

'Old style' Cape Breton fiddling: narrative, interstices, dancing

Jessica Herdman

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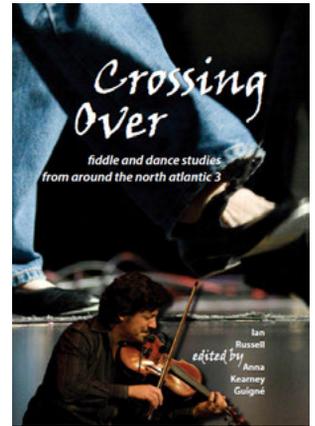
Crossing Over

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3

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About the author:

Jessica Herdman is currently pursuing a PhD in musicology (University of California, Berkeley). After receiving her BMus in violin performance (University of Ottawa), and her MA in musicology (UBC), Jessica has continued to perform as a violinist and fiddler, while also teaching musicology (Acadia, CBU). Her interests include issues of performativity, practices of (Renaissance) religious confession, anthropological histories of the senses, musical systematizations, ideologies, and usages of modality.

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'Old style' Cape Breton fiddling: narrative, interstices, dancing

JESSICA HERDMAN

Introduction: symbiosis

Pointing out the symbiotic relationship between fiddling and dancing in Cape Breton traditional practices is almost redundant. Nearly every conversation I have had about Cape Breton fiddling with both members of the community or interested scholars has included some reference to dancing, whether indirectly or explicitly. The dancing and fiddling is simply perceived as interrelational, with one propelling the other. In 1973, scholar John Gibson suggested:

Cape Breton has never lost its step-dancing and that is probably the most important factor in the story of the fiddle. Step-dancing is to fiddling as rhyme is to poetry; both make something memorable and transmittable; in the case of step-dancing, while people dance that way the music must continue.¹

Since the period during which Gibson asserted this view, the point has been made time and again that the traditional fiddle music of Cape Breton has an infectious liveliness so obviously connected with dancing. As fiddler Sandy MacIntyre is known to say, 'If you're not dancing, you'd better pinch yourself, because you're probably dead.'²

As the tradition has developed during the past several decades, however, it has begun to interface with elements of globality, variously affecting this perspective, and resulting in a complex narrative. After a brief contextualization of this discourse, this paper will focus on two specific analyses of performance practice that aim to musically concretize these views: firstly, I will compare fiddlers' dance tune performances from across different generations and commercial roles; and secondly, I will compare an idolized innovative old-generation fiddler's performance of a listening tune versus a dance tune.

Commercialism: duality

As Cape Breton musicians were swept up in the wave of the Celtic boom in the 1990s, the fiddling was integrated into impressive spectacles, sometimes somewhat

detached from its origins. Being a teenage violinist in Ontario during this rising Celtic craze, and spending summers with my family back in Cape Breton, I was acutely aware of the difference between the tradition that I saw being practiced in Cape Breton and the manner in which it was being portrayed in the media. If Natalie MacMaster integrated flashy dance numbers into her sets, or Ashley MacIsaac broke into seemingly spontaneous dance in his grunged-out Cape Breton arrangements, this all seemed more like part of the show; despite the awareness on the part of the performers, and their known dancing abilities, the intricate connection between the music and dance would have been difficult to convey in these types of mass-Celtic-culture contexts.

Yet, there exists a duality to the image of the Cape Breton fiddler, and the import of associated social practices. On the one hand, there is the impression drawn from the commercially-manipulated ideals – the etic view; on the other hand, there is the vision apparent in the community discourse – the emic view. Within the latter, the integrality of the connection between dancing and fiddling is not only understood, but is also frequently expounded upon.

'Old style' – emergence and discourse

The narrative about the history of the tradition developed a strong bent towards authenticity and preservation in the wake of the 1971 CBC documentary *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*.³ This oft-cited film, in asserting the seeming decline of the island's fiddling practices, incited a wave of fear about the possible loss of these traditions. In a simplified view, the community narrative emerged from this period as a bipartite formula that has persisted in some ways into the twenty-first century: firstly, eighteenth-century Scottish fiddling practices had been preserved into late (or mid) twentieth-century Cape Breton; secondly, these practices were then being lost or manipulated by the present generations.

The idealization of 'old style' engaged with and developed out of both earlier and concomitant socio-political forces and conceptions. The trendy Celticism emergent in the 1980s–1990s Western mass culture was rooted in the fabrications of Enlightenment Scotland and the manipulations of the Highland image.⁴ The resurgence of these ideals in twentieth-century Nova Scotia continued the Enlightenment romanticization of the 'old' customs (supposedly the most ancient practices, but realistically primarily those customs extant only in the post-Battle of Culloden period of the militarily and socially threatless Highlander).⁵

As this folkloric mystique infiltrated the projected Nova Scotian identity through the clever machinations of MacDonaldian tourism of the 1930s onward, Cape Breton was brought under the Celtic labels and triumphs of tartanism.⁶ This surge of antimodern commercialism propelled the expectation of a disconnection between broadcasted folkloric practices and continued dynamic traditions. That is, with the obviously commercialized mystique of the spectacles from the Celtic boom – such as the *Riverdance* shows – a detachment from actually continuous social practice was relayed. This fantastic projection of Celtic artistic practices was

nonetheless drawn from extant – though mostly exaggerated and idealized – Celtic traditions. In Cape Breton, from the growth of MacDonaldian tartanism to the mystical boom of Celticism, living cultural traditions continued throughout the communities on the island.

