or step-dance competitions are not currently seen as an important part of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, despite the fact that fiddle and dance competitions are

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<sup>18</sup> Guitar, mandolin, and tenor banjo courses have all been offered at the Gaelic College at various times.

integral to other musical traditions such as those found in the Ottawa Valley or in Texas.

Today, fiddling contests in Cape Breton are rare if not unheard of. That is not to say, however, that there is no history of traditional music competitions in Cape Breton.

Allister MacGillivray offers,

If you look back in the '20s and '30s and even later than that – there were huge competitions held, more in the urban areas. It wasn't so popular in the country areas. But at the same time, it was attracting rural violin players, coming into town to try out their stuff. There were competitions in Boston, in which better Cape Breton fiddlers would be selected in competitions here and sent down to compete for trophies and medals, money in some cases. There was a competition in 1933 in Glengarry, Ontario. There were very few of the older generation of players that I know, who weren't in a contest at some point or other, and lots who've been in many. (Allister MacGillivray in Caplan 2006: 102)

It is evident that while fiddling competitions may not have been as pervasive as in other traditions, they have certainly been part of Cape Breton fiddling, at least peripherally.

Even more recent fiddlers have competed (and won) in contests outside of the island. Lee Cremo and J. P. Cormier are both highly respected as fiddlers in Cape Breton, but are also well-known as fiddling champions in the old-time fiddle contest community. Ashley MacIsaac also competed in, and won several fiddle competitions as a young fiddler (Angus and Carmelita MacIsaac in Caplan 2006: 171).

It seems that in Cape Breton, fiddling contests are sometimes seen as bad for the community. Historically, many contests ended in resentment and anger (McKinnon 1989: 39-40). This is likely due, in some extent, to the overall diversity of the Cape Breton fiddle style. Not having ever been institutionalized in the manner that other competition oriented traditions have been, judging a Cape Breton fiddling or step-dance competition could conceivably be highly subjective. As I have mentioned earlier, informal competition and rivalry has and does exist, though often implicitly. It is not unheard of

for the capabilities of a fiddler to be questioned at a house party, or have a fiddler demonstrate his or her prowess in such contexts (Allister MacGillivray in Caplan 2006: 101).

Highland dance and military-style piping, on the other hand, are traditions which are based around competition. While such competition does require a degree of standardization within the tradition, it does not necessarily mean that there is a lack of a supportive community or that competitions create bitter rivalry. Kelly MacArthur states,

I don't think competition is always perceived in the way that it's intended. And I think that's what maybe is happening here, is people haven't actually been to a Highland dance competition that are making decisions, and they might see it differently if they attended one. (Kelly MacArthur CBC Radio 2011)

Competition-based performance traditions such as Highland dance or piping have a regional “circuit” of events which performers participate in. There are entire communities that form around these events, and the competitions themselves represent only one small part of these communities. In her doctoral thesis, Sherry Johnson demonstrates that the Ottawa Valley fiddle contest circuit plays an integral role to the growth and development of individual musicians and dancers, as well as the tradition as a whole (2006). Although there is certainly very real competition and high stakes at play (i.e., money and cultural capital) for competitors, contests are also the site of much non-competitive activity, serving as a means to maintain the tradition and for tradition bearers to share their knowledge with younger musicians.

Although the potential programming changes at the Gaelic College elicited a significant response from the Cape Breton traditional music community, the majority of this debate occurred prior to official or definitive comments from the Gaelic College

itself. Thus far, the programming changes have indeed shifted to focus on traditions that are deemed to be “Gaelic” or Cape Breton in nature, yet do not exclude classes such as Highland Dance. Regardless of the final outcome, the debate surrounding the perceived changes in the programming clearly demonstrate not only the multiplicity of possible definitions of tradition, but the ways such definitions are linked to power negotiation, cultural capital, and even regional identity.

### **Social Capital, Cultural Capital and Lineage**

Lineage is very important in establishing social and cultural capital. Belonging to a musical family can be highly prestigious. In a context where transmission is still largely through direct person-to-person contact, having a wealth of resources within one’s home or family tree can certainly be an advantage. Furthermore, it is more likely that one would be exposed to talented, high-profile musicians within the scene through such family connections, allowing one to develop a nuanced ear. Prominent tradition bearers in one’s family can be a source of substantial cultural capital even if they were not a teacher. This can be attributed to broad aesthetic ideals within families to some extent, much like the way particular “schools” of performance practice are connected to pedagogues, no matter how tenuous. This can be seen in traditions like Hindustani music, where pedagogy is divided into “houses” and a strict lineage of pedagogy is maintained (Neuman 1990 [1980]).

Chrissy Crowley’s grandfather, Archie Neil Chisholm, also was a well-respected fiddler, and though this is frequently mentioned in her professional biography and press

releases, she never saw him perform, nor did she take any interest in the fiddle until after his death. This is an issue that she has been at odds with to some extent:

I'm really lucky that there are a lot of things I haven't had to experience because of my lineage. A lot of things I just didn't realize at the time. Because Archie Neil [Chisholm] had MCed so many shows back in the day. [...] And when I first started, I didn't like having that name attached to my playing, I was thinking, "I don't play anything like the Chisholms... This is way too much pressure to put on somebody when she hasn't even heard her grandfather play." And now I just appreciate it for what it is. Archie Neil did a lot for people; that's why people are returning the favour to me. (2010)

Crowley benefited from the musical influence and cultural capital of a musical family; the prestige and social capital of her lineage offered her certain advantages.

In other cases, transmission is contextualized not through familial ties, but through relationships with teachers or mentors. Stan Chapman, for instance, has been a prominent influence in the development of young fiddlers since the 1980s. Many of his students have gone on to become respected fiddlers in their own right, many with successful careers, including Ashley MacIsaac, Natalie MacMaster, Dwayne Côté, Mairi Rankin, Kenneth MacKenzie, and Dawn Beaton. Just as belonging to a prestigious musical family can be a source of cultural capital, one's musical teachers and mentors can have comparable significance.

The portrayal and representation of one's lineage is not neutral. Western genealogy is inherently patriarchal, and a last name can also ethnicize an individual. As such, certain branches of one's family tree may be less visible to the public. It is common for musicians with Acadian names, for example, to make a point to stress their maternal Scottish heritage. This, of course, is not always possible (as not all musicians are only half Acadian), and it is believed by some that a French name can hold a musician back in

this predominantly Scottish scene. Chrissy Crowley's comments, however, remind us that cultural capital is context dependent, and what might be a cause for tension in one place, may be perceived as belonging in another:

Having the last name Crowley, I was like, "will people judge me for that?" It was such a well-known fact that I was half Chisholm that it wasn't really a problem. I don't think I really felt anything. And in the end, I think it helped me out because when the ECMAs<sup>19</sup> were in Newfoundland and all the Crowleys came out just because I had the last name Crowley. They were all excited. (2010)

To further contextualize this, Chrissy has had the opportunity to play family reunions in both Ireland and Scotland due to her family names. In addition, her paternal, Irish heritage is the source of another respected fiddler, Bill Crowley of Grand Bank, Newfoundland. While this is an interesting fact that surfaces from time to time, it is clearly a musical side of her family that she identifies with less and is one that holds considerably less weight in Cape Breton than belonging to the Chisholm family.

### **The Significance of Region**

The theorization of region has become increasingly important in understanding local culture. Folklorist Suzi Jones problematizes region, arguing that a region cannot be defined solely in terms of geographical boundaries; region exists as a cultural construct, a process in which local meaning is mapped onto an existing landscape (1976).

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai contends that the very notion of locality

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<sup>19</sup> The East Coast Music Awards (ECMAs) are an annual music industry conference and awards gala held by the East Coast Music Association. The ECMA events that Crowley is referencing were the 2009 ECMAs which took place in Corner Brook, NL.

exists in relation to larger global flows. As such, locality is “a structure of feeling, a property of social life, and an ideology of situated community” that is consciously produced by a group (1996: 189). Further addressing region within the context of globalization, cultural studies scholar Cheryl Herr demonstrates that region is often contested, with multiple competing regionalisms existing simultaneously. For instance, Herr frames the American Midwest as a nostalgic, rural agricultural region that is also exploited by global capitalist forces (1996).

The regional distinctions in Cape Breton fiddling can have a profound effect on not only musical style, but also on cultural identity. Commenting on the existence of regional styles, Glenn Graham suggests,

I don't know if it should exactly be called regional, because it can be related to a specific fiddler or family of fiddlers that are purveying that way of playing. And if they're getting heard all the time and they're getting favoured by the people in that area all the time, that is what the regional style springs from in my opinion. [...] The regional style stems from these really good players that are influencing others in the community. (2011)

Graham raises a point echoed by many of my participants – one's individual agency and creativity is something that cannot be ignored in an analysis of style and influence. At one time, region and style were virtually synonymous, and the musicians in one's surrounding community were often thought to shape style. Scholars have noted that regional styles are less distinct today, as there is easier access to influences outside one's immediate community (Doherty 1996: 296-297; Graham 2006). Although one's individual style may certainly be influenced by one's region, which in turn influences potential social



interactions, conceptualizing regional styles in terms of preservation through isolation and subsequent deterioration due to globalization silences the role of the individual. Graham's account, and those of my other participants, reveal a delicate interplay between social structures and individual agency.

At times, regional competition can exist between groups. Feintuch explains that even though Inverness County venues and performers are well represented in the Celtic Colours programs, the county and grassroots traditional music are largely absent from the planning documents, and not everyone in Inverness County agrees that the government-sponsored economic development work has been equitable or thoughtful. (2004: 97)

As one of Feintuch's participants explained, "there is a serious problem between the two sides of the island with one holding the population and the political influence and the other holding the island's real assets" (2004: 97). In the opinion of this particular individual, the "island's real assets" were the cultural identity and traditions of rural Inverness county. This sentiment is also evident in an explanation by Frank MacDonald (a journalist and writer from Inverness, Cape Breton) of how region relates to economic issues:

Cape Breton is not a very cohesive island. Off the island we're all Cape Bretoners, but on the island there's very little cohesion. What they call "industrial Cape Breton," which has been having horrendous problems itself, has become the black hole that's been sucking up all the development money that's been coming, trying to help the island. So that the rural area, which makes up maybe ninety percent of the size of the island, has been not able to get heard. And when we go with projects like we have for, say, Inverness, two thousand people, they say, "We already gave a hundred million to Cape Breton." But you know, it just never got here. (Frank MacDonald in Feintuch 2010: 25)

While Frank MacDonald's comments are directed toward the politics of region and local power structures as a whole, it is also evident that an element of regional competition exists in Cape Breton. In the case of traditional music, however, significant and powerful

locations are not determined through industrial or economic development, but through cultural capital.

By many accounts, Inverness County is the home of Cape Breton fiddling, while Sydney and the surrounding area of industrial Cape Breton is largely ignored in this regard. To this end, the village of Mabou is crowned as the home of the style. This places the Mabou fiddling style as dominant and most celebrated throughout the island. The history and more prevalent discourses about Cape Breton fiddling come from a Mabou oriented perspective of Cape Breton culture, which is an area that is known for its dances and Gaelic. This is evident in the way Glenn Graham cites the Mabou Coal Mines as a prime example of a Gaelic-speaking area where the “old style” of playing has survived (2006: 112-113). A focus on the Scottish, Gaelic, traditional music of Mabou, as perhaps the most “authentic” fiddling on the island, positions other regions and sub-styles as subordinate. However, I do not mean to say that this Scottish region is being unjustly privileged, but merely that it is part of the overall social dynamic within the traditional fiddling scene.

Mabou has a rich history of traditional musicians, particularly among the Beaton family, whose lineage has produced many respected musicians, including Kinnon Beaton, Joey Beaton, Andrea Beaton, Dawn and Margie Beaton, Glenn Graham, and Rodney MacDonald. Along with these musicians, the surrounding area has produced some of Cape Breton’s most popular acts: The Rankin Family band, Ashley MacIsaac, and Natalie MacMaster. On this topic, folklorist Jodi McDavid explains,

Although a small rural town, Mabou has risen to one of cultural importance in Cape Breton. It is considered the heart of Cape Breton traditional music, which, especially since the decline of industry on the east of the Island, has become

increasingly commodified and intrinsically linked with tourism. Of central iconic importance in both the folk and popular manifestations of this music is the fiddle. Mabou is constructed in tourist literature, and to an extent by its residents as well, as a pastoral utopia, providing the perfect example of rural Scots-Gaelic Cape Breton, and a sharp contrast to industrial Cape Breton. (2008: 120)

Cape Breton piano icon Maybelle Chisholm McQueen points out that although Mabou now represents a style iconic of Cape Breton as a whole, this is a newer development (2011). However, this development is one that musicians today must deal with. The dominance of the traditions of the Mabou area can be seen from the perspective of participants from other areas. As Chrissy Crowley states,

When I started [playing the fiddle], I just assumed that every fiddler was from Mabou and Troy and Judique.<sup>20</sup> And I was saying “I’m a really big fan of this fiddler I just found out about – Howie MacDonald. Have you heard of him?” They said, “Howie’s great, you know, he’s been around for years.” They told me he was from Sydney, and I thought they were liars. “There are no fiddlers in Sydney! What are you talking about? Fiddlers come from Mabou.” I was ashamed of the fact that I was from Margaree and not from Mabou... It irritates me a little bit when tourists come up to me and say, “Oh, you’re from Mabou right? Because you play the fiddle.” (2010)

In actuality, the Cape Breton traditional music scene is quite small and tight-knit. This is a community whose members learn from each other, socialize and party with each other, and gig together. Although there may be regional politics at play within the community, being a member of the traditional music community places an individual as an insider. Within the community, there are varying levels of cultural capital according to different contexts. That is to say that the traditional music scene, like any group, is comprised of smaller, sub-groups based around region, age and circles of friends in which some people are more of an insider than others.

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<sup>20</sup> Troy, Judique, and Mabou are neighbouring communities on the west coast of Inverness County located on Route 19, now renamed the “Ceilidh Trail” for tourism purposes.

Through the comments discussed above, we can see how region may shape tradition in the Sydney area. For example, Crowley explained that,

The first time Elmer<sup>21</sup> booked me for Cedars Club, he said, “Could you, if you don’t mind, I’m not telling you how to play, but it’s going to be your first dance in Sydney,” and I had never even played a concert there. He said, “Really do your research before you come here, because it’ll help you in the end. Not only will you sell more CDs, you’ll impress the crowd better. You’ll have a good chance of getting asked back if you look up Howie [MacDonald]’s stuff. Just pay attention to the tunes he’s playing, the swing he has.” (2010)

Regional preferences and traditions shape repertoire and performance practice. In this way, we can see that communities create differing repertoires and expectations of performers.

J. P. Cormier demonstrates how one’s personal tastes and worldview can shape their definition of the tradition. A smooth, “modern,” non-Gaelic-style player who has modelled his playing after Winston Fitzgerald, Angus Chisholm, and Jerry Holland,<sup>22</sup> Cormier sees these players as the most significant tradition bearers. As such, he does not relate to dance-style, Inverness County playing, despite the fact that many other fiddlers consider it to be iconic of the Cape Breton style as a whole, and an important link to a Gaelic, immigrant past. He shared,

The Inverness [County] style, I call it the old way. It’s another style altogether that you can’t really play unless you’re from there. That’s something that’s ingrained. They all sound the same. They all have that old, raspy, stick against the strings, I-mean-business-right-now, kind of playing. They’re not about technique, they’re about the emotion of it. And that’s what they elicit when they play, this emotion. Raw emotion. And it makes you want to dance like crazy. (2012)

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<sup>21</sup> Elmer Fraser is responsible for booking the entertainment at Cedars Club, a community hall in Sydney that holds square dances twice a month.

<sup>22</sup> Originally from Brockton, Massachusetts, Jerry Holland (1955 – 2009) lived much of his adult life in Cape Breton, and is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant composers and performers in the tradition.

Cormier connects Inverness County playing with the dance tradition, and views the style as a survival of the past. In contrast, he conceives of his smoother, fluid, more “modern” style of playing, largely popularized by players like Winston Fitzgerald, as being the more mainstream, definitive style of Cape Breton fiddling.

### **Ethnicity**

Ethnicity has much to do with how the tradition is defined and is the topic of contestation among musicians in Cape Breton. Although Cape Breton fiddling is frequently categorized as “Scottish,” or more specifically, “Gaelic,” this can be construed as a narrow and reductionist understanding of the tradition by some scholars and musicians. On the other hand, there are a variety of discourses that attempt to circumvent notions of the tradition being inherently Scottish. Liz Doherty notes that many local musicians believe that Cape Breton fiddling is a syncretic tradition that has developed from a mixture of Scottish, Irish, French, and Mi’kmaq traditions. Doherty, on the other hand, disagrees with this, arguing that the tradition is primarily derived from Scottish traditions (1996: 62). Ethnicity and region can have similar meanings, positioning particular towns or groups as more or less “legitimate” depending on the context. Doherty argues that much of this discourse of musical syncretism stems from the conflation between ethnicity and region. It is noteworthy, however, that while there may be correlations between demographics and discourses, they exist independently and are not interchangeable categories (Doherty 1996: 295).

Ethnicity, however, is integral to understanding the politics of Cape Breton fiddling. The tradition has undeniable Scottish roots, but removing ethnicity from the

tradition undermines the contributions and innovations made by those of non-Scottish backgrounds. Although Cape Breton fiddling may not reflect a survival of colonial-era Acadian fiddling, there are a significant number of Acadian musicians who have been part of the tradition. The ways in which musicians engage with the issue of ethnicity can significantly affect how they conceptualize the tradition. The strategies used to explain how a non-Scottish musician can be an integral part of a “Scottish” music can reveal how musicians define the tradition. In some cases, the tradition may be defined strictly as a Scottish tradition, othering non-Scottish musicians and labelling them as appropriators. In other situations, the tradition may be defined more broadly, as a regional music (a strategy often employed by those of non-Scottish ancestry).<sup>23</sup>

In the past, the privileging of Scottishness was particularly prominent. This was evident in the inclusion of “Scotty” to the names of a number of non-Scottish fiddlers such as Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald, and Paddy LeBlanc, who made two recordings as “Scotty” LeBlanc (*The Fiddling French Canadian Scot*, and *Fiddlin’ Scotty LeBlanc*). Robert Deveau comments on how one’s name can frame a musician ethnically, and by extension, how they are seen in relation to the tradition:

If your last name is MacMaster or MacIsaac, or MacDougall, or Mac anything... Right off the bat, it just looks better, I guess, than if your last name is Côté, or Muise, or Wood. Or... Stout, or LeBlanc. Or... Aucoin. Because along with the Mac whatever, that whole tartanization kit that comes with it. But you’ll never see *me* wear a kilt. (2011)

That having been said, Deveau acknowledges such tensions, but prefers not to engage with such issues: “If you can’t enjoy some musician who’s mastered the instrument

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<sup>23</sup> For further literature on ethnicity, see Isajiw (1974), McCready (1983), Oring (1986), and Greenhill (1994).

simply because of their last name, do you really enjoy music? Maybe these people just don't like music. Maybe it's that simple" (2011). While these ethnic tensions and power structures are undoubtedly more subdued today than they once were, it is evident that in some ways they still exist, thereby affecting the politics of traditional music in Cape Breton.

While Glenn Graham makes an effort to include the contributions of non-Scottish players in his book, *Cape Breton Fiddle: Making and Maintaining Tradition* (2006), he labels such musicking as Scottish, viewing it as an appropriated style. He says that the ability of non-Scottish players

to interpret and apply applications for an older sound can help explain why players of other ethnicities on the island have been able to master the Cape Breton style – Acadian players like Arthur Muise, Donnie LeBlanc and Robert Deveau. Because of their ability to apply learned rhythms and ornamentations to the violin, these players have taken the “Gaelic” influence from the Cape Breton style and made it part of their own playing. It is also here that I caution and question whether the style should still be called “Gaelic.” Because of the abilities of other-ethnic and now non-Gaelic-speaking players to develop and exhibit this style that has been described, in the future it may be more inclusive and indeed correct to call the style / sound the “older sound,” but still recognize it as being rooted in the influence of Gaelic language. (Graham 2006: 162)

Graham's comments position the tradition as Scottish, and rely on Gaelic as a source of cultural capital to some extent.

Upon examining how other ethnic groups interpret their role in the tradition, it is apparent that there are alternate discourses that explain the tradition differently from Graham's explanation. One such example can be seen in the life and music of Lee Cremo, a Mi'kmaq fiddler from Eskasoni, Cape Breton. While Cremo's playing was stylistically very different from others on the island, being influenced by both old-time fiddler Don

Messer and Quebecois fiddling sensation, Jean Carignan, he was an important part of the Cape Breton fiddling community, and frequently cited as such.<sup>24</sup>

Cremo spoke about how his ethnicity made him self-conscious about playing Scottish music; although fiddling was an important part of his identity, not everyone fully understood his connection to the music.

I've always been a bit nervous playing in competitions with the others [non-Natives]. They don't say or do anything exactly – sometimes they just look at me and I guess they are wondering what this little Indian guy is doing playing “their” music. If that is what they are thinking then I would just like to say that it's my music too. I grew up with it like they did, and besides, I play it my own way. People don't own this music. (Lee Cremo in Smith 1994: 546)

Cremo's mention of playing in competitions refers to his involvement in non-Cape Breton musical circles, but his comments are highly relevant to the Cape Breton traditional music scene.

Ethnomusicologist Gordon E. Smith asserts that the way in which one categorizes Lee Cremo's playing depends largely on one's perspective:

From the etic angle, Lee Cremo is viewed as a talented “borrower” of an “outside” musical practice; from the emic angle he personifies a blending of cultural traditions, which has come to be seen as a positive value among the Micmac. There is indeed a striking level of difference in these interpretations. [...] Also significant is the fact that Lee is seen by some as an embodiment of the struggle for contested identities in the Maritimes. In this context, Lee's “Nativity” is not simply an aspect of Micmac identity, but is representative of the struggles for identity and cultural survival by other Maritime minority groups such as Gaelic-speaking people, African-Canadians and Acadians. [...] For some, he is a proud representative of Micmac identity. To others, his stylistic borrowing demonstrates adaptation rather than distinctiveness. (1994: 522)

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<sup>24</sup> Admittedly, this is a gap in my research that I am unable to remedy, as I am unable to find any Mi'kmaq fiddlers currently active in the Cape Breton fiddling scene.



It requires little imagination to connect this quotation to Glenn Graham's interpretation of ethnic appropriation in the fiddling tradition. In this case, we can see both sides of how ethnicity and cultural capital shape discourse and how this is interpreted. J. P. Cormier made a similar comment about Cremo:

He would have preferred to have been called an Indian fiddler. He was a Cape Bretoner. He loved being a Cape Bretoner. But he was proud to be a Mi'kmaq. And he knew how he delivered this music was different from the rest of us. And that's why he did it that way. (2012)

Again, we see that framing can have a significant impact in how meaning and worldview are constructed.

Although Cremo was widely acknowledged as a tradition bearer within the Cape Breton fiddle scene, old-time fiddling itself is not widely accepted as relevant to Cape Breton fiddling. Both Cape Breton fiddlers and mainland, old-time fiddlers consider themselves to be "Scottish" fiddlers, but old-time fiddling is not necessarily viewed as Scottish by Cape Bretoners. In fact, Ian McKinnon notes that Cape Bretoners tend to have little respect for other fiddling traditions (aside from Scottish fiddling) and often have elitist attitudes about such topics (1989: 41). In regard to this, Glenn Graham referred to old-time fiddler, Don Messer's music as "supposedly Scottish" (2006: 39), undermining the legitimacy of a Scottish musical tradition that is distanced from the Gaelic language.

J. P. Cormier, a musician who has been tremendously influenced by old-time music explains,

People of the Cape Breton fiddle scene discount those people many, many, nine times out of ten. Don Messer, Graham Townsend... all those people were completely discounted. And today, strangely enough, people like Howie [MacDonald] and myself... and Jerry [Holland], too, began drawing from some of those old-time composers: Andy DeJarlis, John DeRoche, Don Messer himself, Graham [Townsend]. One of Howie's most famous jigs is a Graham Townsend

tune: the Murray River Jig. People don't realize it. They think it's his tune, or they think it's a Cape Breton tune he discovered, an old Scots tune that he found in the books. But again, it gets by because he doesn't mention it. (2012)

Despite being disappointed with the lack of acceptance of old-time music in Cape Breton, Cormier is quick to defend such judgements. He continues, "And you could look at that whole situation and go, 'Well, that's an unpleasant way for Cape Bretoners to be. It's a clique-ish, closed minded way.' But it's not. What it really is, is an ingrained, sub-conscious effort to maintain the integrity of what's going on here" (2012).

Robert Deveau conceptualizes the tradition in a similar manner, explaining that, you have contemporary pieces that were composed by Marcel Doucette, or, like, Donald Angus Beaton recorded it. That's a sign of acceptance to me. And Lee Cremo composed some music and so did Wilfred Prosper. Donnie LeBlanc, Hilda Chiasson... All of these people compose music that's accepted. (2011)

It is evident that Deveau conceptualizes the tradition in a broader manner that goes beyond ethnicity or region. This speaks to the fluidity of identity that exists in contemporary, global culture (see Storey 2003). While Cape Breton fiddling was once a uniquely Scottish (or even Gaelic) construct, it has become considerably more cosmopolitan as it has developed.

Doherty examines the shifting sense of cultural identity in Cape Breton fiddling through the way the tradition is labelled and how this label has changed over time:

This shift from Scottish, through Cape Breton Scottish, to Cape Breton proper, began with the need to distinguish the tradition from that of contemporary Scotland. It arose principally through the dissemination of both musics through the mass media, but also with the decrease in isolation of Cape Breton, accelerated by the opening of the Canso Causeway in the 1950s linking the island to the Nova Scotian mainland. (1996: 57)

It is evident that Cape Breton fiddlers have become increasingly aware of how they are represented. Although still closely tied to notions of Scottishness, making the distinction

between Scottish and Cape Breton fiddling demonstrates a sense of independence and cultural legitimacy, while implicitly acknowledging that a certain degree of musical change has occurred.

Tommy Basker, a Cape Breton Irish harmonica player, discussed with author Ronald Caplan how Scottish and Irish traditional music have been historically quite separate in Cape Breton, expressing discontent with how little respect some people had for Irish music:

Cape Breton. Cape Breton, you know. Oh—I can say this—I don’t care where in the hell, what you do with this—some people they’re very bigoted when it comes to Scottish music. You know, if it’s not Inverness, it’s no good, it’s not Scottish. I don’t know how they get that way. [...] Like the French people here, they had a great influence on the music here. But they don’t get any credit. (Tommy Basker in Caplan 2006: 144)

Today, the Irish fiddling tradition in Cape Breton is virtually nonexistent, with only a handful of musicians who might feel that they directly relate to this lineage. Many Irish musicians also played Scottish traditional music, which seems to have become the dominant style in the early 1900s.

### **Gaelic and Cape Breton Fiddling**

While many individuals consider the Gaelic language to be an important part of the fiddling tradition, this is an assertion that is fraught with ambiguity. To some, Cape Breton fiddling is by its very nature, inherently Gaelic, while other framings consider Gaelic-style fiddling to be a highly specific sub-style. In either case, Gaelic fiddling is described in relation to aesthetics, typically thought of as rough. This rawness is often referenced in the phrase to have “dirt” in one’s playing, which is a generous compliment.

It is noteworthy, however, that having a “rough” or “dirty” sound is deliberate, and not due to sloppiness. On the contrary, it is a style with unique phrasing and articulation, giving varying levels of accent, volume, and stress to each note. Time is also an important aspect of the style, which, as noted below, is often thought to mirror the rhythms of Gaelic speech.

The relationship between the Gaelic language and fiddling is seen as controversial by many individuals, but I have found that it is an area that suffers from confusion. That having been said, some scholars have made convincing arguments in regard to the relationship between the Gaelic language and Gaelic song. John Shaw, for example, carefully demonstrated a correlation between note length and broad vowels in Gaelic (1993). Similarly, Sparling has noted that her participants insisted on this relationship, believing that “Gaelic language maintenance is essential for the preservation of their culture as a whole” (2003: 150).

The shift from song to instrumental music is where the arguments become more heated and less clear. Shears insists on an “inherent” connection between the language and Gaelic piping, yet offers little more than evidence of a broad correlation between the two (2008). This is a common attitude, one that is evident in the fact that having “the Gaelic” in one’s music is meant as an important compliment in Cape Breton fiddling, regardless of one’s ethnic or regional background. What becomes problematic is when we address how the tradition as a whole is framed. There is a significant difference between conceptualizing Gaelic-style playing as a distinct subset of Cape Breton fiddling, and understanding all Cape Breton fiddling as fundamentally Gaelic music. In relation to this, Feintuch asserts, “Indeed, it is not necessary to come from a historically Gaelic

community to play this music in Cape Breton, as any visit to Inverness County Francophone communities, such as Cheticamp, or Mi'kmaq communities, such as Whycobah [sic.] will demonstrate” (2004: 82). Doherty similarly argues for a separation between style and language:

It is possible for characteristics of the Gaelic language which have come to influence the fiddle style, to be retained as purely musical idiosyncrasies, understood in musical terms, without reference to their linguistic origins. In any case, many of the almost exclusively English speaking fiddlers have no direct experience of an intense language-music relationship. The direct connection has already been severed for the majority of today's fiddlers, so that the concern for the language is generally not viewed by them as something which has any significant bearing on their styles. (Doherty 1996: 303-304)

These assessments of the relevance of Gaelic by Feintuch and Doherty are very broad, and do not consider the possibility of the coexistence of Gaelic and non-Gaelic fiddling, or there being various degrees of “Gaelicness” from one musician to the next.

Glenn Graham frames all Cape Breton fiddling as essentially Gaelic; however, he argues that it is not necessary for a musician to be fluent in the language, as Gaelic-style performance can be learned as any other style of music. He elaborates:

Although not all fiddling now played in Cape Breton is still in the old style, many (if not most) fiddlers old and young, exhibit the Gaelic style. While others play a newer, smoother style, lacking a lot of ornamentation and certain distinctive bow strokes, many display a combination of both or numerous elements of one or the other. The main point is that the Gaelic style remains, while the culture has allowed for internal change or innovation, which has led to some smoother, more streamlined players, and an overall expansion of styles. (Graham 2006: 66)

With regard to bias and cultural capital, it is evident that Gaelic plays an important role in the process. Even so, it would appear that what is and is not considered “Gaelic” is a subjective choice.

Gaelic plays an important part in the way fiddling and its history is understood by Chrissy Crowley's family (the Chisholms of Margaree), who were fluent Gaelic speakers. However, Crowley herself notes that her own experience is far removed from the language, and there is some tension associated with this.

[My grandfather,] Archie Neil [Chisholm] was a fluent Gaelic speaker, so right from the time I started playing the fiddle I was told that I'd need to learn Gaelic, and... especially start singing Gaelic if I wanted to be fully involved in the music. It wasn't one or the other, according to most members of the family. I personally never did learn Gaelic, and I don't sing, but I do want to learn it. I think it's kind of unfortunate that a music that was derived from the language has become the sole forefront and the language has almost disappeared. (2010)

In this way, Gaelic is a source of cultural and social capital, but this capital is disputed at times.

In sharp contrast to these Gaelic-based understandings of the tradition, there is also considerable resistance to such discourses. Cape Breton traditional music specialist Sheldon MacInnes summarizes the prevalent notions:

It is common knowledge that some music lovers explain that the very heart of the Cape Breton traditional music is the Gaelic language itself. Many of the active and sometimes determined proponents of the language agree that the very existence of the vibrant music culture is because of its strong link with the Gaelic language. This view concerning the fiddlers' music has evoked some very interesting debate and discussion in select communities of rural Cape Breton and beyond, where some individuals also hold fast to an opinion which places less of an emphasis on the link between the music of the Cape Breton fiddler and the Gaelic language. (MacInnes 1997: 62)

It is evident that not all musicians hear similarities between the Gaelic language and Cape Breton fiddling. This is also an issue that reaches beyond Cape Breton, connecting it to Scotland. Anthropologist Jonathan Dembling demonstrates that the persistence of Gaelic in Cape Breton is used to argue for its authenticity, something that a number of Scottish

musicians like Alistair Fraser and Hamish Moore support in spite of some opposition by fellow Scots.

Those who are not on the Cape Breton bandwagon, especially those brought up in one of Scotland's stronger regional traditions, such as Shetland or the Northeast, are often sceptical of the characterization of Cape Breton styles as "Scottish." For them, Scottishness is defined as what Scottish people do, not what they might have done in the past. They [those who do not see Cape Breton music as "Scottish"] see the last two centuries of music and dance culture as an evolution, not a break, and they resent the implication that their own styles are somehow debased. (Dembling 2005: 186)

This contention regarding Gaelic in Scotland extends a step further. There is little consensus among even Gaelic-speaking musicians in Scotland. Some of these Gaelic-speaking musicians relate closely to Cape Breton fiddling, while others are unable to see any of it as Gaelic whatsoever (Dembling 2005: 188).

Dembling aptly elaborates that,

Scots who pursue Cape Breton music and dance styles are taking part, wittingly or not, in a debate over what it means to be Scottish in the twenty-first century. Their embrace of Cape Breton necessarily implies a claim of ownership of that tradition. Gaels and Anglophones in both Scotland and Cape Breton all have a stake in the discussion, but their voices are not all equal. (2005: 196)

This contextualization of Gaelic and Scottish music is clearly relevant to the role of Gaelic in Cape Breton fiddling. To some, largely Gaelic speakers and those with Scottish heritage, the language debate is of utmost importance to all playing. To musicians of other backgrounds, Gaelic may be understood very differently. However, Gaelic speakers and learners, in many contexts, have considerable cultural capital and social influence within the musical community, thereby establishing their perspective as a broader fact within Cape Breton culture.

## **Conclusion**

In this thesis, I endeavour to present the broad range of how the Cape Breton fiddling tradition is understood and interpreted. By looking beyond established attitudes and beliefs that are sometimes taken for granted, further insight can be gained into the tradition and its meaning to performers and other tradition bearers. Conceptions and definitions of the tradition are subjective, and differ according to context and worldview. While the tradition can be understood and represented in myriad ways, the various discourses associated with tradition are not random or haphazard. Rather, they are products of socio-cultural processes and underlying power structures in the Cape Breton fiddling community.

Cultural and social capital play an important role in shaping discourses and attitudes about the tradition. Specific tradition bearers or social groups can be influential within a community, and musicians in such positions of power can do much to define what is and what is not “legitimate” or culturally relevant. This power and influence, however, is context dependent and, while a tradition bearer may have profound influence within one social circle, he or she may have relatively little power in another social context. Cultural legitimacy itself can be established by demonstrating musical skill within the tradition, or can be associated with extra-musical factors such as ethnicity or geography. Ultimately, one’s interpretation of cultural legitimacy draws idealistic and social boundaries and defines one’s peers. It is how tradition bearers engage with discourses of what is and is not accepted in the tradition that determines who is powerful and in what context.



The next chapter will further explore the different conceptions and expressions of tradition. More specifically, I will consider how tradition is negotiated in Cape Breton fiddling through performance practice. By analyzing repertoire, composition, arranging, and accompaniment, I demonstrate that notions of tradition change significantly according to context. Moreover, actors actively engage in the manipulation of such ideas, framing themselves as either traditional or contemporary. The negotiation of tradition in this manner can serve as a marker of identity, functioning as a means to distinguish oneself from others with dissimilar tastes or values, and as a way to align oneself with like-minded individuals.

## Chapter 4

### **“How *traditional* do you want to sound?”: Negotiating Tradition in Repertoire, Accompaniment, and Arranging**

Cape Breton traditional musicians often occupy a place of ambiguity between vernacular and professional contexts. On a vernacular level, the tradition is tied to community events such as house parties, weddings, and square dances. Musicians learn from, and share with, other players as tradition bearers. On a professional level, they are part of the commercial music industry that focuses on recordings and large-scale performances, a context in which a certain amount of musical experimentation is sometimes expected. As a musician and studio producer in the Cape Breton traditional music scene, I have found that the question, “How *traditional* do you want to sound?” is of the utmost importance to musicians. Their answers demonstrate an awareness of traditional and commercial influences, revealing a conscious decision to orient themselves in regard to these differing styles.

Repertoire and accompaniment are key elements in contextualizing a performance as “traditional” or “contemporary.”<sup>25</sup> While notions of tradition are relative to the accepted norms of a given context, this distinction can be much subtler than one might think. Traditionally a duo performance consisting of a fiddler and piano accompanist, a “contemporary” Cape Breton fiddling can sometimes be augmented by rock band instrumentation like Ashley MacIsaac or Natalie MacMaster. However, this

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<sup>25</sup> I am using quotations for traditional and contemporary because I use these terms to refer to sub-styles and specific aesthetic. I acknowledge that labelling these contrasting styles as either traditional or contemporary may seem oversimplistic, but have chosen to do so because these are the terms that my participants use to make such stylistic distinctions.

