THE CAPE BRETON FIDDLING NARRATIVE:
INNOVATION, PRESERVATION, DANCING

by

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Abstract

With the fear of decline of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition after the airing of *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* by the CBC in 1971, both the Cape Breton community and ethnographers clamored to preserve and maintain the extant practices and discourse. While this allowed for performance contexts and practices to burgeon, it also solidified certain perspectives about the “diasporic preservation” and resultant “authenticity.”

This work aims to trace the seeds and developments of the beliefs surrounding the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, from the idealizations of Enlightenment Scotland to the manipulation and commercialization of the folklore and Celticism of twentieth-century Nova Scotia. These contexts romanticized older practices as “authentic,” a construct that deeply impacted the narrative about the Cape Breton fiddling tradition.

One of the most rooted and complex concepts in this narrative is that of “old style,” a term that came to represent the idealized performance practice in post-1971 Cape Breton fiddling. As models were sought for younger players to emulate, pre-1971 “master” fiddlers with innovative stylistic approaches began to be identified as “old style” players. The interstices of the tradition allowed more extreme stylistic experimentation to be accepted as “traditional,” while the symbiotic social practice of dancing necessitated relative conservatism. Analysis will show that “listening” tunes fell into the interstices of allowable innovation, while dance (particularly step-dance) tunes demanded certain “old style” techniques. A more holistic view of the complexities of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition follows from a perspective not only of the socio-musical elements that shaped
the historical narrative, but also of the musical elements of this dance-oriented “old
style.”
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Preamble

Driving to Nova Scotia from Ontario during the summers of my childhood, I was always excited to visit Nova Scotian tourist bureaus, where one was regaled with tartan prints, lighthouses, and even a live, kilted bagpiper. There was a duality to my impression of Nova Scotia, as the tourist industry pummeled me with an appealing mythological Celticism that it was difficult not to embrace; however, on the island, my relatives that we spent most of our time with did not seem to exude the pristine Celtic folk nature that I was beginning to expect.

Although I grew up as a classically-trained violinist, I gradually developed an interest in the Cape Breton fiddle music that was so prominent in the east coast summers when I was visiting my family. Luckily for me, as my passion for Cape Breton fiddling grew, in the early 1990s, so too did the Celtic boom; suddenly fiddle music was “cool.” The recurring tale that I encountered throughout my youthful studies of Cape Breton fiddling situated it as a remnant of a tradition long lost in its original home – the Scottish Highlands. As I began my fieldwork for this thesis last summer, I came to realize that the historical discourse surrounding Cape Breton fiddling did not exist in isolation from the rampant faux-Celticism and mythologizing that was being manipulated for commercial profit. Over the years, social perspectives and forces have impacted the emic view of this tradition.

The current narrative about the history and continuity of the Cape Breton fiddle tradition is rooted in broader developments. This thesis elucidates how the Cape Breton fiddling narrative has engaged with issues stretching from Enlightenment Scotland to twentieth-century Nova Scotia. One of the most vital entrenched concepts of the narrative
is that of “old style,” for it is connected with various pertinent issues: idealized tradition, authenticity, and preservation; and revivals, interstices, and innovation.

Developing a perspective on the socio-political contexts for this narrative in its relation to the living practice of Cape Breton fiddling demands historical, ethnographic and musical analysis. The first chapter of this thesis delves into the “invented” aspects of Scottish Highlandism and its perpetuation in the diasporic Cape Breton communities. The continued evolution of this mythology will be examined in the context of twentieth-century Nova Scotia: the tartanism propelled by the government found a new commercial gain for these “Celtic” ventures, which has had a lasting impact on the projected Nova Scotian identity.

