

## Crossing over

*Ian Russell and Anna Kearney Guigné*

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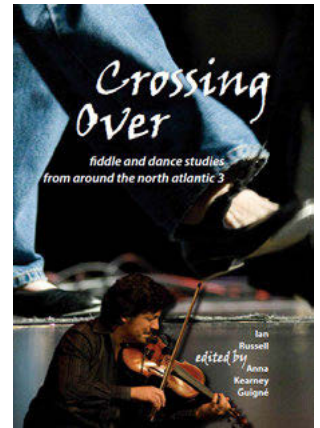
### Crossing Over

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3

*Edited by Ian Russell and Anna Kearney Guigné*

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## Crossing over

IAN RUSSELL and ANNA KEARNEY GUIGNÉ

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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