In her doctoral dissertation, Doherty explained that in the post-1971 climate of concern, the second half of the above bipartite formula (the loss or manipulation of the traditional Cape Breton fiddling style by younger generations) became loudly asserted. In order to preserve this pristine, original form of the tradition, young fiddlers were encouraged toward the emulation of chosen models of the ‘old style’. With the above idealization of the older ways, the ‘old style’ was propelled as the yardstick by which younger players could measure their ‘authentic’ connection to their tradition. Doherty discovered that the application of the term ‘old style’ came to encompass nearly any older generational player active prior to the 1971 *Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*; interestingly, innovative fiddlers from earlier generations were some of the most frequently held up exemplar proponents of the ‘old style’.⁷

Interstices

The acceptance of these older generational fiddlers’ innovations as traditional components of the fiddling practice engages with the Hobsbawmian social phenomenon of ‘interstices’. Within a formalized social past:

We will always have interstices, that is matters which form no part of the system of conscious history into which men incorporate, in one way or another, what they consider important about their society. Innovation can occur in these interstices, since it does not automatically affect the system, and therefore does not automatically come up against the barrier: ‘This is not how things have always been done.’⁸

These interstices, lying outside of the protective cultural guard-rails, allow for a degree of innovation and manipulation of cultural practice. This change, so long as it,

is sufficiently gradual to be absorbed, as it were, by increments, it can be absorbed into the formalized social past in the form of a mythologized and perhaps ritualized history, by a tacit modification of the system of beliefs, by ‘stretching’ the framework, or in other ways.⁹

In the narrative surrounding Cape Breton fiddling, the acceptance of certain aspects of players’ innovative musical manipulations points to the interstices active both within the specific practices of the fiddling, and within those social practices related to fiddling. While there is certainly a larger spectrum of natural interstices within the tradition, this paper will address two requirements for allowable bold experimentation to be accepted into the discourse of traditional playing that are related to the above concepts of commercialism and ‘old style’: firstly, the innovative

practices must be developed for an emic audience; secondly, they may not interfere with other integral social practices. In the case of Cape Breton fiddling, as noted above, the fundamental associative relationship is between fiddling and dancing. Over-manipulation of attributes of the fiddling is not functional in tandem with this social practice.

Dancing

In particular, we see the necessity of a certain degree of conservatism with playing for solo step dancing. Glenn Graham articulates the adherence to tradition that solo dance demands:

Stepdancing has lasted, and is going on with the fiddling. So as long as that stepdancing is there to keep us in check, we have to play a certain way rhythmically to compliment that. And if it goes beyond that, that's when the style will be lost. But it doesn't. Because, if you're playing for dancers, if you're playing for dancing, a lot of that old style has to remain there.¹⁰

Because of the changing nature not only of the social makeup of dance settings, but also the integration of exogenous dancing features into the square sets, fiddling has likely retained the closest linkage with solo step dancing rather than social dancing.¹¹ While aspects of the tradition have undergone mutations during the past century, the practitioners involved with solo step dancing have most frequently remained members of the community. The resultant nature of performance is one of symbiosis between fiddler and dancer mentioned above. Solo step dancing also involves an aspect that is not as active with square sets: the critical participation of the observing community. Most of the evening at a dance involves square sets, in which any attendee may participate. In a typical third figure, danced to a reel, men and women face one another and have the opportunity to show off their solo reel steps. The exhibition of prominent step dancers occurs more explicitly, however: at some point at each dance, the fiddler will slip into a strathspey, signalling for the solo step dancers to step up and perform. A crowd will form to observe each step dancer, and their interactions with the fiddler. Although a number of these observers may be tourists, many are involved, informed community members. With the nature of the open critical discourse surrounding the Cape Breton traditions, the latter proponents would thus be engaged with a certain degree of evaluation of the fiddler-dancer relations. There is a resultant pressure for the performers towards maintenance of traditional style – so revered in Cape Breton circles – while, of course obtaining a level of equally vital individual expression.

The essential requirement for the fiddlers in this performative context is that they play in a manner conducive to step dancing. Playing for dancing requires particular techniques that become concretized as stylistic attributes. While some of these features may have a rootedness elsewhere – in imitation of bagpipes, or from the nature of the intangible Gaelic flavour – some degree of their perpetuation has

been demanded by the practical needs of dancing. While the continuity of elements of this stylistic approach would certainly not be restricted to dance contexts, the requirements of playing for dancers demands that these performance practices be generally applied to dance fiddling.

