

Bridging fiddle and classical communities in Calgary, Canada: the Baroque & Buskin' String Orchestra

Elisa Sereno-Janzen

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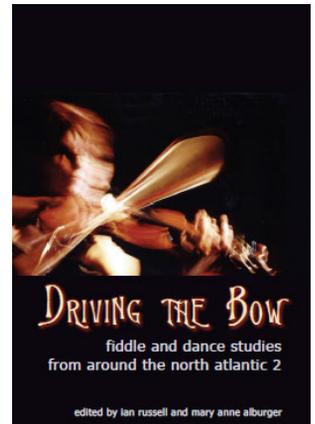
Driving the Bow

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 2

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Bridging fiddle and classical communities in Calgary, Canada: the Baroque & Buskin' String Orchestra

ELISA SERENO-JANZ

The Baroque & Buskin' String Orchestra in Calgary, Alberta, Canada was created to provide a social environment where people of all ages and musical backgrounds have the opportunity to pursue music as a means of expressing creativity in their lives. I will discuss how making music in a social context is important to lasting enjoyment of musical pursuits, how an atmosphere of non-judgment and non-competitiveness leads to more satisfaction and the freedom to be expressive and, how breaking down the barriers of musical and social segregation creates a community of cooperation. I will also explain how fiddle music and baroque music are related, how the performance of these two styles support each other, and how they are the vehicles through which the primary aim of this orchestra is achieved.

Making music in a social context

Many amateur and professional musicians seek out musical groups with which they can practise and perform. Socially, they have the chance to make friends with similar interests. Musically, they have something to practise for, and there are often opportunities to perform. Music is an art which can be enjoyed as a private pastime and a way of unwinding after a stressful day, yet it seems that the pleasure is magnified when there is an opportunity to make music with others.

In my twenty-five years of experience as a violin and fiddle teacher, I have found that those students who have opportunities to play with other musicians continue to enjoy music throughout their lives, whereas those who practise alone and have no social connection to music often turn to other activities. Whether in a small ensemble of two, a large group of fifty or any of the possibilities in between, I believe that the ensemble experience is essential to the continuation of the enjoyment of music. Steven Mithen, Professor of Early Prehistory and Head of the School of Human and Environmental Sciences at the University of Reading, England, notes: 'music-making is first and foremost a shared activity, not just in the modern Western world, but throughout human cultures and history.'¹

It is natural to our humanity to desire to make music with others. John Holt (1923–1985), a well-known educator who wrote several insightful books about the

ways in which children learn, began cello at the age of forty. In his book *Never Too Late* he describes his journey as an adult student of music. After a couple of years of study on the flute, he stopped taking lessons and then stopped playing altogether. Among other reasons he cites, 'I did not play enough with other people ... if my teacher had done more to get me to play with other inexperienced players, I might have learned to enjoy it more.'² This supports the idea that being part of an ensemble, and making music with others is an important part of continuing the enjoyment of musical interests.

Music is recognized as a language for creative expression. The Hungarian educator and composer, Zoltan Kodály (1882–1967), believed that musical literacy was the right of every human being. As he wrote:

Without literacy today there can be no more a musical culture than there can be a literary one ... The promotion of music literacy is as pressing now as was the promotion of linguistic literacy between one and two hundred years ago. In 1690 ... [the] idea that everybody could learn to read and write his own language was at least as bold as the idea today that everybody should learn to read music. Nevertheless, this is something no less possible.²

Kodály also believed that it was important to use national folk music as a basis for music education. About using folk music he said,

Folk songs are never to be omitted ... if for no other reason, for keeping alive ... the sense of the relationship between language and music. For, after all, the most perfect relationship between language and music is to be found in the folk song.³

His vehicle for music education was the only instrument available to all: the voice. As a violin teacher, I have used many of Kodály's concepts of music education in developing my violin pedagogy, using fiddle music as a primary resource.