“contemporary” style is often performed with acoustic instruments as well. A “contemporary” performance is not merely determined by instrumentation, but also by the harmonic gestures and accompaniment patterns employed by such bands. The discussion of what tunes are considered “traditional” addresses conceptions of what the tradition actually is and was, simultaneously relating to the past and present. This conception of “traditional” repertoire is connected to compositional and arranging style, as well as performance practice.

### **Conception of Tradition**

Tradition is something that is conceptualized differently in different contexts; what is and is not considered “traditional” is dependent on perspective and subject to debate. When discussing their beliefs about the boundaries of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, I found that many of my participants spoke of both conservative and innovative forces within the tradition. Fiddler and pianist Kimberley Fraser explains:

The Cape Breton piano style is considered traditional, but it’s very innovative at the same time. It encompasses a lot of musical elements outside of Gaelic music. I mean, there’s so much jazz in the piano playing, it’s ridiculous: the bass lines, the chords, the rhythm. The piano style has evolved significantly, and there was never any complaint about that from purists, not that I’ve really heard, anyway. You get people praising John Morris Rankin<sup>26</sup> all the time, and Tracey Dares, and those players who have really kind of developed the piano style. I think it’s important for it to always evolve, because anything that stays stagnant is not going to carry on, and you need that newness, you need new ideas from people, from people who are coming up, from the younger players who are going to build upon what they’ve heard, so that process should always continue. (Kimberley Fraser in Feintuch 2010: 272)

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<sup>26</sup> Many consider John Morris Rankin’s accompaniment style to be the antecedent of modern, contemporary accompaniment style of recent generations.

As Doherty argues, the issue of change is one of great significance in Cape Breton fiddling: “The current pre-occupation of the Cape Breton musical community is with the changing Cape Breton fiddler. Change, as perceived in this context, impinges upon all aspects of musical activity” (1996: 288). This is consistent with Glenn Graham’s findings that tradition bearers are commonly concerned about the tradition changing and subsequently being lost forever. He states that,

fears continue to persist among followers of the tradition that undesired changes are occurring. Some are concerned that the old Gaelic sound is being lost while others worry about outside influences such as the Irish style and various innovations creeping into the tradition. Some fear the old tunes are being ignored, new ones lack the older sound, the music is getting faster, drums and innovative accompaniment sound foreign. It is important to note, however, that changes have always been occurring and contributing to the music’s survival. (2006: 72)

Both Graham and Doherty demonstrate that there has been a degree of tension between tradition and innovation. Although this may be commonplace in many musical traditions, preservation and romantic nostalgia have become significant in how Cape Breton fiddling is understood by many community members. These individuals construe Cape Breton fiddling as directly representative of the music played in pre-Clearance era Highland Scotland. For those who hold such beliefs of romantically static tradition, musical and cultural change may not necessarily be desirable.

For instance, in an interview with Feintuch, celebrated fiddler Buddy MacMaster expressed dissatisfaction with more commercial, contemporary versions of the music:

They’re getting some different sounds in there, maybe getting a few rock-and-roll sounds and different types of music. Some of the younger players maybe want to do something different – it attracts the young people, some of the more modern sounds. To some of us older fellows, well, we think that they’re kind of ruining the music to a certain extent, you know? But they play music in other places, and I suppose the people don’t know what the original stuff was, and this sounds maybe pretty good to them. [...] That’s the influence from the outside world, so to speak.

And, of course, they want to be a little different, to come up with something different to attract, to say “I’m not old-fashioned” or “I’m not playing the way the old fellows playing. I’m more modern.” But I think our Cape Breton music is unique, and people enjoy it. And if they’re going to change it too much, it won’t be Cape Breton music any more. We’re going to lose something. (Buddy MacMaster in Feintuch 2010: 96-97)

Tradition bearers such as MacMaster have the cultural capital and social influence to define the boundaries of acceptability within the tradition. Such attitudes are not entirely uncommon in some social circles, and evidence that less traditional, “contemporary” playing does not hold the same currency in all contexts.

To view “contemporary” and “traditional” fiddling styles as binaries, however, is an oversimplification. Although terms like “traditional” and “contemporary” imply such a divide, this is somewhat inaccurate. Instead, it is not unusual for musicians to be comfortable in both worlds. In this sense, they are not at odds with each other, but are instead two differing styles within a larger tradition. Many innovators have great respect for the tradition. Robert Deveau highly values “traditional” music and feels that it should be the basis of “contemporary” music, but sees them as somewhat separate entities:

I still really enjoy sitting in someone’s house. Laid back and relaxed. That’s where I enjoy it the most. But I have learned to enjoy the big productions. Apples and oranges. [...] If you want to make a living at it, you have to be versatile. But I think that there’s something about the whole idea of being true to your roots, because that’s probably what brought you there in the first place, and once you’re there, you dance. But I think it takes a balance of both. It has to be like the history... your music has to be a certain amount... You at least have to respect the traditions in order to be able to take it farther, because otherwise it’s like a house of cards. (Robert Deveau 2011)

Deveau’s opinions are mirrored by many of my participants, who try to find an appropriate compromise between sometimes contrasting values.

“Traditional” and “contemporary” musical styles may be thought of as each belonging to different social and performance contexts. Although there is not a strict relationship between style and context, “traditional” performances are generally associated with the social interaction and connected with places and events that are highly significant to the local community such as house parties, community concerts, or square dances. “Contemporary” performances, on the other hand, tend to be less socially relevant on a local level, and are more closely related to the music scenes on a national or international scale. The differences between “traditional” and “contemporary” Cape Breton fiddling are reminiscent of the distinctions made by scholars such as Chapman and Reiss between vernacular traditional music and Celtic music, arguing that Celtic music is a romanticized, commercialized version of the vernacular traditions it depicts (Chapman 1994; Reiss 2003).

Although Glassie has established that innovation is not antithetical to tradition (2003), there must be a balance between the forces of preservation and innovation to ensure a tradition’s longevity. Clearly preservation plays a significant role in tradition, yet without change and innovation, traditions can easily lose meaning or viability and be discarded for other practices. Likewise, innovation is integral to tradition, but without some level of preservation there can be no continuity or group memory of established practices.

The balance between innovation and respect for tradition is also discussed in relation to Cape Breton step-dancing by ethnochoreologist Pat Ballantyne. She explains that a continuing dialogue between “old-style” dancers, and today’s “newer style” dancers that can occur because Cape Breton step-dance is not standardized by any particular

group or institution in the way that Irish competitive dance or Highland dance is (2008). Due to this heterogeneity, both old and new style dancers – much like fiddle styles – can coexist at the same time, and do not necessarily correlate with old and young fiddlers or dancers respectively.

Burt Feintuch similarly explains the coexistence of traditional performance along with more commercial interpretations of the music; he notes, however, that musicians are often fluent in both styles. Feintuch states that although Ashley MacIsaac's and Natalie MacMaster's " 'fusion' styles have pushed the limits of what traditionalists find acceptable in their music, both also play at home for dances and local concerts, performing very much in what local traditionalists would describe as authentic styles" (2004: 90). This is an important observation, as this is a common practice among musicians today. While on tour, they are primarily participating in the music industry, and are encouraged to push boundaries and play in less "traditional" ways; when they return, however, these same individuals are thrust into vernacular, traditional contexts where such commercialism is unappreciated and even frowned upon.

Ethnomusicologist Jasmine McMorran identifies three distinct periods of piano accompaniment in Cape Breton. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century piano accompaniment was fairly rudimentary, with simple rhythms, harmonies, and little variation. A more complex style played by musicians such as Maybelle Chisholm McQueen and Mary Jessie MacDonald emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. It featured heavy syncopation as well as varied harmonies and inventive bass lines. McMorran credits this group of piano accompanists for encouraging players of the next generation (1970s – 1990s) to experiment with their playing, challenging the limits of "tradition" (McMorran 2013). Although there are

attitudes of conservatism and romanticism within the Cape Breton fiddling community, my participants (and musicians as whole) do not engage with the tradition in simplistic ways. Maybelle Chisholm McQueen who is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential Cape Breton piano players, told me that as a young player in the 1950s, she actively attempted to modernize the accompaniment style:

I was studying music and I said, “My God, there are eighty-eight keys here,” you know? I remember a lot of the older records had just three finger chording – basic chords. [...] But I started my own. A lot of them did not like it, but then there were some who loved it. One of them was Donald Angus Beaton, and then they all began to like it. [...] And it was cool. The word “cool” was out at that time. But if I could go back, I would say it was cool. If you’re going to go out there to sound bad, then forget it. So, you try everything. Try to be innovative, with different sounds. For my time, I was very innovative. [...] Now, a lot of them are playing my style. And then they’re taking it up another notch, which is even better. (Maybelle Chisholm McQueen 2011)

In this way, we can see that the cultural change can occur quite quickly, and individual agency can be a significant factor in such events.

During an interview I had with fiddler and academic Glenn Graham, he stressed the importance of agency in regard to performance practice and style:

Some musicians are very adept musicians. So, they chose, or they choose often, *not* to play a certain style. For instance, somebody might say, “Listen to this 1980s recording of Howie MacDonald. [...] It’s more of that smoother, newer, sleeker type of style.” But then, you could go and sit down with Howie, and he’d take off on the fiddle an old-style fiddler, in a way that we’d consider to be older style, with maybe added extra drones and more full style with different ornamentations. [...] So I think that when you’re talking about style, there’s a lot of individual choice that’s involved with it that people might not be taking heed of when they’re analyzing fiddlers. (2011)

A musician may choose to vary his or her style based on the performance context, the expectations of the audience, or personal taste. As Graham describes, a musician cannot be easily pigeon-holed or categorized based on an isolated performance.



So far, this chapter's discussion of tradition has included different perspectives, each with different conceptions of exactly how they relate to the tradition; all of these ideas are part of the discourse surrounding the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. To some, the negotiation of different values, stylistic choices, and performance practice is simply part of what makes up the tradition. J. P. Cormier explains how he conceptualizes the Cape Breton fiddling tradition as a whole, encompassing both the most orthodox and progressive practitioners in a manner that is straightforward and unproblematic:

This music has to evolve and it does. It evolves in a very unique way. It has shoots like a plant. You have the main tree. <places his palms together vertically to form a metaphorical trunk> That's where the music will always be and what it always will be. It's always that thing – Winston “Scotty” [Fitzgerald], Angus [Chisholm], Jerry [Holland], Howie [MacDonald]... all of them... The Wilmots, the MacKenzies, the Barras. That's that main tree where we all go, “Yeah, those guys are... you can't go wrong there.” Then all of a sudden, you'll have... Bang! <gestures that a branch has grown from the “trunk”> Natalie [MacMaster] sticks out there. Woohoo! What's that? And it does its thing, and it goes Swhoo! Back in. It doesn't stay out there. It just goes out there, does its thing, and comes back. Then you have Ashley [MacIsaac]. Whoa! What was *that*? That went *way* out. That was a massive branch that went out. Touched the whole world, Ashley did. He changed everything. Everybody started wanting to listen to bagpipes and Gaelic singers. Because of him. And Gordie Sampson. Gordie Sampson was *instrumental* in the making of the “Sleepy Maggie” thing. Then he did his little thing out there, then he went back and forth for a bit... But eventually, now, he went back. He's back with us now. And he's doing what he does. What *this* is. <motions to the “trunk”> He's not out on the branch anymore. Colin [Grant] is on his way out. It's already out; he's going. He's going to go. [...] It's hard to do this. It's *hard* to make that branch come out there and stay on it. You're balancing on it all the time. You could fall off at any minute and either piss off everybody back here, waiting for you to come back into the fold, or you piss off everybody out there and can't go any further. It's a balancing act. [...] That's the secret of to making this music fit in *today*. It's going to do the same thing that everything else does – change, grow, build. (J. P. Cormier 2012)

Cormier's extended metaphor of the tradition as a tree is a vivid one that accounts for agency, cultural change, and the politics associated with Cape Breton fiddling. One's repertoire, choice of accompaniment style, or even ornamentation can all have profound

meaning. The choices a musician make during performance demonstrates how they interpret the tradition, and how this interpretation changes from one context to another.

This distinction between “traditional” and “contemporary” composition illustrates ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino’s framework of “live performance fields”: participatory and presentational music (2008). He describes participatory music making as primarily a social activity, with little distinction between the performer and audience. Participatory music is designed to be predictable, requiring little to no rehearsal so as to encourage music making amongst a wide range of individuals. Presentational music, on the other hand, makes a clear distinction between performer and audience, is less predictable, and highly arranged. It takes little imagination to equate participatory music with “traditional” fiddling performance at a house party and presentational music with a “contemporary” performance on the international stage. There is, of course, a considerable grey area between these two extremes. While Turino’s framework distinguishes between these two fields, it is important to keep in mind that he did not intend for these categories to be absolute or mutually exclusive, and describes them as existing within a continuum, with performances often including aspects of both fields (2008: 87-88). In the context of Cape Breton fiddling, this is frequently the case. Even the most informal and “participatory” of performances can still be understood as having elements of formal presentation where one’s skill and prowess are displayed to fellow tradition bearers. Conversely, even the most formal concert performance implicitly includes a degree of participation, albeit considerably less than other contexts.

## **Repertoire and Tradition**

The concept of tradition is strongly evoked with regard to repertoire, and the discussion of what tunes are “traditional” addresses the varying nature of compositional style. This is closely tied to the context of the performance; for instance, there are expectations of tradition at a dance, while a festival performance or commercial recording may be expected to be more cutting-edge. This is illustrated in folklorist Neil Rosenberg’s study of Canadian old-time fiddler, Don Messer, which demonstrates how Messer’s repertoire was carefully manipulated according to context; his repertoire choice was distinctly different for audio recordings, to radio performances, television performances, and tune books (2002). Sherry Johnson also views Messer as a highly significant figure in contemporary fiddling, who laid the groundwork for how many fiddlers present themselves today:

I see Messer as a model of how fiddlers negotiate the concept of tradition, balancing an “old-time” and “modern” sound and persona, appealing to his audiences from the past at the same time as attracting new listeners. This process of negotiating past and present, stability and change, preservation and innovation is also at the heart of contemporary contest fiddling, and suggests that today’s young contest fiddlers have more in common with Don Messer than the sound of their music would suggest. (Johnson 2006: 130)

Although Johnson’s comments are directed specifically toward old-time fiddling competitions and their participants, a similar negotiation of tradition is also encountered by Cape Breton fiddlers today.

The negotiation of tradition through repertoire was evident at a performance with which I was involved during my fieldwork. Having been booked to perform on a BBC radio show, a fiddler and I had prepared a set list that would showcase her current repertoire, particularly her own more progressive compositions. This fiddler, Chrissy

Crowley, is known for her increasing departures from traditional Cape Breton fiddle arrangements. She often couples her compositions with arrangements that deliberately juxtapose her contemporary style with what traditional fiddle purists would expect. Upon arriving at the BBC recording venue, Crowley was told that there was an expectation of a “traditional” performance. She quickly dropped the majority of her own compositions, replacing them with standard tunes played by most other musicians, even though these standard tunes would not give an accurate representation of her repertoire as a contemporary composer. Although her usual repertoire is less conventional, by virtue of her being a fiddler and tradition bearer, her own tunes are also part of the tradition. The decision to omit these compositions demonstrates her awareness of her position within the tradition and what she deemed to be appropriate or “traditional” in this context. Although the performance was an opportunity for commercial exposure, she aligned herself with consciously staged tradition simply through the tunes that she chose to play. This may seem like a sacrifice, but the maintenance of repertoire for particular performance context is not an unusual part of the tradition.

Crowley explained that the social context of a performance played a significant role in her tune choice as a whole:

If it’s a square dance, or say, the Red Shoe,<sup>27</sup> or the Doryman,<sup>28</sup> I try to limit the “away” tunes to like maybe one in a four tune set, and maybe three in a really big blast. Because my experience has been, if I do three tunes from away in a row, I start getting the eyebrow from people. <laughs> [...] But it’s the complete opposite when I’m playing around musicians. If we’re just jamming or playing in

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<sup>27</sup> The Red Shoe Pub is in Mabou, Cape Breton, that is an important venue and social space for Cape Breton traditional musicians. Originally opened by Rob Wilson in the late ninties, it is now owned and operated by members of the Rankin Family.

<sup>28</sup> The Doryman Beverage Room is a traditional music venue in Cheticamp, Cape Breton. Over the last thirty years, its weekly matinees have showcased some of the most respected of the island’s tradition bearers.

a circle, I try to play every tune from away as possible that they may not have ever heard before. Just for the excitement, because we all get tired of playing the same tunes at the session. (2012)

Despite the fact that she is a professional musician who plays internationally, Crowley is young and admittedly self-conscious of her playing in some ways. In a local context, she is less established than many other fiddlers and therefore could be thought of as having less cultural and social capital. As such, she is remarkably aware of the boundaries of taste and acceptability in various contexts.

Repertoire can also be particularly important in shaping performances that are more commonplace. Fiddler Andrea Beaton explains how context affects her repertoire choice:

I am definitely careful about what tunes I play at dances. Sometimes when I'm away playing, some of the choices I make are less dance tunes and maybe more familiar to people away... it depends on who's accompanying me too. [...] I kind of adjust for the atmosphere. (2012)

Both Crowley's and Beaton's considerations of repertoire demonstrate the interplay that takes place between performance context and repertoire. That is to say, the ways in which musicians conceptualize specific places, performance contexts, or even the tradition as a whole can directly affect their repertoire in a given situation. In addition, repertoire choice can also be indicative of audience expectations in particular settings. Such decisions can reflect what is expected and appropriate for particular contexts, or at the very least, what the performer *believes* the audience expects.

Colin Grant similarly suggests that the context of a given performance can have a profound effect on the tunes he chooses to play:

You do need to cater to your audience, just as any singer-songwriter, or band playing for their hometown fans needs to cater to that audience. That's been a part

of music for a long time and certainly doesn't change when it comes to Cape Breton music. That being said, the confidence to try tunes that might not normally be accepted by your audience in a particular area, that confidence comes from playing and trying new things on said audience. [...] No one's going to turn Cheticamp off of "King George's Strathspey"<sup>29</sup> anytime soon, but they certainly can open their ears to tunes like "Wes and Maggie's Croft"<sup>30</sup> if they hear them often enough. I use that tune as an example because that's the kind of tune that four years ago, I might not have had the confidence to play in Cheticamp because I was worried about what they might think of me. I no longer have that insecurity there. (2012)

Grants' comments address not only that individual tunes can have specific meaning, but that this significance can change in different social situations. "The King George IV Strathspey" is a very popular tune in the Cheticamp area, yet in some other places, the tune might be considered to be such a standard that it is over played or even thought of as pedestrian. "Wes and Maggie's Ceilidh Croft," on the other hand, is very popular among players who actively follow the traditional music scene in Scotland and Ireland, but may be unknown to certain crowds of ardent Cape Breton traditionalists.

There is a degree of overlap between social group and region. A geographical region has certain people who live there and frequent the venues of that region, yet both categories are separate; social groups can change and migrate, while specific historical or geographical significance may be independent of the people living in the area at a given time. In this sense, both region and social context can play subtly different roles in repertoire selection. Fiddler and composer Kinnon Beaton, for example, explains the importance of the audience / performer relationship, as well as spontaneity and inspiration:

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<sup>29</sup> "King George IV Strathspey" is a traditional strathspey from Scotland that is found in many Scottish music collections.

<sup>30</sup> "Wes and Maggie's Ceilidh Croft" is a reel written by Irish button accordionist, Leo McCann.

If I'm playing a dance and someone walks in, that will remind me of a tune. It might be a person. And that will jog my memory, like, "This guy wrote this tune," or "Oh, there's a tune written for him," and I'll play that tune." (2012)

Glenn Graham spoke of a similar scenario, yet contextualized it quite differently:

If you're playing for a group of people that might be associated with a certain fiddle player, or in an area where a certain tune is played, and you have a couple of tunes in your repertoire that came from that family or somebody associated with those people... You might play a couple tunes like that where you might not play them elsewhere. So you do a little bit of that. You're playing to an audience, so you want to make people happy. If you play for yourself, you might end up playing for nobody, literally, but yourself. (2011)

While Beaton's explanation of tune choice focused on the inspiration of an impromptu decision, Graham depicts a deliberate attempt to communicate with the audience through the signified meaning of a tune.

Musical meaning, however, can be constructed in much more nuanced ways.

Meaning need not be limited to repertoire, but can be closely related to stylistic choices of a performance. Colin Grant says,

When I play for square dances in Mabou, as opposed to Sydney, in Mabou, I will alternate between a very straight Howie MacDonald style of playing, which doesn't dot and cut and notes in jigs. <hums an example of rigid, even triplets in a jig> I'll do that when they are step-dancing and when they are swinging, then I will switch to the more, say, Natalie MacMaster style with dots and cuts <hums example of a jig with a swung time-feel> because that helps people swing. Those are the two styles that I choose to alternate between in *Mabou*. When I play a square dance in Sydney, I'll alternate between Howie's style and a more... contemporary, maybe more Irish / Scottish style. Those are the two I pick to draw from both repertoire-wise and feel-wise. While there are all of these different concepts of the tradition, fiddlers of our generation are still very self-conscious about what style they're playing. And are not necessarily going to just walk into a gig and blast the audience with unfamiliar material in an unfamiliar way. (2012)

Again we see that while audience perceptions are integral to how musicians choose to present their music on stage, a fiddler's perception of the audience is equally important.

In Grant's variation of repertoire and time-feel, he actively constructs a musical representation of how he interprets a region, venue, or audience.

When playing in a context with a mixed audience of locals and tourists, a musician must retain credibility by appealing to locals who are both critical and knowledgeable of the tradition, while appealing to outsiders largely ignorant of the tradition. In this way, these performances serve a dual function, satisfying both esoteric and exoteric tastes. The same performance may impress locals through subtleties like obscure repertoire choice or melodic ornamentation, and also interest tourists more generally, perhaps by being particularly energetic. This is similar to how Pierre Bourdieu discusses the dialectics of taste and how art is defined – where art is “legitimately” understood on an esoteric, symbolic level, as opposed to naïve, or “barbarous” taste, which is determined by sensuality, function, and innate like or dislike (2010 [1984]). In this context, tourists have power through their economic capital, yet lack the habitus necessary to appreciate the subtle nuances of a performance.

### **“Traditional” Compositions**

What, then, may lead to “contemporary” compositions being interpreted as non-traditional? First, we must consider what is traditionally conventional. It is noteworthy that although recent compositions are not “traditional” in the sense that they are not centuries old and part of the Cape Breton fiddle canon, a substantial amount of current repertoire is made of relatively recent compositions. In this way, one might have “traditional” tunes in the sense that they are old, often pipe tunes or Gaelic songs, but one might also have “traditional”-style tunes, which might be recently written. The fact that



the distinction between the two may be not readily apparent to a listener reveals the consistency of the melodic structures and idioms in the tradition.

“Traditional” compositions follow certain patterns and rely on particular melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, and formal structures. Moreover, many aspects of a “traditional” performance are improvised. The tunes themselves are chosen mid-medley by the fiddler and the accompaniment is also improvised (there is no specific, repeated set of chord changes to a given tune). This level of improvisation is made possible by a combination of familiarity with tunes, and the predictability of musical structures. A piano accompanist can easily harmonize a tune much in the same way that Western Classical musicians during the Renaissance were commonly expected to be able to improvise counterpoint. Fiddler Robbie Fraser explains:

The music stayed very similar to what was played in Scotland in the 1800s. [...] If you skip ahead even a hundred years or whatever, to Dan R. MacDonald,<sup>31</sup> and Donald Angus Beaton, and Dan Hughie MacEachern,<sup>32</sup> some of the biggest composers, or the people who added so much of the music to the current repertoire... I don't think you notice a whole lot of discrepancy between that and the way the music was played in the 1800s. It stayed quite similar, I would say. The chord patterns and things like that... I could play a tune that was composed by Kinnon Beaton a week ago, and then put a tune composed in Scotland in the 1850s after it, and it works fine. You wouldn't really know that one is 150 years older than the other. (2012)

The melodic and harmonic gestures associated with Cape Breton traditional music become intuitive for musicians. As Fraser mentions, this level of predictability continues with 20<sup>th</sup> century compositions which commonly imitate the same musical gestures and structures as earlier “traditional” compositions.

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<sup>31</sup> Dan R. MacDonald (1911 – 1967) was a prolific composer and fiddler. His compositions are among the most celebrated and widely played in the Cape Breton fiddling canon.

<sup>32</sup> Dan Hughie MacEachern (1914 – 1996) was an influential fiddler and noted composer from Queensville, Cape Breton.

While some of these structures are undoubtedly quite nuanced, there are some very clear structures as well. With regard to form, tunes can be extremely predictable. They are always played twice through, with exception to tunes that are four parts long, which can be played once through. More specifically, each part consists of two four-measure phrases (eight measures total), (commonly ending in a half cadence and final cadence, respectively) which is played twice through. This form is often halved so that the phrases are two bars long, and four measures total. In relation to this, if the phrasing is inconsistent between the two parts, the second part may only be played once, in order to keep the form symmetrical. Overall, the typical form for a tune is AABB, with both A and B parts usually structured as ABAC or AB1CB2.

With regard to harmony and scale choices, the tunes almost exclusively use Ionian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, or Dorian modes. For Mixolydian, Aeolian, and Dorian tunes, the chord progressions generally alternate between the tonic and bVII, with many melodies consisting almost entirely of arpeggios of these two chords. This style of melodic and chord structure is sometimes known as a “double tonic” (Dunlay and Greenberg 1996). The predictable nature of these chord progressions, and the modal nature of the melodies allow for a plethora of chord substitutions that can be and are employed by accompanists. Tunes that are Ionian-based employ classic Western harmony (with the exception of the occasional bVII chord in place of the dominant V chord). These tunes feature standard chord progressions such as: I IV I V and I ii V. In addition to these broad conventions of structure, there are also established conventions of common melodic material that are used. Such motifs construct melodies through arpeggiation, scalar passages, and pentatonics. There are similar four note motifs that commonly occur.

An example of a typical minor, “double tonic” tune is the common reel, “*Muileann Dubh*.” A simple two-part reel in A Dorian, it exemplifies many of the expected conventions of a tune in Cape Breton.

**Muileann Dubh**

**A**    Reel

Am                      G                      Am                      G                      Am

**Scottish Traditional**

G                      Am

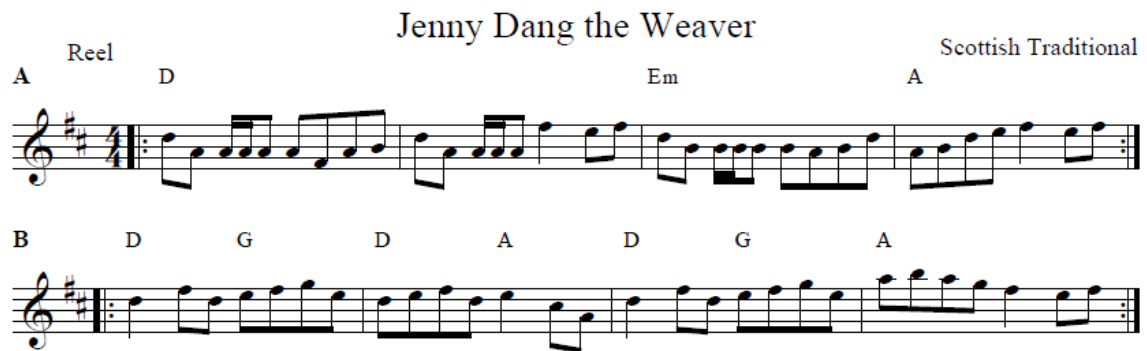
**B**

Am                      G                      Am                      G                      Am

**Figure #2: “*Muileann Dubh*” – Scottish Traditional Reel**

Although “*Muileann Dubh*” is marginally atypical in that it is comprised of four-measure sections as opposed to the eight-measure sections (a common feature of early Scottish tunes), the tune is otherwise very conventional. Its form is AABB on the macro level, and on the micro level, both sections can be understood as being structured as AB1AB2 or: Opening phrase (motive); First ending (counter motive); Opening phrase (restatement of the motive); and Final Ending (altered counter motive with cadence). Harmonically, the chords oscillate between the tonic (Am) and the bVII (G), with the final bar of each section ending on the tonic again. The melody clearly outlines the chord changes, particularly in the B section, which is constructed almost exclusively of chord tones.

A typical example of a major tune structure and harmony is the reel, “*Jenny Dang the Weaver*.”

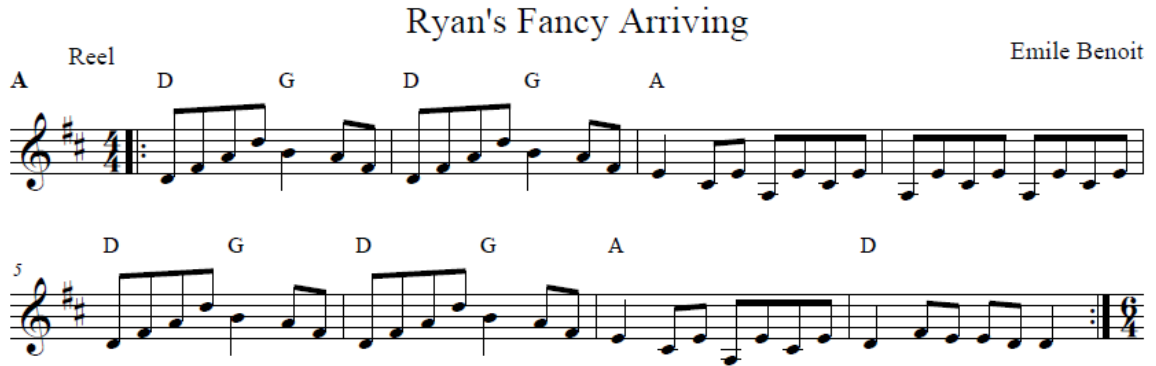


**Figure #3: “Jenny Dang the Weaver” – Scottish Traditional Reel**

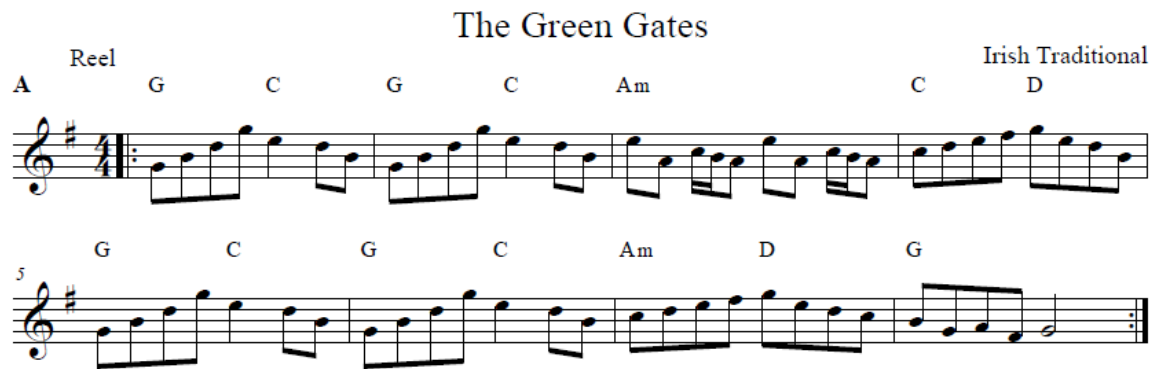
Also following an AABB form, the form for each section can also be represented as AB1AB2, although this structure of Motive and Counter Motive is followed more loosely in the A section than the B section. Harmonically, the chord changes suggested by the melody relies on common I ii V and I IV I V progressions. In the A section, this occurs once, resolving to the tonic on the downbeat of the next measure, while the B section is more harmonically active: I IV I V, I IV I V. Both “*Muileann Dubh*” and “Jenny Dang the Weaver” are representative of many other tunes in the Cape Breton repertoire. With such formal, melodic, and harmonic structures in place, tunes such as these could easily be accompanied by a piano player or guitarist familiar with the tradition even if he or she had never heard the tune before.

The melodic idioms employed in Cape Breton melodies have a great deal in common with the traditional musics of the British Isles and various other styles around the north Atlantic. While Cape Breton fiddling is distinct in regard to style and repertoire, it relies on much of the same source material as other fiddling traditions. As such, a parallel example of melodic structures can be drawn from the Newfoundland and Irish traditions. With thousands of melodies making use of the same structures, certain

redundancies become inevitable. Emile Benoit’s “Ryan’s Fancy Arriving,” for example, evidences how easily a composition can reproduce existing melodies.



**Figure #4: “Ryan’s Fancy Arriving” (A Section – measures 1-8) – by Emile Benoit**



**Figure #5: “The Green Gates” (A Section – measures 1-8) – Irish Traditional Reel**

As we can see here, the first two measures of each phrase (measures 1-2 and 5-6) of “Ryan’s Fancy Arriving” are remarkably similar to the melody of “The Green Gates.” In fact, the only difference between the two is that they are in different keys. Measure 3 of both tunes is also somewhat similar in that they outline arpeggios with a similar melodic contour.

The degree of structural predictability in these tunes can create ambiguity as to what constitutes an original creation or composition. Participants of mine who are active composers expressed their desire to compose tunes that are unique and that do not closely resemble existing tunes, but also acknowledged that this can be very challenging. Colin Grant elaborates,

I think in the grand scheme of things, we should be aware of plagiarism, but given the constraints of tradition, which is expanding, we can't beat ourselves up for writing something twice, because our tunes in our tradition do follow certain patterns and conventions. So if we can accept that, we're going to write something and we can contribute to the tradition, but it might be borrowing a few ideas from the past and moving them forward. (2012)

It is precisely this self-awareness that influences Cape Breton fiddling today. Although it is certainly possible to compose a tune within traditional conventions that is sufficiently unique, some composers choose to write tunes that are less conventional.

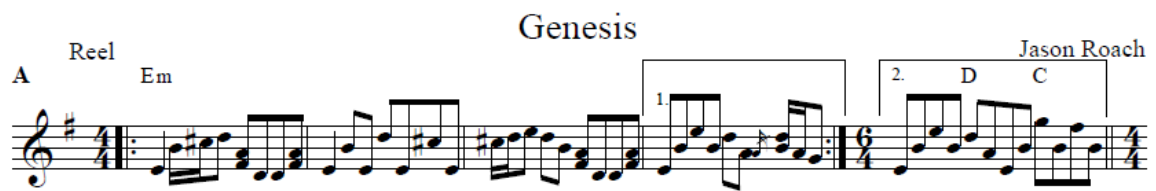
### **“Contemporary” Compositions**

While “contemporary,” progressive compositions may be more easily identified as “untraditional,” they still rely on traditional musical elements enough to be identified as belonging to the tradition. What marks them as distinct, however, is their lack of predictability; these compositions subvert normative compositional practices. Newer, less standardized compositions may be understood to be “non-traditional,” but individual composition is a long-standing part of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, making the performance of one's own compositions a very traditional idea. Fiddler Colin Grant offers, “It's hard to tell if we're being *deliberately* unconventional, or simply not following conventions” (2012). Compositions in this style often include uncommon chord

substitutions, extensive syncopation, irregular metres, and idioms atypical of the tradition. Their lack of predictability often requires rehearsal, as they may be less intuitive for other performers than more standard tunes.

Now that the conventional aspects of “traditional” composition have been established, we can now effectively address unconventional aspects to some “contemporary” compositions. One notable feature of “contemporary” compositions is irregularity of form. Such compositions may have parts that are not the same length sometimes because they are not repeated. They also tend to deviate from the standard AABB form, more often having three to four parts, and may order sections in non-sequential patterns (i.e., AABAACD).