The second chapter examines the concepts of innovation through both ethnographically and historically documented periods of transformation within the Cape Breton fiddling style. The narrative surrounding the idea of change will clarify where the interstices are to be found in these social practices; the basis of legitimized and proscribed innovation will be identified in the interstices in the community discourse.¹

The third chapter interrogates the role of preservation within the narrative. The idealization of older practices has allowed Cape Breton fiddling to be conveyed as more “authentic” than extant contemporary practices in Scotland and various Scottish diasporas. Nonetheless, the concern for the preservation of the tradition that arose after 1971 included a restorative impulse – thus automatically altering existing aspects of the tradition. In this process, certain elements slowly became projected as the threads of

¹ I will follow Hobsbawm’s concept of interstices in the social perception of history (i.e. the intervening spaces of allowable innovation within “tradition”), which will be examined in detail in the second chapter.
continuity for the fiddling practice; the gradual exclusion of dance from this discourse will receive particular attention.

The fourth chapter investigates the idea of “old style” and its transformation within the narrative. I will examine the duality in the usage of “old style” in its post-1971 manifestations, as well as the duality in the stylistic transformational abilities of the global Cape Breton fiddler.

The fifth chapter clarifies the connections between the Cape Breton dancing practices and the retention of techniques associated with “old style.” I will show how the combination of conservative ideas through the community participation at dances, and the practical demands of fiddling for dancing, have resulted in the retention of certain technical elements connected with “old style” playing.

The final chapter provides analyses of four fiddlers recorded across the generations who utilize the “old style” techniques to support integral characteristics of dance playing – namely, their “timing,” “drive,” and “lift.” A further comparative analysis of one of the idealized innovative Cape Breton fiddlers from the pre-1971 era will exemplify the interstices of the tradition versus the conservative connection with dance tunes. It will thus be demonstrated that across different generations and commercial roles, the continuation of elements of “old style” performance practice are evident in association with dance fiddling.
Chapter 1: The Roots of Invented Tradition

The historical narrative of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition has its roots in two broader social histories: Enlightenment Scotland, and twentieth-century Nova Scotia. Academics have thus typically begun their studies of the tradition by tracing the historical lineage of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition from the eighteenth-century Scottish Highlands to its transplantation in Cape Breton. Unfortunately, as several scholars point out, extant documentation about the musical traditions in both the eighteenth-century Scottish Highlands and nineteenth-century Cape Breton is lacking. As a result, most of these “historical” examinations have relied largely on orally-perpetuated accounts of this historical narrative. For instance, Allister MacGillavray’s deservedly acclaimed *The Cape Breton Fiddler*, upon which many later scholarly works rely for their historical understanding, shows the history of the tradition through the lens of twentieth-century informants.2

Taking this narrative as the definitive account of the history of Cape Breton musical culture does not acknowledge its likely transformations, through both the gradual alterations that normally occur within oral tradition, and the particular influences of the twentieth century. In striving to trace the developmental path of this narrative, the historical focus in this thesis will address the manipulations and constructions of the musical and social identities of both the original Scottish Highland culture, and its diasporic placement in twentieth-century Nova Scotia.

These chronologically and socially disparate periods of eighteenth-century Lowland Scotland and twentieth-century Nova Scotia have a commonality: the

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construction of “Scottish” identity for an anticipated economic benefit. In many ways, the Enlightenment idealization of the peasantry generally, and the Scottish Highlanders in particular, was the seed for the production and manipulation of “folk” culture in twentieth-century Nova Scotia. A brief view of this historical basis will thus ground the more specific narrative being traced in this thesis.

**The Invented Scottish Tradition**

With Hobsbawm’s ground-breaking *The Invention of Tradition*, scholars began to unveil the layers of politically and socially constructed myths surrounding the “Scottish” identity. The origins of this mythologizing lie in the political-intellectual atmosphere of post-Battle of Culloden Scotland, which allowed for the type of “invented tradition” that Hobsbawn describes:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.