Creating a non-judgmental and non-competitive atmosphere

For one to enjoy a lifelong pursuit of music, it must bring joy and a feeling of well-being. Many musicians, amateur and professional, are much happier when they free themselves of internal judgments, and reject competition. Benjamin Zander, a conductor and music educator, supports this view when he states, 'competition puts a strain on friendships and too often consigns students to a solitary journey'.⁴

Kodály and Zander also recognize that musical education and expression are possible for all people. Unfortunately, much of our musical education is judgmental and competitive. In the fiddle community in Canada, many performance opportunities come in the form of fiddle contests where participants play their selections of a waltz, a jig and a reel for a group of judges. In fiddle clubs, there are more opportunities to perform for events in concert settings, and occasionally, albeit rarely, for dancing. In Calgary in the classical music community performance opportunities are student recitals hosted by the teacher, the Kiwanis Music Festival,

and conservatory examinations. The Kiwanis Music Festival is a competition in which students and amateur musicians, ranging in age from 5 to 25 years, compete in various classes, with an adjudicator deciding the first, second and third place winners. The halls are deathly quiet and tense, so much so that it seems unnatural that music could exist in such an atmosphere. Conservatory exams offer other performing experiences, in a tense atmosphere, in front of a judge. If one pursues music to university level, there the performing exams are called 'juries', and many students have experienced only these judgmental and tense performances. This is not to say that such performances are never necessary. They are essential preparations for auditions and exams. However, if these are the only performing experiences available, it is understandable that students develop anxiety problems, because every time they perform, they feel that they are being judged not only by their colleagues, their friends and the audience, but most of all, by themselves. Zander explains this very well.

We in the music profession train young musicians with utmost care from early childhood, urging them to achieve extraordinary technical mastery and encouraging them to develop good practice habits and performance values. We support them to attend fine summer programs and travel abroad to gain firsthand experience of different cultures, and then, after all this, we throw them into a maelstrom of competition, survival, backbiting, subservience, and status seeking. And from this arena we expect them to perform the great works of the musical literature that call upon, among other things, warmth, nobility, playfulness, generosity, reverence, sensitivity, and love.⁵

It is possible to educate students in music, focusing on cooperation, and promoting feelings of joy and well-being rather than judgment and competition.

Breaking down the barriers of musical and social segregation

The idea that music education is part of our humanity is very important to the philosophy of the Baroque & Buskin' Strings. This group is not only for the 'gifted' or the 'talented' among us, nor only the 'young,' but for all who love to play music, and want to share their passion for music. John Holt's journey as an adult beginner on cello challenges the widely-held belief that how a child is educated in the first few years of life determines what he or she is able to do as an adult. It is a common philosophy in music education, that music students must be taught from a young age for the student to experience any success. Kodály supported this, believing that 'the years between three and seven are educationally much more important than the later ones. What is spoiled or omitted at this age cannot be put right later on. In these years man's future is decided practically for his whole lifetime.'⁶ Sinichi Suzuki (1898–1998), the creator of 'Talent Education,' commonly known as 'The Suzuki Method,' believed that 'children already five or six years old, and already trained, are judged from there on as to their ability, superior or inferior. But it is the earliest stages of infancy that are critical.'⁷ This leads us to believe that it would be hopeless for anyone to aspire to play music with any modicum of success unless she or he has

had the most perfect education in music from infancy. Suzuki himself did not study music as a child, but rather began as a young adult, after he had finished high school and had been trained to work in his father's violin factory.⁸ He of course went on to become one of the best-known music pedagogues of the twentieth century.

Zander further supports the idea that all students have some measure of ability and that it is the teachers' responsibility to help them realize their potential.

Michelangelo is often quoted as having said that inside every block of stone or marble dwells a beautiful statue; one need only remove the excess material to reveal the work of art within. If we were to apply this visionary concept to education, it would be pointless to compare one child to another. Instead, all the energy would be focused on chipping away at the stone, getting rid of whatever is in the way of each child's developing skills, mastery and self-expression.⁹

Education in the arts must be inclusive, not exclusive; individuals can realize their potential regardless of age and musical background.

Calgary, with a population of close to a million people, has a diverse musical culture. There are venues for popular music, jazz, swing, country music, folk clubs, world music, fiddle clubs, chamber music societies, and a symphony orchestra. However, despite this, there is little crossover between genres of either audiences or musicians. Personally, I feel strongly about the division between the fiddle and folk community, and the classical community. When I was performing on fiddle, if anyone discovered that I was also a classical violinist, I was no longer taken seriously as a fiddler. Historically, fiddle players in my community are either self-taught, or were taught by another fiddle player, often a family member. Therefore, if I wasn't taught to fiddle by my grandfather or uncle, I couldn't be a 'real' fiddler. My training and background became something that I felt I had to hide, in order to enjoy the company of other fiddle players. At the same time, I could not mention to my classical colleagues that I also played fiddle and folk music, because then they would not consider me to be a 'serious' musician. To help bridge this rift, I developed the Baroque & Buskin' String Orchestra to provide opportunities for folk and classical musicians to come together and share their unique passions for music.