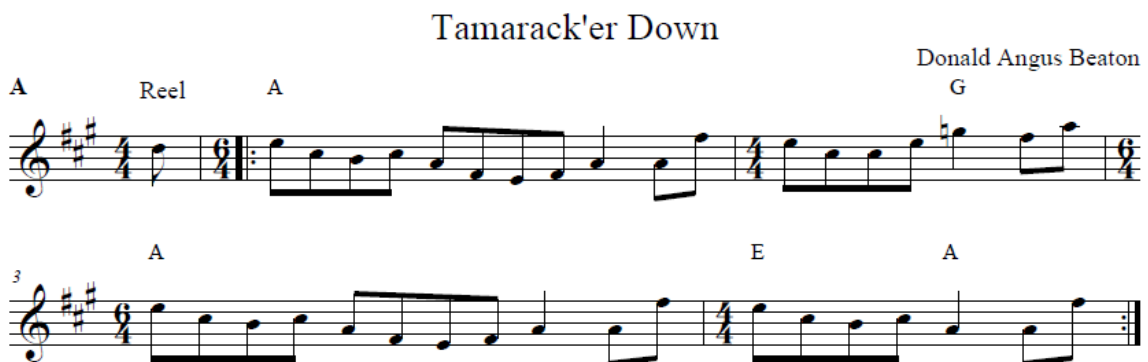
This irregularity of form also occurs within the context of meter, mixing bars of 6/4 with regular 4/4 reels, or 9/8 in jigs. Although “crooked” tunes are commonplace in other traditions like in Quebec and Newfoundland fiddling, asymmetrical forms are unusual in Cape Breton tunes, likely due to the lack of predictability associated with them. In some cases, it is possible that these metric irregularities in Cape Breton composition may be influenced by such outside traditions, but this is not necessarily the case. Jason Roach, for example, who frequently writes tunes in irregular meters, has had limited experience of “crooked” tunes in the context of folk tradition. However, he is an avid fan of Dave Brubeck’s *Time Out* (1959) album, which features countless examples of such metric play. The A section of Roach’s tune, “Genesis,” for instance, is mildly crooked in that it includes a measure of 6/4 in its second ending:



**Figure #6: “Genesis” (A Section – measures 1-8) – by Jason Roach**

Although the departure from 4/4 time is somewhat atypical, the overall form of the tune (AABAACD) also adds to the more “contemporary” feel of the tune.

That having been said, asymmetrical tunes are not entirely without precedence in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. The reel “Tamarack’er Down,” written by renowned fiddler and respected composer Donald Angus Beaton features several measures of 6/4 in the A section:



**Figure #7: “Tamarack’er Down” (A Section – measures 1-4) – by Donald Angus Beaton<sup>33</sup>**

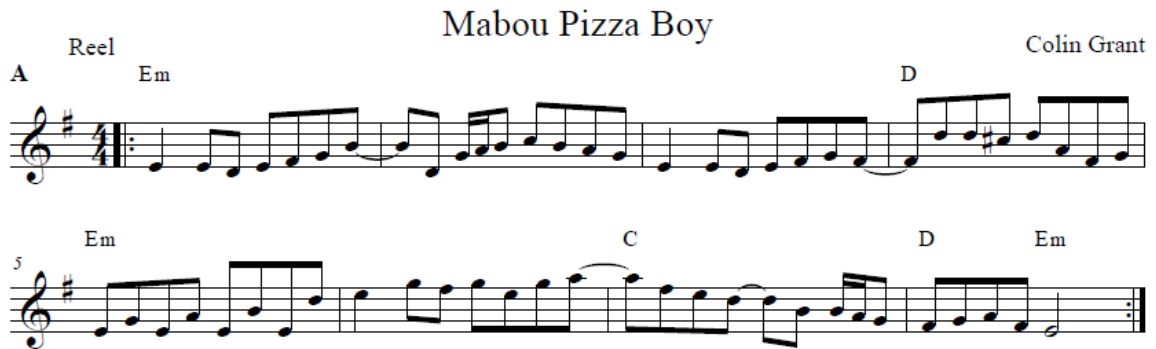
This example, however, is highly unusual. Moreover, it seems that the tune itself has not been conceptualized as “crooked,” per se. In *The Beaton Collection* (2000), Kinnon Beaton (Donald Angus Beaton’s son) notated “Tamarack’er Down” in 4/4, with the explicative note that “Some bars in part A contain more notes than required” (201). It

<sup>33</sup> This figure was re-notated but not transcribed by the author.



would seem that the tune has been heard as “square” or symmetrical, and any notion of asymmetry was realized during the notation process. Even so, the choice of remaining in 4/4 time for the notation would imply that “Tamarack’er Down” is heard as a relatively standard reel.

Melodically, syncopation and more angular melodies are other less conventional features of a “non-traditional” tune. The reel, “Mabou Pizza Boy” employs prominent syncopation as well as including unusual melody fragments with notes outside the key.



**Figure #8: “Mabou Pizza Boy” (A Section – measures 1-8) – by Colin Grant**

While the A section of “Mabou Pizza Boy” adheres to many standard structural elements (i.e., note choice, use of phrasing, harmonic implication of the melody), Grant consistently uses syncopated melodies that extend over bar lines, thereby obscuring the pulse of the music. Many “traditional” tunes consist of a uniform string of eighth notes with several quarter notes, essentially having little to no rhythmic content or variation. This syncopation is not unlike the Prince Edward Island “shuffle” employed by Acadian fiddlers on Prince Edward Island that stresses the weak beats of a tune (Forsyth 2012: 361-362). Some newer compositions, on the other hand, often rely as strongly on rhythmic motifs to shape their melody as on pitch.

Chrissy Crowley's tune, "The Doppelganger," makes use of several different rhythmic devices that together, make a tune that is highly unusual:

The musical score for "The Doppelganger" (measures 13-24) by Chrissy Crowley is presented on three staves. The first staff (measures 13-15) is in 4/4 time and features chords Em, Am, D, G, and D. The second staff (measures 16-18) begins with a C section, featuring a tie over the bar line from measure 16 to 17, and includes chords C, G/B, Am, G, D/F#, Am, G/B, C, D, G, and D. The third staff (measures 19-24) continues the C section, featuring a meter change to 6/4 for two measures (measures 19-20) and then returning to 4/4, with chords C, G/B, Am, G, D/F#, Am, G/B, C, D, G, and D.

**Figure #9: "The Doppelganger" (measures 13-24) – by Chrissy Crowley**

Figure #9 is an excerpt of the second half of the B section of the tune (measures 13-15), followed by the C section of the tune. Initially, the C section begins in measure 16, a measure earlier than usual, which also includes a tie over the bar line into measure 17, which obscures the pulse, much like syncopation found in "Mabou Pizza Boy." Further, there is a meter change to 6/4 for two measures, then a return to the standard 4/4 meter. There is also an element of rhythmic displacement in measures 19 and 23, where three note arpeggios obscure the pulse with a final rhythmic resolution on the downbeat of the following measure.

Such rhythmic devices are sometimes combined with unusual note choices for dramatic effect:



**Figure #10: “Mabou Pizza Boy” (measures 17-20) – by Colin Grant**

In measures 19 and 20 of Mabou Pizza Boy, not only does Grant include rhythmic syncopation, but the melody is comprised of several unconventional notes. The prominent F natural at the beginning of measure 19 and the descending F major arpeggio obscure the key centre in a manner similar to how jazz musicians often manipulate tension and release by playing “outside” the key centre or given chord changes before finally resolving the melody.

Jason Roach's "Amegerous Time on a Fork" also makes use of unusual melodic choices:

**Amegerous Time on a Fork** Jason Roach

**A** Reel A/C# DmMaj7

**B** A

**C** Am F Em

**D** A Bm DmMaj7 A Bm G

**Figure #11: "Amegerous Time on a Fork" – by Jason Roach**

The tune is highly atypical in that it is based on the harmonic major scale (a b c# d e f g#). Further, the meter constantly shifts back and forth between 6/4 and 4/4 in an unpredictable manner. Lastly, the melody of the D section outlines the unconventional

chord progression of A Bm Dm maj7, A Bm G (I ii ivmaj7, I ii bVII), and has a contour that features wide leaps seldom, if ever found in more traditional melodies.

Colin Grant explains that his compositional process has begun to shift away from more traditional, conventional approaches to focus more on “contemporary” writing. To some extent, this is because he finds that there is a greater amount of freedom when there are fewer established conventions to adhere to:

When I get that key two-bar phrase that will dictate the rest of the tune... As of late, those two-bar phrases that have been coming to me have been modern sounding tunes. Writing a traditional tune for me, is harder than writing one that steps outside the box a little bit, because you have these almost invisible conventions to abide by when you're writing a trad tune. It's either more simple, or it has certain patterns and phrases that are characteristic to a trad tune. For the past year, at least, I can say that every tune that's come into my head has been something I thought “Oh, yeah. That would fit the band,” never, “Oh, that would be really cool at a square dance.” I guess I'm evolving into a contemporary traditional musician. If I were to write a trad tune, I would be probably writing stuff and then checking books to see if I'm stealing something. (Colin Grant 2012)

Again, Grant raises the significance of repertoire – “traditional” compositions belong to more traditional, conservative contexts such as square dances, while “contemporary” tunes would be expected at performance with a band at a local bar or festival. Although he is proficient in numerous performance styles, Grant takes great care to ensure that the repertoire he plays is appropriate for the performance context.

Commenting on Grant's “contemporary” compositional style, fiddler and multi-instrumentalist J. P. Cormier explains,

[Colin Grant] is going to contemporise the way we think of composition because he's making tunes right now that are just frigging amazing. And they're staying true to this art form. That's what's so scary about him. He can write a tune and it sounds brand new. It sounds contemporary, but you can hear all the influences of this [the roots of the tradition] in what he's playing. (2012)

Cormier's comments further exemplify both the separation and connection between "traditional" and "contemporary" compositions. The tunes by Grant that Cormier discusses are typically played in non-traditional settings — particularly with the Celtic rock group Sprag Session (formerly known as the Colin Grant Band) — yet these newer, less idiomatic compositions are still identified by fellow musicians as belonging to the Cape Breton fiddling tradition.

### **Arranging**

So far in this chapter, my musical analysis has been largely textual, analyzing the compositions themselves. However, there are aspects of how these compositions are performed that are also important. While certainly related to composition and arranging, these features have more to do with execution and framing. While repertoire is a significant aspect of tradition, much of what is "traditional" or "contemporary" about a performance is also determined by accompaniment. For example, an accompaniment that relies extensively on ideas taken from modern jazz or funk frames a performance very differently than do the walking bass lines and chord progressions of more "traditional" accompaniment. A significant part of "contemporary" accompaniment practices is linked to both European traditional music and commercial recordings. This is tied to harmonic movement in piano and guitar, but also relates to other issues of instrumentation. In a band format, this includes ostinato patterns in the bass, and drum grooves, significantly changing time-feel. This issue of instrumentation also includes the use of other melodic instruments such as the mandolin, tenor banjo, and accordion.

The contextualization of “contemporary” compositions also includes how they are framed within an arrangement. As such, a “contemporary” performance is not simply a melody of tunes without interruption, but often includes introductions, endings, arranged transitions from one section to another, and interludes that may include improvised solos. As mentioned earlier, these non-traditional, “contemporary” compositions and performances are unconventional (in relation to the tradition) and arranged. Perhaps the most significant examples of “contemporary” arranging such as this are found on Jerry Holland’s landmark recording, *Master Cape Breton Fiddler* (1982), which is acknowledged as the first Cape Breton fiddle recording that was formally arranged. American traditional musician, Jody Stecher<sup>34</sup> wrote in the liner notes of the 2001 re-issue of *Master Cape Breton Fiddler*,

I think this may have been the first Cape Breton fiddle album to consider the total aesthetic experience of the listener. The sequence was like a well-planned concert, and the arrangements sounded well-rehearsed. Moreover, there was a vivid relationship between Jerry’s powerful bowing, highly emotive tone, and unique phrasing, and sounds of the guitar and piano and the sometimes startling choice of chords. In the ’70s, some Irish albums had used this technique, but before the release of *Master Cape Breton Fiddler*, Cape Breton fiddle LPs were mostly a mono-textured random sequence of melodies. (Jody Stecher – liner notes – re-issue 2001)

While I would argue that Stecher’s dismissal of previous Cape Breton recordings as a “random sequence of melodies” is a gross oversimplification of how fiddlers carefully construct their sets, *Master Cape Breton Fiddler* was indeed arranged to an unprecedented degree.

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<sup>34</sup> Jody Stecher (b. 1946) is an American old-time, folk, and Scottish traditional musician. He plays the banjo, mandolin, fiddle and guitar.

Hilda Chiasson, the piano player on *Master Cape Breton Fiddler*, noted her experience of encountering such a carefully arranged version of the fiddling tradition:

Jerry's second album was the first one that I worked on, and that was the first time I ever used chord charts. Three days before the record was made, Dave MacIsaac and Jerry sat down and wrote out the charts, and I was a pile of nerves. But we went through it pretty well with no problems. (Hilda Chiasson in MacGillivray, 1988: 174)

Arranging today has become considerably more intricate in some cases, yet even in contemporary recordings, chord charts and lead sheets are rare. In the early 1980s, however, such formality would have been unheard of.

The reason for such a formal arrangement becomes apparent when one considers that not only was Holland arranging the music in very specific ways, but he was also including sounds used by traditional Irish musicians that were relatively foreign to Cape Breton music. Cape Breton guitarist Paul MacDonald writes,

Although the Irish recordings filled Jerry with new ideas for Cape Breton music, in preparing for *Master Cape Breton Fiddler*, both Jerry and Dave still wanted to remain within the limits of the classic trio sound. This requirement is one of the reasons the album was so well accepted. (Paul MacDonald – *Master Cape Breton Fiddler* re-release, liner notes 2001)

Significant influences on this landmark recording were the traditional Irish bands Planxty and The Bothy Band. The static style of modal harmony employed by these bands – which relies on pedal points – was used extensively on *Master Cape Breton Fiddler*, and is very similar to much of the “contemporary” accompaniment that exists today. Formal arrangements became more common in the 1990s among musicians such as the Barra MacNeils, the Rankin Family, Ashley MacIsaac, and Natalie MacMaster. This trend has continued over the past decade, with instrumental groups such as Sláinte Mhath, Beòlach



and, more recently, Sprag Session further exploring the arranging possibilities within a band setting.

Although Doherty suggests that the “band format” may be the result of Cape Breton traditional musicians submitting to pressures of commercialism (1996: 255-256), popular and traditional music are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories.

Individual agency and artistic expression should not be overlooked in either case. For instance, ethnomusicologist and music theorist Jeffrey Hennessey asserts that the accompaniment “grooves” used in Cape Breton fiddling have much in common with rock grooves, making them naturally compatible (2008). That having been said, in the 1990s, the time when Doherty was commenting on such traditional bands, the social environment was significantly different than it is now. Colin Grant elaborates,

In the 90s, different became cool when Ashley [MacIsaac] and Natalie [MacMaster] were seen at the ECMAs playing with full bands. Now, it’s coming around full circle in that people have realized that to compete on a world stage, sometimes the tradition suffices. People are being creative with contemporary music for experimentation purposes and not out of necessity or lack of confidence. Whereas back then, Natalie and Ashley might not have had the balls to go as far with their careers as they did as full on traditional musicians. Because no one up until that point had been successful on a world stage without [being at least somewhat non-traditional]. (2012)

Grant demonstrates that there are a variety of reasons a musician may choose to play in a particular style. Moreover, there are occasions when, in even the most commercial performance context, a highly traditional interpretation of the music may sometimes be chosen by performers.

In this way, we can see that much of this untraditional, arranged style of composition and performance has roots in commercial recordings. This, however, is indicative of more than the influence of studio recordings, as Cape Breton fiddling has a

history of commercial recordings dating back to 1928s. These arrangements were part of Cape Breton fiddling's shift toward a more commercialized music industry. Pre-determined chord progressions, interludes and endings, and later on, the inclusion of bass and drums with accompanying rock grooves, are all prominent parts of modern day popular music production.

There are a number of significant aspects to this “contemporary,” commercialized accompaniment style. Most notable is the fact that this arrangement style can be separated from compositional style. Very “traditional” tunes can be recontextualized as “contemporary” in nature. This has been evident in Ashley MacIsaac's recording of “Sleepy Maggie.” A hugely successful single from MacIsaac's *Hi, how are you today?* (1995), “Sleepy Maggie” features Gaelic singer Mary Jane Lammond, who is arguably the main focus of the recording. She is supported by a rock band, and MacIsaac plays the fiddle during the introduction and interludes between the verses of the song. Though this recording is highly arranged in a pop format, this kind of modern recontextualization need not be cut and dry.

As such, there is not always an obvious distinction between “traditional” and “contemporary” accompaniment. The harmonic approaches and gestures of a “contemporary” accompaniment can be improvised within a live setting, further blurring ideas between performances, commercial recordings, improvisation and arrangements. This places the piano accompanist in an important position of determining how “commercial” or how “traditional” a performance can be, and in what manner, something that can change considerably according to context.

Unusual harmony or melody notes are also a way in which conventions are challenged. Chord progressions more frequently include uncommon substitutions that sometimes fall outside the key. Most importantly, however, is the fact that chord choices are more frequently pre-determined – due in part to the increasing irregularity of instrumentation (which will be discussed shortly). When these chord progressions are composed, they tend to follow less predictable and classic, functional harmony, making use of modal harmonies that prominently feature pedal points and inverted triads (i.e., G/B). While notions of “contemporary” arrangements and performances are relative to accepted norms of a given era or performance context, the distinction between traditional and non-traditional is often much more subtle than it has been in the past. A “contemporary” performance can be easily identified by rock band style instrumentation like that of Ashley MacIsaac or Natalie MacMaster, but today, the “contemporary” style occupies a space somewhere closer to Jerry Holland’s *Master Cape Breton Fiddler* – arranged, yet with acoustic instruments. In this context, the experimentation and “contemporary” influences are more harmonic in nature. The function of the instruments in a given arrangement may not necessarily be changed significantly from a band format. This “contemporary” style is largely an adapted form of the band format.

An example of how the arrangements of *Master Cape Breton Fiddler* influenced future Cape Breton recordings can be seen in Allie Bennett’s recording of Gerry Cromane’s Reel (2004). The piano accompaniment differs significantly from the standard Cape Breton piano groove, and features sustained block chords with little movement in the bass.



**Figure #12: Piano Accompaniment by Mac Morin**

The overall feel of this arrangement is reminiscent of *Master Cape Breton Fiddler*, which employs sustained block chords in a similar way. While this is partly an arranging technique used to develop interest, predetermined harmonies, rhythms, and chord voicings can become a necessity in certain instances. This is the case in Allie Bennett's recording of Gerry Cromane's Reel (Figure #12), which included bass guitar. In Cape Breton traditional accompaniment, the piano plays bass notes very prominently in the left hand, so it is important that these notes compliment what a bass is playing. Although some adept pianists and bassists may be able to function with little to no arrangements, the more complex the harmonies and rhythms, the more likely a formal arrangement may be required.

The larger the ensemble, the more arranging is needed to prevent clashes or redundancies between instruments. Moreover, larger ensembles offer more varied possibilities for arrangements. The five-piece, trad-rock band, Sprag Session (fiddle,

mandolin, piano, bass, and drums) demonstrate a very detailed approach to arranging within a band format. The following figure from their debut album (2012) represents the first 68 measures of “The Gwanwitcha” (introduction and first 8 measures of the main melody).

Section 1 (8 measures)	Section 2 (4 measures)	Section 3 (16 measures)
<b>Violin</b> – tacit <b>Mandolin</b> – tacit  <b>Piano</b> – tacit <b>Bass</b> – enters with ostinato line <b>Drums</b> – tacit	<b>Violin</b> – tacit <b>Mandolin</b> – enters with 8 <sup>th</sup> note figure on tonic <b>Piano</b> – tacit <b>Bass</b> – ostinato continued <b>Drums</b> – enter with 8 <sup>th</sup> note groove on closed hi-hat	<b>Violin</b> – tacit <b>Mandolin</b> – figure continued  <b>Piano</b> – enters with melody line  <b>Bass</b> – ostinato continued <b>Drums</b> – add bass to groove
Section 4 (16 measures)	Section 5 (16 measures)	A Section of main melody (8 measures)
<b>Violin</b> – double-stop accompaniment groove <b>Mandolin</b> – melodic, reel-like figure <b>Piano</b> – melody line continued  <b>Bass</b> – ostinato continued <b>Drums</b> – adds floor tom to groove	<b>Violin</b> – doubles Mandolin melodic figure <b>Mandolin</b> – continues melodic figure <b>Piano</b> – rhythmic, chordal accompaniment figure <b>Bass</b> – ostinato continued <b>Drums</b> – simplifies groove to alternate between bass and snare, opens hi-hat slightly on last 8 measures, and fills on cymbals	<b>Violin and Mandolin</b> – plays main melody in unison  <b>Piano and Bass</b> – stop-time shots  <b>Drums</b> – new rock groove (throughout)

**Figure #13: Formal description of “The Gwanwitcha” (Introduction) – by Sprag Session<sup>35</sup>**

This arrangement is representative of how tunes are presented in a band format. Making use of carefully planned introductions, interludes, and endings, such arrangements contrast sharply with the “traditional” performances which may have no formal arrangement whatsoever. In a “traditional” context, if there is an introduction, it is most often the final phrase of a tune played on the piano. The addition of new melodic

<sup>35</sup> A full transcription of “The Gwanwitcha” is available in musical notation in Appendix 1-8.

fragments as seen in Sections 4 and 5 is also an important part of a “contemporary” arrangement. This arranging technique features a short melody that could conceivably be the motive for a composition, but rather than developing the melody further and creating a full composition, it is repeated in a cyclical fashion, becoming a “hook.” At times, there may not be a clear distinction between this newly-written, fragmentary material and the feature melodies in an arrangement. “Contemporary” arrangements can be understood as a blending of traditional and popular music elements. While featuring melodies broadly construed as traditional (in the sense that they belong to the Cape Breton fiddling tradition as a whole), on a macro level, they feature bass lines, drum grooves, and hooks commonly found in the context of popular music.

### **Accompaniment**

Accompaniment and arranging are closely linked; although the arrangements of a commercial recording are carefully planned, accompaniment in a live context can be understood as improvised arranging. Moreover, particularly influential recordings become inspiration for future performances within the musical community, making the various musical gestures and elements of the arrangements source material for live accompaniment. There is a dialogue between commercial recordings and live performances. The role of the accompanist is integral to how traditional a performance can be, though the notion of tradition is flexible, and changes over time. Pianist Ryan MacNeil of the Barra MacNeils shares,

The [piano] style has changed so much over the years. I’m heavily influenced by my brother Sheumas’ playing. I remember their album in 1986, a lot of people thought that it was a little too far out. But you listen to it now and it sounds very

traditional. Before that, a lot of the players were playing more of a vamping style, very simple. But people today – probably a lot of the young players – would call that traditional style playing. But it’s relatively new when you think about things. (2012)

While there are specific musical elements that can identify a performance as “traditional” or “contemporary,” there is no strict division between the two; the line between “traditional” and “contemporary” can be highly subjective.

The idea of modern accompaniment is heard in two very different approaches of to piano accompaniment. In one style, “contemporary” accompaniment is representative of earlier piano accompaniment styles, in an organic progression. In this context, many of the same elements of “traditional” Cape Breton piano accompaniment are still present, but are even more pronounced, creating a denser, more active style. The walking bass lines, chord substitutions, and syncopation that define the Cape Breton piano style are used so extensively, that the accompaniment style becomes less predictable. The bass lines and chords have become increasingly more chromatic, making use of notes outside of the key centre. Further, the improvised nature of Cape Breton accompaniment is also apparent, having less repetition from one phrase to another. Describing such an approach in Jason Roach’s playing, Colin Grant offers that “Jason, if it worked, he would start an A tune on an A/C#, and never sit down after that. <laughs> He would never just lock into a normal chord. You *can* do that, but I think it has to have its place” (2012).

An example of highly traditional accompaniment can be seen in this excerpt of Joey Beaton’s accompaniment from Karen Beaton’s recording, *How Sweet the Sound* (2003).



**Figure #14: Piano Accompaniment by Joey Beaton**

Beaton employs many of the characteristic features of Cape Breton piano accompaniment: a right hand that plays syncopated chords and chord or melody fragments, and left hand activity that largely consists of octaves and perfect fifths (played either harmonically or melodically), which makes use of chromatic bass lines. Although these elements are present, the accompaniment figures in Beaton's performance are relatively consistent throughout. This predictability of rhythmic and harmonic vocabulary makes this excerpt conservative in comparison to more "contemporary" examples of piano accompaniment.

The following example of Jason Roach's accompaniment on Colin Grant's *Fun for the Whole Family* (2009) demonstrates a markedly different approach to piano accompaniment:





**Figure #15: Piano Accompaniment by Jason Roach**

In this figure, Roach, like Beaton, is accompanying a double-tonic tune in B minor.

Although Beaton outlines the chord changes very clearly, alternating between Bm and A (i and bVII), Roach expands his interpretation of the harmony considerably to include chords that offer more harmonic colour than functional harmony: G and Em (VI and iv) in the place of Bm (i). Moreover, Roach's walking bass lines are so extensive that they go beyond a supporting role to be the main focus of his accompaniment, becoming melodies in their own right. Finally, the melodic and harmonic ideas put forth throughout the performance vary considerably, with less repetition or predictability than that of Beaton's accompaniment example.

Even this example of Roach's accompaniment is relatively straight forward in comparison to what is possible in "contemporary" Cape Breton piano accompaniment. In a live recording with Andrea Beaton, *The Tap Session* (2006), Troy MacGillivray makes

some bold harmonic choices accompanying the classic John Morris Rankin tune, “Jack Daniel’s Reel,” taking considerable risks in his performance.

The image displays a musical score for piano accompaniment, consisting of four systems of staves. Each system includes a treble and bass staff joined by a brace. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. Measure numbers 1, 5, 9, and 13 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The notation is highly chromatic, featuring many accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and complex voicings, particularly in the bass line. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fourth system.

**Figure #16 – Piano Accompaniment by Troy MacGillivray**

In the above excerpt, MacGillivray’s accompaniment is highly chromatic, to the point of obscuring any key centre and even form. The opening phrase of this excerpt is fairly conventional, save for a jazz-influenced AMaj6 voicing in measure 4. MacGillivray

begins chromatically planning diads (consisting of a root and perfect fifth) downward in measures six and seven of Figure #16. This continues beyond the end of the form, all the way to the final two measures of the tune, where the progression is resolved with IV ii V I, bringing the accompaniment back to the realm of functional Western harmony.

The other, very different approach to accompaniment has less to do with the established tradition, and is largely inspired by accompaniment approaches found in the traditional music of Europe. The same modal accompaniment style that employed drones and pedal points that served as source material for *Master Cape Breton Fiddler* is still highly relevant today in Cape Breton. Ryan MacNeil shares that, “Besides piano players, I listen to a lot of traditional Irish bands – the accompaniment with bouzouki and guitar – and try to emulate that. The Bothy Band... What they were doing, to me, it was something different than what Cape Bretoners were doing at the time” (2012). This connection between Cape Breton and European traditional musicians is still ongoing. The international Celtic music festival circuit features events such as the Celtic Colours International Festival (Cape Breton), *Blas* (Scotland), Celtic Connections (Glasgow), Celtica (Italy), *Le Festival Interceltique* (France), and The Milwaukee Irish Festival (USA). At these events, musicians from various backgrounds are exposed to each other on a regular basis. In addition to this direct influence of European accompaniment, the significance of *Master Cape Breton Fiddler* should not be underestimated. Not only did the record expose many Cape Bretoners to a European influenced accompaniment for the first time, but Hilda Chiasson and Dave MacIsaac’s playing successfully incorporated this modal accompaniment into the existing framework of Cape Breton piano accompaniment.

An example of this modal accompaniment style can be seen in Troy MacGillivray's accompaniment for the tune "The Auld Wheel" on *Eleven* (2005) in Figure #17.



**Figure #17: Piano Accompaniment by Troy MacGillivray**

In this example, the bass remains a stationary pedal point, reinforcing the tonic (D). In MacGillivray's right hand, diatonic chords move in parallel motion to compliment the melody and add harmonic colour, but do not take on the same functional role that they would normally have in more "traditional" accompaniment.

This accompaniment style embraces an aesthetic that contrasts with the busyness of traditional Cape Breton piano accompaniment. Colin Grant raises the importance of maintaining a balance between simplistic minimalism and the unexpected changes that add interest to music:

The European sound usually involves a kind of an open-tuning or a sus2. It still aligns with the trance-like groove that Buddy MacMaster playing a square dance without changing a key... and staying in sort of like the key of A for a whole set... While the chords are changing, the premise of the dancing, it's trance-like,

staying in one key and never changing. And that constant, European-style of accompaniment just kind of consolidates that. It helps focus on the fiddle, where the guitar player is holding one chord. That idea is definitely nothing new here. It's just that we go about it differently. (Colin Grant 2012)

Grant's mention of a performance being "trance-like" is significant in that it addresses competing aesthetics and functions associated with traditional music. To some, a constantly changing accompaniment may seem erratic and unpalatable, while an understated, predictable, minimalist one could seem unimaginative or boring to others.

Accompaniment, however, cannot be separated from the music it is accompanying. Fiddlers and accompanists interact with each other and influence how the other plays. Andrea Beaton offers,

Different players inspire me to play different things or different tunes. With some people, if I'm sure that they're pretty used to just certain keys or kinds of tunes, then I might stick to some of that stuff. And some others that play other styles as well, then I might venture into some whackier stuff. Well, I don't mean whacky, but outside the box. Also, if they might have heard some of these tunes that aren't really from home, then I'll be a little more adventurous with that stuff. (Andrea Beaton 2012)

The interplay between fiddler and accompanist is a significant part of any performance. Neither fiddler nor accompanist should be seen as passive; both shape a performance in critical ways. Beaton went on to describe the role of her accompanists in her understanding of one of her own compositions, "The Young Alumnus," featured on *Branches* (2009).

**The Young Alumnus** Andrea Beaton

**Figure #18: “The Young Alumnus” – by Andrea Beaton**

Beaton explains,

I was calling it my “slip reel” because I didn’t know exactly what it was except that in my mind, it had all sorts of percussion and stuff in it. I just thought it would be fun to put something different on the recording.<sup>36</sup> But actually, it just happened that Rémi [Arsenault],<sup>37</sup> the guitar player, was over, and I said, “I have this weird tune,” and I started playing it for him, and he started chording along with it. And I thought, “Oh! It sounds more normal with accompaniment.” And then when Tracey [Dares MacNeil] came onboard, she just kinda went crazy in it. I thought, “This is great!” That was one of the ones we were pretty excited about, actually, when we finished it, because it was different, and it was new. But I was worried a bit about what people might think about it around home. But I got some decent feedback on it from the people who I was more concerned about. (2012)

Beaton’s mention of the tune being a “slip reel” references the phrasing in groups of three that commonly occurs in slip jigs. In the case of “The Young Alumnus,” however, the pulse aligns with two notes (in 3/4 time) instead of the three notes (in 9/8 time) of a slip

<sup>36</sup> The recording that Beaton is referring to is her album named *Branches* (2009).

<sup>37</sup> Rémi Arsenault is a well-respected guitarist in the Prince Edward Island traditional music scene.

jig. More importantly, Beaton acknowledges that her accompanists were integral to the way the tune was eventually performed and recorded. The unconventional nature of the tune, as well as the arrangement and accompaniment made it both exciting and rewarding, yet also somewhat risky when attempting to please a traditionalist audience.

In the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, there is a clear hierarchy. This can be seen semiotically: while fiddles appear as prominent signifiers of Cape Breton music and culture, the piano does not take on a comparable status despite the importance of piano accompaniment in the tradition. This is also mirrored in attitudes held by some musicians that the piano should take a purely supporting role, never distracting from the fiddle (Graham 2006: 80). A similar hierarchical relationship has been discussed by Sherry Johnson, who noted that in Canadian old-time fiddling competitions, house piano accompanists are typically paid less than the house fiddlers (2006: 242). The fiddler often has complete control over tempo and repertoire choice, something quite significant when one considers that it is rare, if not unheard of, to rehearse for most local fiddling gigs.

In essence, this becomes a situation where the “leader” (fiddle) is playing traditionally, but the “subservient” accompanist (piano) has the power to contextualize the performance. This issue of style must therefore be negotiated between the performers, where the accompanist has an unusual position of power. Fiddlers have the power of framing a performance through repertoire but the accompanist has the power to contextualize the performance. This reminds us that context can be as important in the construction of meaning as a text itself. For example, the meaning of serious exchange can be reframed entirely as tongue-in-cheek with a wink or a smile.

A more subtle example of “contemporary” playing can be seen in contexts when accompanists are not simply viewed as support musicians, but musical collaborators of equal importance who can offer musical suggestions. Ethnomusicologist Michelle Swab analyzed the power dynamics between vocalists and pianists in the art song genre (2009). She writes, “Because of growing opposition to musical, social, and economic inequalities within singer-pianist interactions, singers and pianists currently contend with issues of power and authority within their relationships. Negotiations of these power dynamics are highly individual” (2009: 87). Some singers currently position themselves as dominant: a “traditional” relationship in the genre where the pianist accompanies quietly with little musical interaction between vocalist and pianist. Others, on the other hand, prefer to collaborate with their pianists, sharing the interpretation and responsibility of the musical performance with them. Swab adds that, “In reality, however, most singers and pianists continually renegotiate the distribution of power within their interactions (Swab 2009: 78).

In our interview, Colin Grant discussed the relationship between fiddler and accompanist in his own performances:

Where Jason [Roach] chooses to take more of a [dominant] role, he’s received some backlash from people that enjoy traditional music, saying he’s playing too loud, he’s playing too heavy, that he’s overwhelming the fiddler. Well, he overwhelms *some* fiddlers, but some people say that they wouldn’t go to hear Jason play with another fiddler. They would come and hear us together because I have also chosen to play with my piano player, which only seems natural to me – to respond to his dynamics, his choice of chords, and to his overall feel of a tune. I choose to do that because it’s more interesting for me and it lets the music take on a whole new personality that might not have been achieved if I had been driving the bus and letting my piano player take a back seat role. This, to me, is just another example of the way traditional music is evolving to kind of fit contemporary times, where we see all kinds of questions of equality being discussed in the world today. It’s equality for piano players and fiddlers alike.



They each have their own personality, and why should one bend for the other?  
(2011)

Although repertoire can have significant cultural meaning, accompaniment too has comparable significance. As a dominantly duo tradition in which the fiddler often determines repertoire mid-performance, the accompanist also exerts some control. This dynamic relationship between text and context can be actively shaped in real time, with a wide range of potential outcomes and meanings. When a performance is planned to some extent, there is not only greater predictability in overall meaning of the performance, but power relations between musicians become more stable, with less need for negotiation.

It is evident that although fiddlers and accompanists may appear to be unequal, this hierarchy is not permanently fixed; there is still interplay and exchange between them. Michel Foucault reminds us that power is something that is rarely entirely asymmetrical; power relations are frequently fluid and unstable, which makes the negotiation of power a key aspect of much interaction (1997: 292). Chrissy Crowley discusses the negotiation that takes place between fiddler and accompanist:

Anytime that it's just a Chrissy Crowley show, I let Jason [Roach] do whatever the heck he wants, and I love him for it. But if we're at a dance... and Jason starts bringing out the funk... I'll be like, "Put the funk in a box. And get rid of it."  
(2010)

Her description underscores the role of accompaniment in framing a performance, and more importantly, how the acceptability of performance style can vary significantly according to context. Crowley continues,

[One time] Jason kept playing a particular blues chord, and I said, "Okay. Fine." So they turned that very traditional Irishy reel into a blues reel. <laughs> And it was pretty awesome. Any theatre setting here, or concert setting... people, they'll let you get away with a little bit of that. As long as you get one trad set in to prove your traditional worthiness. (2010)

It is significant that Crowley mentions the fact that one may be expected to prove one's skills in the traditional performance style even having already demonstrated a proficiency in "contemporary" performance.

Fiddler Mike Hall, for example, comments on the need for musicians to be able to showcase their traditional abilities when at home. He expressed concern about musicians today who play more commercialized musical styles without first solidifying their Cape Breton traditional playing:

Natalie [MacMaster] had a book launch here in October; she sat on that stage and played for an hour. All trad music. Beautiful. I mean, it made the hair on my arm stand up. Ashley, the first time I heard Ashley MacIsaac, I had to walk outta the Doryman because I was in tears. That man's music moved me. [...] And that's not the same guy I saw in Saint John, New Brunswick, at the Imperial Theatre when *Hi, how are you today?* came out. But that's the thing: they learned their tradition first, *then* made it big. People got it backwards. Because now when it comes time to come home and do the deed, here, they can't. That irks me. I don't like that. And you can put that in your thesis. (2011)

Not only does Hall stress the importance of the musical contributions made by earlier tradition bearers, but he expresses a wariness of musicians whose goals in music making are more financial than socially oriented.