This invention of tradition is apparent beginning from the eighteenth-century Lowland and English manipulation and appropriation of the Highland identity. The phenomenon is traceable back to the supposed representative vestments of Highlander: the kilt (in the form that we identify it today), generally portrayed as a symbol of the

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3 The Battle of Culloden was the final clash between the Jacobites (mostly Highland Scots) and the Hanoverian British Government. The Jacobites supported James Francis Edward Stuart’s (or, more generally, the descendants of the House of Stuart’s) claim to the throne of Great Britain, while the British supported the ruling sovereign, King George II. In finally quashing the rebellion, which had intensified over several decades (1688-1746), the Jacobites (and therefore Scottish Highlanders) lost all military capability against the British. See John Sadler, *Culloden: The Last Charge of the Highland Clans, 1746* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2006); and Michael Fry, *Wild Scots: four hundred years of Highland history* (London: John Murray, 2005).

independent and peculiar Scottish tradition, was actually created by an English Quaker
industrialist, Thomas Rawlinson.\textsuperscript{5} This kilt was constructed for practical physical labour:
not to preserve an ancient tradition, but to facilitate the Highlanders’ transition from the
heather into the factory.\textsuperscript{6} We will see the continued relevance of the kilt in the tourism-
oriented construction of “tartanism” in twentieth-century Nova Scotia later in this
chapter.

The Highland transition into modernity, combined with English domination and
attempted suppression after the Battle of Culloden, essentially brought about the downfall
of the Highland clan system and its traditions.\textsuperscript{7} The eighteenth century saw a period of
agricultural revolution, as new farming methods were introduced; these, in turn, resulted
in new political and social structuring systems, on local and broader levels.\textsuperscript{8} This
restructuring was a response to the expansion of new industries, which demanded a
change in the emphasized modes of production. An Argyllshire chieftain summarized the
beginning of these transformations: “When I was young the only question asked
concerning a man’s rank was how many men lived on his estate; then it came to how
many black cattle it could keep; but now they only ask how many sheep the land will
carry.”\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{5} Rawlinson, and ironmaster, had a thirty-one year lease of a wooded area of Invergarry, where he had
wood felled and burned by Highland labourers. Hugh Trevor-Roper, “The Invention of Tradition: The
Highland Tradition of Scotland,” in \textit{The Invention of Tradition}, eds. Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger,

\textsuperscript{6} Trevor-Roper, “The Highland Tradition,” 19-22. Until the seventeenth century, the Highland costume
closely resembled that of the Irish: a long ‘Irish’ skirt (\textit{leine}); a tunic (\textit{fàilàin}); and a cloak or plaid,
generally of russet or brown (for camouflage in the heather). In the seventeenth century, there are many
accounts of Highland armies is the costume of the \textit{breacan}, or ‘belted plaid.’

\textsuperscript{7} Interestingly, the clanship system (derived from a kin-based society, modified by feudalism) itself
engages with an idealization of the Highland narrative: while both chiefs and clansmen believed clanship to
have existed since time immemorial, the tradition only reached true cohesion and systematization in the

\textsuperscript{8} Bingham, \textit{Beyond}, 138.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 146-7.
This explanation refers to the change from a clan system based on groups of warriors that traditionally raided cattle, to one that gradually devalued the people of the land as a legal cattle trade usurped the raiding tradition, and finally to the complete deterioration of the clan system as chiefs succumbed to the lure of the high rents offered for commercial sheep farming from 1760 onward.\textsuperscript{10} This latter situation led to the climate that impelled the famous Highland Clearances, as it encouraged these chiefs, in their role as Highland landlords, to evict their tenants for their own financial gain.\textsuperscript{11}