There are several ensembles in Calgary available to string students and amateur musicians. For those with classical backgrounds, there is the Civic Symphony, an orchestra consisting of amateur musicians (adults only), which performs works mostly from the standard classical symphonic repertoire. For children there are a variety of levels of orchestras available at the Mount Royal College Conservatory, from very young children up to the Calgary Youth Orchestra, whose members are students aged 18 to 24.

The folk and fiddle community in Calgary is very diverse. For those interested in folk and fiddle music, the Irish Cultural Society plays mostly Irish music with fiddles, flutes, drums, and harp. They often play in a concert setting for events at the Irish Cultural Centre, as well as for occasional ceildh dances. An Old Time Fiddle

club, the Prairie Mountain Fiddlers, featuring fiddle, guitar, and piano, is made up mostly of senior citizens who play a few concerts a year, host Fiddle Jamborees, and are members of the Alberta Society of Fiddlers. Some members of this club also form their own groups to play for square dancing, while the Foothills Bluegrass Society plays only bluegrass music. There is little crossover in either of these groups with other styles of fiddle music such as Scandinavian, or Scottish. Once a year the Scandinavian Club hosts a fiddle and dance workshop with instructors from Norway, with the workshop available to fiddlers of all ages.

For young people, the Bow Valley Fiddlers provide a venue for children from the age of five through their teens to learn folk and fiddle tunes. The teen group is the Calgary Fiddlers, who perform annually at the Calgary Stampede and tour all over the world. However, all of these groups remain isolated from each other, with little crossover of members or interaction between the different groups.

For some time I had been aware of the need for an orchestra which would be open to older beginners. The orchestras at the conservatory start with beginners around the age of six or seven, so it is not an option for teenagers or adult beginners. Since I had some students who had started violin lessons in their teens or as adults, I believed that they also needed an ensemble that would provide a social musical experience. Even though there is an increasing trend for adults here to pursue musical studies, there were no string ensembles to accommodate their musical needs, although opportunities for wind players were plentiful.

It is common for musical communities to be based on ideas of segregation: by age, ability, musical genre and instrumentation. While some specialization is necessary, many groups are exclusive rather than inclusive. Breaking down the barriers of musical and social segregation can have a positive influence on the nature of the group as well as being a model for interactions in the outside world.

Creating a community of cooperation

In 1997 I taught at the Alberta Society of Fiddlers' summer camp. At this camp, classes comprised both children and adults, and were set up according to the level of playing, rather than the age of the player. It was a pleasure to see friendships grow between children and adults who shared a common love of fiddle music. Bridging generations in a social and musical context went beyond the traditional activities for mixed age groups. Before teaching at this fiddle camp I had only seen cross-generational sharing of music within families, and at church, experiences not available to everyone. It was wonderful to see a sixty-year-old man and an eight-year-old boy sitting outside at the picnic table, practising their tunes together. I realized then that an orchestra comprised of both children and adults could work well.

In addition, the whole atmosphere of the fiddle camp was friendly, helpful and non-competitive. There were four levels of classes, starting with beginners trying the fiddle for the first time, to the advanced class for more experienced players. Every evening there was a fiddle 'jam,' known in Europe as a 'session.' At this jam, everyone sat in a circle and each participant had the opportunity to choose

a tune. There were easy tunes that everyone knew and some tunes that only a few knew, but everybody played and everyone knew many more tunes by the end of the week. Everyone was included in the circle regardless of playing skill, and the better players would help those less skilled to learn the tunes. It was a very supportive atmosphere, completely lacking the competition that I was accustomed to in the classical music world.

Using the cooperative model of the fiddle camp, the Baroque & Buskin' String Orchestra has no seating hierarchy as in many amateur groups where the 'good' players sit at the front of the section and the 'bad' players sit at the back. Rather, this is an orchestra where it is recognized that all members have strengths to share: strong players sit with those who are less experienced, and stand partners are chosen to compliment each other's strengths. For example, someone with very good rhythmic skills might sit with someone else who plays musically and with a good sound. In this way a helpful and supportive atmosphere is created in which there is no competition.