Demands of dancing: resultant 'old style' techniques

Interviews with informants have revealed a logical overlap between the discourse on 'old style' and that on dance playing.¹² Three integral elements identified consistently by informants as necessary in both 'old style' and dance playing will be examined in this paper in relation to the application of related techniques. Playing for both social dance sets and step dancing alike requires these components: timing, lift, and drive. By timing, informants are basically referring to metric consistency and precision. There is a deeper implication to this term, however, as it also signals the fiddler's ability to select a proper tempo for dancing. As Andrea Beaton states, this process is not simply the application of a single tempo for every dance or solo step dancer: 'Timing is so important. I guess every dancer would have a timing that they like – some like to dance fast, and some don't.'¹³ Doherty also emphasizes the importance of timing within the tradition: 'Good timing is a characteristic aspired to by all Cape Breton fiddlers, and is one of the criteria most commonly referred to in the appraisal of an individual fiddlers [*sic*] style. [...] The concept of timing is of course inextricably linked with the dance.'¹⁴

The ideas of lift and drive are also recurrent in the community discourse on Cape Breton fiddling. In her study of *puirt-a-beul*, Sparling strives to explain the concept of lift:

The lift is hard to describe but one knows that it is happening by spontaneous audience applause and cheers, and by body language such as tapping or moving feet, erect bodies sitting forward in chairs, and smiles. I personally respond to lift physically, wanting to move and to dance. It is the sense of excitement that arises when a singer or musician suddenly moves from the strathspey to the reel, with their change in tempo and rhythm. Lift occurs when a performer moves to a new tune in a new key or mode. It results from syncopation, which is often due to the 'Scotch snap' (sixteenth to dotted eighth-note rhythm), but also happens in fiddling as the result of repeated notes interspersed with leaps, which gives the sense of a drone against which a melody is heard.¹⁵

Informants also clearly associate lift and drive with a surge of energy or a propulsion toward movement and dance. Lift or drive would likely be what makes one's feet tap uncontrollably to the ebullience of a fiddler's playing. These ideas, while clearly meaningful, are challenging to conceptualize. Andrea Beaton contemplated this: 'Good lift, you know, good swing. I don't know – it's hard to explain.'¹⁶

Some of the techniques that are associated with 'old style' are almost exclusively employed in dance tunes: for example, the up-driven bow, high-bass tuning, and cuts and cutting. In particular, some of these techniques – up-driven

bows and cuttings – are generally only used in the performance of strathspeys. This again emphasizes the specific connection between solo step dancing, which necessitates the use of strathspeys, and 'old style' techniques.

Because of these interrelations, there are traceable stylistic elements of 'old style' that can be connected inter-generationally, and across players' roles within the tradition in the performance of dance tunes. A comparative analysis would offer a view of this continuity. To exemplify this, I will examine four fiddlers in recordings engaged with different social and performative contexts, representing four points in the twentieth-century Cape Breton fiddling tradition: mid-century (Bill Lamey – Appendix A); post-1971 (Buddy MacMaster – Appendix B); the Celtic boom period (Ashley MacIsaac – Appendix C); and the present young generation (Robbie Fraser – Appendix D) (see also Appendix E). Although these four fiddlers all have their unique characteristics of style, roles, and images, they are nonetheless emically considered to be both important dance fiddlers, and bearers of the 'old style'. The tune used for this study is a prototypical exemplar of a standard step dancing tune, 'King George IV Strathspey'.¹⁷

The recording of Bill Lamey comes from the compilation album *Bill Lamey Full Circle*.¹⁸ Although it was released as a commercial recording, all of the tracks on this album are from amateur recordings done by community members in the casual context of dances and house sessions. Bill Lamey is upheld as a master Cape Breton fiddler, having had a seminal role in the recording and radio industry in the 1940s and 1950s. While Bill himself idealized bearers of the 'old style' tradition (such as 'Big' Ronald MacLellan and 'Little' Mary MacDonald), he is now championed by several of the recent generations of master fiddlers (such as Jerry Holland and Dave MacIsaac) as an outstanding specimen of traditional playing.