In propelling the destruction of the Highland traditions, this modernization fed into broader English attempts at suppressing the independent Highland way of life after the Battle of Culloden. Interestingly, along with Highland disarmament and the revocation of any hereditary jurisdiction carried by their chiefs, all typical Highland garb was banned, including “plaid, philibeg [kilt], trews [breeches and stockings], shoulder belts … tartans or parti-coloured plaid or stuff.”\textsuperscript{12} This was carried out so thoroughly that by around 1780 the Highland dress had basically become extinct.\textsuperscript{13} The Highlanders’ diminishing political threat after the English quashing of the 1745 rebellions, combined with the stifling of Highland traditions, meant that symbols typically associated with Highlanders lost their socio-political salience.\textsuperscript{14} Hence, the time was ripe for the Scottish elite to arrogate aspects of the Highland culture for their own usage – such as the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 147-67.
\textsuperscript{11} Sheep farmers from the Borders and the Lowlands could often offer Highland landlords upwards of ten times the rent that local tenants had been paying. Most tenants worked in some kind of cottage industry, and it was basically impossible for them to convert to sheep farming – again, mainly due to the financial impossibility of buying a flock of sheep. Bingham, Beyond, 167-68.
\textsuperscript{12} Sporting this attire was forbidden “under pain of imprisonment without bail for six months and, for a second offence, transportation for seven years.” Trevor-Roper, “The Highland Tradition,” 24.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{14} Trevor-Roper points out: “Before 1745 the Highlanders had been despised as idle predatory barbarians. In 1745 they had been feared as dangerous rebels. But after 1746, when their distinct society crumbled so easily, they combined the romance of a primitive people with the charm of an endangered species.” Ibid., 25.
“peculiar” manner of Highland dress, the kilt – ironically fashioned by an Englishman. However, the Scottish upper class did not choose to sport the true traditional garb of the Highlanders, but rather wore a “costly and fanciful version of […] the philibeg or small kilt.”¹⁵

The appropriation of this Highland symbol engages with two of the typical features of the English/Lowlander highlandization of the late eighteenth century: the celebration of the “Highland Spirit,” and the distortion of tradition for an elite audience. The idealization of the “Highland Spirit” derives from the growth of nationalism and the resultant typical Enlightenment search for national identity: the Scottish elite appropriated the lower class “folk” – the Highlander – as their representative of the organic Scottish national character. Logically, this resulted in the Scottish upper class manipulating the Highland identity into their desired image. This contortion of the Highland lifestyle into the Lowland-created “Scottish” identity developed further with the genesis of the Highland Societies.

The first Highland Society was founded in London in 1778, supposedly with the intention of encouraging “ancient Highland virtues” and preserving “ancient Highland traditions”; in truth, these attempts at practice and preservation were actually directed toward Lowland-invented “Highland” traditions. This society had two main aims: preserving ancient Gaelic literature, and removing the legal proscription of the Highland dress in Scotland.¹⁶ Both of these goals lie within the typical Lowland manipulation of Highland culture: the “ancient Gaelic literature” that they sought to preserve, namely the “original” Gaelic text of Ossian, was a complete fabrication by the elite antiquarian,

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.
¹⁶ Ibid., 26.
James MacPherson;\textsuperscript{17} the “Highland dress” for which they appealed for legalization had long ago been abandoned (and indeed was never reinstated) by any bona fide Scottish Highlanders.\textsuperscript{18} The practices that developed as a result of these goals, governed by the overtly accepted rules set up by the societies, were meant to represent (if superficially) a continuance of “Highland” traditions; in this manner, these Highland Societies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries embody an explicit Hobsbawmean “invention of tradition.”

The “Art” and “Folk” Music Dichotomy

Matthew Gelbart connects this Hobsbawmean “invention of tradition” with an invented dichotomy between “folk” music and “art” music. He states that “‘Folk music’ and ‘art music,’ being recent constructions that have portrayed themselves as timeless categories, share much with the idea of ‘invented tradition.’”\textsuperscript{19} Gelbart regards early eighteenth-century Scotland as a breeding ground for this folk/art split: “for philosophers and musicians across Europe, Scottish music was the initial catalyst in the conceptual polarization of ‘folk’ and ‘art’ musics. […] Scotland served as the primary bridge between the ‘primitive’ and ‘civilized’ within Europe.”\textsuperscript{20} This dichotomy was a creation of the Enlightenment movement – prior to this, distinctions between musical styles and genres were largely of function (their usage in a particular circumstance), rather than

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] This falsification has been studied many times over. In particular, see Theresa Sorel, “Scottish Cultural Nationalism, 1760-1832: the Highlandization of Scottish National Identity” (MA thesis, University of Guelph, 1997).
\item[20] Ibid., 14.
\end{footnotes}
Generally, the various strata of Scottish society passed around tunes from a common pot for various uses and circumstances. “By the middle of the [eighteenth] century, it was common to have folk music, classical music and hybrid forms of both played side-by-side in the dance hall, often written and performed by Scottish musicians.” The likelihood of an emic meaning for the labels of “folk” and “art” music in this context is belied by most Scottish collections of the eighteenth century, which contain “indiscriminate mélanges” of international styles and “folk” and “art” music.