## Conclusion

Academics study culture critically; established beliefs and narratives are evaluated and analyzed, unearthing biases and power relations not previously evident. The nature of tradition in a modern context is one such topic that is frequently addressed. Although we may intuitively feel (in both vernacular and academic contexts) that tradition is highly predictable and largely unchanging, tradition is not a survival or artifact but rather an

ongoing process. Discourses surrounding tradition may or may not recognize this, and can also raise questions about where the boundaries of a given tradition lie. In the case of Cape Breton fiddling, we see how notions of tradition change according to context, negotiating repertoire and accompaniment. The distinction between what is “traditional” and “contemporary” is associated with a number of binary oppositions: the global and the local, the professional and the vernacular, the presentational and the participatory. All of these categories, however, are fluid; while they may overlap considerably, they are not interchangeable. Just as a performance can rarely be entirely presentational, presentational performances need not be professional in nature. As such, Cape Breton fiddlers negotiate these issues with each performance, thereby engaging in a dialogue of what constitutes tradition in each specific context.

The next chapter continues my discussion of both composition and professionalism through an examination of intellectual property rights. When making a commercial recording, it is important to secure the mechanical rights to any copyrighted compositions on the album; however, current music copyright has significant shortcomings, poorly addressing the needs of traditional musicians. Composers are often faced with the decision of whether to charge for the use of their compositions, or allow it to be used freely. In this context, compositions can function either as a commodity or gift. Further, this distinction between commodity and gift can position the composer with the music industry, or the vernacular musical community.

## **Chapter 5**

### **“You have to strike that balance between sharing and charging”:**

#### **Cape Breton Fiddling and Intellectual Property Rights**

As I have demonstrated in Chapter Four, repertoire is negotiated according to context, significantly affecting performance practice; however, another way in which repertoire is negotiated in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition is in relation to intellectual property and tune ownership. Musicians have relative freedom with regard to the repertoire they decided to perform in a given context, but tune choice can also have consequences as far as commercial recordings are concerned. While such cultural commodification is certainly not new, it has become more evident in recent years. Commercial recordings of Cape Breton fiddling date back to 1928 and peaked in popularity on an international level during the 1990s.

As Ian McKinnon notes, earlier Cape Breton fiddle recordings were made not for financial gain as much as public recognition (1989), but as he and Doherty (1996) explain, there was an increasing sense of professionalism among these musicians. An important part of such recordings is repertoire, and choosing which tunes to feature on an album is something that is not taken lightly. Composition has enjoyed a long history in Cape Breton, and as some aspects of the tradition become more professionalized, so does the nature of composition and intellectual property rights.

Using the Cape Breton fiddling tradition as a case study, this chapter addresses some of copyright law's shortcomings in relation to traditional music and the strategies employed by musicians to modify conventional copyright practices to better suit their needs. Music copyright is generally quite effective for dealing with popular music;

however, it is a system that is not necessarily compatible with traditional musical forms because it recognizes creation as a process of “fixing” a work by an individual.

Notions of musical ownership change according to context, and the way in which such ownership is negotiated marks the boundaries between the commercial music industry and vernacular tradition. On one hand, there are discourses that favour the rights of the individual, arguing that intellectual property should be protected and acknowledged, and that the creator should receive compensation for the use of a work. Another perspective favours the rights and needs of the local musical community,<sup>38</sup> valuing sharing and free exchange. In a sense, this is a discussion that not only places the rights of the individual against that of the group, but also creates an opposition between “commodified,” global culture, and “uncommodified,” community-based, vernacular culture. Within this context, musical compositions enjoy a fluid existence, moving freely between commodity and gift. Just as author and music critic Jonathan Lethem asserts that “works of art exist simultaneously in two economies, a market economy and a gift economy” (2008: 38), I argue that in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, music is neither inherently gift nor commodity. The distinction between these two can be nuanced, and even subject to manipulation.

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<sup>38</sup> Although the term “community” can be ambiguous (Shelemay 2011), for the purposes of this discussion, I use “community” in relation to the local, grassroots Cape Breton traditional music scene. In this local context, the musical tradition consists of performances such as house parties, square dances, church picnics and family gatherings.

## **Commodification and Ownership**

Intellectual property is a topic that sometimes seems deceptively simple, and can change significantly according to socio-cultural context. Walter Benjamin asserts that the reproduction of a work raises issues of authenticity, ownership, and the creative process (1968). Similarly, Foucault has argued that while notions of authorship are frequently taken for granted; even basic ideas regarding what constitutes a “work,” and when authorship of a work or discourse should be attributed is subjective (1998). The contrast between copyright and more vernacular notions of intellectual property has been an issue of increasing importance in recent decades around the world. This was evident in the legal battles of early P2P file sharing<sup>39</sup> and continues to be relevant today in regard to pirated downloads and streaming websites. While these are very recent Western challenges to copyright law, the non-commercial nature of some traditional music reveals the capitalist and Eurocentric biases associated with copyright law.

One of the first scholars to address the implications of musical Eurocentrism was lawyer Sherylle Mills. She writes that copyright law “has evolved in tandem with Western music, focusing primarily on the protection of individual property rights and financial profits. Thus, traditional music and Western law clash at the most fundamental level” (1996: 57). In addition, Mills maintains that Western copyright law has its roots in circumstances when “Western culture remained either relatively isolated or the ‘colonial power,’ and it was not necessary to defer to the needs of other cultures” (1996: 57).

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<sup>39</sup> Peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing allows individual users to download files from each other, as opposed to downloading from a central server. Perhaps the best known example of P2P networks was Napster, which was launched in 1999.

It is generally understood that there is an ethical obligation to provide financial compensation for the use of one's intellectual property, but the commodification of non-Western music is more than a problem of royalties. Mills argues, "To an American, the gravest injustice may appear to be the denial of monetary compensation to the community for the song's use. However, even if the royalties were voluntarily relinquished to the originating community, the misuse of spiritual songs can create far greater damage than lost financial opportunities" (1996: 68). Cultural effects can be much more damaging and longer lasting than the economic consequences in this regard.

Ethnomusicologist and documentarian Hugo Zemp made numerous field recordings in West Africa and the Solomon Islands from 1961 and 1977, many of which were collected for UNESCO and the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). Despite the fact that all efforts were made to proceed with these collection projects ethically, Zemp faced significant challenges in his attempt to control the subsequent use of these field recordings and ensure that they were not used in unsuitable ways.

One such dispute regarding musical ownership began when two French musicians, Eric Mouquet and Michel Sanchez, approached Zemp for the permission to use his commercial field recordings of African musicians for a techno album that they were making. He reluctantly agreed to this, based only on the fact that Mouquet and Sanchez had deliberately deceived him into believing the project was non-commercial in nature (Zemp 1996: 45). Instead, samples were taken from unrelated recordings Zemp made in the Solomon Islands without his permission, and released as the commercially successful album, *Deep Forest* (1993). Zemp has been outspoken about this misappropriation of his

field recordings of non-Western music, and founded The Pygmy Fund, so that the original musicians could receive financial reimbursement for the use of their music.

Unfortunately, ethnomusicologist Steven Feld is suspicious of what amount of royalties from *Deep Forest* are actually going to The Pygmy Fund, suggesting that is considerably less than what should be (Feld 1996: 26).

In *The Music of the Other* (2007), ethnomusicologist Laurent Aubert acknowledges the difficulties and complications that arise when traditional music becomes part of the music industry and identifies two contrasting notions of musical ownership that arise in contemporary contexts. He asserts that there are “two opposing cosmologies, two incompatible mutually exclusive value systems: the first claims the primacy of individual rights, placing the individual at the centre of the world, whereas the second affirms the pre-eminence of collective conscience” (2007: 17). Although these two notions of value and ownership differ significantly, they are both equally relevant. Traditional music can exist in commercial and non-commercial forms, but this distinction is not always easily made.

Simon Frith addresses this fluid nature of contested musical evaluation systems by combining the work of Howard Becker (1982) and Bourdieu (1984) to create a three-part model of Bourgeois (high art), Folk (folk art), and Commercial (pop art) music worlds (1996). While this may initially seem to be problematic, by relying on rigid binaries such as high and low culture or commodified and non-commodified culture, Frith intends these categories to be understood as fluid. He explains, “In the end, what is involved here is not the creation and maintenance of these distinct, autonomous music worlds but, rather, the play of three historically evolving discourses across a single field” (1996: 42). Frith’s



framework contextualizes Cape Breton fiddling as a folk music, with its own set of musical and cultural values, but also a commercial music, which is evaluated on entirely different criteria.

Culture is often understood as being most genuine in an uncommodified state, positioning cultural commodification as shallow and insincere. In reality, this is a much more complicated issue; commodification need not be accompanied by a complete loss of integrity and cultural relevance. According to Marx, a commodity has both use value and exchange value. That is, in order for a product to be a commodity, it must be useful, be potentially desirable, or there must be the possibility for exchange (Marx 1990 [1867]: 955).

In more current scholarship, the definition of a commodity, while still clearly associated with Marx's conception, has been broadened and refined to address more nuanced social interactions between individuals. When faced with defining the term "commodity," Appadurai offers that, "a commodity is *any thing intended for exchange*. For comparative purposes then, the question becomes *not* 'What is a commodity?' but rather 'What sort of an exchange is a commodity exchange?'" (1986: 9). In this passage, Appadurai demonstrates how varied a commodity can be, distancing his discussion from the moralistic connotations often attributed to commodification.

Moreover, Appadurai addresses the fact that not all exchanges are commodity-based. Drawing on Marcel Mauss' analysis of gift exchange as a market based on reciprocity through social obligation (1976 [1923]), Appadurai distinguishes between Marx's idea of a commodity exchange and Mauss' concept of gift exchange. He writes,

Gifts, and the spirit of reciprocity, sociability, and spontaneity in which they are typically exchanged, usually are starkly opposed to the profit-oriented, self-centered, and calculated spirit that fires the circulation of commodities. Further, where gifts link things to persons and embed the flow of things in the flow of social relations, commodities are held to represent drive – largely free of moral or cultural constraints – of goods for one another, a drive mediated by money and not sociality. (Appadurai 1986: 11)

In this way, we can see that the distinction between commodity and gift does not lie in production, but in exchange. A gift is defined not by *what* is being exchanged, but by its social context; it is an exchange that is shaped by intention, social convention and personal relationships. In its truest sense, a gift is a product that is given freely, without an agreement of any sort of reciprocity; yet in a gift economy, this reciprocity occurs voluntarily.

These examples parallel discussions raised by Irish traditional music scholars such as ethnomusicologist Anthony McCann and anthropologist Adam Kaul. Kaul, for instance, distinguishes between commercialization and commodification, where commercialization is a process in which the producer / musician still has control of the creation of music (2007). McCann discusses the distinction between commodity and gift in Irish traditional music. Much of his research revolves around the resistance the Irish Music Rights Organization (IMRO) encountered from the Irish traditional music scene, largely due to policies which failed to adequately distinguish between commercial and non-commercial music (2002). McCann maintains that the IMRO believes “all musical practice is commodity exchange” (2001: 93) and ignores the social and cultural aspects of music making. In opposition to this reductionist view of music, he puts forth that “grassroots Irish traditional music transmission rests upon an as-of-yet-unarticulated system of gift and sharing” (McCann 2001: 89).

That is to say, playing at a house party for food and drink could be an exchange within a gift economy, wherein the food and drink is an expression of reciprocity and hospitality between friends. On the other hand, this same arrangement can easily take on a commodity-based exchange between acquaintances, where the host may have a degree of control over the performer through his or her “hospitality.” Even a paid performance can be considered to be a gift exchange. For example, it is not uncommon for musicians to play for an event that pays very little due to personal relationships or some other social connection. While this may not be a free performance for a fundraiser or charity, it could be a reciprocal exchange of goodwill or cultural capital, with payment being more of a symbolic gesture than one of pure commodity exchange.

### **Mechanical Rights and Cape Breton Fiddling**

Like these other examples of traditional music, conventions surrounding intellectual property rights generally serve commercial interests and are not entirely compatible with certain aspects of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. This speaks to ethnomusicologist Anthony Seeger’s framing of copyright as a hegemonic power. He argues, “Like all laws, the codification of copyright law in the United States reflects a certain perspective (and certain powerful interest groups) within the music industry, and is the direct result of a particular set of historical processes in the United States” (1992: 351).

Copyright acknowledges the creator of a particular work, and grants the creator exclusive rights over the use and distribution of that work. With regard to music, mechanical royalties are paid to the creator when a musical work is reproduced on a

recording and are bound by license agreements. Musical performances of a work are subject to performance royalties, which are also associated with licenses, though performance royalties are paid by venues and institutions and not the performers themselves. In the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, however, musicians tend to have particular interpretations of copyright law and how royalties should be paid or negotiated. Moreover, Cape Breton traditional musicians tend to elide copyright and royalties, making the topic both complex and regionally specific.

A significant issue is the unusually high cost associated with pressing a Cape Breton fiddle recording due to mechanical royalties. The standard price for mechanical royalties is based on popular music records, where a commercial recording may feature between ten and fifteen compositions. Cape Breton fiddle compositions, on the other hand, are relatively short (often roughly a minute in duration), and played in medleys, with a Cape Breton fiddle recording sometimes containing up to fifty or sixty compositions in total.

Mechanical royalty rates can be negotiated, but the current standard industry rates in 2014 are 8.5 cents in Canada and 9.1 cents in the United States.<sup>40</sup> Several cents per song may sound like an insignificant cost, but these rates are *per composition, per copy*. So, to further contextualize these rates, each composition on a CD would cost roughly \$90 per 1000 copies printed.<sup>41</sup> This cost is compounded when one considers that any given Cape Breton fiddle recording could contain such a large number of compositions. From the perspective of a composer, allowing someone to record a tune free of charge

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<sup>40</sup> These standard royalty rates are that of the Canadian Mechanical Royalty Rights Association (CMRRA) and the Harry Fox Agency respectively.

<sup>41</sup> 1000 copies is a common unit of measurement for many CD manufacturing companies.

may not noticeably affect one's income on a case-by-case basis, but some tunes that become standards in the international traditional music scene can be recorded dozens of times, and could represent substantially more than \$90 of income as a whole.

Cape Breton fiddler, composer, and publisher, Paul Cranford points out, "The last record I did, I had 113 tunes on it. If you were paying royalties for 113 tunes, you couldn't sell the thing" (2012). Musician and engineer Paul MacDonald explains,

The trouble with the mechanical licensing system per se, as it works today, is that it doesn't work for traditional music where there are medleys involved. And plus, the mechanical licensing system, it's built on the old-fashioned hit wonder model. If you got a hit, you could make a fortune. And it doesn't work for minority music. But the biggest problem is that it doesn't work for medleys. If you got three tunes in a medley and one of them is Jerry Holland's, and two of them are Paul Cranford's, well then, that's a twenty-four cent medley, right? (2011)

In an effort to address this matter, Cranford and fellow musician and engineer, Paul MacDonald, have introduced the "fraction method" of calculating royalties. With this method, the mechanical royalties are divided according to the number of compositions in the medley. There are, of course, drawbacks to this approach. For example, fractioning a medley evenly among composers may be seen as unfair when there are different composition lengths or tempos in the medley.

Although this seems fair to the individual pressing the record, the fraction method involves considerable compromise from the composer. The composer does not receive the total payment which he or she is legally entitled to, and this, by extension, implicitly frames the composition that is part of a medley as less important than a composition played on its own, like a song. In the eyes of some composers, however, this is a reasonable compromise in the name of aiding one's fellow musicians. Cranford acknowledges that the system is not perfect: "It's not an officially recognized method. I

think it either has to be fractional or it has to be by the second. I think it will go by the second eventually. You know, with computers and everything else, it just makes sense to make it totally by the second” (2012).

While a large portion of the Cape Breton fiddle repertoire is public domain, individual composition has enjoyed a long history within the tradition as well. In the past, however, composers rarely received direct compensation for the use of their music. In fact, even early commercial recordings offered little monetary gain, though they were important in establishing cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). As the tradition became more active commercially, the issue of royalties became increasingly important.

Early record labels, such as Celtic, followed by Rodeo and Banff, became involved with the tradition and were responsible for the vast majority of commercial recordings of Cape Breton fiddling from the 1930s to 1960s. However, these labels were notorious for dishonest business practices such as withholding royalties from musicians (McKinnon 1989: 93-94). Musicians received few, if any, royalties from Bernie MacIsaac, the original owner of the Celtic label. George Taylor, the owner of Rodeo, and later also the owner of Celtic and Banff, was also well-known for failing to pay the royalties he owed musicians. George Taylor, in particular was taken to court by Revenue Canada over such issues, and the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) actively discouraged musicians from working with him (McKinnon 1989:94). In partial response to these issues, along with a growing shift towards professionalism, individual ownership of compositions became a greater priority.

Cranford explains that, during the 1970s, “There were SOCAN<sup>42</sup> royalties for television so people started registering their tunes for television shows and things like that. I think SOCAN sort of drew everyone into the professional arena and then the mechanicals were the next logical step” (2012). That having been said, it was not until issues associated with copyright began to arise that musicians became fully aware of copyright law. Paul MacDonald explains,

Back in the early '90s, nobody around here knew what a mechanical royalty was. I knew there was a thing called a copyright, but I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know what mechanical right meant. [...] But I got involved with it at first. I guess one of the first people around here that I was working with got a letter in the mail that said, “You recorded this tune without my permission.” And that person asked me for help. And that's where I got the interest and started trying to learn what this is all about. I helped that person out and wrote back to the composer and said “Look... Sorry. We didn't know... This fiddler didn't know that this was a requirement,” and “please issue us a mechanical licence.” (2011)

This lack of understanding significantly affected the Cape Breton traditional music in the 1990s when Cape Breton fiddling experienced unprecedented success during the international Celtic music boom. Copyright issues were once again brought to the forefront as major music labels became interested in the tradition. MacDonald continues,

Mechanical royalties are the biggest reason that the major labels got into Cape Breton music and got out. Back in the early '90s, when they first saw Ashley [MacIsaac] and Natalie [MacMaster] play, and the major labels got this, before they came out here, they signed everybody up. They saw dollar signs in their eyes, because all they could see without even doing any research at all was – this is free music. It's traditional. They were fixated on that. [...] And all of a sudden everybody's got a major deal. And Warner and Capitol and Polygram, they're selling records like hell... Well, they're laughing. They're delighted. They're not paying mechanicals. Until a couple years go by and people start going after them for their mechanicals and all of a sudden they start realizing. “Oh... so and so's gotten in touch, and we got to pay for that, and we got to pay for this.” (2011)

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<sup>42</sup> The Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada (SOCAN) is a not-for-profit organization that collects and distributes performance royalties.

Shortly after this boom, the major record labels quickly lost interest in Cape Breton traditional music. Although they did not then fully understand the intricacies of intellectual property rights in this context, Cape Breton traditional musicians have since educated themselves on the topic, and have developed their own unique interpretation on such issues.

This parallels the challenges regarding copyright and royalties in flamenco music. Ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel explains that the precise distinctions between composition, improvisation, authorship, and public domain have been inconsistent and ambiguous, with a greater focus on individual, fixed composition emerging as the flamenco became commodified for mass distribution. Moreover, Manuel asserts that issues regarding ownership and royalties were largely overlooked until the 1990s, when the commercial success of the music meant that unprecedented amounts of money were at stake (2010).

Funding a commercial recording can be a significant challenge in Cape Breton fiddling. Although major record labels were most recently involved in the tradition in the 1990s, such funding is now almost entirely absent. However, the polished aesthetic of a multi-track recording continues to be expected in a commercial recording. Combined with the costs of graphic design, mechanical royalties, session musicians, and printing, the cost of recording an album frequently comes to a total of approximately \$10, 000, although some artists do opt to record in a considerably cheaper, on-location approach. This considerable cost is often paid upfront by the musicians themselves, either directly, or through informal loans by family members. That having been said, musicians do have



access to funding for recordings via the Canada Council for the Arts, Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent on Records (FACTOR), Music Nova Scotia, and most recently, The Festival Volunteer Drive'ers Association. Regardless of how one secures the funds for a recording, it places an individual not only in the position of a professional musician, but also of venture capitalist and entrepreneur.

While the vast majority of current Cape Breton fiddle recordings are made independently, CD manufacturing companies require the documentation of all the compositions on the album. This entails not only the permissions and licences for copyrighted compositions, but providing proof that traditional tunes are, in fact, part of the public domain. One of the most important parts of making a commercial recording is this research of repertoire. Piper and fiddler Kenneth MacKenzie comments on his experience securing mechanicals and permissions for his recording,

I just wasn't used to it and I had no idea that happened really, just chasing everybody down. Some of the tunes were by Jamie MacInnis, that you never ever see anymore. [...] He's living in Halifax and you can't get a hold of him. There were different guys. There's a tune by Brendan Ring, who lives in the north of France, who's kind of a hermit... There are all these little hiccups. You're trying to track all these people down and get permissions. And we didn't know how it worked with some of the pipers and Irish players. We just couldn't track them down. It just took a while. (2011)

The amount of work can be substantial even for a musician within the Cape Breton fiddling scene, but this kind of research can be considerably more difficult for outsiders.

Paul MacDonald explains the confusion that this caused major music labels in the 1990s:

Not only did they not want to pay the mechanicals, but they threw their hands up in the air trying to figure them out. They couldn't get their head around the fact that Natalie [MacMaster] could be playing a tune by William Marshall alongside of a tune by Paul Cranford. And we'd get a phone call: "This is so and so from the licensing department at Warner Brother's Music and you're Paul – someone told us you could help us get in touch with some of these composers. Could you help

us get in touch with William Marshall? We'd like to get in touch with Neil Gow.<sup>43</sup> It was a riot! It was just a riot. You'd be there, "Ah... well... uh... no." "Well, how about Jerry Holland?" "Yes! Sure, no problem." Not only did they not want to pay, but they also couldn't deal with it. (2011)

The mixture of contemporary and traditional tunes within the repertoire not only causes confusion for some, but creates unrealistic demands. While it is reasonable to be expected to produce proof of permission to record a composition, it is not always possible to prove the origin of a product of oral tradition. Paul MacDonald remembers,

I was working in Washington D. C. on a Joe Deranne record,<sup>44</sup> and there were three tunes on it that were traditional Irish tunes. But they wanted me to prove to them that they were traditional tunes. And I even went for lunch with the head of the organization and said, "Look, you know, you're asking me to wave a magic wand. I can't do that. I mean, sure, I can point to a book that a tune was published in, say it's O'Neill's Collection,<sup>45</sup> 1920... for some of them. But I can't do that for all of them. So I ended up pushing that record through on my word. They let it go in the end just based on my word, but it was an awful problem, and I'm sure other artists have come up against it too.

There is documented proof of the origins of a significant number of compositions, but the absence of proof is not the proof of absence. By assuming a composition is copyrighted unless proven otherwise, it can be very difficult to prove a composition belongs to the public domain if has never been written down.

In fact, even a tune appearing in an old collection may not necessarily be proof that it belongs to public domain. Paul Cranford shares,

Some of these record labels trust me. [...] Ninety percent chance that I'm right, but there's always the possibility that a twelve-year-old composed something, who lived to be a hundred years old. If something's in O'Neill's Collection, it's still *possible* that it's in copyright. If someone was very young when they

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<sup>43</sup> William Marshall and Neil Gow are composers of Scottish fiddle tunes from the early 19th and 18th centuries, respectively.

<sup>44</sup> Joe Derrane (b. 1930) is well-respected an Irish button accordionist from Boston.

<sup>45</sup> O'Neill's Music of Ireland is the largest collection of Irish traditional music. First published in 1903, it features 1850 melodies. The collection was compiled and edited by Chicago police Captain Francis O'Neil (1848-1936).

composed it, lived very old and has someone, one of their heirs, who's trying to hold onto copyrights... Actually, I've never experienced that, but when people come to me, I give them my best opinion, and they usually trust me. But I know that it is possible to be wrong on some of these things because there's just no way we can prove it. Forcing these musicians to prove things is not very fair. [...] That discourages the tradition because sometimes people won't record because they're afraid there's a possibility that they're infringing copyright. And rather than take that risk... Which I think is crazy. I've never heard of anyone suing anybody *yet*, and I've been in this for a long time. (2012)

Being expected to prove the origins of a composition places musicians in the position of a folklorist or ethnomusicologist. While some tunes can be found in books or other similar places, this is not always possible. In such instances, particularly knowledgeable community members such as Paul MacDonald or Paul Cranford are often approached for help. Cranford offers, "A lot of people come to me in the same way. And I don't charge them like a lawyer would for consulting, you know. I just give that information for free because I have it" (2012).

It is in this contrast between vernacular tradition and commercialism that these discourses cohere. For some individuals, the current costs associated with mechanical royalties have become a significant influence on the repertoire that they record. There is a growing trend to record original compositions and those belonging to the public domain, while omitting tunes by contemporaries that may be popular today. Fiddler and academic Glenn Graham comments on these differing interests:

I'm less apt to record [a tune] if I know that every time there's going to be printing of it, I have to pay for it. That just makes me say, "Well, as much as I like that tune, I'm going to record something that I did myself, or something that a family member composed, because I know they're not going to charge me." There's this balance you have to strike between paying for music in a tradition, when nobody's getting rich. And you have to balance that with sharing, which is what traditional music is... that's a big part of it. It's about community and family and sharing. (2011)

Although Graham does play on a professional level (as shown in quotes from our interview throughout this thesis), it is evident that he highly values the local, vernacular aspects of the tradition. That having been said, when he records, like many other Cape Breton musicians, he must weigh such priorities against financial constraints.

### **Commodity Versus Gift**

Today, there is some contention about whether a composer should share their work and make it freely available as a contribution to the tradition, or charge for the use of their work. It is a decision that is negotiated according to social context and personal relationships. In one sense, it is a negotiation of rights, weighing those of the individual against those of the local Cape Breton traditional music community. While both are important, this distinction of priorities relates to how one conceptualizes the fiddling tradition. Favouring the rights of the individual frames compositions as commodities and personal property. This is a stance that is sometimes taken by composers who are well-respected for their tunes and rely on royalties to make a living. On the other hand, some composers, much like McCann's participants, consider the repertoire of the tradition to be communal property that is shared freely. For this reason, McCann contextualizes Irish traditional music as a commons, which is owned and maintained by the community as a whole (2002).

For example, fiddler Colin Grant explained, "I could call up Kinnon [Beaton], and say, 'Hey Kinnon, I recorded your tune.' And there's a guy who's composed probably close to 1000 tunes by now, and he said, 'Great, I really appreciate that. I'd just like a copy if that's okay.' That's all he asked for" (2010). When I asked Kinnon Beaton about

his opinion on charging mechanical royalties for recording his compositions, he responded,

I can see both sides of it. If that's the people's livelihood, then I agree with them, let them charge them. But personally, the way it was in our home, it was a compliment if somebody wanted to record my father's tunes. He looked at it as "Gee, he wants to use my tune. That's nice of him." He'd never think of charging for them. And I have the same philosophy. (2012)

Kinnon Beaton is an active musician on the local music scene: he gigs regularly, has appeared on over half a dozen recordings and has published several books of his compositions. Despite such success, clearly financial gain is not his main motivation, and he is as much a tradition bearer and mentor to local fiddlers as he is a professional musician. Ultimately, he chooses to share his compositions, viewing traditional music as something belonging to the social realm of friends, family, and community.

In most cases, however, compositions occupy a grey area between a commodity and a freely given gift. The idea of sharing tunes is common among musicians today, though it largely depends on the relationship between the composer and licensee. Colin Grant explains,

Every composer would go about it a different way. I go about it the way, if it's somebody I know, I have no problem giving my music away, like sheet music wise, so they can learn it. But if they are going to record it, and I don't know them, whether or not I think they're going to make many copies of it... [I would charge them]. (2010)

As a career musician, Grant views his compositions as a means to make a living; he is entitled to earn royalties from them, and is willing to do so. While he is also willing to make exceptions, he does not feel obligated to forego his royalties for an individual with whom he is not acquainted.

Glenn Graham articulates a similar, yet somewhat different approach to making such distinctions:

On a local level, there's so little money to be made off charging your tunes to someone, why do it? I'm just happy that they're being played, that they're getting out in public and people are getting to enjoy them. But back in the heyday, where somebody might be lucky enough to have a record contract with a company that has huge distribution, and they have publishing as well, and there's going to be music placements, etcetera, that's where you say, "Well, since this person has this big machine behind them, I'd be stupid not to charge them." Because they could use one tune, and it could be in the middle of a song they did, and the song could be a hit, and you could make a lot of money. And it's not hurting them individually, it's helping them. In that regard, I would say, yeah, okay, you could charge in that sense. But in a local sense, I think it's best in my mind for us all just to share. Share it. (2011)

In this explanation, Graham focuses on how charging royalties for recording a composition affects the other individual. In most cases, he does not feel that he would be earning enough money as a composer to inconvenience the licensee to use a composition on a recording. It is also noteworthy that he mentions the significance of having a well known tune on the vernacular level; although it is common for composers to play their own tunes, most composers would agree that is preferable to have their music played by a large number of people. Some musicians feel that they would rather have widely known tune and not receive royalties for it than have a tune which they receive small amounts of royalties for that is relatively unheard of.

Paul Cranford, on the other hand, uses an even more flexible approach. While he, too, is very conscious of how commodifying a composition affects others, he is also a successful composer and publisher of several tune books. He explains,

If someone volunteers to pay for it, well, I take it. I mean, none of us are loaded, you know? So if someone wants to do it that way, that's fine. But I'm fair with them. I don't ask for any full track rates. I tell them to split it. Mind you, I've had

some that have just assumed the full track rates are the law and cheques come in that way. [...] Basically, I take whatever anyone offers. (2012)

Cranford is willing to accept compensation for the use of his compositions, but also compromises, offering reduced royalty rates. Being well aware of the range of possibilities for negotiating royalties, he lets the licensee have a degree of control over the outcome.

What Grant, Graham, and Cranford seem to imply is that there is a difference between legal rights and ethics. While any composer is indeed legally entitled to mechanical royalties, they feel that it is not ethical to enforce these matters at all times. They are happy to renounce their mechanical rights if they feel it would benefit the musical community. Anthony Seeger aptly describes this distinction, “Law is the codification of rights and obligations, but not all rights and obligations are laws. Some rights and obligations fall under the heading of custom (what people do), others may be called ethics (what people should do)” (1992: 346).

Some people feel, however, that the cost of mechanical royalties is part of the tradition, arguing that they should not get in the way of recording whatever compositions an individual wants. As Paul MacDonald explained,

Both Paul [Cranford] and I are worried that the issues that have come up with mechanical rights are going to discourage people from recording each other's tunes. [...] I like it that you want to record a tune because you like the tune. And you want to pay for it because you like that person, or that person doesn't want you to pay for it because they like you. I want that kind of stuff to continue because I think that's part of the tradition. (2011)

From this perspective, the *possibility* of someone having to pay for mechanical royalties is crucial to the notion of composition as gift. It is the fact that there is a reasonable expectation that a composition will be a commodity that allows it to be given as a gift.

Without this interplay between the composer and licensee, the gift economy of compositions would exist very differently. Cranford offers that the current system of mechanical royalties

does alienate some people who think there's no place for royalties in music. I don't know what to say to those people. What do you do about people who are trying to make a living at it? I look at someone who has no other form of income. Well, of course, you know, you should be paying for it. (2012)

Charging royalties for the use of one's composition not only frames an individual as professional musician, but as a noted composer. Some professional musicians compose relatively few tunes, making royalties of little interest, while other composers such as Jerry Holland or Brenda Stubbart have significant numbers of compositions that are played all over the world. In a sense, having status as a composer gives one the right to charge for the use of one's compositions.

In an interview with Feintuch, fiddler and composer Jerry Holland admitted that despite being one of the most highly-regarded musicians in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, he found that making a living in the traditional music scene was no easy task.

In this business, you can't bank on anything until it's in your pocket. Like I say, I am blessed with the abilities to turn my hands to many different things. The older and stupider a fellow gets, the more scared I get of damage to my hands. I've had carpal tunnel operations and that sort of thing from ripping and tearing and hammering all my life. And I guess after one operation I made up my mind that maybe I should look at fiddle music as some bit of a career, and see if that will pay the milk bill, as it were. It's a struggle. It's a damn hard struggle. I wish there was somebody out there that had all kinds of money, far more than they knew what to do with, that would look to invest in the tradition and give a fellow little bit of stress-free time to develop stuff and to preserve what we have here for how good it really is. There's no one aspect of work that's available to me here year-round, or that I can bank on, and it's just a juggling act continually. "Well, what's going to come in this week, and how? What hat do I have to wear in order to bring in this week's worth?" (Jerry Holland in Feintuch 2010: 109)



In some ways, Holland's experience is not dissimilar from that of previous generations of fiddlers; traditionally, Cape Breton fiddling has not been lucrative and was not even truly a viable as a career option until the 1980s. Musicians such as Buddy MacMaster or Winston Fitzgerald, for instance, while highly successful on a musical level, held full-time day-jobs. Robbie Fraser suggests,

Making money on it and promoting it as an industry, that was never the intention of the artists who played years ago or people that composed tunes. So in that regard, it's certainly different from the way things used to be. Dan R. MacDonald would write tunes, and he didn't expect or want any compensation for it. But that's changed to some extent now, where you have to secure rights for recording music and composers might want some compensation for that. (2011)

That having been said, there certainly have been fiddlers who have supported themselves entirely from their musicking as essentially itinerant musicians, something that still exists today, but to a lesser extent.

Being a full-time, professional musician is now possible, but as fiddler Colin Grant explains, flexibility and versatility is integral to sustaining a music career.

By no means is music a really good paying career, but I'm able to pay the bills. I have to go to many different avenues. For the better part of six years now, I have had my solo career and at least one other thing on the go that I could rely on. [...] When I'm in one place for at least a six months span, I've been teaching, because it's a good, reliable source of income and I really like teaching music. (2010)

In addition to playing in multiple bands (such as Acadian traditional music group, Blou; indie rock band, The Tom Fun Orchestra; and Cape Breton trad-rock band, Pogey) Grant has also spent a significant amount of time in musical theatre, first at the Louisbourg Playhouse show, *Lyrics & Laughter*, and later at the French language, Cheticamp-based, *Soirée chez Gélais*. He elaborates,

I liked doing it. But I did five or six seasons in Louisbourg, and well, it paid my way through college. Without it, I would have been knee deep in student loans

right now. I was lucky to have that as a steady job every summer that I could come home to. I sold a *pile* of CDs because its 100% turnover in your crowd every night. [...] For three or four years, I thought that it was the greatest gig in the world, because I'd just go to work and then I'd go home, and I'd have the whole day off until the show the next day. And the weekends off. But then, you do realize that in order to sell more CDs and to make it a long-term career, you need to be able to travel and you need to have that freedom in the summertime. (2010)

Although Grant is now a full-time working musician, he worked as substitute teacher between gigs for several years before he was able to pursue his career full-time. This can be a difficult transition for musicians; a day-job can prevent one from having the freedom to play certain gigs, yet, without enough steady gigs, a day-job is still necessary.

One of the difficulties faced by Cape Breton traditional musicians is that there are a large number of talented musicians competing for relatively few gigs. As such, the ability to effectively differentiate oneself from other performers can be paramount to one's success as a professional musician. Fiddler and pianist Kimberley Fraser comments,

Natalie [MacMaster], you can't replicate what she's done. That's her thing. You can't replicate what Ashley [MacIsaac]'s done. You have to find something unique about yourself and market that. You can't just be a Cape Breton fiddler who goes and plays a dance or goes and plays a concert as a Cape Breton fiddler. You could do okay with that, but I think if you really want to be successful, you have to find something unique about *yourself*, and go with that. (2011)

Fraser's explanation implicitly acknowledges that the glory days of the 1990s Celtic boom is over and not likely to repeat itself. However, she also recognizes that MacMaster's and MacIsaac's success was also closely linked to their musical skill and good business sense. Colin Grant agrees:

In the '90s, when bands like The Rankins and Ashley [MacIsaac] and Natalie [MacMaster] had their big boom, Celtic music was *the shit*. Everybody went for it and it worked. Those guys were doing everything right at the right time. Since then, all of Cape Breton has been saying, "Who's the next Natalie?" or "Who's the next Ashley?" Their time has come and gone, and for the boom that it was, they're still going to make a living at music and do things right. If anything, the

music needs to change for there to be another Ashley and there needs to be another approach. No longer can you take trad tunes and throw a flamenco beat under them, or a rock guitar, or be a crossover Celtic / country band. It's been done, and now there has to be a new approach, whatever that may be. There's not going to be another boom like that for a while. (2010)

Although Cape Breton traditional musicians today may enjoy a modest success in comparison to the major record labels, extensive radio airplay, and platinum albums by some Cape Breton traditional musicians in the 1990s, it was acts like The Rankin Family, Ashley MacIsaac, and Natalie MacMaster that inspired the professionalization of many of this generation of fiddlers.