Collaboration between amateur and professional musicians may also take place. Often when professional musicians and amateur musicians get together to play music, the professional's role is that of the teacher, and we tend to think that the exchange is only in that direction. Certainly that is the case with sectional rehearsals, and when hired professionals assist at workshops. However, in a cooperative environment, the professionals are re-inspired by witnessing the joy of music in the hands of those with less expertise, amateur musicians who demonstrate the will to do their best. Trust in their instructors allows them to constantly challenge their limitations, and professional colleagues find it refreshing to be surrounded by that energy.

Fiddle music in an orchestral setting

Training music students by exploring their own folk traditions was part of Kodály's philosophy. In string music education, fiddle music seems to be a logical choice for a folk idiom. However, fiddle music is almost always exclusively the realm of violinists. Other string players, violists and cellists, are often excluded from the traditional fiddle clubs, whereas bassists may be found in the rhythm section of a fiddling group, but always playing pizzicato, never using the bow.

Repertoire for the fiddle orchestra is limited. String orchestra material based on folk or fiddle tunes seems to appear in two kinds of arrangements: one type of music available is folk tunes that have been imported into a classical setting, the other type gives all of the melodies to the first violins while the remainder play accompaniments, and much of the vitality of the folk music is lost in the translation to a different idiom or style. The second type of arrangement uses simple bass lines and/or offbeats, imitating the chording on guitar or piano, which the second violinists, violists, and cellists find boring to play. Neither type of arrangement supported the main philosophy of this orchestra, which is that violists and cellists have the opportunity to learn the fiddle style, and finally have the chance to play the tunes. My frustration with the lack of suitable repertoire led me to write my own arrangements, paying particular attention

to giving the melody to each part in turn while keeping the folk/fiddle style. In this way I have been able to make all the parts for the various instruments interesting and fun to play. In a student orchestra it is difficult to inspire members of the orchestra to play musically and their best when their parts are dull and repetitive. Many students, stuck with playing a 'third violin' part, which is also the viola part in elementary orchestras, not only find their parts to be monotonous, but also see it as unimportant to the effect of the piece as a whole. Rather than inspiring them to play well, they are indifferent or uncaring. When students have melodic material, interesting counterpoint and innovative accompaniment figures, they are much more likely to enjoy playing and practising their parts.

The musical score for 'Sally on the Hilltop' is written in 8/8 time with a key signature of two sharps (D major). It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score illustrates how the melody is passed between parts. In the first measure, the melody is in the Violin I part. In the second measure, it moves to the Violin II part. In the third measure, it is in the Viola part. In the fourth measure, it is in the Cello section. The Double Bass part provides a steady accompaniment. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). Performance markings include *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco).

Figure 1 'Sally on the Hilltop', demonstrating melody distribution¹⁰

This is an example of how the melody passes through the orchestra. The first measure of the melody is in the first violins. The second measure of the tune is in the second violins. The third measure is in the viola part, and the fourth measure is given to the cello section. This encourages all parts to listen to each other. In this way they become more aware of the other parts of the orchestra and what they are playing. The accompaniment of the tune in this particular example simulates a piano or guitar, but is still interesting, which keeps the musicians thinking and actively engaged.

The musical score for 'Roslin Castle' is written in 8/8 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major). It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score demonstrates counterpoint and accompaniment. The Violin I part has a melodic line with some grace notes. The Violin II part has a rhythmic accompaniment. The Viola, Cello, and Double Bass parts all have their own melodic lines, creating a rich counterpoint. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano).

Figure 2 'Roslin Castle', demonstrating counterpoint and accompaniment.¹¹

This example illustrates rhythmic figures in a slow air. The melody is in the first and second violins, one octave apart. The viola part begins with a syncopation followed by eighth notes. This places emphasis on the second half of the first beat, and beat three of the measure. In the cello part, the beginning of the measure also emphasizes the second half of the first beat, but in a more sustained figure. The second half of the bar emphasizes the second half of the third beat. The bass is playing straight quarter notes on the beat, adding rhythmic stability. The violas have a counterpoint to the main melody. The viola's line complements the cello line with its rhythmic motive. The cello and bass lines are important harmonically and rhythmically, and the way in which each of the lower parts interweave and support the melody in an interesting manner helps each section to become aware of the importance of their part within the orchestra.