The catalyst for the distinction between “folk” and “art” music that developed later in the eighteenth century was likely the search for musical origins that grew out of a nationalist sentiment. In tracing its origins to a particular region, a melody could become cultural capital; this conception led to works being abstracted away from context and usage.

A particularly interesting musical culture melding these “folk” and “art” musics developed around the fiddle in Scotland. This blend was most obvious in the Scottish musical societies’ concert programming; these societies, founded throughout the eighteenth century (Edinburgh 1728, Aberdeen 1748, Glasgow 1799, Dundee 1757), culminated in a period of thriving musical activity between 1760 and 1780, and declined over the following twenty years. Although the concert programs at first were heavily stocked with foreign composers (Handel, Pergolesi, Bach, Haydn, Corelli, and Jommelli

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21 Ibid., 47.
22 Ibid., 20.
23 Barbara Louise Downie, “William McGibbon and Niel Gow: Reflections of tradition and taste in eighteenth-century lowland Scotland” (MMus thesis, Rice University, 1997), 27. Allan Ramsay’s famous poem “To the Music Club” (1721) celebrated this admixture: “And show that music may have as good fate/ In Albion’s Glen as Umbria’s green retreat,/ And with Corelli’s soft Italian song,/ Mix ‘Cowdenknowes’ and ‘Winter nights are long’.”
24 Ibid., 37.
were favourites), they also tended to include a “Scots Song.” Scots fiddle tunes also found their way onto recital programs. However, it was this emphasis on foreign composers (and Italians in particular) that allowed a particular genre of fiddle music to develop: the Scots drawing-room style. Essentially, this was a fusion of Italianate and Scots style, where, typically, a Scottish composer would impose “genteel” harmonizations onto native melodies. In particular, the Italian Renaissance chord progression of the *passamezzo antico* and the *passamezzo moderno* became popular.

While many composers experimented in this genre, the Scots drawing-room style crystallized in the collection *Scots Tunes* (1742) by William McGibbon, one of the most important classical violinists in Scotland during this period.

In some ways, “folk” and “art” music began to diverge in Scotland as a reaction to the 1707 Act of Union with Britain. Scotland’s dire financial straits had forced this union; in exchange for England’s trade routes, Scotland rescinded its independent government and laws of monarchial succession. However, it was widely believed in Scotland that culture had been sacrificed for the sake of fiscal stability. One of the many reactions to this was the alienization of “art” music: while “art” and “folk” music had flourished in tandem (indeed, without this genre differentiation at all), the threat of English domination over Scottish culture bred a fear of the “foreign.” As a result, “folk” music gradually came to represent the “Scottish,” while classical music came to represent “foreign interference.”

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27 Ibid., 12-13, 70.
28 Ibid., 70-73.
29 Ibid., 75.
30 Ibid., 3-5.
The Anglophone Narrative

The 1707 Union was at the tail end of a long history of conflict and prejudice between English and Gaelic cultures; with English domination, the historiography of Gaelic society has logically been dominated by Anglophone writers. The Lowland appropriation of Highland images during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries follows from their manipulation of the Highland experience of the Clearances and emigration. Although the Clearances’ widespread effect on geographically and culturally disparate areas of the Highlands would logically not have resulted in one cohesive, uniform narrative of Highland emigration, there have nonetheless been two basic perspectives of this history: “one, derived from Gaelic, represents the impressions of the people at the center of the migration saga, while the other, derived from English, represents the external observations of a neighbouring society with a long history of hostility toward the Gaels.”