The recording of Buddy MacMaster comes from his first album, *Judique on the Floor*, released in 1989.¹⁹ Now 86, Buddy is distinguished as one of the older generations of master fiddlers. As noted by Doherty, although there are aspects of Buddy's playing that exhibit newer stylistic attributes, in the post-1971 atmosphere he was grouped into the older generational representatives of 'old style'. According to Paul MacDonald, however, Buddy was reputed as an 'old style' player long before this period.²⁰ Buddy's playing is inseparable from the Cape Breton dancing tradition and the square dance circuit: 'It is the community dance that is at the heart of his music'.²¹

The recording of Ashley MacIsaac is from his *Fine Thank You Very Much* album, released in 1996 (and re-released in 2004).²² This 'traditional album' followed directly behind his triple-platinum 1995 grunge-Celtic CD *Hi, How Are You Today?* Ashley exhibits a duality in a more pronounced way than any of the other internationally successful Cape Breton musicians. The Cape Breton discourse identifies him not only as an 'old style' player, but also as an innovative experimentalist. Ashley's 'old style' is certainly connected with dance playing, as his initial participation in the tradition was as a step-dancer, and he later became extremely active in the dance circuit as a fiddler (from the age of 12 or 13).²³

The recording of Robbie Fraser comes from his *Hear this ...Here it is* album of 2004.²⁴ As the first album by a young fiddler, it exhibits the early stages of his musical development. Nonetheless, since he began performing onstage at the age of 5, Robbie was praised as both a dance player and a bearer of the 'old style'.²⁵

'King George IV Strathspey'

Although there are countless fascinating aspects of melodic manipulation, intonation, and accompaniment, this comparison is only intended to survey aspects of fiddling performance practice associated with the 'old style' employed by these fiddlers that are related to the requirements of dancing. It will be noted that there is a great variety of approach to performance practice within this realm; this diversity is related to the prized individuality within the Cape Breton style. There are, nonetheless, consistent practical motivations to these stylistic manoeuvres that relate back to the emically prized concepts of timing, lift, and drive.

My relational analysis of these performances is not meant to provide a definitive sketch of performance practices; rather it is intended to offer a perspective on how these interpretations relate to a common goal: 'drivin' 'er for the dancer' (see Appendixes A–D for apposite representationally selective transcriptions of each fiddler).

These ideas noted above of timing, lift, and drive serve as overarching principles in the application of 'old style' techniques; while each player employs the 'old style' manners in a different way, they are consistently functional for the rhythmic stability, emphasis, and energy necessary for dance playing. The first area of study will focus on the aspects of 'old style' performance practice related to bowing, while the second area of study will focus on those related to left-hand techniques; these will be analyzed in relation to their functionality for timing, lift, and drive.

Although there are many variances in bowing approaches, each fiddler's application of bowing techniques adheres to the most vital dance-bowing feature: that each bowing choice allows for powerful emphasis on the strong or important beats of the bar. A specific technique that all four fiddlers employ prominently in the A section (mm. 1–8) is the up-driven bow. This technique not only facilitates a re-articulation of the second beat of the measure, but also offers a bow distribution that positions the bow closer to the frog (its natural heavy point) for the third beat of the measure, thus helping to accentuate the fiddler's timing (see Figure 1). Bill Lamey also employs a combination of other 'old style' bowing patterns in the A section. For example, in measure 7, he uses a dig bow on the first beat (placed on an *appoggiatura*), followed by a hooked up-bow on the second beat, in order to recover the bow for a cutting on the third beat.

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Figure 1 Up-Driven Bow Distribution

Each fiddler also changes his approach to this bowing in their various iterations; however, within these differences, the articulation in this A section consistently follows a pattern: a lift after the first beat, and a strong accent on the second beat. This articulatory structure can be seen as providing a lift to the phrase, through the accentuation of the off-beat. This second-beat accent also directly interacts with step dancing, as the basic strathspey step involves an emphatic forward kick on the second eighth-note, and a hop on the second beat (see Figure 2). This motion engages with the fiddler's motions: an up-driven bow (as the dancer kicks), followed by a lift and an accented second beat (as the dancer hops).

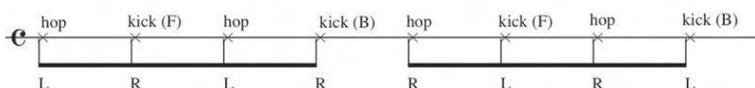


Figure 2 Basic Strathspey Step²⁶

The bowing applied by all fiddlers in the B section falls within the classification of 'choppy bowing': there are no audible slurs or hooked bowings throughout. This type of bowing is connected not only with the traditional Cape Breton style in general, but is also, more specifically, attached to dance fiddling. As fiddler Andrea Beaton explained, the separate bows allow for a clearer articulation of beats for dancers – essentially, helping to accentuate the timing.²⁷

Similar to the pervasive use of 'choppy bowing' is the application of 'dig bow' (or 'bow push').²⁸ The frequently employed 'dig bows' often appear in conjunction with other emphatic techniques, making them less conspicuous; however, they are more noticeable in Robbie Fraser's playing, due to a lesser degree of ornamentation. Since Robbie was at an early stage of his fiddling development in this recording, it is not surprising that he used fewer embellishments than the more mature fiddlers here. Fiddler Glenn Graham suggested to me that the gradual integration of more 'dirt' is often a part of a fiddlers' musical growth.²⁹ However, the same compulsion towards the emphasis of strong beats is notable in Fraser's B section; although he does not use the left-hand ornamentation that we will see in the other fiddlers' playing here, he accents the same beats through the use of a 'dig bow', and frequently a drone.