Ensemble skills for fiddle and classical musicians

Bringing musicians with a fiddling background and musicians with a classical background together in one ensemble makes it clear how each group has strengths to share. First, it is necessary to teach musicians with a classical background how to play in an idiomatic fiddle style. In order to do this, the orchestra members are all given the melody to learn in unison. Through demonstration they learn the nuances of expression in playing airs and dance tunes.

Once the orchestra has had a chance to learn the tune, we begin the arrangement. This is the challenging part for the fiddle players. Many of them have never played in an ensemble before joining the orchestra, although those who had played in a group situation may have experience of a 'session' group where everyone plays the melody together in unison. Occasionally members played some tunes with harmony, or played 'back up' for others playing the tune. Since some of these fiddlers have had no experience in reading parts with rests, counter melody, accompaniment, and the tune all intertwined, the orchestra parts challenge them to read more fluently.

For the fiddle players in the orchestra, playing in parts develops their reading and listening skills. Since they are not always playing the tune, they must listen for it and hear how the melody weaves through the orchestra. They learn how to play accompaniment figures and counter melodies in a musical and sensitive manner, which also allows them to hear how the accompaniment figures and counter melodies enhance the tune.

All members, whether they are classically trained or primarily fiddle players, need to learn ensemble skills. These skills are developed through a variety of methods. First, it is important for members to be aware of their stand partner and their playing. They begin by watching each other's bows while they are playing, and try to move together. Next, they must expand their awareness to playing together within their own section. For this, they must be aware of body movement within the section of the orchestra. Exercises are given to teach all members to cue each other, not only the section leaders. They learn to cue each other at entries, watching their

stand partners first, and then later become more conscious of the others in their section, who are cuing as well, which promotes much better ensemble playing. If every member takes the initiative to cue entries it gives confidence to all the players around them, and when they move together, they play together.

An important part of ensemble playing is learning to play with other sections and hear how their parts interact with each other. One method of increasing awareness is to mix up the sections in the orchestra. Instead of having the first violins seated in a group, second violins in another group, etc., keeping their stand partners, we mix everyone up so that all players are surrounded by people who do not play their part. All the cellos, violas, basses, first violins, and second violins are scattered around the room, a common method used to promote better intonation and ensemble work in choral groups, although it is almost never used with instrumental ensembles. From this position, two main things occur. Firstly, it is very easy to hear the other parts when they are sitting right next to you. In fact, it is very difficult to ignore them. In this mixed up format, one can't help hearing how the parts interweave. Secondly, the musicians are listening for others playing the same part elsewhere in the room. By stretching their listening awareness, they also hear the others in between, and routinely hear parts that they have never heard before. Steven Mithen, in his book *The Singing Neanderthals*, talks about how, through making music in a group, the individual loses the sense of self and instead exhibits cooperation for the good of the group.

Those who make music together will mould their own minds and bodies into a shared emotional state, and with that will come a loss of self-identity and a concomitant increase in the ability to cooperate with others. In fact, 'cooperate' is not quite correct, because as identities are merged there is no 'other' with whom to cooperate, just one group making decisions about how to behave.¹²

When playing music with others, a point is reached where our awareness expands through listening, moving, and reacting musically to those around us. In this we lose our sense of self, lose our focus on the sound we are making individually, and find ourselves part of the greater whole. The music itself is what becomes most important in our consciousness.

Comparison of fiddle music and baroque music

There are several reasons why this orchestra's repertoire combines fiddle and baroque music. The baroque music compliments the fiddle music because classical music was developing at the same time in history as the fiddle became popular in folk music, and there are many similarities in style, form, and structure. 'The Golden Age of the Fiddle', which produced much of the fiddle repertoire as we know it today, started around the same time as the Baroque Period in Western Europe, c. 1600–1750. At this time many composers wrote for the violin and virtuosos appeared in both the folk/fiddle world and the courts of Europe. James MacPherson, reputed

composer of the well-known 'MacPherson's Farewell' was born in 1675. Niel Gow, the famous Scottish fiddler, performer and composer of one of the most comprehensive fiddle tune collections of the time lived from 1727 to 1807. In Italy, Archangelo Corelli (1653–1713), as well as being a famous virtuoso of his time, was the first composer to make his living exclusively from instrumental music. Fiddle music was the music of the common people, comprised of country dances, jigs, reels, and strathspeys as well as songs or airs. What we refer to as 'baroque' music was the music of the aristocracy and the church, which used stylized dance forms, and shared many aspects of style and ornamentation.