There is, however, a noted exception to the choice of whether or not to charge someone for the use of a composition. Any compositions registered with the Canadian Musical Reproduction Rights Agency (CMRRA)<sup>46</sup> are standardized in the way their mechanical royalties are calculated. Most Cape Breton musicians are not CMRRA members, but some who have substantial catalogues take advantage of this. In this context, one who is registered with CMRRA aligns himself with the music industry, framing himself as an accomplished composer, who makes a living as such.

For instance, Dan R. MacDonald's compositions (of which there are said to be as many as 2000) are registered with CMRRA. The fact that his compositions are among the most strictly regulated in the Cape Breton canon is somewhat ironic and raises issues of ownership and compositional control. While MacDonald is renowned for his compositions, during his life he rarely collected royalties from them. His focus on sharing with his friends and contributing to the musical community is readily apparent in the 1971

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<sup>46</sup> The Canadian Musical Reproduction Rights Agency (CMRRA) is a not-for-profit organization that issues licences and distributes royalties for mechanical and synchronization rights.

documentary, *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*. When asked what happened to his tunes after they were composed, he responded without hesitation, “Well I get the manuscript and I give them to my friends: Buddy MacMaster and Donald Angus [Beaton], and anyone who wants them.” Unfortunately, through such generosity, many of his tunes have entered oral tradition and have been subsequently misattributed as part of public domain and have been named incorrectly.

One time when he mentioned that he was allowing a tune to be recorded free of cost, his nephew, John Donald Cameron suggested he register his tunes so he could get the money he deserved from them. Cameron remembers, “He took offence to that. He said, ‘Anyone who wants to play my music,’ he said, ‘they can go ahead and play it.’” (John Donald Cameron in Caplan 2006: 18). John Donald Cameron’s brother, well-known performer John Allan Cameron, explained that in spite of MacDonald’s aversion to collecting royalties, it was always a priority for John Donald and John Allan Cameron to ensure that his compositions were appropriately recognized. John Allan recounts,

There was one day that Dan R. got a cheque for \$2500. And he didn’t understand. He said, “What’s this for?” I said, “We played your music on national television, and made sure it was logged.” And he still didn’t understand why. I said, “Well, because every time something is played – and I make sure, Dan R., that your tunes are in here, and we play X amount of Dan R. MacDonald tunes, because they’re first quality, they’re good – and you’ll make a few bucks.” And Dan R. certainly needed it. I mean, Dan R. was never rich. He was rich in so many ways, and if I could provide an avenue where he could make a few more dollars, that’s fine. And I made sure that the royalties went to Dan R., and I included a lot of his tunes. (John Allan Cameron in Caplan 2006: 19)

This specific example refers to performance royalties, though it reveals an interesting dynamic regarding gift and reciprocity. Although it is clear that Dan R. did not truly understand the nature of copyright, he did firmly believe in sharing his music. On the

other hand, we often assume that money is intrinsically linked to commodity exchange, but in Dan R. MacDonald's case, we can see that payment for his tunes and the registration of them is out of respect for him and the quality of his work. As such, payment can be understood as a gift by those who use a composition.

It seems that Dan R. was intimately aware of the various social functions that a composition can fulfill and preferred to receive compensation for his musical contributions in a direct way. As a semi-itinerant musician, he supported himself with his music, and the community benefited greatly from his talents. Folklorist Cliff McGann explains, "It was a symbiotic relationship, with Dan R. receiving room and board in exchange for his musical services. Dan R. would repay his hosts by composing a tune in their honor, giving them music lessons and leaving first-rate musical notations of his and other traditional tunes" (2003: 125). The nature of such an arrangement, of course, can change significantly according to context, ranging from highly calculated to pure gift exchange. Regardless of the specific context, however, he was always known as a very generous man.

### **SOCAN and Performance Royalties**

In addition to the issues surrounding mechanical royalties, a topic often mentioned by my participants was the problems associated with performance royalties.<sup>47</sup>

Performance royalties in Canada are distributed by SOCAN, and the current system for calculating and distributing performance royalties, which is primarily intended for

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<sup>47</sup> For the purposes of SOCAN, a "performance" is defined as any time music is played, be it by live performers, a recording (such as a CD) through a sound system, or radio play.

popular music, is considered by many to be wholly inadequate for traditional music. Overall, traditional Cape Breton musicians are extremely appreciative of SOCAN as an organization and the role it plays protecting the rights of songwriters and composers. SOCAN is able to accurately collect and distribute performance royalties of compositions that are featured on the radio. However, royalties derived from live performances, which comprise a considerable portion of performance royalties for Cape Breton traditional musicians, are rarely received, due to the lack of an appropriate method of monitoring what compositions are played at such performances.

SOCAN tracks live performance royalties through a self-reporting system, where musicians submit their set lists from a show, and SOCAN subsequently distributes performance royalties to the composers of all copyrighted material from that performance.<sup>48</sup> The royalties are paid from the revenue collected from blanket licensing fees paid by any music venue across the country where Canadian musical content is performed. McCann details the complexity of performance royalties for live venues in Irish traditional music (2001; 2002), and Cape Breton traditional musicians face challenges in this area as well. First, there are many Cape Breton traditional musicians who perform publicly that are unaware of this system. Second, much like the problems associated with mechanical royalties, Cape Breton fiddling is medley-based music and a performance would feature significantly more compositions than a typical performance by a popular musician. Documenting all of the tunes played at many shows is simply not feasible.

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<sup>48</sup> The royalties for live performances vary according to size of the venue and its capacity. Royalties for a performance at a club or bar are a maximum of \$75, while larger events have a minimum royalty payment of \$75.

There is a clear disconnect between SOCAN and traditional musicians in this regard, as SOCAN still expects traditional musicians to submit their set list after they perform. Colin Grant recounts,

We had a guy from SOCAN come and do a workshop for this tune makers thing that I was part of as a part of Celtic Colours a couple of years ago.<sup>49</sup> They had a guy from SOCAN come down and say, “So you guys... the traditional musicians... We can’t quite figure you out, because we have songwriters breaking down our door, looking for royalties for the song that they played one time... somewhere. We know you guys are gigging constantly, we know you’re playing in SOCAN licensed venues, we know you’re playing your own tunes. All you’ve got to do is write us and tell us that you played them and we’ll *give* you money. What else do you want?” (2010)

From the perspective of SOCAN, it is reasonable to expect musicians to submit their set lists after performances; this system works well for popular musicians, who regularly submit their set lists and are compensated appropriately.

There seems to be no clear dialogue between the organization, traditional musicians, and the venues where the musicians play. Paul Cranford critiques how SOCAN deals with this situation.

They [SOCAN] go to all of these festivals and everything, and they demand the certain percentage of the gate for them. And yet they don’t carefully educate the venues, so the set lists will come back. So what it means, because they’re not carefully educating people, it means that lots of our royalties will just go into the general revenue of SOCAN, which is totally unfair. I resent SOCAN from that perspective. I think they should be much more proactive at making sure that everywhere they’re taking royalties from understands how to educate the artists. (2012)

There are some venues that are well-educated in SOCAN’s royalty distribution methods and ensure musicians submit their set lists. The Celtic Colours International Festival, for example, makes such documentation a requirement of all their musicians. Smaller venues

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<sup>49</sup> The New Tunesmakers event at Celtic Colours in 2007 featured ten composers and songwriters, who prepared a show of entirely newly-written material.

such as restaurants and bars are often less aware of the intricacies of performance royalties. Although they pay SOCAN to license their venue for the performance of Canadian content, the set list submission is ultimately the responsibility of the performers themselves. In a sense, having the knowledge of SOCAN's royalty distribution and collection practices, and actively participating in this system, marks a musician as being a professional within the industry. For musicians who play exclusively on a grassroots level, performance royalties are not a priority.

In addition, grassroots performances by their very nature do not lend themselves to the creation of set lists in the same way that a larger music festival does. Colin Grant explains,

I forget what I played in a set as soon as it's done. So, to sit down and fill out a whole sheet of tunes after playing a two hour gig... It would be easy enough to file Colin Grant Band tunes, because one tune is one medley, generally, or two tunes in a medley. That's easy. But a Jerry [Holland] tune, a Kinnon [Beaton] tune, a Colin [Grant] tune, a trad tune, a trad tune, a Colin [Grant] tune – that's one medley that I played and there's eighteen more like that. Fuck me, I can't do that! No one has that kind of time. (2010)

As Grant notes above, acts that are more popular in nature such as his band Sprag Session can more easily document their set lists. Also, gigs that are more professional in nature, such as large music festivals entail considerably shorter performances as a whole. An international festival may only require a thirty minute set while a local gig at a pub could easily last for several hours. Aside from the sheer quantity of tunes that may be featured in a traditional performance, in a live performance, a musician may not necessarily know the title and composer of all the tunes they play in a night.

Even the notion of creating a set list at all can be problematic in some contexts. Glenn Graham shares,



Traditionally, in our style of music, people who have their own compositions don't always play them in the same order, don't have set lists, well, unless it's a specific kind of performance. You don't know what you played at the end of the night, because you're playing tune after tune after tune after tune. If you went and played the same set list every night for people, they'd be saying "What the hell is going on? There's nothing traditional about this. What's this person doing?" (2011)

The improvised, flexible approach that Cape Breton fiddlers have to ordering a medley is very important to traditional music making. In a tradition where there is relatively little melodic variation, repertoire choice is an important part of musical expression. As such, skilful medley construction among Cape Breton traditional musicians can demonstrate the size of and command of one's repertoire, and one's ability to tailor a performance to a specific audience, musicians, or instant in time.

While it is common for fiddlers to know hundreds of tunes, choosing an appropriate tune at a moment's notice, as well as keeping track of what has already been played in a night, can be extremely challenging. To better deal with this challenge, I am aware of several younger fiddlers who bring rough set list sketches or a list of tunes in their repertoire to consult at a gig. However, these players do not do so openly, and often make a point to hide such tune lists, viewing them as a weakness or a crutch. It is evident that in many cases, explicit planning of a set can be at odds with the general expectations of musicians in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. SOCAN operates on the assumption that there is typically at least a rudimentary set list at a public performance, but this is not necessarily correct.

## Copyright Infringement

Copyright is meant to protect the rights of the composer; so, what then constitutes musical theft? Within the context of traditional fiddling, this can be a complex issue.

Traditional fiddle tunes typically rely on a series of melodic gestures and sequences that are used and reused extensively. Drawing the line between what is idiomatic and what is original can be difficult. This is evident in ethnomusicologist Colin Quigley's discussion of Emile Benoit's compositional practices (1993). In his study, Quigley addressed how and why some of Benoit's compositions were eerily similar to existing tunes. Benoit openly acknowledged such similarities and cited these similar, pre-existing tunes as what Quigley refers to as a "source tune" (1993: 163). Quigley explains,

The seeds of a new composition are to be found among the melodic ideas with which he is familiar from the repertoire he already knows. When the initial musical idea is not spontaneously evoked, Emile consciously searches through known tunes for fertile ideas and he often explains the sources of his compositions in terms of the known tunes from "off of" which he has "taken" the new "note," a somewhat flexible concept that refers most often to borrowing a motif. As a musician who was keenly aware of minute melodic variation, he saw no problem with this; his compositions may be similar, even based off of other tunes, but they were unique. (1993: 162)

We can see that even within established contexts of traditional composition, musical ownership is not always clearly defined.

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Porcello (1991) and technology scholar Paul Théberge (2004) have explored how the advent of audio sampling has raised questions about the nature of the ownership of a sound. Porcello explains,

On the one hand, rap musicians have come to use the sampler in an oppositional manner which contests capitalist notions of public and private property by employing previously tabooed modes of citation. Conversely, samplers are being used within the industry for purposes of expediency – to save time and money –

which reinforce and reproduce the already existing internal hierarchies through marginalizing the wage labour musician in the studio. (1991: 82)

This issue of audio sampling marginalizing studio musicians has been demonstrated in the dispute between Jan Hammer, who wrote and produced the Miami Vice theme, and percussionist David Earl Johnson. Johnson argued that the samples of his conga playing were integral to the theme, and by relying on a sample of his playing as opposed to hiring him for the performance, he was owed compensation for his lost wages (1991: 70). Not only does this case raise issues about the ownership of sound itself, but also supports Jason Toynbee's argument that, while copyright law protects music *creators*, it largely ignores the rights of music *performers* and their creative contributions (2004).

In Cape Breton fiddling, copyright infringement is a concern that is fuelled at least in part by musicians' experiences with the Celtic and Rodeo labels and is representative of the shift from a local tradition to one that is widespread. In the past, playing another musician's compositions was a compliment, but today it could be seen as theft. This may be representative of a shift away from community-based musicking to an industrial one. Even early commercial recordings were sold almost entirely locally, but now they are commonly sold internationally.

In a commercial, industry context, tradition bearers must operate within legal constraints, having less recourse within the community. There are also certain times in which an individual may have a certain degree of ownership not acknowledged legally. A traditional tune, for example may be a signature tune of a particular player, being so closely associated with them that it may "belong" in an unofficial sense. Similarly, a tune that was written for someone else could be thought of "belonging" to the source of

inspiration in a sense. A musician is quite free to play what he or she wishes in a live setting, but this freedom is not only limited significantly on a recording, but one may be held financially responsible for such decisions. Jerry Holland's CD jacket for *Fiddler's Choice* makes concerns of copyright infringement explicit:

Please do not deprive the musicians and composers of their royalties by copying this recording for personal or commercial purposes. Such reproductions will limit the artist's future ability to produce music. (If musicians and composers are not compensated for their artistic efforts and talents, they will need to pursue other livelihoods.) (1999)

This notice is somewhat different from other copyright concerns that have been discussed in this chapter, in that it addresses unauthorized reproduction of recordings. Although there is a distinction between creating bootlegged copies of a recording and recording a composition without the composer's permission, the outcome is ultimately the same. In either outcome, Holland strongly believed in composers being compensated for the use of their work.

In Cape Breton fiddling today, it is relatively uncommon for tunes to be recorded without proper mechanical licensing, and if it does occur, it is most often unintentional. However, fears of copyright infringement do persist due to the dishonesty of early record labels such as Celtic, Rodeo, and Banff, and subsequent ignorance of traditional music by the major record labels in the 1990s. Paul Cranford explains that, even if a composition is used without permission or payment, it can be difficult to collect such royalties: "It's an odd one, because you can end up alienating people because you're chasing them for a hundred dollars, and they didn't even know they owed a hundred dollars, you know? And it's just sort of this... It's sort of an ugly system" (2012).

## **Conclusion**

As we can see, contemporary copyright law and the current system for calculating royalties have a number of inadequacies. Privileging the interests of the commercial music industry, the current system favours music's existence as a commodity above other more socially derived definitions. While effectively acknowledging composers' contributions and protecting their personal intellectual property rights, without proper context, such priorities can be detrimental to the community as a whole.

With regard to Cape Breton fiddling, various strategies are used to reshape music industry norms to function more effectively within the tradition, often distinguishing between what is legal and what is ethical. When possible, the "fraction method" of distributing mechanical royalties is used as a compromise that makes independent commercial recordings more affordable for the community. Musicians are faced with the decision of when and how to consider a composition a commodity. This can position an individual as a professional musician, or as a local tradition bearer. Most musicians fall into both categories at one time or another, and there is power and cultural capital associated with each label.

The result is a negotiation between personal rights and those of the community. This is a situation that is further complicated by personal relationships; a composer who normally collects royalties may overlook such rights for a friend as a gift, and conversely, some musicians may deem it necessary to pay for a tune out of respect for the composer. While these nuances in music ownership based on community and personal relationships may address certain shortcomings in the industry-based system, in this context, the gift also fulfills another important function –sustainability. When a composition is shared, it

helps offset the cost of independent recordings, something that helps maintain the integrity and relevance of both commercial recordings and vernacular repertoire.

My next chapter will also consider aspects of the professionalization of Cape Breton fiddling, but from a technological perspective. Over the years, public performances have created an increasing demand for amplification. The amplification of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, however, has become very standardized, such that it has come to represent a regional soundscape. Through the analysis of audio recordings and the significance of the L. R. Baggs violin pickup, I will examine the role of audio technology and timbre in the tradition today.

## Chapter 6

### **“Our fiddles sound big. That’s the way I think it should be”:**

#### **Cape Breton Fiddling and Amplification Practices**

As an active member of the Cape Breton traditional music scene for over a decade, I have frequently encountered how amplification affects traditional musicians. Whereas some violinists outside Cape Breton may choose varying methods of amplification, or even avoid it altogether, the amplification practices of Cape Breton fiddlers are quite standardized, having been shaped by function and local aesthetics. As such, Cape Breton fiddlers relate to violin timbre and audio technology in a way that is distinct from other traditions. The significance of audio technology in Cape Breton fiddling is noted by scholars such as Glenn Graham (2006: 72) and Burt Feintuch, who writes, “Nearly all the fiddlers who play in public use L. R. Baggs<sup>50</sup> transducers to amplify their instruments, and nearly all the pianists use electric keyboards” (2004: 93-94). However, this is a topic that has not been deeply examined by scholars, and has largely remained a cursory observation. In an effort to address the topic, this chapter will serve as a case study of the role of audio amplification in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. I will focus on the violin pickups produced by L. R. Baggs in particular, which have become the norm for professional performances, and are also common in vernacular settings, such as house parties.

This chapter will use the issues surrounding amplification and sound reproduction to address the larger discussion of this thesis, examining Cape Breton traditional

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<sup>50</sup> L. R. Baggs is a small company based in California specializing in the amplification of acoustic instruments.

musicians as professionals and tradition bearers, and how they negotiate their identities in the colliding worlds of vernacular and professional music making. My participants voiced strong opinions about amplification and timbre, invoking discourses of romanticism and modernism, along with those of tradition and sense of place. This tradition of amplification has become an expected, valued, and sought-after local aesthetic. These uses of audio technology demonstrate how mass-produced, material products can be appropriated and imbued with highly glocalized meaning.

Although certain aspects of technology have become so integral to Cape Breton fiddling that they are now taken for granted, they have become an assumed aspect to any given performance, and more broadly, the musical community and culture. This process of technological naturalization is, in fact, a way in which groups adopt and make sense of technological advancements. Folklorist Hermann Bausinger asserts that even something as simple as the creation of fire was once considered “technology,” though today it is something that has become naturalized (1990: 18). What we do and do not consider “technology” is entirely relative. He asserts,

Even the first production of fire was a “technical” act, one that may be considered an essential beginning of human technology. However, with habit it soon acquired a “natural” character. This was possible because, with few specific instruments needed, making a fire was barely different from other natural activities, and once the concept of the natural is applied to human activity, it transcends its strict limits and becomes valid in the relative sense. Matches clearly divided the old and the new way of making fire when they appeared in the second quarter of the last century. [...] However, by the time the lighter is introduced, man is already surrounded by technical gadgets to such an extent that he uses them without being constantly aware of technological alienation from the natural state. The apparatus itself has acquired a “natural quality” which even new inventions achieve all too soon. (1990: 18)



If we are to take Bausinger's argument a step further, the discourses of what is or is not construed as "technology" sheds light on how a group defines its traditions; the more naturalized an aspect of technology becomes is an indication of how accepted that technology is.

### **Discourses on Audio Technology and Music**

Audio technology has been a source of contention since the emergence of the gramophone. Recording technology brought about new ideas that contrasted live performance with audio recordings. As such, audio fidelity and authenticity quickly became issues in ways that had not been relevant prior to sound reproduction (Benjamin 1968; Schafer 1977; Feld 1994; Auslander 2008 [1999]). By considering audio reproductions as being situated within a complex network of social processes, communication studies scholar Jonathan Sterne addresses changing attitudes toward audio technology, revealing aesthetics of audio fidelity and listening practices as cultural constructs (2003). Indeed, he demonstrates that notions of audio fidelity are so changeable that, "after 1878, every age has its own perfect fidelity" (222).

Sterne critiques histories of sound reproduction that rely on a narrative of modernist progress wherein audio fidelity improves continually and incrementally moves toward a more accurate representation of the original (2003). This history of progress is convenient, but it does not account for the fact that "perfect" audio fidelity was believed to be attained in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nor does it explain how formats such as MP3s (which are known to be low fidelity) remain extremely popular. Sterne details how in many cases, the sound quality of early gramophone recordings were deemed indistinguishable

from a live performance (2003: 262-265). To this end, a linear discussion of audio fidelity is complicated by the fluid nature of the aesthetics and processes that define audio fidelity itself. Sterne contends that it is an issue that cannot be explained through binaries or isolating the reproduction from the process of its creation. He writes,

Without the technology of reproduction, the copies do not exist, but, then, neither would the originals. A philosophy of mediation ontologizes sound reproduction too quickly. Therefore, a notion of sound fidelity based on a fundamental distinction between original and copy will most likely bracket the question of what constitutes the originality itself emphasizing the products of reproduction. [...] “Original” sounds are as much a product of the medium as they are copies – reproduced sounds are not simply mediated versions of unmediated original sounds. Sound reproduction is a social process. The possibility of reproduction precedes the fact (2003: 219).

What is most significant about Sterne’s model is that audio reproductions are situated within a complex network of social processes, a point similar to Howard Becker’s conception of an “art world” (1982). While I support conceptualizing audio reproduction as a social process that positions “originals” and “copies” as interdependent and equal, it is still important to consider how reproduced sound compares or contrasts with its sound source.

Sound reproduction is a social process that is also intrinsically linked to physical objects. Material culture scholar Simon Bronner offers the idea that “people use objects as symbols. Each person recognizes objects as metaphors for human experience and value” (1985: 23). As such, the physical objects associated with amplification can take on symbolic meaning, as in the case of the electric guitar, which is associated with rock ‘n’ roll, framing the instrument as loud, rebellious, and subversive. This symbolic meaning was evident by the reaction and debate evoked when Bob Dylan “went electric” at the

Newport Folk Festival in 1965 (Waksman 1999: 1). The controversy in the United States surrounding Dylan's shift from acoustic to electric guitar was paralleled by similar processes happening in England, which "developed partly as a counteraction to the restrictive 'authenticity' of the folk club culture" (Sweers 2005: 11).

The concept of "authenticity" associated with the folk revival was often highly conservative, with only the most "traditional" repertoire and performance practices deemed acceptable. The linking of authenticity with acoustic instrumentation is discussed at length by folklorist Peter Narváez, which he refers to as the "myth of acousticity." He writes,

This myth pits the supposedly superior, authentic, "natural" sound of the traditional wooden guitar, as perceived by sensory media (ears and eyes), against the inferior amplified sounds of guitars employing electronic magnetic pickups, sound processors, and amplifiers. [...] In addition, however, the myth of acousticity, which was embraced during the folk boom, attaches ideological signifieds to the acoustic guitar, making it a democratic vehicle vis-à-vis the sonic authoritarianism of electric instruments. (2012: 200)

While the electrification of instruments is commonplace today, these discourses surrounding the difference between acoustic and electronic sounds remain, particularly in relation to "traditional" music.

The "myth of acousticity" helps to explain how amplification has come to be naturalized in certain ways. Just as electric instruments have been positioned as inauthentic or untraditional, microphones and pickups have become widely accepted and are at times an invisible part of a performance (Porcello 1998: 2004). Acousticity and amplification are often conflated; a purely acoustic performance would involve only acoustic instruments without any microphones or speakers, though in popular discourses,

an acoustic performance means the use of acoustic instruments equipped with pickups and amplified through a PA system. Ethnomusicologist Boden Sandstrom observes,

Most of the music we hear has been electronically altered, perhaps several times. In fact, the recent trend for major popular musical groups in the United States to perform “unplugged” – with lesser but varying degrees of electronic amplification – is an attempt to get back to the basics. It indicates the pervasiveness of electronic alteration, enhancement, or amplification of sound. (2000: 289)

Various components of amplification such as microphones, PA systems, and pickups may be viewed (somewhat misleadingly) as transparent in certain situations, as they can become an expected and naturalized part of live performance.

### **Amplification and Cape Breton Fiddling**

Over the past two decades in Cape Breton, violin amplification has created a sound that, while most common at dances, is pervasive in virtually all live performance contexts due to a combination of convenience and aesthetics. This amplified sound is high-volume, bassy, full-bodied, and highly compressed. Authoritative and “electric” sounding, though at times lacking clarity, this amplified violin sound differs significantly from the sound of microphone amplification, which provides a more detailed, “natural,” and somewhat “thinner” timbre. The amplified sound created by violin pickups has become iconic of the dance tradition and the fiddling tradition as a whole in Cape Breton.

Although the amplification that I am discussing includes other components such as preamps, amplifiers, and speakers, for the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the pickup in particular, and by extension, the preamps that normally accompany them. So, while my participants and I discuss this in terms of pickups, the sound is really the combination of the two. While used for some rudimentary equalization, preamps are used

primarily as a signal boost, making which specific brand, model, or even technique is associated with it less important than the fact that it is simply there, being used by the fiddler. Amplifiers and speakers also affect the sound of a violin, but are also widely used in other circumstances. The sound systems used by Cape Breton fiddlers, be they owned privately or by music venues, are not unlike those found in performance venues across North America. The distinctiveness of tone created by a fiddler's pickup or microphone is easily heard regardless of the sound system he or she uses, making the sound system less significant in shaping violin timbre than the pickup itself.



**Figure #19: L. R. Baggs violin pickup<sup>51</sup>**

From an etic perspective, it is a fact of physics that reproduced sound is sonically different from the original sound source. As noted earlier, this is a point also stated by audio engineer William Moylan, in *The Art of Recording* (2002), who reminds us that

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<sup>51</sup> Photo courtesy of [www.lrbaggs.com](http://www.lrbaggs.com).

reproduced sound is not neutral, and it is distinct from unamplified or non-recorded sound.

The changes in sound quality that are created by recording do not occur in nature. They are unique to audio recordings and give recorded music (or music reproduced over loudspeakers) a set of unique sound characteristics. These characteristics may be very different from a live, unamplified performance. These sound qualities have become accepted as part of the experience of listening to recorded and reproduced sound, and of music. (2002: xx)

It is the difference between acoustic and amplified sounds that reshape the timbre of a violin in a live setting. Spencer Crewe, an audio engineer in the Newfoundland traditional music scene with groups such as Great Big Sea and Shanneygannock, explains how a violin pickup affects the amplified sound of the instrument:

It can sound harsh because it's almost an overload of too many good things. It's contact miking the fiddle, and the fiddle is such a resonant instrument anyway. So, you're going to get almost overwhelmed with almost all frequencies. [...] It can get very shrill and very sharp, as well as the big MHUUUH!!! ...low-end mud kind of thing. You're basically picking up every frequency that the fiddle's making, and not necessarily in a good way. But, if you got a really nice pickup and a really nice sounding instrument, then you're all set. It's plug and play at that point – you don't have to really do much with it. (2013)

It is this amplification of *all* frequencies that affects the timbre of the violin, thereby obscuring a violin's characteristic sound. As such, the violin tone associated with L. R. Baggs pickups is not only the hardware, but the ways in which the tone is equalized once it has been amplified. It is this element of agency that further complicates my analysis. Although there are general trends associated with amplification in Cape Breton fiddling, there is also a degree of variation within accepted conventions.

That having been said, it is possible to provide an etic description of the general acoustic properties associated with the L. R. Baggs pickup and preamp.

Ethnomusicologist Cornelia Fales has successfully employed spectrographic analysis to better understand timbral elements of music and how they are interpreted by listeners (Fales 2005; Berger and Fales 2005). Through a comparison of various recordings of amplified and acoustic performances<sup>52</sup> by Cape Breton fiddlers, I have identified key aspects of the L. R. Baggs sound. The specific sample recordings that I have chosen were picked solely for practical purposes – in order to ensure an accurate timbral analysis, the audio sample must be of the violin in isolation, without other instruments. As a performance tradition which is overwhelmingly duo or group-based, even small samples of solo violin recordings can be challenging to acquire. My results, however, were nonetheless consistent.

I have found that while an acoustic violin sound offers a wide spectrum of frequencies, the spectrum of a typical amplified Cape Breton fiddle performance is significantly narrower. Most notably, the upper mid and high end frequencies (beginning roughly between 6 khz and 8 khz) are almost completely absent. There is also a narrow band at approximately 3 khz – 4 khz that is also less prominent than other frequencies. In addition, the overall volume is compressed, making the level of frequencies relatively uniform throughout the duration of each note, with little decay. The end result is a sound that is remarkably different from an acoustic violin. The lower and middle frequencies are very prominent, with considerably fewer of the higher frequencies that provide the crispness and clarity of an acoustic violin. Interestingly enough, the frequencies limited by the pickup can be problematic and quite harsh at high volumes. While this change may

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<sup>52</sup> I have used Adobe Audition for my spectrographic analysis. The sample recordings used for my analysis come from a mix of my own field recordings and professionally made commercial recordings (both studio and live).

eliminate some of the finer nuances of a violin tone, decreasing these frequencies can also give a fiddler a warmer, mellower sound. Moreover, without these frequencies, the violin can be amplified at high volumes without sounding piercing. Acoustic and amplified violin timbres are two separate entities, each with distinctly different aesthetics.

Amplification varies from one musical tradition to another, yet these differing conventions often rely on the same technology that is disseminated and used on a global level. In a glocal world, sense of place still remains significant. As geographer Yi-fu Tuan writes, “place can acquire deep meaning for the adult through the steady accretion of sentiment over the years” (2001 [1977]: 33). The meaning of place, however, is not merely created through individual experience alone, but through one’s larger community as well. This local significance is culturally constructed, causing the meaning and use of audio technology to differ substantially according to context.

In short, it is necessary to consume audio technology in order to produce music, which is then in turn consumed; the components of the production of music may be the same in different contexts, but the product and meaning therein may be drastically different. In this way, technology is entrenched in performance issues, as well as social and consumptive practices. This is consistent with Paul Théberge’s discussion of how the lines between production and consumption are blurred in the contemporary music industry (1997). At times, it is not the equipment itself that is important, but how it is used and the meaning attached to it. This point is made by folklorist S. A. Tokarev, who states, “A material object cannot interest the ethnographer unless he considers its social existence, its relationship to man – to the person who created it and the person who makes use of it” (1985: 79).



Bluegrass offers an excellent example of an amplification tradition that relies on standard equipment – microphones and a PA system – in a genre-specific way. Until the late 1960s, it was standard practice for the entire band to stand around one centrally placed, omnidirectional microphone. In a fluid act of musicianship and audio engineering, each musician controlled his or her level in the mix by his or her proximity to the mic. While this practice fell out of favour for several decades, the centre mic has once again become commonplace. However, in contrast to its original use, today the centre mic is often used in conjunction with other microphones (Finch 2011: 200).

In Cape Breton, amplification practices are considerably different. Historically, dances were often played with Highland bagpipes, an extremely loud instrument. As fiddles became a more popular choice, often several fiddlers played in order to be heard over the dancers. Prior to amplification, it was commonplace to retune the violin to increase the volume. This practice is often said to be the basis for what is known as “High Bass” tuning, for which the violin’s lower strings (G and D) are both tuned up a whole step to give the overall tuning of AEAE (lowest to highest). The idea behind this is that it allowed fiddlers to easily play a melody in octaves, particularly if the tunes were pipe tunes, which are limited in range to a major ninth. Today, High Bass tuning is generally only employed for a self-consciously “traditional” performance.

Amplification became important to fiddlers playing publicly as early as the 1940s, and fiddling great Buddy MacMaster identifies fellow fiddler Winston Fitzgerald as one of the first traditional musicians to have a sound system in Cape Breton (MacInnes 2007: 83-84). These early sound systems have remained a part of the tradition’s cultural memory and anecdotes of MacMaster’s own old “horn” loud speaker are common today.

Over the years, sound systems became progressively more common, and, by the 1990s, owning one was a necessity for fiddlers who were performing publicly on a regular basis.

Cape Breton Glenn Graham comments,

Back in the day – it’s not like I’m really old or anything – but you had to figure out by asking around and by listening to people what’s a good sound system to buy, and then you had to, through trial and error, figure out how to use it. A sound system was expensive. But if you were going to be playing regularly back in the ’90s, you had to have your own sound system, or you’d have to be borrowing it from someone, or the people that hired you would have to look around to find a sound system for you, so it was more difficult. So maybe you were more apt to get more gigs because you had your own system, and if you were, well, decent enough to play. (2011)

Today, music venues for traditional musicians in Cape Breton are often equipped with house systems.

Fiddler and piano player Kimberley Fraser shares this opinion about the importance of socially spread, word-of-mouth knowledge in acquiring a sound system and comments on the popularity of the L. R. Baggs system: “I think part of it too is one person gets it and everybody else follows suit. [...] When I was a kid, I didn’t know any different. I was eleven when I got mine, or twelve. Everybody did that, so that’s the system that I got” (2011). Of course, the influence of prominent tradition bearers cannot be underestimated in this context. This discussion of word-of-mouth knowledge and advice is significant in that it acknowledges that amplification practices are not entirely based on aesthetics. They are, rather, partially due to the fact that these conventions are socially sanctioned. Choices of audio technology, therefore, have to do with local, communal knowledge, further connecting these decisions to community and place.

J. P. Cormier notes that the introduction of amplification has had a concrete influence on the Cape Breton fiddle style:

That pickup changed our touch. I think it made us have a lighter touch. [...] That immensely affected the whole style, *I* think. I don't know if other players realize that or think that way, but I know I played differently when I didn't have to kill myself to be heard. And it was like, "Oh... *now*. Watch." You get a lot more subtleties. (2012)

In an oddly similar, yet contrasting, manner, Newfoundland fiddler, Emile Benoit, stressed that during his formative years as a musician, he had no access to amplification, which resulted in him becoming a very loud player, something that shaped his style for the rest of his life (Quigley 1995: 168). In my interview with Glenn Graham, he argued that amplification has become a necessary part of public performance in Cape Breton:

I think [amplification] is crucial because of the type of music and the social context that it's being played in. We're not sitting in either a small room or a small theatre, although this happens there too with these types of amplification that we're talking about, but the audience isn't sitting down in absolute silence, listening to you play a three part series and then they clap at the end of it and that's it and that's all they're hearing. You're surrounded by people eating, people drinking, etcetera. And it's loud. You're in loud rooms and people want to hear you, so it has to be overcome. You just compensate, and just like we're compensating with technology now, they compensated by adding another fiddler to add the amplification back before they had this. So, in a way, we're just continuing what they did, where you're finding solutions to the social context that you find yourself in. (2011)

To some extent, Graham's explanation of amplification in Cape Breton fiddling identifies a shift in how the audience relates to the performance. At a time when amplification was limited or less common, it would seem that fiddlers were more often the focus of the social context. Today, however, it is more common for performers to be amplified, and coincidentally, may be less prominent, supplying

background music. While this may not be a causal relationship, it may represent a change in the social function of Cape Breton fiddling.

In Cape Breton, fiddlers now rely on a standardized method of amplification, which, despite being a well-established convention, is still subject to critique and debate. Perhaps the most significant aspect of these amplification practices is that microphones are rarely used at a Cape Breton fiddling performance to amplify anything other than an upright piano or musicians speaking to the audience. Pickups are the conventional choice for violin amplification, but there has been a progression of preferred violin pickups over the years. Graham explains,

A thing that was common in Cape Breton for a while, I guess probably in the '70s and '80s were these DeArmond pickups. They stuck on the fiddle, and then you put an elastic band over it. It kind of gave the fiddle a harsher type of sound. So, because of that, people said "Hmmm... How are we going to get the fiddle to sound better?" So... equalizers. So they get these little boxes and they put that with it... And people started using a Fishman pickup. And then a Barcus Berry. And then the L. R. Baggs pickup showed up... But now the majority of fiddlers are using these things called L. R. Baggs pickups. (2011)

Graham details the progression of a contemporary fiddle sound that is constantly "improving." While this is valid description in one sense, this modernist explanation of audio technology is precisely what Sterne critiques (2003). Sterne contends that changes in audio technology cannot be viewed objectively in terms of incremental progress, but are bound by the social processes of which they are a part. For instance, audio technology is not merely a mediator that reproduces a copy of the original sound, but is central to a musical performance itself.

J. P. Cormier offers a similar history of violin amplification in Cape Breton, yet from an aesthetic perspective.

When I first started having to play square dances, Baggs wasn't around... for fiddle. We were waiting for it. The closest thing we had was a Fishman, but it made the violin sound terrible. Thin, ugly sound. And too loud. Too much gain, too much... Ueeah! The fiddle would just explode in the hall. Not really what you want. So I ended up using what everyone was using – the old DeArmond with the elastic band, right? Until, finally, Baggs came out with the one we have now, which is basically unchanged for the last twenty years. And what it did was, it retained the natural sound of the violin, with as much gain as you want. (2012)

The degree to which the L. R. Baggs pickup “retained the natural sound of the violin,” however, is debatable. What is significant is that the sound offered by the L. R. Baggs pickup is deemed by Cormier to be “natural” (or perhaps, “more natural”) than other alternatives. Other musicians, on the other hand, note that the pickup sounds very “electric.”