English domination also led to a literary and historical sublimation of this Gaelic voice, forming a narrative around the romanticized hearty, suffering Highlander. The resultant history of this emigration has generally presented an image of an illiterate, dysfunctional, unprogressive society of Highlanders that suffered through constant trials and melancholy in its immigrant experience. The realities, as depicted in Gaelic historical accounts, were frequently much more positive, complaining of the corruption of the

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Anglicized Highland Chiefs, rather than of modernization, and expressing excitement about their adopted country, rather than sorrow in their exile.\textsuperscript{32}

The prominence of this English perspective derives in large part from the societal Anglicization from the top down during the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. This Anglicization remained rooted in the upper echelons of the Scottish society, but, since history typically turns to the elite to narrate the past, this Anglicization deeply affected the received historical view. Kennedy suggests that the “top-down rot” blurred the historic vision of a distinction between English and Gaelic.\textsuperscript{33} The constructed Anglophone narrative of the Gaelic experience therefore appeared to hold an acceptable level of authenticity, at least until the recent trend of myth debunking.

**Immigration and Continued Constructions**

As Scots migrated to Nova Scotia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some of the most salient aspects of this nascent constructed identity were either imported with them, or were developed contemporaneously in both Scotland and the diaspora. Despite myth-debunking Scottish historical study having become nearly axiomatic to any exploration of the identity of the North American Scot, the cultural impact of these examinations of “constructions” and “inventions” have had little impact on the North American Scottish narrative. Michael Vance points out that “received ideas about ‘Scottishness’ in Nova Scotia have had important ‘political’ consequences. They have

\textsuperscript{32} “Weighing the wide diversity of evidence left by immigrants from the Highlands – poems, stories, anecdotes, letters and so on – one is struck by just how overwhelmingly favourable they are.” The ignorance of an entire body of Gaelic historical commentary allowed for their story to be narrated by English observers. Kennedy, “Lochaber no more,” 276-78.

\textsuperscript{33} Kennedy, “Lochaber no more,” 272-3. In some ways this was a purposeful obfuscation, as elements of “Highlandism” were appropriated by the English and Lowlanders.
distorted the actual experience of the Scottish minority in the province and relegated them to emblems of a bygone rustic age. 34 Examining the political underpinnings of this constructed identity would thus offer a valuable perspective on the idea of Scottishness in Nova Scotia.

Comprehending the effects of socio-political machinations on formed cultural perspectives is vital for grasping the bases and manipulations of ethnographic viewpoints. Cowan states that in some ways, the study of the Scottish experience on either side of the Atlantic is anomalous, in that “the myth of Scotch Canada is not all that different from the myth of Scotch Scotland.” 35 Cowan is referring here to the early period of Scottish emigration, when many of the literary ideals of the Scottish world, with their popularizations of Enlightenment Highlandization, were as favoured in Canada as they were in their homeland. 36 This shared mythology logically seeped into various social practices.

For instance, one of the most fertile grounds for breeding invented Scottish traditions was developed simultaneously in North America and overseas: the Highland Games. The first Highland Games in Scotland, organized by the St. Fillans Highland Society in 1819, coincided with the establishment of the Highland Society in Glengarry, Ontario, whose purpose was the organization of Highland Games. Many of the symbols that became associated with Highland Games were either part of the typical invented Scottish tradition, or were appropriated from broader practices: for instance, the kilt (the

36 Cowan points particularly to the Kailyard school of literature, with its “saccharine tales of couthy Scots living in rural idyll,” so popular in both Scottish cultures. Cowan, “The Myth of Scotch Canada,” 67.
quintessential representation of Lowland Highlandization) became mandatory for the competitors in the heavy events; caber tossing (the hefty, kilted caber-tosser has long been an image associated with Highland Games) was also very popular elsewhere – particularly in Sweden – but became considered characteristically Highland.\textsuperscript{37}

The constructed Games and their associated images play into the typical elements of the original Lowland-invented “Highland Spirit”: rustic, aggressive, simplistic and peculiar.\textsuperscript{38} Also, these Games are notable for engaging with the Nova Scotian government’s “tartanism,” discussed below. This tartanism in Nova Scotia – essentially, the promotion of Scottish kitsch – grew out of two broad, interrelated movements: the growth of the tourism trade, and the mushrooming of folkorism.