In the Baroque & Buskin' String Orchestra, fiddle music is used as a basis for teaching the playing style of baroque music. Illustrated below are some of the fiddle dance forms with their corresponding equivalent in baroque music.

Folk Music *Baroque Music*

Jig	Giga, gigue
Air, Lament	Aria, Largo, Andante, Adagio
Reel	Allegro
Waltz	Minuet
Strathspey	Schottische, <i>Scozzese</i>



Figure 3a Fiddle jig, 'The Bridal Jig', bars 1–8¹³



Figure 3b Baroque giga, Archangelo Corelli (1653–1713) *Giga*,
Sonata Opus 5, no. 3, v, bars 1–16¹⁴

Figures 3a and 3b demonstrate how the baroque *Giga* developed from the folk dance form. Both are in compound time, although Corelli's *Giga* is in 12/8 rather than 6/8. In the fiddle jig, the A section is a typical eight measure phrase, followed by an

eight measure B section. This form is found in the majority of fiddle and folk tunes. These fit the set dance steps perfectly and the same dances can be danced to many different jigs, as long as there are eight measures in each phrase. This is for a total of 32 measures, which are then repeated. The typical form in which it would be played for dancing is AABB, AABB.

Harmonically, 'The Bridal Jig' is fairly typical of this genre of fiddle music and employs the primary chords; the tonic G major, the subdominant C major, and the dominant D major. In the baroque example, Figure 3b, not only is the meter extended from 6/8 to 12/8, but the whole A section of the jig has been extended. The antecedent of the phrase is four measures long, and the consequence is only two measures. However, that is not the end of the statement. It is developed by a running passage of eighth notes, which continue for an extra ten measures. No longer confined to eight measure phrases, Corelli has taken the rhythm of the dance and played with our expectations of where the phrase should end and where it should repeat. The A section of the *Giga* is a total of 16 measures which is repeated, followed by the B section which is 23 measures, also repeated. Harmonically it is also more complex. Although in the key of C major, by the fourth measure there is a tonicization of G major, the dominant. The next phrase returns to the home key followed by a running eighth note passage outlining a circle of fifths progression that cadences in G major for the end of the A section.

Stylistically and structurally the jigs have certain similarities. They are both in compound time with steady eighth note figures, and both are in binary form with repeated A sections and B sections. The *Giga* by Corelli expands the fiddle tune concept with its complexity of phrase extensions and harmonic language.



Figure 4a Fiddle air, William McGibbon (1690–1756), 'Roslin Castle', bars 1–4¹⁵



Figure 4b Baroque slow movement, Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767), *Adagio*, Sonata No. 1 in G minor (Methodische Sonaten), bars 1–2¹⁶

Figures 4a and 4b illustrate the similarities of ornamentation of slow airs in fiddle music and slow movements of the baroque period. The types of ornaments are the same, the appoggiatura, the mordent, the turn, and other grace notes used as passing notes. Ornaments in both traditions are usually improvised and individual musicians are expected to improvise in his or her particular style. It would be unacceptable for either piece to be performed unornamented. In orchestral parts, the ornamentation is specified for clarity of ensemble.

The collection of *Methodische Sonaten* by Telemann (1728) is unique in that the music was written as a teaching tool for students and amateur musicians. He published this set of sonatas so that amateur players would gain an understanding of how to add ornamentation to slow movements in the appropriate style. The basic melody of the opening slow movement is presented with an ornamented version of the melody. Here both examples show a marked similarity in their ornamentation with the use of turns, and *appoggiaturas*. However, the phrase structure of Telemann's *Adagio* is more complex than that of McGibbon's 'Roslin Castle'. In 'Roslin Castle' the phrases are consistently in 4 measure phrases. In the *Adagio*, the phrases are more seamless, and avoid regular cadences. The first phrase is 7 measures long and the entire movement is 15 measures long in contrast to 'Roslin Castle', which comprises four phrases, each four measures in length, for a total of 16 measures.