There is a great deal of droning throughout these performances that is most likely to be rooted in the bygone need to amplify for dance playing. That is, all of the fiddlers apply drones quite consistently throughout the tune: in the A section, the pervasive drone is accomplished by stopping the G and D string with the first finger (thus creating an a/e' drone); in the B section, the drone is similarly a/e'', but on open strings. This type of droning resembles the effect of playing in the 'old style' tuning

of high-bass, where droning on the open strings would create the same pitches (a/e; a'/e''). Thus, the prominent usage of these drones by all of the fiddlers seems to be a continuance of an older necessity for dance playing – amplification.

That said, each fiddler approaches these drones in a different manner. MacIsaac's and Lamey's are the most consistently audible, whereas MacMaster's and Fraser's are gentler. Mostly, the fiddlers also tend to bow the droned tone more audibly in conjunction with another type of accent. For example, on the second beat of the measure, the drone tends to be more detectable concomitant with the up-driven bow. Further, the first and third beats that fall on Cs (sharp or natural) in the B Section (for example, measures (mm.) 10 and 12) are also generally droned more emphatically, in conjunction with ornamentation that will be investigated below. It is apparent that the application of various techniques is often combined to articulate important beats and phrasing – thus contributing to the accentuation of the fiddler's lift or timing.

This phenomenon is also apparent in the fiddler's usage of ornamentation. For the most part, throughout this tune, the left hand embellishments fall on the strong beats of the measure. For example, all of the fiddlers tend to ornament the third beat of the measure throughout the A section; the first beats here do not require additional accentuation because of their natural accent through the rhythm of the Scotch snap. In the B section, as noted above, fiddlers consistently ornament the first and third beats that fall on Cs (sharp or natural). Although each fiddler ornaments these Cs in their own individual manner, there is obvious overlap in the usage of certain 'old style' embellishments; in particular, most fiddlers favour the use of either vibrato or the 'warble' (ornaments which are based in the same movement) for these strong beats. The choices of ornamentation thus vary only slightly from fiddler to fiddler; and as in the approach to bowing, the resultant phrasal patterns and emphases are similarly oriented toward the needs of dancing.³⁰

Conservatism versus innovation in idealized 'old style' pre-1971 fiddlers

The association of this 'old style' with dance playing can be further implied by examining a pre-1971 innovative fiddler's more conservative approach to tunes employed for dancing, and a more experimental approach to tunes disconnected from dancing. Angus Chisolm's performances of 'Mrs Scott Skinner' (see Appendix F), a listening air, and 'Christie Campbell' (see Appendix G), a dance strathspey, will illustrate this.³¹

Chisolm's interpretation of 'Mrs Scott Skinner' is noticeably influenced by the popular Classical style of the period in terms of three aspects: rubato, phrasing, and extended techniques. All of these elements are clearly tied to Kreisleresque interpretations, as comparison will illustrate.³² First, Chisolm freely applies rubato throughout the piece. The most frequent uses of rubato, however, appear in the typical *gemütlich* style of early twentieth-century Classical performance practice: accelerandi and decelerandi oriented around the shapes of runs. For instance, in measure 1, the top of the run in beat 3 is stretched out, while the scalar descent

from it accelerates into the fourth beat. Chisolm also frequently uses ritardandos into the ends of phrases, and pauses on their culminatory points – another typical technique in the Kreisler style. This is apparent in measures 4, 6, 8, and so on. Chisolm's phrasing is related to his use of rubato, and similarly follows the Kreisleresque patterns: generally, the high points of phrases (pitch-wise) are reached in a crescendo (corresponding to an accelerando), while the terminations of phrases (which are normally falling patterns) are relaxed to in a diminuendo (corresponding to a ritardando). For example, see measures 1–4.

In Chisolm's performance of 'Mrs Scott Skinner', his extended techniques include vibrato, shifting, and non-traditional chords.³³ While vibrato is normally an ornament in Cape Breton fiddling, Chisolm applies it more continuously; furthermore, in the moments when the vibrato is exaggeratedly audible, it is wider than traditional fiddling vibrato.³⁴ Position playing is rarely demanded in traditional tunes. Although this tune is a J. Scott Skinner composition (which does at times require up to the fifth position), the pitches do not necessitate position playing; thus, it is a choice on the part of the performer to shift, as Chisolm does. Beyond the use of upper positions (likely only the third position in this tune), Chisolm's shifting approach is imitative of the quintessential Kreislerian schmaltzy style, typically called the 'Romantic shift': he does an audible, saccharine slide into the final moment of the shift (the slide is particularly discernible in the last semitone of the movement). Lastly, Chisolm's frequent use of non-traditional chords is most apparent in association with his shifts, for instance, the recurring motive in measure 6, which is performed with a simultaneous 'Romantic shift'.