\textbf{Tourism and Tartanism in Nova Scotia}

Cape Breton was already becoming established as a tourist destination for the observation of “preserved” Gaelic culture in the 1880s.\textsuperscript{39} However, it was only in the 1920s and 1930s that Cape Breton governmental tourism programs were set up to cope with fiscal instability.\textsuperscript{40} The 1920s in Nova Scotia was a period of socio-economic turmoil: there were seemingly perpetual layoffs and labour wars; manufacturing and

\textsuperscript{37} The activities chosen for Highland Games were largely considered for their cheapness and accessibility. Cowan, “The Myth of Scotch Canada,” 62.

\textsuperscript{38} Vance states: “As Scottishness became more formalized with such games, the original Gaelic culture, which survived only in enclaves, began its precipitous decline […] This points to the disconnected nature of the relationship between representations of Scottishness and actual historical experience.” Vance, “Powerful Pathos,” 160.

\textsuperscript{39} Charles Farnham’s 1886 essay “Cape Breton Folk” for Harpers magazine embodied the trendy expectation from tourists in this period: exposure to a “primeval community with exotic customs,” living close to the earth, in rustic abodes. Vance, “Powerful Pathos,” 166.

resource industries declined; and waves of young Nova Scotian workers abandoned their province for work in central Canada and the United States.\textsuperscript{41}

Central to the Nova Scotian government’s attempt to cope with these crises was the creation of a provincially-controlled tourism economy; the result was an ingeniously manipulated, marketable Nova Scotian identity. The key emphases in this constructed image played into both the age-old, Enlightenment-based idealization of the folk — and also had an anti-modernist bent. From the 1920s to the 1950s, the province became a touristic variant of the antimodernism that MacKay identifies as “Innocence”: “Nova Scotia’s heart, its true essence, resided in the primitive, the rustic, the unspoiled, the picturesque, the quaint, the unchanging.”\textsuperscript{42} Much of the progress of modernity that Victorian Nova Scotians had engaged with was undermined by this constructed image. Under this regime, all aspects that would have appeared backward – rustic livelihoods, folklore, superstition – became ideal; all that had been thought of as essential – cities, factories, infrastructure – now became peripheral. To a large degree, this tourism became an endeavor of \textit{commercial} antimodernism.\textsuperscript{43}

This vein of antimodernism was in bed with similar ideals that had been developed since the Enlightenment – namely, the creation and romanticization of the “folk.” This phenomenon was epitomized in Nova Scotia by the work of folklorist Helen Creighton, who “from the late 1920s to the early 1970s […] stood for the idea of the Folk in the province.”\textsuperscript{44} Building on the work of other folklorists (e.g. Roy Mackenzie), Canadian and British academics, and the popularizers of Folk events, Creighton

\textsuperscript{41} McKay, \textit{Quest}, 27.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 43.
developed the broad assumption that there had once been organic unity within society; these “folkways,” once shared by all, continued to exist in substrata of society. As a folklorist in the early twentieth century, Creighton had the typical role of deciding what aspects of these societal traditions should be valued and disseminated. Her views of the “folk” as rustic peoples uncontaminated by modernity were widely accepted and popularized.\(^45\)

The expectation that such distinct peoples existed in a sort of timeless atmosphere of older practices allowed a cultural tourism industry to develop successfully in the province. In what Ian McKay has coined the “quest of the folk,” the search for profits pushed the production of the Nova Scotian “folk” for an international market.\(^46\)