Figure 5a Fiddle reel, 'The Swallow's Tail', bars 1-8¹⁷



Figure 5b Baroque music, J. S. Bach, *Allegro*, Sonata No. 2, iii, for solo violin¹⁸

In Figures 5a and 5b, one can see the similarities between the reel dance found in folk music, and the typical *Allegro* first movement found in baroque music. Both are played fast, in simple time, with quadruple division of the beat. Both employ arpeggiated figures as a primary motif.

The typical reel consists of an 8 measure A section, which is repeated, followed by an 8 measure B section, also repeated. The most common form for dancing is the same as the jig, AABB, AABB. Harmonically, traditional reels use simple chord progressions, as in 'The Swallow's Tail', in A, in the Dorian mode, harmonized with chords of A minor and G major. The melody consists largely of arpeggiated passages (bars 1,3,5,7,8) that are linked with ascending step-wise passages (bars 2,4,6).

In baroque music, the *Allegro* movement was often written in duple or quadruple time (2/4, or 4/4). Although it has the same feel as the dance music of the reel, the harmonic language and phrase structures are more complex. In Bach's *Allegro*, we notice the similarity of using the arpeggiated figures, linked by ornamented passages in step-wise motion, with the subsequent passage consisting of arpeggiated figures of sixteenth notes. In the *Allegro*, 58 measures, the A section is 24 measures repeated, and the B section is 34 measures repeated. Again, the styles are seen to be similar while the baroque music contains more extended passages.

In general, many works from the baroque period comprise stylized dances from the folk music of the time. Folk music forms such as jigs, airs, and reels form common foundations for the compositions of baroque composers. They are similar in style and ornamentation yet differ in complexity of phrase structure and harmonic language.

Performance of fiddle music and baroque music

In the Baroque & Buskin' String Orchestra, fiddle music is used as a basis for teaching the baroque playing style. In both fiddle and baroque music the beat is emphasized, particularly in the dance movements, with the performance style of the dances in baroque music borrowed from the fiddle dance style. The ornaments used in airs and laments in fiddle music are also found in the ornamentation of slow movements in the baroque repertoire. In both styles the ornaments are improvised. As the classical players become more fluent in the fiddle style, it is easier to transfer the vitality of the folk music to the baroque music.

Perhaps the most distinct differences in style between fiddle and baroque music are found in the bowing techniques. Emphasis on the beat in fast dance tunes is done more with the speed and length of bow, rather than with accents, which are often used in the classical style. When playing the faster tempo dance tunes, the Canadian style is to play mainly in the middle to the upper half of the bow. In baroque music, many of the faster bow strokes are performed in the middle to lower half of the bow. Bows made during the baroque period were lighter than the modern bow. The baroque style bow average weight is 50g whereas the modern bow is 59g to 64g. The baroque bow stick is smaller in diameter, and it is shorter in length. This is not to say that we never play at the tip, for long notes require that one uses all of the bow length. However, the baroque bow is very light at the tip and therefore passages of eighth notes or sixteenth notes are played more easily in the middle of the bow. The lighter baroque style bow gives a very light and transparent sound. It is also interesting to note that many fiddle players hold the bow up the stick, above the grip, which makes the bow lighter and emulates the feel of the baroque bow. It is interesting to experiment further to see what it was like to play music on the bowed string instruments during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with using unwound gut strings and an eighteenth century style bow. To play with a clear, clean sound with gut strings and a baroque style bow the adjustments one has to make indicates very clearly how the music at the time was played.

In classical music today, much of the expression on bowed string instruments is achieved with the left hand, using vibrato and shifting. In fiddle music, the bow is the primary tool of expression, through use of weight of bow, length of bow and articulation. The left hand produces the pitches and the ornamentation while the bow expresses the nuances of line in the airs and the dance feel of the dance tunes. It is often difficult for classically trained musicians to play without vibrato, because in the modern technique of string playing, vibrato is used almost constantly. As they gain more expertise with using the bow expressively, they are able to slow down their vibrato and rely on it less as their main means of expression.