As a master fiddler before the 1970s, Angus Chisolm's suave, unorthodox style in his listening tunes snuggled into the interstices of the allowable innovations within the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. The practical demands of dancing, however, did not offer the same opportunities for extreme stylistic flexibility in dance tunes. Further, the participants who were engaged with dance fiddling would have objected to the loss of the lift, drive, and timing – concepts that are most easily accomplished through the application of 'old style' techniques.

'Christie Campbell Strathspey'

The strathspey 'Christie Campbell' is a favourite among Cape Bretoners, and is an exemplary tune belonging to the 'old style' – particularly because it is one of the few remaining tunes that fiddlers continue to play in high-bass tuning (a/e'/a''/e''). Throughout his performance of this tune, Chisolm also employs many of the 'old style' techniques explored in the performances of 'King George IV Strathspey' above.

The most pervasive 'old style' bowing that he uses are the cuttings that cut up the tune. These terminate every phrase of the A section (mm. 2, 4, 6, and 8), and are also used sporadically throughout the B section (mm. 12 and 16). Interestingly, Dunlay and Greenberg's transcription of Mary MacDonald, one of the undisputed 'old style' players, shows nearly the same pattern of cutting as Chisolm in measure 12 (beats 1 and 2), and identical cutting in measure 16 (beats 1 and 2).³⁵ While some of these cuttings are ornamental, or perhaps part of the Gaelic flavour, those falling

at the ends of phrases (or sub-phrases) operate functionally to energize the pick-up into the following phrase. For instance, in measure 8, after landing on the strong third beat for a full quarter note, the application of a cutting on the fourth beat animates the movement into the new phrase, through the acceleration of the bow. Thus these phrasal pick-ups with cuttings help to drive the tune.

Many of Angus Chisolm's ornamentations also fall on the strong beats, as with the above performances of 'King George IV'. His drones generally follow a similar pattern to those of the above fiddlers in that they fall most prominently on strong beats of the measure; both of these applications therefore help to emphasize the timing of the tune. Chisolm's use of drones throughout this tune further parallels the 'old style' approach to 'King George IV' above. In essence, Chisolm drones frequently on the open a (normally g when not scordatura) string throughout the A section, and on the open e'' in the B section. Again, for the most part, the prominence of this droning is most likely based in the prior need for fiddlers to amplify their sound.

In contrast to the above listening tune, 'Mrs Scott Skinner', Chisolm's performance of this step dance tune, 'Christie Campbell', not only avoids extreme creative stylistic experimentation, but also projects copious qualities associated with the 'old style' of playing. These techniques are particularly important not only in emphasizing Chisolm's timing, but also in aiding his drive and lift – all features that informants have declared necessary both for the performance of 'old style' and for ideal dance fiddling.

Conclusion

In particular contexts fiddlers throughout the twentieth century have engaged with the performative interests of varying audiences and market types, resulting in experimental approaches to stylistic attributes. However, the acceptance of these innovative approaches as aspects of the traditional practice only occurs in the interstices; for the most part, these interstices have been found in connection with listening rather than dance tunes.

Analysis of cross-generational players, Bill Lamey, Buddy MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, and Robbie Fraser, has shown that, despite their varying roles in the tradition, and their (often period-based) divergent performance contexts, fiddlers identified as 'old style' players tend to display techniques of performance practice emically associated with the 'old style' when playing dance tunes. Further, an analytical perspective on Angus Chisolm, an innovative master fiddler from the idealized pre-1971 period has contrasted elements of conservatism versus experimental traits, dependent on the position of the tunes within the tradition. This stylistic divergence evinced in the playing of a single fiddler points musically to the accepted interstices versus proscribed innovations in the tradition. The conservative traditional approach is again connected with the performance of dance tunes.

It seems that we are always discovering variances to the 'old style'; perhaps it is simply that one of these sub-styles is that employed for dancing. Whenever fiddling has continued to have a prominent role in the social practices of Cape Breton, dancing has blossomed in tandem. Although I would not suggest that the 'old style' in its entirety has been preserved in conjunction with dancing, there is a

continuity of certain technical attributes associated with 'old style' fiddling in the performance of dance tunes.

As I worked through my connections between musical analysis and ethnographic perspectives for this paper, I was continually reminded of a humbling remark that Kinnon Beaton had made about the elusive Mabou Coal Mines style: 'You can get all the PhDs that you want, I think, and you're not going to identify what that sound is.'³⁶ While I hope that this analytical view of specific performance techniques has provided a perspective on the continued interrelations of the emic expression of 'old style' and the practical demands of dance playing, admittedly, such a theoretical perspective has a limited reach – which I nonetheless hope to keep stretching in future.