J. P. Cormier explained that prior to his “obsession” with Cape Breton fiddling, as a bluegrass player, he played into microphones exclusively, either on stage or in the studio. Since his transition to Cape Breton traditional music, he has changed his amplification methods, almost counter-intuitively:

When I made that transition and thought “Okay, I’m not going to play bluegrass anymore,” and you’re thinking this when you’re buying instruments and preparing instruments too. You’re like, “Well, this is a great fiddle, but I think I’ll leave this one here alone, because it sounds better acoustically. I won’t put one on that. I’ll use this one, it doesn’t sound as good, but maybe *plays* better. I’ll put a Baggs on that. Cause it doesn’t matter, right? It’s weird. It’s interesting. *That* in itself could be a whole chapter [in your thesis], the psychology behind that. I play a beautiful, \$10,000 Roth [violin]... with a Baggs on it. And we all know that the Baggs bridges are shite. They’re terrible bridges. If I put a *real* violin bridge on that thing, and put it in the right place, and took that giant Carpenter Jack<sup>53</sup> off of there, the violin would be three times louder. You could play it through an SM57 or an SM58.<sup>54</sup> Either one. And it would blow the walls out of the place. But

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<sup>53</sup> A Carpenter Jack is a quarter-inch output created by violinist Fred Carpenter that attaches to the body of the violin with a clamp similar to those used for chinrests.

<sup>54</sup> The SM57 and SM58 are microphone models made by Shure. They are industry standards for amplifying instruments and vocals, respectively.

there's just something... I got to be able to plug in... I got to be able to plug in. Plug me in, plug me in! (2012)

Cormier raises a point that is sometimes made by non-Cape Breton musicians. Violin pickups are often undesirable to fiddlers outside of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, who are not only unwilling to alter their violin's tonal characteristics by installing a permanent pickup, but prefer the sound of a microphone. On the other hand, Cormier is not unique: a number of Cape Breton fiddlers play highly valuable instruments, yet amplify them in a way that diminishes the nuances in their sound. It seems that, somewhat paradoxically, the sound and function of the L. R. Baggs pickup takes precedence over the sound of the violin itself.



**Figure #20: Colin Grant playing his violin equipped with an L. R. Baggs pickup<sup>55</sup>**

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<sup>55</sup> Photo courtesy of [www.cbflavor.com/nineteen/](http://www.cbflavor.com/nineteen/)

I have found, through personal observation, that this is frequently the case with violinists who perform in classical settings in addition to folk music circles. Although convenient for some performances, a permanent pickup would be inappropriate both sonically and visually in the context of an orchestral performance. With respect to other traditions, L. R. Baggs pickups and similar systems are standard in Prince Edward Island fiddling and in high-volume band settings with bass and drums. Violin pickups are sometimes used in other Canadian old-time fiddling scenes, but microphones generally seem to be more common.

Cape Breton traditional piano player Jason Roach articulated the role that technology has played in creating a sense of place:

You don't go into the Doryman and hear a miked fiddle. That would be so wrong. And it's been that way for a very long time, that everybody's been using preamps and keyboards. I mean, it would be wrong to go in there and hear something that sounded like anything but [that]. It's become the Cape Breton sound, and I don't know why you would want to change that. (2010)

Roach feels very strongly about this, and his opinions have been the source of disagreements when working with non-Cape Breton musicians. "I've gotten in heated discussions about that, over how fiddles should never be miked. It kills me! Our fiddles sound big. That's the way I think it should be," he explained (2010).

Ethnomusicologist Louise Meintjes explores the ways in which seemingly simple aspects of audio engineering such as choosing to record an instrument with a microphone instead of running the signal on a direct line can have significant connotations in representation and the way that sense of place is constructed musically. In Johannesburg, South Africa, audio recording engineers prefer to record electric bass guitars through a

direct input, but the musicians often insist that the bass amp should be recorded with a microphone (Meintjes 2005: 36). These disagreements relate to differing aesthetics, where the musicians, typically from black, working-class backgrounds, understand their music through live performance, gravitating toward a loud wall of sound found in traditional local performance. The typically white, middle-class engineers, on the other hand, value clarity and the pan-genre hyper-realistic aesthetic of the international professional music industry.

Jason Roach elaborated on amplified sound, mentioning that electric keyboards were also important to this: “I’m not necessarily a piano player. I play the RD 700<sup>56</sup> with my own little tweaks. [...] It has a lot to do with the tone of those keyboards. It’s not a piano tone, you know? But that’s exactly what I want to play” (2010). His reference to “tweaks” is an acknowledgement of how he equalizes his keyboard prior to sending his signal out to the PA, as well as his own unorthodox mechanical alterations and repairs. This can be compared to the way that audiophiles add their own tweaks to their stereo systems or how guitarists personalize their instruments as a means to create a sense of personal attachment to otherwise impersonal, mass-produced commodities (Everett 2003; Perlman 2004; Waksman 2004).

Some Cape Breton musicians prefer acoustic pianos, but as Roach explained, the sound of an electric keyboard is now recognized in and of itself, and valued accordingly. Feintuch feels that in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, the electric piano “further adds to the distinctiveness of the sound, as the keyboard has both a crispness and a

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<sup>56</sup> The RD keyboard series is manufactured by Roland and are an industry standard for professional electric stage pianos.



characteristic not-quite-a-piano quality. The keyboard and the fiddle transducers combine to produce a sound that is strong and assertive” (2004: 76). Glenn Graham recalled that

there was an FP8<sup>57</sup> piano type that was very popular among piano players in the '90s. Some of us, we're so used to hearing tapes with that sound on it, we're really happy to get to play with someone who's still using one of these FP8s because that's what you're so used to hearing. (2011)

Acoustic and amplified aesthetics and timbres may be relatively standardized, but these conventions are not fixed. There is not absolute consensus regarding these aesthetic differences and when each is appropriate, making these ideas the topic of compromise, negotiation, and debate.

### **Critiquing and Negotiating Current Conventions**

While current amplification practices are fairly uniform, there is a wide range of opinions on such technology. As ethnomusicologist Leslie Gay writes, “The relations between technologies and their cultural use are complex and interrelated, with uses and meanings constructed and contested through the discourse of daily lives, through image schemata and metaphorical shifts” (1998: 91). In the context of Cape Breton fiddling, some individuals may uphold these amplification practices due to social convention and convenience, but the existence of differing aesthetic values within the tradition must also be addressed. As scholars such as ethnomusicologist Marc Perlman (2004) and Sterne (2003: 270-78) explain, competing aesthetics do not refer to objective judgements of

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<sup>57</sup> Roland's FP keyboard series is relatively similar to the RD series, but intended more as a home piano. Also a standard among professional musicians, FP keyboards are equipped with speakers and fewer electronic effects.

quality, a point that is evident in the divide between analog and digital audio formats.

Sterne argues,

Nobody disputes the clarity of digital reproduction, but, to many ears, the old vacuum-tube equipment sounds better, and the result has been an explosion in the vintage and used market. Similarly, audio recording engineers routinely select microphones with an incomplete or uneven frequency response in order to record a more appealing sound (2003: 277).

Indeed, although the overall sound of digital audio equipment may be often described as “clean,” “crisp,” and “accurate,” the “warmer,” “earthier,” sounds typically attributed to analog audio equipment are sometimes preferred by audiophiles. The disconnect that sometimes arises between clarity and a sound that is aesthetically pleasing is a concept on which much of this chapter is based.

In Cape Breton, two separate soundscapes emerge. The first, the “Baggs” sound that I have discussed, is attached to some of the most characteristically “Cape Breton” performance contexts such as dances, pubs and even house parties. The second is what my participants refer to as a “natural” sound, associated with a purely acoustic performance, which is an aesthetic sometimes associated with concert halls or commercial recordings. These two different styles of amplification, then, directly correspond to the needs and values of performance styles in a given context. Although the sound of the L. R. Baggs violin pickup is certainly a dominant sound in many contexts, a more “natural” sound, be it created acoustically or amplified with a microphone, is also recognized and valued. Again, the “myth of acousticity” is relevant, as few musicians distinguish between the sound of a purely acoustic violin sound and one created by a microphone. As audio technology changes, however, this “natural,” acoustic sound

picked up by a microphone has slowly begun to gain more support, becoming more prominent in some performance contexts.

Paul MacDonald, an audio engineer, and self-professed audiophile, is an advocate for acoustic music and preserving a musician's natural, unprocessed tone. "L. R. Baggs pickups sound like that," he said, holding his nose between his thumb and forefinger. "It's like holding the violin's nose. It's a killer. I really hate it and I wish at least a few fiddlers would try something else. But people seem stuck on them" (2011). MacDonald feels that violin pickups have created a more homogenized violin tone, making musicians sound less unique. He continues,

It's not even 50% of the violin's sound. It's so compressed that to me it just doesn't really do any justice to the Cape Breton fiddle sound. It's become a crutch. I have these arguments with certain players about it where they say, "Oh, well, I like the security of it." And I say, "Well, what do you mean?" "Well, when I'm at a dance I like feeling secure that I'm going to be loud enough." And I say, "Well, you could learn to use a microphone too!" (2011)

MacDonald's thoughts on amplification are based primarily on aural aesthetics, leaving convention and practicality to be less of a priority in how he believes an instrument should be played or amplified.

While his opinions are not held by all musicians in the area, there are a number of like-minded musicians who share his passion for preserving an acoustic violin tone. As such, he is a sought-after engineer for commercial recordings which he makes in an on-location, field-recording style. Being interested in acoustic sound, he is quick to stress more "traditional" ways in which the music would be heard. For instance, many Cape Breton homes in the late 19th and early 20th century would be furnished with tamarack or

hardwood floors and walls of Douglas Fir or plaster, creating an excellent acoustic environment, something that was once highly valued. MacDonald explains,

For your average immigrants from the Hebrides, wood was one of the biggest luxuries in the world. You come to Cape Breton where, in the 1860s and 1870s, where your average, even your poorest, poor farmer still had great sound in their house. [...] But now, that tradition's gone too. Room acoustics aren't even important to people anymore. For Godsakes, in Inverness County, they plug in at house sessions now. I recorded house sessions where you couldn't hear yourself talk. What's that all about? That's how much things have changed. I couldn't believe that night. A PA system in a room no bigger than this. And you still couldn't hear yourself talk. (2011)

His opinions demonstrate two important points. The first is that these amplification methods of pickups and electronic keyboards are indeed an unavoidable aspect of today's Cape Breton fiddling tradition. Secondly, it reminds us of individual agency. Although there are various standards that are widely accepted in amplification, there is still room for resistance against them. As with many aspects of culture, these conventions do not represent a perfect consensus, but are the result of the negotiation of various values, motivations, and discourses. Amplification practices have changed substantially over the years, and are likely to continue to change. They have not come to pass accidentally, but through constant evaluation and deliberation by individuals.

Paul MacDonald also found the early violin pickup produced by Fishman to be less appealing than the L. R. Baggs.

The Fishman, that was actually worse [than the L. R. Baggs]. The Fishman was actually more of a compressor. The L. R. Baggs is a compressor when you're playing hard on it. That's why it's not good for Cape Breton music. When a Cape Bretoner really cuts, and really comes down hard on an L. R. Baggs, the signal goes – Shwi! Chi! <gestures that the signal is rising sharply, then immediately being cut off, level> Like that. The Fishman is worse, because it physically compresses the sound because it's this little brass plate that fits into the bridge, and that bridge is meant to move, and breathe. But when you put those two little

brass plates in, the bridge doesn't move and breathe. So, you know, there's only so much dynamics that you're going to get out of the violin. At least with the L. R. Baggs, if you play it a little lighter, you can create the effect of dynamics. But when you're playing flat out like a Cape Breton fiddler, forget it. It's just all a soap bar of waveform. (2011)

Although MacDonald favours the sound of a microphone to that of a pickup, he remarked to me that if choosing a pickup, "I'd prefer the old DeArmond under the elastic band, actually. Sure. And Arthur Muise<sup>58</sup> still prefers that. I mean, okay, it's horrible, because it can howl like a coyote, but at least the violin player's soul is there" (2011).

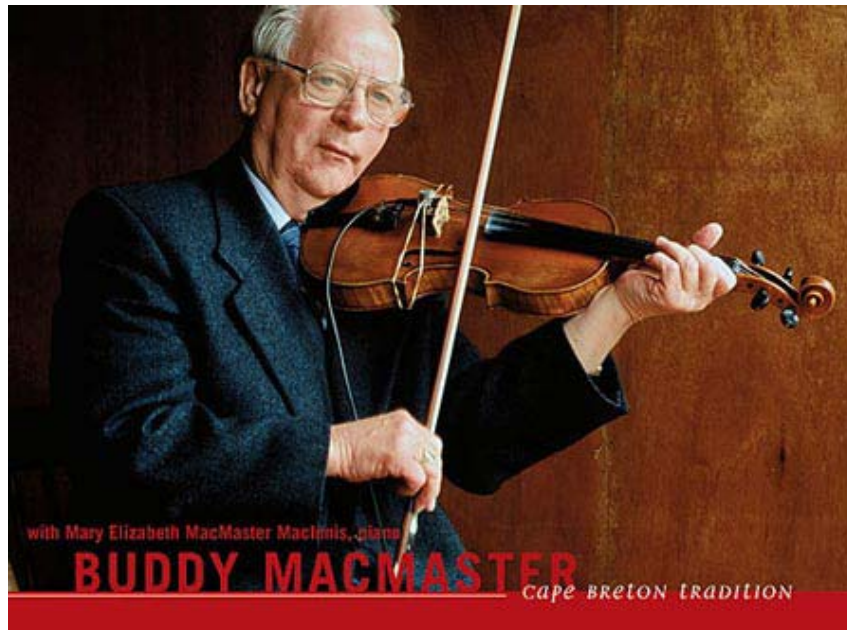
Some fiddlers have never made the transition from previous amplification methods to the L. R. Baggs system. Arthur Muise is one such example.

A big part of Arthur Muise's sound was those old, strap-on DeArmond pickups and the distortion that they gave. To most people, it would be, probably, a horrible fiddle sound. But Arthur could make it sound so good. You know? And Buddy played most of his fiddling career with pickups, you know? That type of pickup. It definitely did give it a different kind of sound didn't it? Where all of a sudden, you know, you're amplified and you don't have to fight with the instrument. You can just turn it up really, really loud. And the bow just moves about *this* much. And it just rings. That was a new era in Cape Breton music. Cuz if you ever watched Arthur play, he uses this much bow. <holds up thumb and forefinger> And you can't get that much sound out of an instrument with that much bow unless it's amplified really, really hot. (Robert Deveau 2011)

In this way, it would seem that there have been different aesthetics associated with amplification in Cape Breton fiddling during different eras. Deveau's mention of distortion is significant in that the sound of a DeArmond pickup may not have been representative of an acoustic violin sound, but was valued nonetheless.

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<sup>58</sup> Arthur Muise (b. 1950) is a prominent fiddler from Cheticamp Island, Cape Breton.



**Figure #21: Buddy MacMaster playing his violin with a DeArmond pickup<sup>59</sup>**

Fiddler Colin Grant argues that amplification is a necessary part of current performance contexts, and microphones are not always practical for fiddlers:

Knowing the potential for feedback onstage when using, say, an SM57 coupled with necessary monitors, it limits us to lower stage volume, which would inevitably make both the fiddler and accompanist play differently. I wonder if we've worked ourselves into a corner by adopting the Baggs pickup as standard. It would be difficult for me, at this point, to go back to a lower volume onstage in order to preserve the tone through a condenser mic. (2011)

Grant added that he felt the L. R. Baggs system has become such an important part of live performances that other methods of amplification may not be welcomed in all situations:

I think that a fiddler using a high-tech mic [condenser microphone] would get a little bit of flack from the community of listeners and players for having a high-tech, fancy invention... and then there'd be the problem of it just sounding too much like a CD, and not having that sound that we have developed with L. R. Baggs. (2010)

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<sup>59</sup> Album Cover – Buddy MacMaster, *Cape Breton Tradition* (2003)

Nevertheless, in recent years an increasing number of fiddlers have begun experimenting with alternatives such as condenser microphones, though, at the moment, they remain a minority. To my knowledge, these individuals have not endured any significant criticism. Grant's anticipation of resistance speaks to the extent to which the L. R. Baggs pickup is an established convention within the tradition.

The exploration of alternative amplification methods is due at least in part to their interaction with musicians from other traditions from around the world. Kimberley Fraser explains that "Celtic Colours was a big eye-opener for that because you get all these musicians over from Europe that have these nice mic systems. And the difference in the sound, it's just amazing" (2011). It is noteworthy that Fraser (and a number of other participants) discuss learning about audio technology in the context of international music festivals, be it at home or abroad. The role that music festivals play in exposing musicians to various amplification practices further ties such knowledge and conventions to community, albeit an international one at times.

Despite the pervasive use of L. R. Baggs pickups and their amplified tone, fiddlers still value the natural, acoustic tone of their instrument. In fact, some fiddlers dislike the sound produced by a pickup but still use one, viewing a pickup as the most viable option for amplification. Chrissy Crowley notes the difference between an acoustic sound and that of an amplified one but acknowledges that practicality and audience expectations are an important part of the reason that music is amplified in this way. She offers, "I prefer the sound of an acoustic fiddle over any sound at all. But for the audience's sake, what they're used to and what they want is an L. R. Baggs pickup – an amplified sound" (2010). It is noteworthy that both Grant and Crowley mention the role that audience taste

can play in determining amplification practices. While not being directly responsible for such decisions, the aesthetic preferences of the audience can be highly significant.

Fiddlers rely heavily on the support of a local fan base in order to secure gigs.

However, both taste and function can change according to context. Kimberley Fraser explained to me that she had considered purchasing a new system for specific venues:

Now, for myself, being more aware, I'd actually like to get a mic for playing something more like a theatre, rather than a Baggs, because it is very electric [sounding]. It's very hard to get away from that electric sound. So, I'd like to get a mic. It would be nice to have both systems. To have a mic for one thing, then having a pickup... Because you don't want a mic when you're playing for a dance, you want something where you can just plug in and go. And [you] don't have to worry about feedback or anything like that. (2011)

Timbre is a significant consideration for violin amplification. The sound created with the L. R. Baggs pickup, as is evidenced in these descriptions, is loud and full, though it may at times lack clarity. J. P. Cormier explains that both versatility and timbre are important to how he amplifies his violin: "If I was going to just play concert halls, yeah, I'd use a DPA mic.<sup>60</sup> No question. But I don't. I have to play the violin everywhere from beer halls to amphitheatres. It just doesn't work. The L. R. Baggs will work anywhere" (2012).

These are opinions commonly voiced by local musicians – while some musicians may appreciate the clarity and detail of a microphone, they find them to be ineffective in a dance or pub setting where they must compete with considerable background noise. For some of these musicians, this disconnect is negotiated by the use of both a microphone and pickup simultaneously, to have both clarity and volume.

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<sup>60</sup> DPA Microphones makes a series of miniature omnidirectional condenser clip microphones for violins and other acoustic instruments.



The role that dance plays in the fiddling tradition should not be underestimated, and has been discussed by numerous musicians and scholars alike (Feintuch 2004; Doherty 2006:105-106; Graham 2006; Herdman 2010; Melin 2012). The prominence of dance in the fiddling tradition is evident in many of my participants' comments, as their discussions of amplification frequently also addressed square dances, clearly positioning them as a significant, perhaps even definitive, aspect of the tradition. Chrissy Crowley comments, "If you don't have a really good sound guy, those [condenser microphones] sound so quiet that you don't get the feeling you would normally get, say, in a dance hall with the L. R. Baggs" (2010). She describes the sound of a fiddle in a dance hall as being iconic of the Cape Breton fiddle sound, and this iconic sound is produced in part with the L. R. Baggs pickup. For Crowley, the definitive Cape Breton fiddle sound (at least in a live setting) is one that inhabits the imagined space of Cape Breton dance halls, and is a sound that is loud and amplified. This point is echoed by a fellow fiddler, who explained that when he plays for tourists, he tries to play in a manner he considers traditional: "I play what I would play at a dance in West Mabou,<sup>61</sup> because *that* is what Cape Breton is" (Anonymous participant 2011).

The use of these amplification practices creates an intertextual performance that references the dance hall of the collective Cape Breton imagination. Such a connection between music, space, and imagination is consistent with popular music scholar Peter Doyle's discussion of the ways in which sound can shape an imaginary space (2005). It is apparent that although amplification is no longer exclusively linked to dances, its use can

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<sup>61</sup> West Mabou is home to the only weekly, year-round square dance in Cape Breton. Started by Margie and Jimmy MacInnis, these dances represent an effort to foster an interest in traditional music and dance, particularly among the younger generation of the community.

be regarded as an implicit reference to them. Moreover, the aesthetics of amplification changed substantially over the years but have now become fairly stable. This sound connects performances to the imaginary space of the dance hall, which is, according to some dominant discourses, iconic of the tradition and region as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

It is my intention that this case study may lay the groundwork for further study in this area, and is by no means definitive or exhaustive. The L. R. Baggs pickup, while the focus of this chapter, has served as an entry point to the topics of audio technology and timbre, chosen because of its widespread use, and relatively recent introduction into the Cape Breton music scene. The study of timbre and audio technology in Cape Breton fiddling can be developed as a whole, with the history of amplification in Cape Breton, discussion of non-amplified violin timbre, and piano amplification all being topics worthy of further inquiry.

Although “good” sound may often be thought of as objective and something that can be described entirely in terms of acoustics, it is evident that such judgements of value and taste are much more ambiguous. The aesthetics associated with particular amplification methods can differ significantly, from nasal and boomy, to crisp and thin, to overdriven and harsh. In the end, each aesthetic has value to those who have participated in its construction. The vast majority of fiddlers in Cape Breton prefer the sound of L. R. Baggs system, but this is not entirely pre-determined – individual agency still allows for other perspectives.

Technology is commonly understood as being antithetical to tradition. Although this is a gross oversimplification, it speaks to pervasive and enduring discourses that align technology with modernist ideologies of progress, and frame tradition as belonging to a static, romanticized past. Through an analysis of amplification in Cape Breton fiddling, we can see how technology has become an integral part of the tradition. In this way, seemingly insignificant, even ubiquitous, technological devices can become crucial to traditional practices within specific contexts. As products of glocalization, these global, mass-produced commodities are locally appropriated and used to reinforce sense of place and regional identity. Violin pickups have come to signify live performance and, more specifically, dances in Cape Breton. L. R. Baggs pickups are visible additions to the instrument, which serve as a marker that identifies the fiddler as both a public performer and as a Cape Bretoner.

In essence, this chapter has been an investigation of the intersection between regional aesthetics and live engineering practices. The following chapter will continue my discussion of audio technology and aesthetics, by addressing Cape Breton audio recordings. Relying on the work of Turino (2008) and Meintjes (2003), I will explore how notions of “liveness” are expressed in Cape Breton fiddle recordings. By interviewing audio engineers and musicians, and examining recordings ranging from lo-fi field recordings to hyper-realistic studio albums, I demonstrate that a live aesthetic is highly valued in Cape Breton fiddling, yet liveness can be represented in several different ways.

## Chapter 7

### **“Holy jeez. I can hear *everything*”: Liveness, Hyper-reality, and Imagination in Cape Breton Fiddle Recordings**

Whether at a house party, a dance, or a formal concert, live performance is an integral part of Cape Breton fiddling. An energetic music, it is understood by its participants (both performers and audience members), as a visceral experience that is closely linked to social context. Audio recordings, however, have been part of the tradition since the first commercial Cape Breton fiddle recording in 1928,<sup>62</sup> and act as a prominent counterpart to live performances. Ian McKinnon asserts Cape Breton fiddle recordings are related to economics, transmission, and cultural identity. As such, he states that “the Cape Breton fiddle recording has proven itself invaluable as a cultural artifact in the island’s cultural process” (1989: 2). The aesthetics of Cape Breton fiddle recordings are intrinsically linked to notions of “liveness,” creating a connection between audio recordings and live performances, framing the tradition as both experiential and participatory in nature.

In this chapter, I will explore the construct of liveness in Cape Breton fiddle recordings. Although having a live sound is highly valued, liveness is a fluid concept that may be portrayed in different, sometimes contradictory ways. Liveness can be heard in a homemade recording of a party, but also in a studio recording that consciously constructs

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<sup>62</sup> The first Cape Breton fiddle recordings were 78-rpm records by Decca and the Columbia Record Company, recorded in Boston and New York, respectively. These early recordings featured musicians such as Dan Hughie MacEachern, Colin Boyd, Alex Gillis, and the Inverness Serenaders.

a live aesthetic. As such, the decision about how to mic and EQ<sup>63</sup> an instrument, or whether to include extra-musical sounds in the final mix, can have profound symbolic meaning. Analyzing the decisions surrounding the representation of Cape Breton fiddling on audio recordings allows us to access the ways in which musicians conceptualize the tradition, and their own playing in the abstract context of the studio imagination, a place not bound by finite time, space, or even logic.

Turino suggests that there are two contrasting styles of audio recordings: hi-fidelity and studio audio art. A hi-fidelity recording is meant to be directly representative of a particular performance (2008: 68), while the latter is not intended to have any direct correlation to a performance in real-time (2008: 78). So, a recording of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* by the Chicago Symphony (1968) would be an example of a hi-fidelity recording, while a recording such as The Beatles' *Revolution 9* (1968) – a collection of abstract manipulated audio samples – would be an example of studio audio art. Studio audio art, however, can also be thought of as representative of a performance, but an imagined performance that exists outside of real-time and space, created through pastiche. With the advent of multi-track recording, recordings can be pieced together, in a non-linear way. For this reason, the multi-track studio can function as a compositional tool (Moorefield 2001).

This representative quality of a recording is also explored by Peter Doyle, who examines the way space – both real and imagined – is expressed in audio recordings through echo and reverb (2005). The reverberant qualities of the space in which a

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<sup>63</sup> Equalization (EQ) refers to the balance of different frequencies on a recording (i.e., bass, mid, treble, etc.).

recording is made are clearly audible to the listener, aurally communicating information such as the dimensions of a room or the relative location of the musicians within the recording space. Doyle argues that Gene Austin's recording of the Tin Pan Alley hit, "My Blue Heaven" combines close-miked vocals with off-microphone musical accompaniment to suggest an intimacy with the vocalist and a physical distance from others (2005: 72-73).

### **Contrasting Conceptions of Liveness**

Although the concept of liveness is common in audio recordings, it is an idea that can have many possible meanings. Musicologist Paul Sanden writes,

Liveness is a perception, guided by the different ways it may be evoked inside cultural discourse and practice. [...] Liveness exists as a fluid concept among different people and at different times, rather than as a concrete ontological category with well-defined essential characteristics. This very fluidity of the concept of liveness is, in part, what makes this issue so complex and worthy of further scrutiny. (2009: 8)

It is this changing nature of liveness that I will explore through different ways in which it presents itself in Cape Breton fiddle recordings.

The construction of liveness can not only change significantly from one tradition to another, but is also presented in different ways. As Turino states, "the aesthetics and conceptions about what live music is among different cultural groups affect the recording and mixing processes" (2008: 72). That having been said, there are similarities than can be drawn from different musical contexts. Porcello and Meintjes discuss liveness as a symbol of regional identity, in Austin, Texas (Porcello 2005), and Johannesburg, South Africa (Meintjes 2003), respectively. Both studies connect liveness to discourses of

authenticity; Meintjes puts forth that in South Africa, “Liveness is an illusion of sounding live that is constructed through technological intervention in the studio and mediated symbolically through discourses about the natural and the artistic. To sound authentically African is to sound live” (2003: 112). Ironically, in many cases for Meintjes’ participants, liveness was reliant on mechanical drum machines or MIDI programming. Although liveness is integral to the aesthetics of Cape Breton fiddle recordings and regional identity, Cape Breton musicians do not associate liveness with authenticity in this same way. For Cape Breton musicians, discourses of liveness connect recordings to the social context of a performance, defining the tradition through experience.

As a tradition of experience and participation linked to the social context of performance such as dances and house parties, Cape Breton fiddlers conceptualize liveness in relation to both imperfection and perfection. On the most basic level, liveness has to do with the context in which a recording is made. A recording is considered to be most live when it is made in a natural, or “traditional” context in which a fiddler would perform. That is to say, a recording of a performance taken from a dance or a concert is more live than a recording made in a studio regardless of the end result. Reverb plays a key role in constructing liveness in Cape Breton fiddle recordings, by connecting the performance to a particular space, whether it is the “natural” ambient sound of an on-location recording or a recording that is manipulated to mimic aspects of culturally significant performance context.

Conceptions of liveness become more complex when a recording is not objectively live due to its social context. In these cases where liveness is indeed, as Meintjes suggests, a studio construction, elements of liveness are included to create a live

aesthetic. With regard to the element of “rawness” or imperfection, liveness is communicated through recordings that are more closely associated with Turino’s hi-fidelity field.

Participatory discrepancies are particularly important in creating a live sound, or human element. This approach is examined by Porcello, who maintains that Austin studio engineers create a live sound by actively including processual (time) and textural (tonal) participatory discrepancies (2005). Ethnomusicologist Charles Keil first introduced the term “participatory discrepancies” to address such issues in his landmark article, “Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music,” (1987). He writes, “The power of music is in its participatory discrepancies, and these are basically two kinds: processual and textural. Music, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be ‘out of time’ and ‘out of tune’” (1987: 275).

The significance of participatory discrepancies has been explored in the context of jazz rhythm sections by ethnomusicologist Prögler (1995), and ethnomusicologist Steven Feld has found participatory discrepancies to be a fundamental part of the musical aesthetic of the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea (1995). More recently, scholars have examined participatory discrepancies within the context of a recording studio. Porcello similarly discusses how participatory discrepancies, both temporal and tonal, are actively preserved to create a “live” sound in Austin recording studios, an aesthetic that is understood by Austin musicians as being in direct opposition to the highly polished Nashville studio aesthetic (2005).

In his study of liveness in Glenn Gould recordings, Paul Sanden discusses what he terms “corporeal livenesss,” sounds of liveness that demonstrate the physicality of the



performance such as the sound of Gould's voice (2009: 21) or the creaking of his chair (2009: 24). Such sounds embody the music and make explicit reference to the physical body of the performer. Without these contextualizing sounds, an audio recording could be heard as divorced from the physical body that performed it. In a Cape Breton recording, this "corporeal" liveness occurs through extra-musical sounds such as the sound of a musician's stomping foot keeping time, or crowd noise.

A "polished" aesthetic of liveness is expressed through sound quality and overall detail of a recording, often taken to the point of hyper-realism. This approach creates a much more detailed sound than what would be experienced by an audience in reality. Although hyper-realism is not the same as liveness, it is an important characteristic of a "polished" live aesthetic. This sense of liveness is usually more closely associated with Turino's field of studio audio art, where recordings are manipulated to evoke or even construct liveness in the imagination of the listener. For example, this polished, live aesthetic may attempt to communicate liveness in one's imagination by creating a recording that contains such aural detail that it would sound as if the listener were seated in the same room as the performers. Moreover, elements of the social context of the performance such as crowd noise may be included in a controlled, rationalized way (e.g., the use of audio sampling), as opposed to the hi-fidelity approach of capturing these sounds *in situ*.

Popular music and media studies scholar Jonathan Burston explores the audio aesthetic of hyper-reality in relation to mega-musicals; the individual miking style (as opposed to the room-miking approach) allows for hyper-realistic situations where actors can whisper for effect, or conversely, exaggerate the volume of an actor's voice, for a

god-like effect (1998: 221). Porcello discusses hyper-reality in regard to studio recording, through his analysis of drum-kit miking (2005: 108). As he explains, each piece of the kit is typically miked individually, balanced and equalized in relation to every other piece, and combined to make a composite drum track.

The distinctions in liveness based on recording context have not been made by scholars such as Porcello or Meintjes because their work is entirely based on studio ethnography. While studio recordings are certainly common in Cape Breton, they are merely one portion of audio recordings; there are also significant numbers of on-location commercial recordings and homemade, non-commercial recordings as well. To have an accurate understanding of Cape Breton fiddle recordings as a whole, we must consider liveness as it is represented in all of these recording contexts. Meintjes, however, does implicitly discuss the difference between “raw” and “polished” liveness in unpacking the differing musical aesthetics of musicians and engineers. Zulu musicians, on one hand, conceptualize liveness as a wall of sound, understood through physical experience. The engineers, on the other hand, conceptualize liveness in its recorded form, valuing clarity and separation — a polished aesthetic that is required for success on an international level (2005: 18).

In Cape Breton, “raw” liveness can be equated with local, vernacular tradition, while “polished” liveness is associated with professionalism and the international music industry. It is noteworthy that there is a correlation between the recording contexts and how liveness is constructed. This correlation, however, is not strict, and various aspects of liveness or recording aesthetics can be combined, even if they might seem

contradictory.<sup>64</sup> For Cape Breton musicians negotiating their position between vernacular and professional music making, these contrasting live aesthetics can be used to create a recording that asserts Cape Breton identity on both local and international levels.

For instance, in a Cape Breton context, hi-fidelity recordings are often recorded on-location, in someone's home, representing a "raw" liveness that would not typically have the detailed sound quality of a recording studio. That having been said, it is equally possible (and fairly common) to make a hi-fidelity recording in a multi-track studio. In doing so, a sense of "raw" liveness could be preserved by recording in a "live off-the-floor" manner which preserves participatory discrepancies. Through close-miking and careful equalization, the recording could also represent aspects of a "polished," hyper-realistic liveness in regard to actual sound quality. These two seemingly opposed aesthetics can be combined to make a live sounding Cape Breton fiddle recording. Current recording practices in a multi-track studio rarely make use of a click-track (unless recording with a rock rhythm section), though such recordings are usually still not considered "live off-the-floor," due to the use of overdubs and audio editing.

### **Liveness in Cape Breton "Dance Tapes" and Commercial Recordings**

Although having a live sound is highly valued in a Cape Breton fiddle recording, the concept of liveness is culturally constructed, and as such, notions of liveness in Cape Breton fiddle recordings have changed in tandem with recording techniques. The construct of liveness is distinct from live recordings themselves, but live recordings are

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<sup>64</sup> This is consistent with Turino's description of the audio recording fields. Although two points on a continuum, Turino maintains that hi-fidelity recordings and studio audio art are not mutually exclusive categories (2008: 87-88).

typically considered to contain liveness, and as such, they are worthy of discussion. The exact meaning of what constitutes a live recording is subjective and dependent on framing. For instance, a live recording could range from a performance recorded on a piano roll to an on-location recording of a concert. Prior to multi-track studio technology, all recordings were, in a sense, live, in that a recording was directly representative of a specific performance, in contrast to the non-linear recording practices commonly found in multi-track recordings today. Despite the ambiguity of definition in regard to what constitutes a live recording, for my purposes, my participants conceive of live recordings as being in opposition to multi-track studio recordings. In this way, a truly live recording is determined primarily in relation to a “natural” performance context like a dance or concert.

Cape Breton fiddle recordings made before the 1970s were produced in what we would now term “live off-the-floor” style with little to no audio editing. This resulted in what some might refer to as a very live sounding recording, but are not actually considered live recordings due to their culturally decontextualized performances. Ian McKinnon explains that a commercial recording of Cape Breton fiddling, “rarely, if ever captures the musicians’ best performances. This feeling was conveyed by everyone I interviewed. The reason for this relates to the atmosphere within the recording session” (1989: 132).<sup>65</sup> McKinnon’s participants contrast these studio recordings with home-made recordings, or “dance tapes.” These highly valued amateur, field recordings (originally recorded on reel-to-reel recorders) of dances and house parties may lack the sound quality

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<sup>65</sup> While McKinnon makes a valid point, it is noteworthy that his thesis was written at a time when “live” commercial recordings were not yet common.

of studio recordings, but are thought of as some of the most accurate depictions of the tradition. Not only are the performers playing in a relaxed and uninhibited manner, but the extra-musical sounds of the performance context (i.e., crowd noise, dancers, etc.) are representative of the tradition and more broadly, of regional identity.

While differences between these two recording styles were originally clear cut, as technology developed and engineering practices became more varied, this distinction became less obvious. Prior to the 1970s, all commercial Cape Breton fiddle recordings were made by record labels in studios. The majority of Cape Breton fiddle recordings were made under the Celtic, Banff, and Rodeo record labels between 1935 and 1962. When Rodeo Records owner, George Taylor left the Maritimes and stopped making Cape Breton fiddle records in 1962,<sup>66</sup> there were very few commercial recordings made for the next decade. McKinnon posits that this slump in recording was due to both a lack of interest by record labels (Rodeo Records was by far the most prominent label making Cape Breton fiddle recordings at that time), and musicians being highly suspicious of record labels (1989: 96).