Ensemble playing possesses both similarities and differences between the fiddle and baroque orchestras. There is a crossover in listening skills and the ability to be aware of the other parts: who has the melody and which sections of the orchestra share the same figures. In baroque music, however, not all the ensemble parts are interesting to perform. Sometimes the melody is only in one part and the remaining parts have an accompaniment figure which is much more challenging for the student to play musically. Students must think the melody in their heads, and then phrase their accompaniment with the soloist or the section of the orchestra that has the melody. Each student is responsible for making his or her part interesting by how they engage with the music while they play, and how they phrase their line to compliment the melody.

To illustrate this point, the accompaniment parts play the section of music without the melody. They must play in an attentive manner, with energy and vitality. This brings us to what does it mean, exactly to 'play musically'? In my view, to 'phrase the music', to 'play musically', to 'play with heart or feeling' are all the same thing. Technically, it comes down to which notes are emphasized, and how those notes are articulated. Emphasis is really another name for dynamics. The notes that are brought out are louder, and those that contrast are softer. Articulation describes how the notes begin and end, whether they are smoothly connected or accented, short or long, get louder within the note or whether it decays, all achieved through bowing technique. Phrasing is not only the domain of the main melody, for accompanying parts require the same – and sometimes more – intensity of expression.

For string players, learning the fiddle style compliments the study of baroque music. Knowing the style of the fiddle dance forms transfers its vitality to the stylized dances of the baroque. Ornamentation of the fiddle airs introduces the style of ornamentation of the slow movements of baroque music. Ensemble skills learned in the fiddle orchestra transfer directly to the baroque orchestra. In these ways an ensemble of cooperation and understanding is created.

Conclusion

Through the continuing development of the Baroque & Buskin' String Orchestra, an environment has evolved where making music in a social context allows members to enjoy music as a lifetime pursuit. Within a non-judgmental and non-competitive atmosphere, musicians gain a sense of joy and well-being which encourages them to

continue to use music as a creative expression in their lives. Breaking down barriers of musical and social segregation creates a positive model for other experiences in the world. Combining fiddle players and classical players in the same ensemble allows musicians to share skills across boundaries of style. Using the tradition of fiddle music as a basis for teaching baroque music, a deeper understanding of both idioms is created. This also connects musicians and audiences of the present to the rich historical traditions of our past.

Notes

- ¹ Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p. 205.
- ² John Holt, *Never Too Late* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978; repr. 1991), p. 138.
- ² Lois Choksy, *The Kodály Context* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p. 6.
- ³ Choksy, p. 8.
- ⁴ Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander, *The Art of Possibility* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000), p. 26.
- ⁵ Zander and Zander, p. 31.
- ⁶ Choksy, p. 7.
- ⁷ Sinichi Suzuki, *Nurtured by Love* (New York: Exposition Press, 1969; repr. 1977), p. 120.
- ⁸ Suzuki, p. 79.
- ⁹ Zander and Zander, p. 26.
- ¹⁰ *Sally on the Hilltop*, arr. by E. Sereno-Janzen (Calgary: Blue Arch Music, 2000), bars 77–80.
- ¹¹ William McGibbon (–1736), *Roslin Castle*, arr. by E. Sereno-Janzen (Calgary: Blue Arch Music, 2007), bars 33–36.
- ¹² Mithen, p. 215.
- ¹³ Capt. Francis O'Neill (ed.), *The Dance Music of Ireland: 1001 Gems*, arr. by Sergt. James O'Neill (Dublin: Walton's Musical Instrument Galleries, [1907]), no. 310, 'The Bridal Jig', bars 1–8.
- ¹⁴ Archangelo Corelli, *Sonata a Violino e Violone o Cembalo, Opera Quinta*, Roma 1700 (Firenze: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1979), Sonata No. 3, v, bars 1–16.
- ¹⁵ McGibbon, *Roslin Castle*, arr. by E. Sereno-Janzen, bars 1–4.
- ¹⁶ Georg Philipp Telemann, *Zwölf Methodische Sonaten für Violine oder Flöte und Basso Continuo (1728)*, ed. Johannes Gerdes (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1980), Sonata No. 1 in G-minor, *Adagio*, bars 1–2.
- ¹⁷ O'Neill, no. 536, 'The Swallow's Tail Reel', bars 1–8.
- ¹⁸ J. S. Bach, *Six Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo (1720)*, ed. Ivan Galamian (New York: International Music Company, 1971), Sonata No. 2 in A minor, *Allegro*, bars 1–8.