Appendix A

The musical score is presented in two systems, A and B, on a single staff. System A (measures 1-8) is a melody in 2/4 time, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature. It features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 3 and a grace note in measure 4. System B (measures 9-15) is a bass line in the same time signature, featuring a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 10 and a grace note in measure 11. The piece concludes with a double bar line at measure 15.

Bill Lamey, 'King George IV Strathspey'

Appendix B

[intro] A

4

7

10 B

13 vib

16

Buddy MacMaster, 'King George IV Strathspey'

HERDMAN 'Old style' Cape Breton iddling

Appendix C

[intro] A

3 p

6

9 B vib vib

12

15

Robbie Fraser, 'King George IV Strathspey'

Appendix D

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in C major and 2/4 time. It consists of six staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note A4. A first ending bracket labeled 'A' spans measures 1 through 4. The second staff continues the melody, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4. A second ending bracket labeled 'B' spans measures 9 through 11. The third staff continues the melody, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4. The fourth staff continues the melody, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4. The fifth staff continues the melody, starting with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4. The sixth staff concludes the piece with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a quarter note B4, ending with a double bar line.

Robbie Fraser, 'King George IV'

Appendix E: Ornamentation and style notation key

Ornamentation and Style Notation Key

Bowing



'up-driven bow'³⁷

[Extra pressure, stronger accent on third note; often lift between first and second up-bows]



articulatory lift

[Extra lift (earlier release) of finger]



dig-bow

[Extra pressure at beginning of stroke; then released]



thrown bow

[Sometimes resulting in a bounced quasi-cutting]



sunk bow

[Extra weight at beginning of stroke]



accented sunk bow



crushed bow

Fingered/Other



'warble'

[Melody note sounded; partial release of pressure; return of pressure]



'vibrato'

[Fast, ornamental shake]



'turn'

[Melody note, pitch above, return to melody note]



lifted run

[Increased speed of 16ths; resulting in nearly 16th-dotted d 8th emphasis]



weighty rubato

[Extra weight and time taken]

Appendix F

The image displays a musical score for a fiddle piece titled 'Mrs Scott kinner' by Angus Chisholm. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). It consists of eight staves of music, with measure numbers 4, 8, 12, 17, 21, 25, and 29 indicated at the beginning of their respective staves. The music is characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. Performance instructions are placed throughout the score, including 'vib' (vibrato), 'rit.' (ritardando), 'accel.' (accelerando), and 'swung' (swung). The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of the eighth staff.

Angus Chisholm, 'Mrs Scott kinner'

HERDMAN 'Old style' Cape Breton iddling

Appendix G

Angus Chisholm, 'Christie Campbell Strathspey'³⁹

Notes

¹ John G. Gibson, *Fiddlers to the Fore* (Port Hawkesbury: Scotia Group Publications, 1975), p. 4.

² Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, Margaree Forks, Cape Breton, 19 August 2007.

³ Every in-depth analysis of the Cape Breton musical tradition written since the early 1970s by both scholars and amateurs has included some reference to this documentary. For examples, see Elizabeth Doherty, 'The Paradox of the Periphery: Evolution of the Cape Breton Fiddle Tradition, c. 1928–1995' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Limerick, 1996); Burt Feintuch, 'The Conditions for Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Social and Economic Setting of a Regional Soundscape', *Ethnomusicology*, 48, no. 1 (2004), 73–104; Virginia Hope Garrison, 'Traditional and Non-Traditional Teaching and Learning Practices in Folk Music: An Ethnographic Field Study of Cape Breton Fiddling' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1985); Glenn Graham, 'Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Making and Maintenance of a Tradition' (unpublished master's thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2004); Allister MacGillivray, *The Cape Breton Fiddler* (Sydney: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1981); Ian McKinnon, 'Fiddling to Fortune: The Role of Commercial Recordings Made by Cape Breton Fiddlers in the Fiddle Music Tradition of Cape Breton Island' (unpublished master's dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1989); and Marie Thompson, 'The Fall and Rise of the Cape Breton fiddler: 1955–1982' (unpublished master's dissertation, St Mary's University, 2003).

⁴ For perspectives on this manipulation of tradition, image and identity, see: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Theresa Sorel, 'Scottish Cultural Nationalism, 1760–1832: The Highlandization of Scottish National Identity' (unpublished master's dissertation, University of Guelph, 1997).