By the 1970s, commercial recordings became more common again, when Mark Wilson of Rounder Records and Dave Miller, an audio engineer from Halifax began making on-location recordings. Miller's recordings represent some of the first independent commercial recordings in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition.<sup>67</sup> With the advent of a mobile recording studio in the region, the first live commercial recording in the tradition was released, *Festival of Scottish Fiddling, 1973*, the first of several

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<sup>66</sup> By this time, Celtic and Banff record labels were owned by umbrella company, Rodeo Records.

<sup>67</sup> Some early clients of Dave Miller's Inter-Media Services were Kinnon Beaton, Carl MacKenzie, Winnie Chafe, and Dougie MacPhee.

recordings made at the Glendale Festival of Scottish fiddling.<sup>68</sup> This was the beginning of a shift toward greater ambiguity about the perceived liveness of a recording. The on-location, commercial recordings were made in a more relaxed manner, outside of the studio, yet still removed from the ideal social context of a party or dance. In a sense, they are more live than a studio recording, yet not as live as a dance tape.

These recordings still represent a “live off-the-floor” style of recording meant to be directly representative of a particular performance. The emergence of musicians who were “recording artists,” however, is much more recent, and began with Jerry Holland’s *Master Cape Breton Fiddler* (1982), the first recording to have extensive, planned arrangements presented in a highly polished manner, both in regard to the sound quality and performances themselves. As the multi-track studio began to offer greater artistic possibilities in regard to engineering, liveness became an aesthetic that could be constructed even without an audience present. The detail and clarity of a recording can also be construed as having a live quality, allowing listeners to hear the performance as if they were physically in the same room as the performers. In contemporary recordings, liveness becomes an abstract aesthetic with somewhat fluid definitions. Today, liveness can take the form of a recording of a gig (albums like this are now quite common), an on-location recording made in someone’s home, or be entirely constructed in a studio.

Two significant examples of a studio-constructed liveness found at dances and house parties in the Cape Breton imagination were Howie MacDonald’s *The Dance Last Night* (1997) and *Why 2 Keilidh* (2000). Both recordings are examples of concept albums,

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<sup>68</sup> The Glendale Festival of Scottish Fiddling began in 1973 as a reaction to the documentary *Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* (1971). There were records released that were recorded at this bi-annual (now annual) concert in 1973, 1977, and 1979.

a mix of music and comedy performed by MacDonald. In *The Dance Last Night*, he chronicles the trip to, and the events of, a Cape Breton square dance by archetypal and stereotypical Cape Breton characters Archie and Roddie.<sup>69</sup> MacDonald's portrayal of drinking, dry jokes, social interaction and music are exaggerated, but the satire is self-aware, and something that Cape Bretoners can relate to, the equivalent of what CODCO style comedy was (and is) for Newfoundlanders of a certain age.<sup>70</sup>

The nature of the CD as a concept album is explicitly referenced by the cover, which humorously creates its own version of the famous album art of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* (1967), but entirely with Cape Breton musicians. A humorous, over-the-top, experience at a dance or house party is something that many Cape Bretoners have had at one time or another. Moreover, they likely tell personal experience narratives that mirror these recordings. The setting for the storylines is deliberately vague for this reason, referencing not a specific dance, but conjuring up images and experiences of *all* dances or house parties.<sup>71</sup> *Why 2 Keilidh* (2000) represents an abstract, imagined space which depicts a house party, but also completely abandons this realism in favour of a polished, multi-track studio, pop aesthetic at times. As such, the recording exemplifies the multiple, and at times, contradictory sets of frames that can occur within the imagined space of a recording.

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<sup>69</sup> Little contextual information is revealed about the characters Archie and Roddie. It is established that they are both aging Cape Bretoners with heavy accents. Fond of traditional music, house parties, and alcohol, their comical experiences usually end in trouble for the somewhat wilder Roddie, who is also married.

<sup>70</sup> CODCO was a Newfoundland sketch comedy group whose CBC television show by the same name ran from 1987 to 1992. Much of the group's material was based on a satirical examination of Newfoundland stereotypes.

<sup>71</sup> This is much like the animated television show, *The Simpsons*, in which the city of Springfield is meant to represent "everytown" USA.

### **Liveness as Realism in On-location Recordings**

Paul MacDonald is an engineer who has worked on roughly one hundred albums at the time of this writing. His recordings represent “raw” liveness in a way that attempts to preserve the original social context of the performances. His recordings are done in an on-location, field-recording style, and can easily be placed in Turino’s “hi-fidelity” field of audio recordings. When recording, he carefully chooses an appropriate space with good acoustics and thoughtfully places the microphones. Microphone placement itself is critical, as he employs only a single stereo pair. Using a homemade engineering device, his mics are mounted on two hinged pieces of plywood, through which he controls the amount of reverb according to the degree the device is opened or closed.

He explains his aesthetic: “Basically, I just want my record to sound like you were sitting there, and that you can have some sort of experience of how much fun was had. The joy of it, the detail of it. What happened at that session, the detail and the joy and the setting” (Paul MacDonald 2011). This method of recording is deliberately different from that of multi-track recordings. MacDonald explained further,

There’s something about the way instruments mix in the air that you can’t or could never do with a mixing board. [...] When those instruments are vibrating and playing together, there are special things that happen that you can’t make happen through the wires. It’s not possible. Only air can do that. [...] There’s a real magic and a soul, I think, that you capture in the air. (2011)

In these comments, we can see that although MacDonald values sound quality in his recordings, he resists the aesthetic of total clarity and separation characteristic of multi-track studio recordings. Instead of recreating the liveness through technological studio manipulation, he attempts to keep the timbre of the instruments and sound of the room directly representative of the performance as it happened.



This recording aesthetic is particularly important to the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. While having a highly “polished” recording is valued in some contexts, for those who conceptualize the tradition as one that exists in dance halls and house parties, the quality of liveness may take priority over aspects of the performance. Moreover, non-commercial recordings occupy an extremely important position in the tradition. Dance tapes are highly valued and sought after, and the most important musical source for many fiddlers.<sup>72</sup> It is these amateur field recordings that have been MacDonald’s main inspiration for his own recordings. As such, recreating a natural, live performance is also important to him:

That Mike Hall record<sup>73</sup> was done in three hours. I had the piano tuned, walked in, stuck that rig in front of the piano and the fiddle, moved it around a bit until I had a nice mix, said “Okay guys, we’re ready,” recorded all the music, had a cup of tea, and went home. That’s the record. But also, it was a good room, and the other essential ingredient is there – a couple of good listeners. Minnie and Alex MacMaster<sup>74</sup> were there. To me, it’s always important too, that when you’re making a recording that you’re actually making it for people. [...] When you’ve got Alex and Minnie on the couch, you’re playing for Alex and Minnie. You’re playing for people, and there’s a certain thing between listener and player there. Listener, player, room, microphones, you know? That’s really special. Whereas, the other way, okay, well yeah, it’s great, it’s all polished, everything’s perfect. Wonderful. But it’s lacking those ingredients, and to me, to have at least one or two good listeners in the room is very important. (2011)

MacDonald’s high valuation of an audience mirrors the “traditional” dance tape conception of a live recording. The inclusion of an audience, even a small one, links the performance to a culturally relevant social context which involves the audience as participants, albeit implicitly.

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<sup>72</sup> Dance tape tradition includes several hundred amateur field recordings of dances and house parties which are actively traded and distributed among traditional music lovers.

<sup>73</sup> Mike Hall’s first Cape Breton fiddle recording, *A Legacy Not to be Forgotten* (2010).

<sup>74</sup> Alex and Minnie MacMaster (née Beaton) of Troy, Cape Breton, are well-known members of the Cape Breton traditional music scene. In addition to being Natalie MacMaster’s parents, Minnie is also an accomplished step-dancer.

MacDonald goes to great lengths to focus on realism as opposed to the idealized perfection of a consciously manipulated studio performance. He continues,

Every one of them has a wart or two of some sort. Chairs that squeak, you know? On *The Fiddle Tree*<sup>75</sup> at one point, like in one of the most profound parts of a slow air, you can hear this fly buzzing himself to death on the floor, right in the middle of the musicians. <laughs> So, maybe some of my recordings have a little too much detail. (2011)

Here, we begin to see that although “raw” liveness is the dominant aesthetic for MacDonald, his recordings are still informed by a “polished” aesthetic. There is an element of imagined perfection, to these recordings, a frame which is broken by the intrusion of “corporeal” liveness, making the recording perhaps *too* live at times.

This realism, however, is highly important to him, and as such, he manipulates the sound of the recording as little as possible. In MacDonald’s view, this is part of preserving the musicians’ tone and dynamics. This translates to specific engineering methods:

I’ve never used compression. I’ve used reverb only to fix bad sounding rooms that are too dry – I’ll put a little touch of reverb on. But I’ve never used compression. I’ll use EQ, again, only to fix a room. I don’t use EQ to change an instrument’s sound. I use EQ to correct room fluctuations that don’t sound that great. But I’m not an engineer that goes dialing up the Nashville sound. Mark O’Connor...<sup>76</sup> No. I just leave the fiddle exactly like it is. If it’s high endy, then it’s high endy. (2011)

That having been said, MacDonald’s recordings are not entirely free of sonic manipulation or modern studio engineering practices. For a commercial recording, he explained that he records three takes, and refines the performance by cutting and pasting

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<sup>75</sup> *The Fiddle Tree* was a recording and book published by Cape Breton luthier Otis Thomas in 2011. The recording features Thomas, Sarah McFayden, Mairi Campbell, Abby Newton, Laoise Kelly, Paul MacDonald, and Claudine Langille. All of these musicians play instruments made by Thomas from the wood of the same large sugar maple tree.

<sup>76</sup> Mark O’Connor is a fiddler / violinist who is a high-profile Nashville session musician.

various takes. In this way, he is willing to manipulate the performance itself to some extent, but not the actual sound quality or tonal aesthetic.

Although the “rawness” of such liveness holds significant cultural value, in part due to its connection to dance tape recordings, a more “polished” aesthetic of some studio recordings is also sought after. J. P. Cormier comments,

Although field recordings need to be done, I think it’s a detriment to do a field recording of somebody who’s not dying – somebody who’s quite able to go into a perfectly good studio and make a beautiful record. And you put a field recording out of him? It doesn’t make sense to me. It was in vogue for a while to do those things. [...] But me, if I ever make another fiddle record, [...] I’m going to make a record that’s sonically... syrup. You’ll listen to it and just fall over in your chair and melt onto the floor. Now that’s what I would go for, for myself. I want to erase all my pimples and freckles, and warps and knobs. I don’t want to *exaggerate* them trying to be PBS material.<sup>77</sup> But like I say, it was the vogue thing to do every once in a while, but you’re not seeing it happen anymore. Unless it’s for real. [...] That’s perfectly legitimate and should be done as often as you possibly can. (2012)

Cormier’s “polished” aesthetic does not come as a surprise, considering he worked as a session musician in Nashville for much of his early adult life. The highly “polished” aesthetic that he values references the original performance in a less direct way than MacDonald’s, relying more heavily on an imagined perfection that can be constructed in a multi-track studio. The contrast between these aesthetics raises distinctions between a recording’s function and its target audience. A “raw” recording reminiscent of a dance tape may be highly valued on a local level, but a highly “polished” studio recording may hold more cultural capital at an international level, where listeners may be more familiar with an engineering style more akin to that generally found in popular music.

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<sup>77</sup> The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) dedicates a substantial amount of its programming to educational purposes and frequently airs documentary films.

### **Liveness and Violin Tone at Lakewind Sound Studios**

A key influence on Cape Breton fiddle recordings, like any audio recording, is the audio engineer, and in regard to studio recordings, this often includes Lakewind Sound Studios and its engineer, Mike Sheppard (locally known as Shep or Sheppy). Originally established in Point Aconi in 1995 by Gordie Sampson and Fred Lavery for personal use, the studio became well-known among their friends, who began making use of the studio as well. Before long the small, private studio had to expand into a full-scale business enterprise. Today, Lakewind is one of the most respected studios on the east coast, and thus a high-profile location for Cape Breton fiddle recording.

Over the course of its nineteen-year history, the studio has received numerous industry awards. In addition, Lavery, Sampson, and Sheppard have received substantial recognition for their contribution to the industry, with a total of over fifty awards (East Coast Music Awards, Music Nova Scotia Awards, Juno Awards, etc.) associated with the studio. Lakewind is prolific in regard to traditional music recording. Lavery and I counted well over seventy-five traditional Cape Breton CDs that were recorded there, which includes the majority of the recordings made by my participants. To put this into perspective, this averages out to roughly six or seven albums a year – a significant number for a relatively niche music market on an island that has a population of approximately 135, 974 (Statistics Canada, Census 2011).

Sheppard's work as an engineer and producer was something that my participants all thought was an important part of their recordings. They used terms such as "pristine," "clear," and "crisp" to describe the overall aesthetic of Lakewind and Sheppard's engineering style. My participants felt that any traditional album recorded there had an

instantly recognizable sound. In reference to this, Jason Roach commented, “Lakewind, the studio itself, is defining that [the sound of Cape Breton]. So much of that is Sheppy deciding on a sound” (October 2010). Lavery also acknowledged Sheppard’s influence in the recordings that are made there:

The term self-produced is a little deceiving in the sense that, you know, usually, someone like Sheppy is there. He’s assisting in production values all the time, and suggesting... maybe helping out when things go a little off track or whatever. You know, just giving sound advice to the artist if they’re not particularly experienced in the studio. A lot of the time, these people could benefit from a producer, but a lot of times they don’t have the money to hire a producer. So, that’s usually the case. As fiddlers gain more experience they’re able to self-produce. They learn how to do it through experience, so it kind of works itself out. (2011)

Well-known locally for his almost magical editing abilities, Sheppard routinely isolates individual ornamentations (i.e., cuts, grace notes, trills, etc.), which he can effortlessly manipulate and reposition within the track, often rendering punch-ins<sup>78</sup> redundant. Lavery commented to me that Sheppard was unmatched in speed and accuracy in this intricate editing. These abilities, along with his familiarity with the music makes him one of the most-skilled engineers in regard to traditional fiddle recordings.

Violin timbre is a crucial part of a recording, and can be significant in how fiddlers relate to their music. As an engineer, Sheppard plays a key role in shaping the timbre of instruments in the studio. The sound that he and the fiddler agree upon is not only an important signifier of Cape Bretonness, but a sound that negotiates the disconnect between “live” and “studio” sounds. He explains,

I try to stay kind of true to the natural sound. That’s where I sway. But as soon as you put a microphone anywhere close to a fiddle, everybody would call that the

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<sup>78</sup> A punch-in is a form of audio editing where a portion of a recording is re-recorded, or “overdubbed” to replace the original recording. This is most often used to fix small mistakes in an otherwise well-performed take.

studio sound. [...] I worked with a couple of Irish fiddlers, and they immediately want to roll the high end off the fiddle. All that top stuff, the clarity part of it, it's not important to them. They just want more kind of a dry, tight sounding fiddle. So, on a couple of occasions, that's been the case. And in Cape Breton style, it's trying to get the full spectrum, so it sounds like you're sitting in front of the fiddler. (2012)

It is significant that Sheppard uses much of the same language to describe his “polished” live aesthetic as Paul MacDonald does to describe his “raw” live aesthetic. Both believe their recordings to sound as if the listener were physically in front of the performers: “to sound like you were sitting there” (Paul MacDonald 2011); “sounds like you’re sitting in front of the fiddler” (Mike Sheppard 2012). This stark contrast in how the same idea is expressed underscores the intertextual nature of liveness, and the role that imagination plays in shaping aesthetics.

Creating a live violin sound in the studio becomes a game of framing, in which the sound that is constructed has aspects of a “studio” sound, as well as consciously included, staged elements of a live performance. While this sound is distinctly different from what would actually be experienced in a live setting, it is understood to be representative of a live performance. In our interview, Sheppard discussed the slippage regarding these colliding frames of context:

It's a tough thing, because fiddlers, they have their instrument by their ear. So, what they're hearing coming through the speakers is really two different things. But you just try to find the middle ground there, where it sounds as close as it does if they were listening to themselves... out of body. <laughs> How it sounds to a person standing right in front of them, that's how we try to represent that on the recording. [...] And of course, some people are used to DI...<sup>79</sup> like the live sound, either in a kitchen or on a stage. So there's a bunch of stuff you have to kind of meet in order to get them happy. (Mike Sheppard 2012)

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<sup>79</sup> A “DI box” (Direct Input) is a preamp used for instruments like violins and guitars in live settings.

Sheppard reveals the importance of perspective in conceptualizing a recorded sound. Any number of violin sounds may be realistic and interpreted as live: the sound of an amplified violin, the sound of a violin as the player hears it, or the sound of a violin being played in a hall. Which sound is used (potentially a combination of several perspectives simultaneously) depends on how one conceives of the imagined performance that the recording depicts.

Fiddler Chrissy Crowley discusses how microphone placement is important in creating an appropriate sound, one that at times must be negotiated. For her most recent album, she explained,

According to Sheppy and Fred [Lavery], I have an “Irish” tone. They could have worked it so that I was further away from the mic and had more of that “Cape Breton” sound, that echo. Or I could keep that Irish tone and sit closer to the mic, and I actually preferred that. (2010)

Space is a key aspect to one’s violin tone in a studio. This can take the form of how the fiddler experiences space in regard to his or her distance from a microphone, as well as how studio space shapes the sound of the recording. Kimberley Fraser offers,

I like it if they can get a sound that’s a nice room sound where you have some air. As opposed to a very tight, room sound, I don’t like. [...] There are advantages to doing it in the isolation booth, for sure. But if you’ve got your stuff together and you’re well rehearsed, you can just go in and play it. There’s nothing that beats that in my opinion. Getting a nice, big room sound and playing live where you’re not separated from the piano player. (2011)

For Fraser, an important part of sounding live in the studio is creating the sound of a space that *could* sound “real” as opposed to one that is decontextualized, separated from a live performance context.

While violin tone functions as a signifier of region and the tradition as a whole, it is also a highly personal part of a fiddler’s musical identity and how she or he conceives

of the tradition. While this is demonstrated in these instances mentioned above, it can be particularly evident when the symbolic meaning of timbre is not understood or properly respected by the engineer. Paul MacDonald tells of a time when such a conflict arose in the mixing process:

So, I had this experience with Jerry [Holland] where we worked really hard just to record him as natural as possible, with no compression, no reverb. No compression, or anything like that. And we were having fun. And we made a couple of good records, you know? And then we went down to do some mastering for his first CD. And in the mastering studio, you know, this very well intentioned engineer, a CBC engineer, hooked it up through these compressors... and it's really fancy, state of the art for its day – Focusrite EQs and compressors.<sup>80</sup> And the first thing he did was squash Jerry's dynamics and rolled all of the top off his tone. And Jerry got really upset, but he was too shy to... He felt awkward, you know, because this guy was giving away his free time and doing us a big favour, and he was a big wig... you know? What do you say? I could just tell Jerry wasn't happy. And this guy kept saying, "Well, it's my professional opinion that that's too much high end for the public." And finally Jerry leaves to go smoke. "Do you hear what that guy's doing to my tone?" [...] And we went back in... Even so, you know, that guy... we tried to compromise with him and he was such a jerk about it. That's Jerry Holland, man. His zing. The zing. The treble. The zing of his tone. (2011)

In this anecdote, MacDonald demonstrates the significance of violin tone, or timbre, as representing Cape Breton identity, personal identity, and liveness. At the time it was common for recordings to limit high-end frequencies, but this is an example of how equalization and timbre can be very meaningful. Although violin tone may be presented in a recording in drastically different ways, both MacDonald and Sheppard agree that capturing a full spectrum of frequencies (particularly the high end) is a fundamental part of creating a Cape Breton violin tone on a recording. As we have already seen, this characteristic Cape Breton violin sound can be expressed using a realistic approach, or in

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<sup>80</sup> Focusrite is a company that manufactures high-end audio recording hardware, based in England.



a more abstract manner that may take more artistic liberties in constructing an imagined performance.

### **Liveness and Hyper-reality in the Studio**

One of the most important parts of more traditional notions of liveness is the sound of the foot stomp. Considered by many to be an essential part of a fiddle performance, this is an important part of a live sounding, Cape Breton recording. There is an element of staging to this; for example, some musicians footwear, or a specific area of the floor may not have a pleasing sound, so the floor may be set up to construct an area for the musician to stomp.<sup>81</sup> This is actually not something that is limited to the studio, however, as I am aware of several traditional musicians who occasionally make a point of bringing plywood or other materials to stomp on at live performances. In both cases, the foot stomp is consciously staged as an iconic reference to some other performance, the dance hall or the house party belonging to the collective imagination. Glenn Graham recounts the deliberate, almost painstaking process of getting an appropriate “foot sound” in the studio:

I really liked those types of studio fiddle sounds that Howie MacDonald was getting. I think there might have been a CD that really influenced me where I knew he had a good foot sound in it. I actually brought him in to record. [...] And we went all around the studio, different places, just trying different places for the foot sound. Actually, where I recorded most of the CD wasn't in one of the isolation booths, it was in a hallway that was between the bathroom and the office of the studio. Because there was this nice place where when you hit your foot it felt like you were on a stage in a hall, or just on your own kitchen or living room floor. It just had this little bit of give to it. So, to me, it's important, because I tap my foot and without tapping my foot and having a good backing to the fiddling, it

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<sup>81</sup> This is often accomplished by putting a rubber mat where the musician's foot hits the ground; however, other materials may be used depending on the musician's footwear.

just doesn't feel right to me. So when I do that I want to try to make it, I actually want to try to make the studio sound similar to how it would sound if I was playing it somewhere else, too. I want a live sound to it. If you're going to be listening to me, well, at least the fiddling, the foot, which I think is a part of my music, should come out in my recording, too. (2011)

Sheppard, the engineer for that recording recalls, "[Glenn Graham] wanted the hollow floor so that he could stomp. And you can hear that all over the record. I mean, it just sounds like thunder. And it can create energy in a track for sure" (2012). In this situation, we can see how musicians can interact in highly specific ways with studio space and the reverberant qualities they possess. Théberge argues that recording studios have become increasingly rationalized with regard to space, sometimes even existing as "non-places" cut off from the world (1997). Graham, however, actively chose to record in a space that was less rationalized than the extremely isolated spaces in the studio, and embraced the sonic character of a space and place that was culturally and personally meaningful.

Recreating a live feeling through the inclusion of a foot stomp reveals the importance the foot plays in some musicians' conception of the music. This is an instance that may also include a certain degree of slippage in regard to how music is experienced differently from various perspectives. In a live, non-amplified setting, the sound of a fiddler's foot is often quite loud and heard by the audience; in a high volume, amplified setting like a dance, however, the sound of a fiddler's foot is considerably less prominent, and may not be heard at all. In this way, including a "foot sound" in a recording relates not only to the sound of a performance in some contexts, but how musicians relate to the music on a physical, experiential basis. The stomp, to a fiddler, is part of the music whether it is heard by the audience or not, and part of how the music is embodied.

This is another example of “corporeal” liveness, in which sound is an expression of the body. This is created with a “polished” hyper-realistic aesthetic that differs significantly from the way the “corporeal” liveness of a squeaking chair intruded on the recording Paul MacDonald spoke of earlier. Instead of being a sound that comes from outside the frame, the “corporeal” liveness of the foot stomp in this case, is part of the frame itself.

Although the inclusion of a “foot sound” has become a fairly common practice in the recording studio, it has not always been part of the aesthetic of a studio. Before the stomp became a sought-after technique in the studio, it was actively avoided. Kimberley Fraser recalled, “The funny thing, when I first went in, they gave me a carpet so you wouldn’t hear the foot sound. Which now, I’d rather hear the foot, I like hearing the foot. [...] Because it’s the way you’d hear it in a live performance” (2011). J. P. Cormier similarly explains that avoiding the sound of the feet on a recording was important in early Cape Breton recordings: “Winston Fitzgerald who cut the four or five LPs, however you want to count them. The four or five that he put out, he cut those with two mics. One mic about a foot away from him, a ribbon mic,<sup>82</sup> and one mic sitting between Estwood and Beattie.<sup>83</sup> And his shoes off so the mics wouldn’t pick up their feet. That’s how they made the record” (2012).

The hyper-reality of the recording studio is also evident in some violin sounds. While to some, a live sound is created through staging iconic sounds like that of a foot stomp and reverb, some musicians relate to liveness through a sound that is as detailed as possible, an almost perfect audio fidelity. J. P. Cormier shares,

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<sup>82</sup> A ribbon microphone uses a diaphragm of thin foil to convert the air pressure produced by sound waves into an electrical signal.

<sup>83</sup> Beattie Wallace was Fitzgerald’s piano accompanist, and Estwood Davidson was his guitarist.

Jerry Holland had the best violin sound that I've ever heard on a record. [...] He was the first person to ever close-mike a violin. They always thought you had to have a room to record a violin properly. No. He had two... a stereo pair sandwiching his fiddle. [...] And there was a third mic there in the corner. So they mixed these three things together. And I'm telling you, you can hear every single breath, movement of finger. It was so intimate, it was almost unpleasant. The first time you heard it, you went, "Holy jeez. I can hear *everything*." Every scratch, movement of the bow, every single thing he did. You could hear him breathing sometimes. That was the best fiddle sound I ever heard, and that's what I've always done since then. I've always multi-miked my violins and done it. (2012)

In this passage, Cormier provides yet another possible depiction of a recorded Cape Breton violin sound as live. Multi-miking a violin offers an extreme close-up perspective of the instrument's tone, an approach somewhat different from either Paul MacDonald or Mike Sheppard's imagination of live violin sounds.

### **Audio Editing and Liveness**

The possibilities of audio editing in a modern multi-track recording studio can be mind boggling; from punch-ins, to pitch correction and time manipulation, a talented engineer can "fix" many parts of a performance without the musician even realizing it has been altered. When possible, Colin Grant prefers to limit audio editing on his recordings, but it is important to him to have such options should he require them:

I try not to rely too much on fixing things, although I realize that it is a part of [it.] Until I get to the level of Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald where I could walk in and play confidently for an afternoon and walk out, with a tape, I can't make a record without relying on a few little fixes and studio tricks. So when you have the luxury of those studio tricks, then you take things in a slightly different approach. And that approach, a more relaxed approach, I think, is what allows today's musicians to record confidently in the studio – knowing that they can afford to make little things better with the magic of technology. (2010)

In Grant's most recent recording project with his band Sprag Session, the group attempted to find a compromise between sounding "industrial"<sup>84</sup> and "organic" (2011), something that could be easily paralleled with my own framework of "polished" and "raw." As a group that plays a mix of bars and folk festivals, live performances and audience feedback are integral to the band's identity. In this way, creating a palpably live sound in the studio was a way to connect to their participatory musicking.

Grant explains trying to retain the natural imperfections and variations made by the group as a whole: "We were careful not to line up everything so that it wouldn't sound unnatural. The certain ebb and flow, where two instruments don't necessarily land exactly at the same time, goes a long way to make a record sound real" (2011). By "lining up" instruments, Grant is referring to minute rhythmic differences between instruments. As such, he explains that he (and the rest of the band) deliberately avoids having perfect rhythmic unison, instead opting to keep instruments slightly asynchronous during the editing process. This speaks to Prögler's discussion of "humanizing" electronic music, who asserts, "Music industry producers and inventors have noted the importance of understanding concepts like swing and groove in their quest to 'humanize' electronically produced musics. No one wants to be the Dr. Frankenstein who produces the dreaded Mechanical Man or a music that sounds machine-made" (1995: 22). In a sense, sounding "human," or natural, involves a degree of imperfection. Much like Austin studio musicians, Sprag Session values having a "rawness" to their sound, yet still engages in the highly rationalized, "polished" aesthetic of multi-track studios and popular recordings.

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<sup>84</sup> Grant uses the term "industrial" to refer to the broad aesthetic of the international music industry, and not a specific musical genre.

Donnie Calabrese, the bassist for Sprag Session, brings a realist aesthetic of imperfection to the group that is not dissimilar to Paul MacDonald's approach to recording. Currently a doctoral student in English at Western University of Ontario specializing in the work of James Joyce, Calabrese compared the studio editing process to editing a novel. He expressed Joyce's influence in his own musical aesthetics, detailing the significant editing process Joyce undertook after publishing the first edition of *Ulysses* (1922), which was riddled with typographical errors. Joyce "said that mistakes are the gateway to genius. If you see where the author's mistakes are, then you start learning their patterns. You can learn how they work by how they fuck up" (Calabrese 2012). Calabrese elaborated, relating this interest in the imperfection of reality found in a musical performance:

People don't think it, but you can hear that when you listen to a record that's been cut up and Pro-Tooled to fuck. It *sounds* that way, right? There's usually a lot of compression that goes on those type of records... and people like that. But... I don't like that. I like musicians, and I like people playing music. And it's not perfect; it's never perfect. I like the grit and the personality that comes out in it. [...] I don't know when this obsession or this fascination with perfect sounding fiddle records began, but I love those old, dirty recordings. And I feel like what we did on the Sprag Session record is more akin to those old things. We didn't auto-tune anything. What's the point? We go out of tune, and it sounds bad. Yeah! Sometimes we go out of tune and sound bad! <laughs> (2012)

The Sprag Session recording retains a sense of liveness by minimizing processes that would place the recording in the realm of polished, hyper-realistic studio recordings.

The decision of how live a recording should sound in respect to participatory discrepancies is often a group decision. Even on a solo album, fiddlers often turn to their fellow studio musicians and engineer to make such a judgement. It is for this reason that Mike Sheppard is commonly credited as a co-producer on traditional recordings at

Lakewind by virtue of his advice on such matters. For Sprag Session, having a group of peers to validate each other's assessments of the recording was an important part of the recording process. Calabrese explains, "It gets so *strange*, because you don't hear the tunes anymore, after a while. And so... you're being so scientific and pedantic about everything that scrolls by. It becomes a visual line on a screen instead of a song or whatever" (2012). After several hours of intense listening, ears can become tired, and it can be difficult to discern what and what not to edit. Colin Grant comments,

That is a very difficult thing because only time can really determine that. [...] We would listen back and make notes at certain time points where we thought we heard something. Then we'd listen and often times, we'd hear, "No... that doesn't really bother me." But sit in your car and listen to it for a week and things start to jump at you. [...] We all need to be happy with the recording and if something is jumping out at you, screw organic. If it's going to bother you forever, find a way to make it sound organic *and* groovy so that it fits. And it could be a matter of just moving one note. Or tuning one note. (2011)

These issues are further complicated by the substantial cost of studio time. When "time is money," musicians can feel pressured to avoid unnecessary editing for the sake of efficiency, as well as aesthetics.

## **Conclusion**

The aesthetics of Cape Breton fiddle recordings value liveness, a quality that relates these recordings to their original social context and frame the tradition as one centered on participatory experience for both performers and audience. Some musicians and engineers prefer a live sound that is closely related to a hi-fidelity recording, essentially a field recording, complete with the "microvariations" of participatory discrepancies – the performance as it was performed. Others create a very "detailed"

recording, but one that is influenced significantly by the multi-track studio, an imagined performance that is both idealized and not actually possible in reality. While elements such as violin timbre, reverb, crowd noise, and even foot-stomping take on symbolic value and indicate liveness, their meaning can change according to context. They are woven together in an intertextual fashion, drawing on experiences in the listener's imagination.

Drawing primarily from three different recording contexts, I have demonstrated how conceptions of liveness can change considerably from field recordings, to hyper-realistic studio recordings, and the strategies musicians and engineers employ to reconcile these at times contradictory notions of liveness. A “raw” aesthetic of liveness is directly connected to the social context of a performance, embracing participatory discrepancies. A “polished” aesthetic often constructs liveness through hyper-reality, taking greater liberties to create a recording less related to an actual event than an imagined one.

Both aesthetics attempt to create the same thing – a recording that sounds as if you were actually there experiencing the performance. “Raw” liveness takes on a particular local meaning, while “polished” liveness connects the recording to the standardized sounds found in the international music industry and popular culture at large. As such, Cape Breton musicians must negotiate these differing definitions of liveness for their own uses, creating recordings that uphold accepted Cape Breton aesthetics while also satisfying norms and expectations locally and abroad.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion and Final Thoughts**

The writing of this thesis has been a growing experience for me. I learned some surprising things about my own heritage, maturing as both an academic and musician. I met many new people who were knowledgeable and passionate about Cape Breton fiddling. My participants were thoughtful and well-spoken, careful to express themselves in a way that would reflect well on their peers. I feel that I have been successful in my original goal – to present the Cape Breton fiddling tradition in a manner that my participants could relate to, a snapshot of Cape Breton fiddling today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I wanted to critically examine some of the most pervasive attitudes and seemingly mundane aspects of the tradition that are sometimes taken for granted, and rarely articulated explicitly. The Cape Breton fiddling tradition has experienced considerable change in recent decades, and is often a site where power, socio-cultural discourses, and identity are negotiated between both individuals and groups.

This thesis demonstrates the diversity of not just the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, but of tradition as a whole. Although a seemingly well-defined, fairly homogenous music, it is evident that there are many different, sometimes contradictory interpretations of the tradition, which fuel the cultural politics at play with various social groups in the region. This negotiation of tradition often occurs implicitly, in subtle ways that may not be apparent to a casual observer. Nevertheless, decisions regarding how tradition bearers represent themselves musically, and how they position themselves within existing social groups and interpretations of the tradition can have substantial consequences to musicians. Such socio-cultural processes speak to how social groups, a

tradition, and a region come to terms with global and social change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Retaining their own distinct identity while adopting elements from global popular culture, Cape Breton traditional musicians express their musical identities in complex ways, engaging with, and even challenging existing and influential discourses. It is evident that glocalization is a process that is not clear-cut or predictable.

The musical and representational decisions made by Cape Breton traditional musicians have many effects on their lives. In addition to having potential economic or professional consequences, there are important considerations regarding status and group. Cultural capital informs much debate surrounding what is culturally “legitimate,” with tradition bearers’ attitudes and values having considerable influence within their social circle. Such negotiation of cultural values, however, is inherently unstable, and as my research reveals, is subject to change according to context. Even widely accepted beliefs are sometimes challenged, or repurposed for actors to better suit their own needs.

In my third chapter, I examined how power and cultural capital are linked to ethnicity, region, and group. As a musical tradition largely rooted in the music of Highland and Hebridean Scots, Cape Breton fiddling is prominently used as an expression of Cape Breton Scottish identity, particularly in Inverness County. However, some musicians challenge historical discourses that so clearly ethnicize or regionalize the tradition, offering more nuanced, more inclusive, or even subversive alternatives. The Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts programming debate was one particular instance when competing representations of Scottish culture in Cape Breton were publicly critiqued by community members. It was evident that there are strong divides within the

Cape Breton traditional music community about what should be considered “legitimate” culture, how the region should be represented, and the institutionalization of tradition.

With this socio-cultural context as the background for Cape Breton fiddling as a whole, musical performances themselves can similarly function as texts that represent the tradition in different ways. In my fourth chapter, I examined how repertoire can be tied to specific interpretations of the tradition, framing a performance as being related to specific individuals, regions, or even revealing a performer’s opinions on tradition and musical change. Moreover, repertoire itself is further contextualized by how it is arranged and accompanied, making the relationship between fiddler and accompanist part of a highly complex system of musical communication, one that can provide meaning on a myriad of levels. What is or is not appropriate in specific performance contexts can change considerably, and is something that is constantly being negotiated between the performers and their audience.

Musical compositions, when removed from the context of a performance, can also be understood as commodities or gifts that can be owned or shared. In the fifth chapter of this thesis, I explored the nature of intellectual property rights within the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. The legal and ethical concerns associated with mechanical royalties that Cape Breton traditional musicians face are distinct from those encountered by other popular musicians. As a tradition that simultaneously belongs to a non-commercial local community as well as the international music industry, one’s decisions regarding intellectual property affect both contexts. A musician may identify more with the local music community and freely share his or her compositions, or choose to receive compensation as a professional artist. Such decisions can change from one instance to the

next, making social and professional ties extremely influential in how musicians view their place in their respective communities.

For Cape Breton traditional musicians, the intersection between the global and the local also occurs through their use of audio technology. My sixth chapter detailed the role that amplification has played, and continues to play in Cape Breton fiddling. By relying on what have now become standardized methods of amplification via violin pickups, electric keyboards, preamps, and PA systems, Cape Breton musicians have sculpted a uniquely local soundscape through global material culture. Although these amplification techniques are now a pervasive part of how the Cape Breton musical community represents itself sonically, they are not accepted by all musicians; some use these products grudgingly, while others reject them completely. This is a significant example of the value of individual agency, and the delicate balance that is necessary for consensus to be achieved within a group.