- ⁵ See Marjorie Harper and Michael Vance, eds, *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia, c. 1700–1999* (Halifax: Fernwood, 1999), pp. 267–97.
- ⁶ For a detailed analysis of this ‘triumph of tartanism’, see Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994); and Celeste Ray, ed., *Transatlantic Scots* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), pp. 158–78.
- ⁷ Doherty, ‘Paradox of the Periphery’, pp. 294–96.
- ⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The Social Function of the Past’, *Past and Present*, 55, no. 1 (1972), 4.
- ⁹ Hobsbawm, ‘Social Function of the Past’, p. 6.
- ¹⁰ Interview with Glenn Graham at the Gaelic College, St Ann’s, Cape Breton, 17 August 2007.
- ¹¹ For the details of these changes, see Emily Addison, ‘The Perception and Value of Dance Halls in Inverness County, Cape Breton’ (unpublished bachelor’s thesis, Trent University, 2001).
- ¹² For specific quotations, see Jessica Herdman, ‘The Cape Breton Fiddling Narrative: Innovation, Preservation, Dancing’ (unpublished master’s dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2008), pp. 69–71.
- ¹³ Interview with Andrea Beaton, 22 August 2007.
- ¹⁴ Doherty, ‘Paradox of the Periphery’, p. 357.
- ¹⁵ Heather Sparling, ‘Song Genres, Cultural Capital and Social Distinctions in Gaelic Cape Breton’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, York University, 2005), p. 291.
- ¹⁶ Interview with Andrea Beaton, 22 August 2007.
- ¹⁷ Dunlay and Greenberg have found this tune in several Scottish collections, including the Skye and Lowe’s collections as ‘King George IV Strathspey’. It is associated with ‘the whole string of George tunes’, which include ‘King George (V) Strathspey’, ‘The Old King’s Reel’, and ‘The King’s Reel’. “‘The King’s Reel’ is frequently played in a group following “King George IVth Strathspey” and with “The Old King’s Reel”, especially for stepdancing.’ See Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton* (Toronto: DunGreen Music, 1996), pp. 38–41.
- ¹⁸ Bill Lamey, *Bill Lamey: Full Circle*, CD 82161 7032 2, Rounder Records, 2000.
- ¹⁹ Buddy MacMaster, *Judique on the Floor*, CD, ACD 9020, Sea-Cape Music, 1989.
- ²⁰ Paul MacDonald, liner notes in Buddy MacMaster, *Judique Flyer*, CD, SMPCD1012, Stephen McDonald, 2000.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Ashley MacIsaac, *Fine Thank You Very Much*, CD, 2 70053, Ancient Music, 1996.
- ²³ Interview between Ashley MacIsaac and Joey Beaton, 21 December 1993, cassette tape, *Beaton Interviews*, CMIC Archives, Judique, NS.
- ²⁴ Robbie Fraser, *Hear this ... Here it is*, CD, 7 7859 14660 2 1, Robbie and Isaac Fraser, 2004.
- ²⁵ For community references to Robbie’s ‘old style’ attributes, see Herdman, ‘The Cape Breton Fiddling Narrative’, pp. 116–17.
- ²⁶ ‘L’ logically represents the use of the left foot, while ‘R’ represents the use of the right.
- ²⁷ Interview with Andrea Beaton, 22 August 2007.
- ²⁸ In their analysis of Cape Breton fiddling performance, Dunlay and Greenberg explain: ‘a little bow-push is applied to so many of the notes [...] so here a bow-push is notated only when it is an especially energetic accent.’ Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton*, p. 15.

²⁹ Interview with Glenn Graham, 28 August, 2007.

³⁰ For a more detailed analysis of these performances, and also these fiddlers' recordings of 'The King's Reel', see Herdman, 'The Cape Breton Fiddling Narrative', pp. 117–25.

³¹ Both of these Angus Chisholm recordings come from unpublished home session or dance contexts, privately catalogued by David Gillis (an active dance community member) as recorded in the 1960s.

³² These *gemütlich* stylistic attributes are apparent in the many recordings of Fritz Kreisler's performance practice. All of these techniques could similarly be connected to the playing of J. Scott Skinner himself, who is viewed as having developed a Classical, smoothed-out style of Scottish fiddling; his models would have been from the Kreisler generation. Further, this approach has also been connected to other Scottish players such as Hector MacAndrew; however, Skinner seems to have had a deeper impact on Cape Breton fiddling than any other Scottish players. Regardless, the style that Chisolm chose to emulate in this listening piece stretched far beyond the realm of the traditional Cape Breton style.

³³ The term 'extended techniques', when applied to Cape Breton fiddling, encompasses the usage of any technical features that surpass the demands present in traditional Cape Breton tunes.

³⁴ This wider vibrato is also what my generation of violinists call 'sheep' vibrato, in that the oscillations are still quite tight; this type of vibrato is again typically connected with the Kreisler style.

³⁵ Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton*, p. 123.

³⁶ Interview with Kinnon Beaton, 21 August 2007.

³⁷ Quotation marks are placed around emic terminology. See Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton* for elaboration on Cape Breton techniques.

³⁸ Angus Chisholm's more consistent, wider vibrato is marked with '___' in areas where the vibrato is particularly audible. On single pitches in 'Mrs Scott Skinner', his marked vibrato is also in the continuous (i.e. not ornamental) Classical style.

³⁹ Transcribed as the pitches *sound*, rather than in scordatura notation.