The professionalization of Cape Breton fiddling has undoubtedly led to the prevalence of such audio technology within the tradition. However, technology has had a profound effect not only on live performance, but on commercial recordings as well. In the penultimate chapter of this thesis, I presented the relationship between live performance and audio engineering. The concept of “liveness” is integral to Cape Breton fiddle recordings (and was even from the days of early amateur field recordings), but “liveness” may be represented on an audio recording in different ways by different individuals. Some prefer a performance to be presented as “live” to the point of revealing imperfection, while others prefer a polished, hyper-realistic, professional aesthetic. Regardless of how “liveness” is portrayed, it functions as a symbolic element, using the

collective cultural imagination to reference common memories of live performances.

Again we see not only a distinct relationship between the local and global, but the negotiation of tradition itself and how it should be best represented.

There have been many kinds of musicians who have been part of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition: innovators, staunch preservationists, professionals, amateurs, composers, performers, the generous, the greedy, the revered sage, and the humble beginner. Although this thesis has made use of specific, contemporary data and examples, I submit that more broadly, many of the socio-cultural processes that I have examined throughout my research are not necessarily unique to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, the degree in which globalization, cultural change, popular culture, and technology affect society today is certainly more pronounced than in previous years, but these are all things that have been occurring for many years.

My research project has largely dealt with group and cultural politics. There is a variety of different social groups that are part of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. There are large groups, and there are considerably smaller groups within them, with many social groups overlapping. The same can be said for almost any scene or community. What is more significant than the groups themselves is how they function internally and how they relate to each other. Although there may be an overwhelming consensus on a topic, there is always room for, and there often is, at least some degree of dissent within the group. At other times, a lack of consensus expresses itself in full-blown contestation. In either case, some level of instability and fluidity are constants, even within the most stable situations. Not only does this underscore the importance of agency, but also demonstrates the intersubjectivity that is part of social interaction.

Due to the overlap among different social circles, Cape Breton traditional musicians, in turn, are each members of several different groups. Living in multiple contexts at any given time, the worlds of the professional, grassroots, global, and local are each important in their own way. One's priorities may change from one situation to the next, according to one's own personal needs or those of a given social group. This reorientation of worldview, however, occurs within larger, accepted discourses. As such, musicians may represent themselves and their music in a manner that is congruent with Cape Breton musical identity as a whole, yet still make nuanced adjustments to fit their own personal beliefs and values.

My research has built upon existing scholarship in Cape Breton fiddling to offer an in-depth look at the tradition in its current form. Previous research has largely been historically based, but this thesis contextualizes traditional music not as belonging entirely to the past, but something that is also relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of particular importance to this has been the influence the Celtic music boom of the 1990s has had on Cape Breton fiddling. I believe that it is only now that sufficient time has passed that we are beginning to truly see the effects that the musical events of the 1990s had on the tradition.

By approaching the tradition from a glocal perspective, I have been able to discuss issues associated with vernacular, grassroots musicking, as well as how Cape Breton fiddling is related to popular culture. Although previous scholars have addressed the tradition from only one of these perspectives, I have offered an extended analysis of the interplay that takes place between the grassroots and the professional worlds. This

contributes not only to the body of knowledge surrounding Cape Breton fiddling, but also to the study of popular music.

Finally, I must acknowledge areas that are worthy of further research. Despite the fact that there has been a considerable amount of academic research done on Cape Breton fiddling, I believe that academia is still only scratching the surface of this rich tradition. One aspect of my research that I briefly explored but ultimately dismissed is an extensive study of social network theory in the Cape Breton traditional music scene. Such research would be grounded in a significant amount of quantitative data, which would require the contextual, qualitative data that I have produced to properly interpret the findings. In addition, there is a wealth of knowledge merely waiting to be tapped in further research on accompaniment, specific to Cape Breton fiddling, or otherwise. A site of power negotiation, collaboration, arranging, and musical communication, sadly, the relationship between accompanists and lead musicians has been seldom explored by ethnomusicologists.

Technology has been a topic of importance throughout much of this thesis. Although technology has been mentioned tangentially by other academics with regard to Cape Breton fiddling, my research is the most complete discussion of such issues to date. In addition to offering new insight to technology studies in Cape Breton fiddling, and arguably, traditional musics as a whole, my thesis clearly demonstrates that technology plays a role in shaping culture in sometimes unexpected contexts. Although technology (and the discourses that surround it) has commonly been a topic reserved for the study of popular music or media studies, it is a subject that is pertinent to a broad range of socio-

cultural contexts. Technology has always been and will always be present in our daily life.

This thesis offers anthropologically influenced fields such as ethnomusicology or folklore an example of how the boundaries of tradition are defined, negotiated, and contested. I have shown how tradition is profoundly influenced by complex power relations, which may be either static or unstable. Furthermore, this research speaks to the theoretical relationship between structure and agency; social groups have larger trends or prevalent attitudes, while still having individual, more nuanced and varied worldviews.



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Appendix 1-1

Ryan's Fancy Arriving

Emile Benoit

**A** Reel

D G D G A

5 D G D G A D

**B** D

13 D G D A D

# Appendix 1-2

## The Green Gates

**A** Reel Irish Traditional

G C G C Am C D

5 G C G C Am D G

**B** G Am C D

13 G C D G

The musical score for 'The Green Gates' is presented in two systems, A and B. System A consists of measures 1 through 8, and System B consists of measures 9 through 16. The music is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in treble clef. Chords are indicated above the staff: G, C, G, C, Am, C, D in System A; G, C, G, C, Am, D, G in System A; G, Am, C, D in System B; and G, C, D, G in System B. System A begins with a repeat sign. System B also begins with a repeat sign. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

# Genesis

Jason Roach

274

Appendix 1-4

Tamarack'er Down

Donald Angus Beaton

A Reel A G

3 A E A

B A G A D 1. A D E A

2. A D E A

9

# Appendix 1-5

## Mabou Pizza Boy

Colin Grant

**A** Reel Em D

5 Em C D Em

**B** Em D Em D

13 Em D C D Em

17 Em D No chords

21 Em C D Em

# Appendix 1-6

## The Doppelganger

Chrissy Crowley

**A** Reel Em Am D G D/F#

Em Am D G

5

**B1** Em Am D G D

9

Em Am D G D

13

**C** C C G/B Am G D/F# Am G/B C D G D

17

C C G/B Am G D/F# Am G/B C D G D

21

**B2** Em Am D G D/F#

25

Em Am D

29

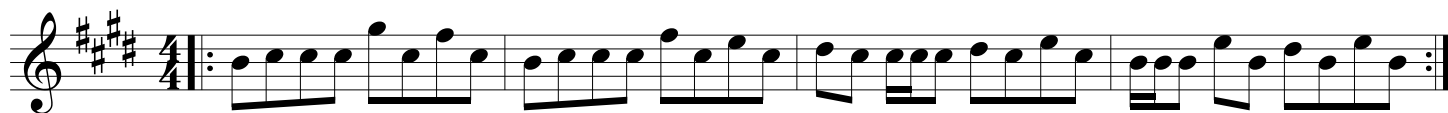
Appendix 1-7

The Gwanwitcha

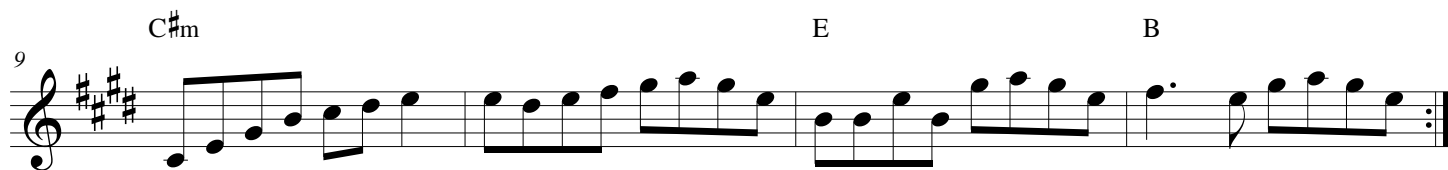
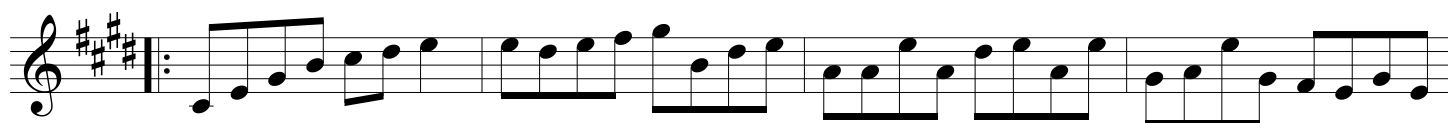
Colin Grant

Reel

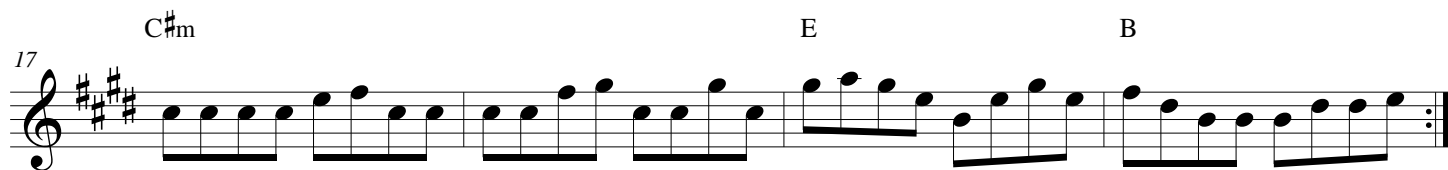
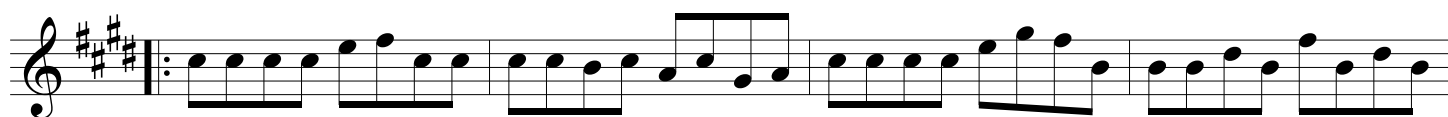
A C#m (Second time - F#m)



B C#m A G#



C C#m B





Appedix 1-8

The Gwanwitcha  
(Introduction)

Written by Colin Grant  
Arranged by Sprag Session

$\text{♩} = 118 \text{ bpm}$

Violin

Mandolin

Piano

Bass

Drum Set

The musical score is for a piece titled 'The Gwanwitcha (Introduction)' by Colin Grant, arranged by Sprag Session. The tempo is marked as 118 bpm. The score is written for five instruments: Violin, Mandolin, Piano, Bass, and Drum Set. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The Violin, Mandolin, and Piano parts are all marked with rests for the entire duration. The Bass part features a rhythmic melody in the first four measures, followed by a melodic line in the last four measures. The Drum Set part is marked with rests for the entire duration.

D. S.

[illegible]

22

Vln.

22

Mdn.

22

Pno.

22

Bass

22

D. S.

The musical score consists of five staves, each with a measure number '22' at the beginning. The staves are labeled Vln., Mdn., Pno., Bass, and D. S. on the left. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Violin (Vln.) staff contains five whole rests. The Mandolin (Mdn.) staff contains five measures of sixteenth-note patterns. The Piano (Pno.) staff is a grand staff with a right-hand part containing five measures of sixteenth-note patterns and a left-hand part containing five whole rests. The Bass staff contains five measures of sixteenth-note patterns. The Double Bass (D. S.) staff contains five measures of sixteenth-note patterns.

27

Vln.

Mdn.

Pno.

Bass

D. S.

The musical score for measures 27-32 is as follows:

- Measure 27:** A repeat sign is present at the beginning of the measure.
- Measure 28:**
  - Vln.: Chords (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Mdn.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Pno.: Treble clef with eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5). Bass clef with a whole note (F#4).
  - Bass: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - D. S.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
- Measure 29:**
  - Vln.: Chords (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Mdn.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Pno.: Treble clef with eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5). Bass clef with a whole note (F#4).
  - Bass: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - D. S.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
- Measure 30:**
  - Vln.: Chords (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Mdn.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Pno.: Treble clef with eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5). Bass clef with a whole note (F#4).
  - Bass: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - D. S.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
- Measure 31:**
  - Vln.: Chords (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Mdn.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Pno.: Treble clef with eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5). Bass clef with a whole note (F#4).
  - Bass: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - D. S.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
- Measure 32:**
  - Vln.: Chords (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Mdn.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - Pno.: Treble clef with eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5). Bass clef with a whole note (F#4).
  - Bass: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).
  - D. S.: Eighth notes (F#4, C#5, G#5) and (F#4, C#5, G#5).

33

Vln.

Mdn.

Pno.

Bass

D. S.

33

33

33

33

33

33

40

Vln.

Mdn.

Pno.

Bass

D. S.

C#m

The musical score for measures 40-44 is as follows:

- Measure 40:** Vln. and Mdn. play eighth-note patterns. Pno. has a whole note chord. Bass and D. S. have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Measure 41:** Vln. and Mdn. continue with eighth-note patterns. Pno. has a whole note chord. Bass and D. S. have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Measure 42:** Vln. and Mdn. continue with eighth-note patterns. Pno. has a whole note chord. Bass and D. S. have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Measure 43:** Vln. and Mdn. continue with eighth-note patterns. Pno. has a whole note chord. Bass and D. S. have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. A key signature change to C#m is indicated.
- Measure 44:** Vln. and Mdn. continue with eighth-note patterns. Pno. has a whole note chord. Bass and D. S. have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

47

Vln.

Mdn.

Pno.

Bass

D. S.

C<sup>#</sup>m E B C

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for measures 47 through 52. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#).  
 - **Violin (Vln.):** Measures 47-48 contain continuous sixteenth-note runs. Measures 49-52 continue this pattern, ending with a dotted quarter note and an eighth note.  
 - **Viola (Mdn.):** Similar to the Violin, measures 47-48 contain continuous sixteenth-note runs. Measures 49-52 continue this pattern, ending with a dotted quarter note and an eighth note.  
 - **Piano (Pno.):** Measures 47-48 are whole rests. Measures 49-52 feature a right-hand melody with eighth notes and a left-hand accompaniment with eighth notes.  
 - **Bass:** Measures 47-48 are whole rests. Measures 49-52 feature a bass line with eighth notes and rests.  
 - **Double Bass (D. S.):** Measures 47-48 feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. Measures 49-52 are indicated by diagonal lines, suggesting a sustained or repeated sound.



# Appendix 1-9

## Parmar's Reel

Chrissy Crowley

Reel  
A1 Am



Am



A2 Am



Am

G

D/F#

G

D



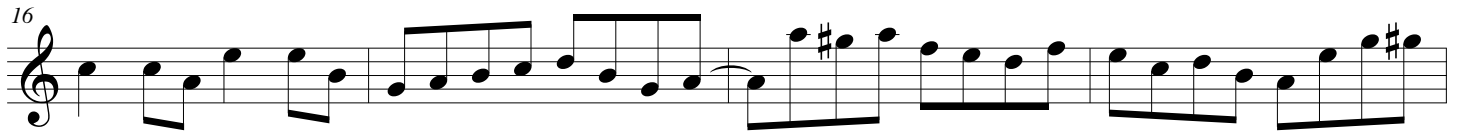
Am

Am

C

G

Am



C Am

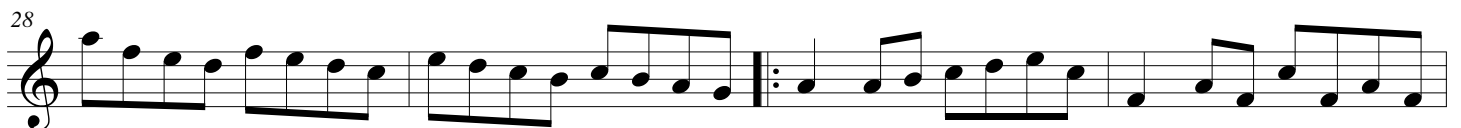


No chords



D Am

F



32 C G E Am B/G F Dm

Musical staff 32-35: Treble clef, key of C major. Measures 32-35 contain eighth-note patterns. Chords C, G, E Am, B/G, F, and Dm are indicated above the staff. A repeat sign is present at the end of measure 35.

36 FMaj7

Musical staff 36-39: Treble clef, key of C major. Measures 36-39 contain eighth-note patterns. Chord FMaj7 is indicated above the staff. The staff ends with a double bar line.

# Appendix 1-10

## Sleepless

Jason Roach

**A** Slowly Em C Am

**B** Em D/F# Em/G C Em D/F# G C Am

**C** Em D C Am Em D C Am

**D** Em D G C Am Em D G C Am

17 Em D G C Bm Am Em D G C Am

21 G D/F# vamp Em C

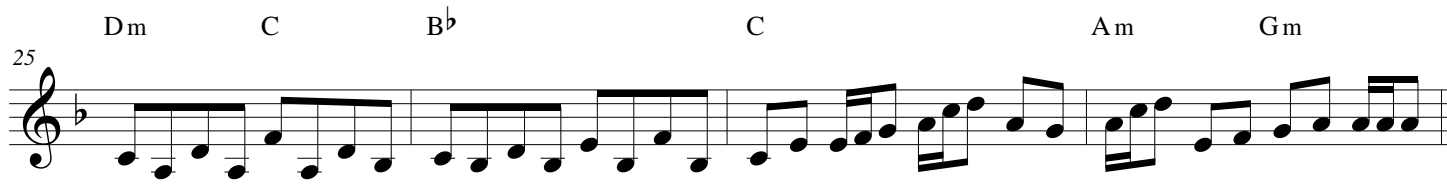
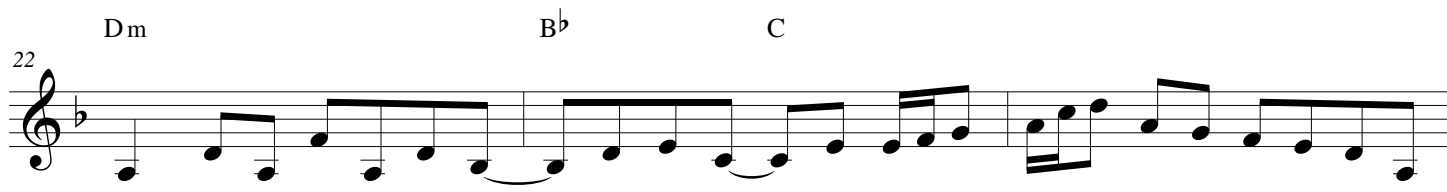
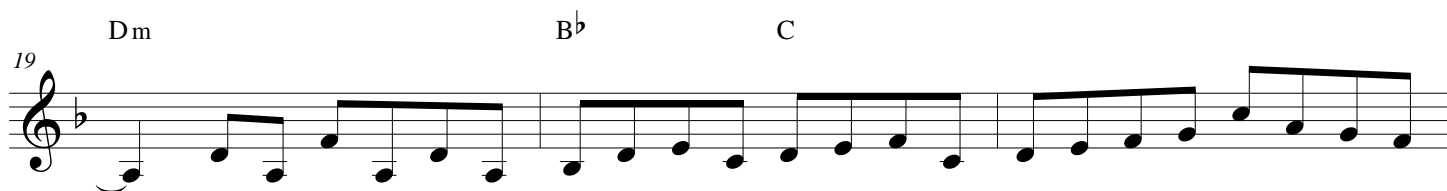
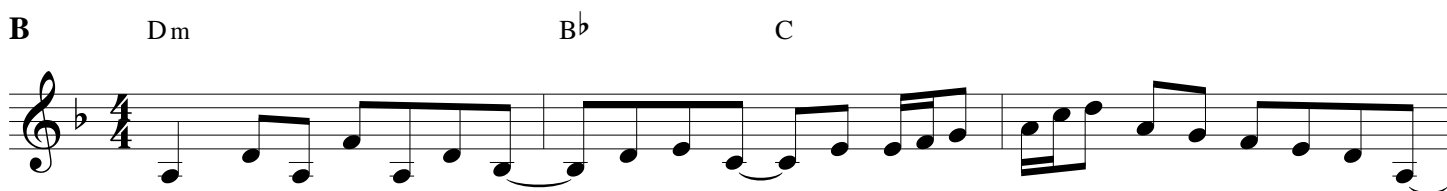
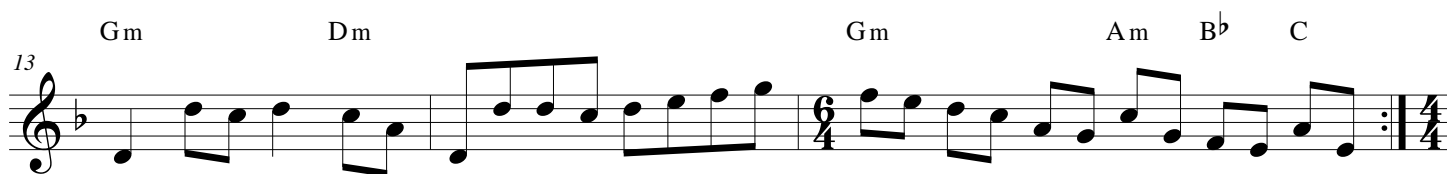
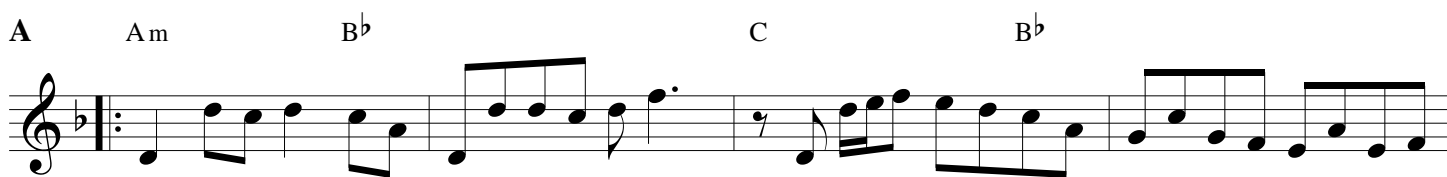
# Appendix 1-11

Slow Reel (Swung)

'S nice-a-tron

Jason Roach

Intro Dm



**C** Dm F

33 B $\flat$  C Dm Gm

Appendix 2-1

Piano Accompaniment -  
Joey Beaton Accompanying Karen Beaton

This musical score is a piano accompaniment in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The score is divided into four systems, each containing a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. Measure numbers 5, 9, and 13 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The notation includes various musical symbols such as eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, and chords, with some notes marked with accents (>) and slurs. The bass line often provides a harmonic foundation with sustained notes and chords, while the treble line features more melodic and rhythmic movement.

17

17

21

21

25

25

29

29

33

Measures 33-36 of a musical score in G major. The treble clef part features a melody with eighth and quarter notes, including a triplet in measure 34. The bass clef part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. Measure 36 ends with a whole note chord in the treble and a half note in the bass.

37

Measures 37-40 of the musical score. The treble clef part continues the melody with eighth notes and quarter notes. The bass clef part maintains the accompaniment pattern. Measure 40 concludes with a half note in the bass and a quarter note in the treble.

41

Measures 41-44 of the musical score. The treble clef part features a more active melody with eighth notes. The bass clef part continues with the accompaniment. Measure 44 ends with a whole note chord in the treble and a half note in the bass.

45

Measures 45-48 of the musical score. The treble clef part continues the melody. The bass clef part includes a whole note chord in measure 45 and continues the accompaniment. Measure 48 ends with a half note in the bass and a quarter note in the treble.



49

49

This system contains measures 49 through 52. The treble clef staff features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, some beamed together, and occasional rests. The bass clef staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

53

53

This system contains measures 53 through 56. The treble clef staff continues the melodic development with various note values and rests. The bass clef staff maintains the accompaniment. The key signature remains two sharps.

57

57

This system contains measures 57 through 60. The treble clef staff shows more complex rhythmic patterns with beamed notes. The bass clef staff continues with the accompaniment. The key signature remains two sharps.

61

61

This system contains measures 61 through 64. The treble clef staff features a melodic line with some sustained notes and rests. The bass clef staff provides the accompaniment. The key signature remains two sharps.

65

65

This system contains measures 65 through 68. The treble clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by eighth notes G4, A4, B4, and C5. Measures 66 and 67 continue with eighth notes and a quarter note. Measure 68 features a half note G4 with an accent (>) and a whole rest. The bass clef staff starts with a whole rest, then plays a half note G3 in measure 65, followed by half notes A3, B3, and C4 in measures 66-68.

69

69

This system contains measures 69 through 72. The treble clef staff continues with eighth notes and quarter notes, including a half note G4 in measure 72. The bass clef staff continues with half notes and quarter notes, including a half note G3 in measure 69 and a half note A3 in measure 72.

73

73

This system contains measures 73 through 76. The treble clef staff features a half note G4 in measure 73, followed by quarter notes and eighth notes. Measure 76 has a half note G4. The bass clef staff continues with half notes and quarter notes, including a half note G3 in measure 73 and a half note A3 in measure 76.

77

77

This system contains measures 77 through 80. The treble clef staff continues with eighth notes and quarter notes. Measure 80 has a half note G4. The bass clef staff continues with half notes and quarter notes, including a half note G3 in measure 77 and a half note A3 in measure 80.

81

81

This system contains measures 81 through 84. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The melody in the right hand begins with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G4, A4, B4, and A4. Measures 82 and 83 continue with eighth notes and quarter notes, including a dotted quarter note. Measure 84 features a half note chord of G4 and A4. The bass line consists of quarter notes G3, A3, B3, and A3, with a final measure containing a half note chord of G3 and A3.

85

85

This system contains measures 85 through 88. The melody in the right hand starts with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G4, A4, and B4, then a quarter note A4. Measures 86 and 87 continue with eighth notes and quarter notes, including a dotted quarter note. Measure 88 features a half note chord of G4 and A4. The bass line consists of quarter notes G3, A3, B3, and A3, with a final measure containing a half note chord of G3 and A3.

89

89

This system contains measures 89 through 92. The melody in the right hand begins with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G4, A4, and B4, then a quarter note A4. Measures 90 and 91 continue with eighth notes and quarter notes, including a dotted quarter note. Measure 92 features a half note chord of G4 and A4. The bass line consists of quarter notes G3, A3, B3, and A3, with a final measure containing a half note chord of G3 and A3.

93

93

This system contains measures 93 through 96. The melody in the right hand starts with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G4, A4, and B4, then a quarter note A4. Measures 94 and 95 continue with eighth notes and quarter notes, including a dotted quarter note. Measure 96 features a half note chord of G4 and A4. The bass line consists of quarter notes G3, A3, B3, and A3, with a final measure containing a half note chord of G3 and A3.

97

97

This system contains measures 97 through 100. The treble clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass clef staff starts with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

101

101

This system contains measures 101 through 104. The treble clef staff features a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

105

105

This system contains measures 105 through 108. The treble clef staff starts with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

109

109

This system contains measures 109 through 112. The treble clef staff begins with a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass clef staff starts with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

113

113

This system contains measures 113 to 116. The treble clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note F#4, and a dotted quarter note E4. The bass clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G3, an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note F#3, and a dotted quarter note E3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

117

117

This system contains measures 117 to 120. The treble clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note F#4, and a dotted quarter note E4. The bass clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G3, an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note F#3, and a dotted quarter note E3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

121

121

This system contains measures 121 to 124. The treble clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note F#4, and a dotted quarter note E4. The bass clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G3, an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note F#3, and a dotted quarter note E3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

125

125

This system contains measures 125 to 128. The treble clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note F#4, and a dotted quarter note E4. The bass clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a dotted quarter note G3, an eighth rest, a dotted quarter note F#3, and a dotted quarter note E3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

Transition to reel

*accel.*

129

129

133

133

137

137

141

141

145

145

149

149

153

153

157

157

161

161

This system contains measures 161 through 164. The treble clef staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass clef staff features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more complex pattern in the left hand, including a triplet of eighth notes. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

165

165

This system contains measures 165 through 168. The treble clef staff shows a sequence of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) followed by a half note (C5). The bass clef staff continues the accompaniment with eighth notes and chords. The key signature remains two sharps.

169

169

This system contains measures 169 through 172. The treble clef staff features a half note (C5) followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note (D5). The bass clef staff has a more active line with eighth notes and chords. The key signature remains two sharps.

173

173

This system contains measures 173 through 176. The treble clef staff starts with a half note (C5) and a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note (D5). The bass clef staff continues with eighth notes and chords. The key signature remains two sharps.



177

177

This system contains measures 177 to 180. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). The melody in the right hand features chords and eighth-note patterns, with a half-note chord in measure 179. The bass line consists of chords and eighth-note patterns, ending with a descending half-note scale in measure 180.

181

181

This system contains measures 181 to 184. The melody continues with chords and eighth-note patterns. The bass line features chords and eighth-note patterns, with a half-note chord in measure 181.

185

185

This system contains measures 185 to 188. The melody includes a quarter-note scale in measure 185. The bass line consists of chords and eighth-note patterns.

189

189

This system contains measures 189 to 192. The melody features chords and eighth-note patterns. The bass line consists of chords and eighth-note patterns, ending with a half-note chord in measure 192.

193

193

This system contains measures 193 through 196. The treble clef staff begins with a half note G4, followed by a half note A4, and then a half note B4. The bass clef staff starts with a half note G3, followed by a half note A3, and then a half note B3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

197

197

This system contains measures 197 through 200. The treble clef staff features a half note G4, followed by a half note A4, and then a half note B4. The bass clef staff starts with a half note G3, followed by a half note A3, and then a half note B3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

201

201

This system contains measures 201 through 204. The treble clef staff begins with a half note G4, followed by a half note A4, and then a half note B4. The bass clef staff starts with a half note G3, followed by a half note A3, and then a half note B3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

205

205

This system contains measures 205 through 208. The treble clef staff features a half note G4, followed by a half note A4, and then a half note B4. The bass clef staff starts with a half note G3, followed by a half note A3, and then a half note B3. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#).

209

209

This system contains measures 209 through 212. The treble clef staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a common time signature. It features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and rests. The bass clef staff begins with a bass clef and the same key signature and time signature. It features a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and rests. The system concludes with a double bar line.

213

213

This system contains measures 213 through 216. The treble clef staff continues the melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes and rests. The bass clef staff continues the bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes and rests. The system concludes with a double bar line.

217

217

This system contains measures 217 through 220. The treble clef staff continues the melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes and rests. The bass clef staff continues the bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes and rests. The system concludes with a double bar line.

221

221

This system contains measures 221 through 224. The treble clef staff continues the melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes and rests. The bass clef staff continues the bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes and rests. The system concludes with a double bar line.

225

225

229

229

233

233

237

237

241

241

This system contains measures 241 to 244. The treble clef staff begins with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 241 features a dotted quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a dotted half chord of F#4 and C#5. Measure 242 has a quarter rest, a quarter chord of F#4 and C#5, an eighth rest, and a quarter note D5. Measure 243 contains a quarter rest, a quarter chord of F#4 and C#5, an eighth rest, and a quarter note E5. Measure 244 has a quarter rest, a quarter chord of F#4 and C#5, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#5. The bass clef staff starts with a key signature of two sharps. Measure 241 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 242 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 243 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 244 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3.

245

245

This system contains measures 245 to 248. The treble clef staff continues with the key signature of two sharps. Measure 245 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 246 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 247 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 248 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. The bass clef staff continues with the key signature of two sharps. Measure 245 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 246 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 247 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 248 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3.

249

249

This system contains measures 249 to 252. The treble clef staff continues with the key signature of two sharps. Measure 249 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 250 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 251 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 252 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. The bass clef staff continues with the key signature of two sharps. Measure 249 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 250 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 251 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 252 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3.

253

253

*rit.*

This system contains measures 253 to 256. The treble clef staff continues with the key signature of two sharps. Measure 253 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 254 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 255 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. Measure 256 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G4, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#4. The bass clef staff continues with the key signature of two sharps. Measure 253 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 254 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 255 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3. Measure 256 has a quarter rest, a quarter note G3, an eighth rest, and a quarter note F#3.

Appendix 2-2

Piano Accompaniment -  
Jason Roach Accompanying Colin Grant

This musical score is a piano accompaniment in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The score is divided into four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs).  
- **System 1 (Measures 1-4):** The right hand begins with a melodic line of eighth and sixteenth notes. The left hand has whole rests for the first two measures, followed by a series of chords and a half note in the final measure.  
- **System 2 (Measures 5-8):** The right hand continues with chords and a half note. The left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.  
- **System 3 (Measures 9-12):** The right hand features a half note followed by a quarter note and then a half note. The left hand continues with eighth notes.  
- **System 4 (Measures 13-16):** The right hand consists of chords and a half note. The left hand continues with eighth notes, including some accidentals (flats) in measures 15 and 16.

19

23

27

31

## Transition to reel

*accel.*

35

*accel.*

35

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two staves, a treble staff and a bass staff, both in the key of D major (indicated by two sharps: F# and C#). The time signature is 4/4. The piece is marked 'accel.' (accelerando). The score is divided into four measures. In the first measure, the treble staff has a whole rest, and the bass staff has a half note D4 followed by a half note E4. In the second measure, the treble staff has a half note F#4 and a half note G#4, and the bass staff has a half note D4 and a half note E4. In the third measure, the treble staff has a whole rest, and the bass staff has a half note D4 and a half note E4. In the fourth measure, the treble staff has a half note F#4 and a half note G#4, and the bass staff has a half note D4 and a half note E4. The piece ends with a double bar line.

[illegible]

47

47

Handwritten musical score for 'The Rose Tree'. The score is written for a piano, with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The music is in common time (C). The score consists of 47 measures. The melody is in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The melody features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests. The accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand, with some chords and rests in the right hand. The score is written in a clear, legible hand, with a large 'V' marking the beginning of the final measure.



51

51

55

55

59

59

63

63

Appendix 2-3

Piano Accompaniment -  
Mac Morin Accompanying Allie Bennett

This musical score is a piano accompaniment for a song, consisting of four systems of music. Each system contains a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The first system (measures 1-6) features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a simple accompaniment. The second system (measures 7-10) continues the melody and accompaniment. The third system (measures 11-14) shows a more complex accompaniment in the bass staff. The fourth system (measures 15-18) concludes the piece with a final chord in the treble staff and a sustained bass line.

7

11

15

19

19

This system contains measures 19 through 22. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The melody in the right hand features eighth and quarter notes with rests, while the left hand provides a steady accompaniment of dotted half notes.

23

23

This system contains measures 23 through 26. The right hand continues with eighth and quarter notes, and the left hand maintains the dotted half note accompaniment.

27

27

This system contains measures 27 through 30. The right hand introduces chords and rests, while the left hand continues with dotted half notes.

31

31

This system contains measures 31 through 34, ending with a double bar line. The right hand features eighth and quarter notes, and the left hand continues with dotted half notes.

Appendix 2-4

Piano Accompaniment -  
Troy MacGillivray Accompanying Himself on Fiddle

The image displays a piano accompaniment score for Troy MacGillivray, written in 4/4 time and the key of D major (indicated by two sharps). The score is organized into four systems, each consisting of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system (measures 1-4) features a melody in the treble with eighth and quarter notes, and a bass line with a half-note chord at the start and a walking bass line. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melody with eighth notes and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the treble at measure 8. The third system (measures 9-12) shows a more active bass line with eighth notes and dotted rhythms, while the treble has chords and rests. The fourth system (measures 13-16) concludes the piece with a final chord in the treble and a bass line that includes a triplet of eighth notes and a half-note chord at the end. Measure numbers 5, 9, and 13 are placed at the beginning of their respective systems.

Appendix 2-5

Piano Accompaniment -  
Beattie Wallace Accompanying Winston Fitzgerald

Measures 1-4 of the piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The music is in 4/4 time. Measures 1 and 2 are whole rests in both staves. Measures 3 and 4 contain chords and single notes in the right and left hands.

Measures 5-8 of the piano accompaniment. Measure 5 begins with a finger number '5' above the treble staff. Measures 5 and 6 feature eighth-note patterns in the right hand. Measures 7 and 8 continue with chords and single notes in both hands.

Measures 9-12 of the piano accompaniment. Measure 9 begins with a finger number '9' above the treble staff. Measures 9 and 10 feature eighth-note patterns in the right hand. Measures 11 and 12 continue with chords and single notes in both hands.

Measures 13-16 of the piano accompaniment. Measure 13 begins with a finger number '13' above the treble staff. Measures 13 and 14 feature eighth-note patterns in the right hand. Measures 15 and 16 continue with chords and single notes in both hands.

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