Angus L. MacDonald, Nova Scotia’s premier from 1933 to 1954, played a prevalent role in the construction of a tourist culture. He used the state’s cultural power to realize his own overtly romanticized idea of the Scottish tradition, thus allowing tartanism to triumph in his province. The success of this tartanism is evident in the unquestioning “Scottishness” attributed to the province, even in the present-day. Yet, even in early Nova Scotia, claims to a strong Scottish identity cannot be substantiated: historically, the seventeenth-century application of the name “New Scotland” had little to do with the new inhabitants of the land (even the scant “Scottish” settlements in Cape Breton and Port Royal were probably mostly populated by English), but rather with political convenience.\(^47\) The possibility that there has been a demographic majority of

\(^{45}\) “So persuasive and popular were Creighton’s works, both in Nova Scotia and in Canada as a whole, that the picture they drew of Nova Scotia has come to seem part of common sense and popular tradition rather than the outcome of debatable assumptions and choices. […] One woman’s antimodernist outlook came to appear to be the natural, spontaneous voice of the Folk.” Ibid., 99.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 276.

\(^{47}\) In an attempt to concretize colonization plans in 1624, the Crown created an order of knight-baronetcies in Scotland. A portion of Edinburgh Castle was designated “Nova Scotia” and some of the
Scottish descendants in the province is also untenable. Although there was a substantial influx of Scots (particularly Highlanders) between 1770 and 1840, by no means did they overwhelm other ethnicities in the province. “According to a 1921 census, [...] Nova Scotians of ‘Scottish origin’ represented just over 28 percent of the provincial population.” Further, “not only was Nova Scotia not predominantly Scottish, but it was not the most Scottish of Canadian provinces.”

The antimodern approach to tourism, an international phenomenon in the early twentieth century, would doubtless have infiltrated the Nova Scotian project, but the constructed rustic Scottish identity would not likely have been as persuasively naturalized had it not been for the Premier at this period. Angus L. MacDonald’s sentimentalization of Scottish culture was deeply rooted and heartfelt; his willingness to commercialize this Scottishness was based in his fidelity to nineteenth-century economic liberalism, which justified free market, individualistic approaches. MacDonald implemented many new programs, from investing money into tourist accommodation, paving the Cape Breton’s Cabot Trail, and creating the state department for tourism promotion, The Department of Industry and Publicity.

The Suppression of Gaelic Traditions in the Gaelic Craze

There are several pervasive ironies in the provincial promotion of Highlandness:

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48 Ibid., 8.
49 “Prince Edward Islanders of Scottish origin accounted for a larger percentage of their province’s population.” Ibid.
50 Ibid., 21.
51 Ibid.
for one, as Nova Scotia promoted Gaelic flavour and imagery, the use of the Gaelic language continued to decline. Unfortunately, this fit logically with MacDonald’s vision of the Gaelic language, and of the suffering and loss characteristic of the Gaelic people: he saw Gaelic not as a living, functional language, but as the ancient Caledonian tongue that tied the Gael to his heroic past. The steps that MacDonald took in the promotion of Gaelicness were in no way related to effective policies for supporting the survival of the Gaelic language. Rather, he “supported a strange tartan fantasia at the Gaelic College at St. Ann’s.”

At its founding, this institution was not intended for Gaelic instruction, but rather for the promotion of MacDonaldian tartanism.

Another irony is that Cape Breton, itself a true enclave of living Scottish traditions into the twentieth century, did not exhibit the tartanism MacDonald aimed to display; his tartanism was, after all, rooted in the Lowland- and English-constructed ideals of the Scottish identity, and not in the realities of the Highland traditions that had been imported with the Highlanders to Cape Breton. Therefore, the aspects of Gaelic lifestyle that had persevered into this period in Cape Breton were more suppressed than encouraged by this promotion of Nova Scotian “Scottishness.”

However, an essentialist view of Cape Breton culture is just as restrictive and unrealistic as a characterization of “Scottish” Nova Scotia more generally. While Gaelic immigrants did dominate the ethnic mélange in Cape Breton by the mid-nineteenth century, groups that became ethnic minorities, like First Nations peoples or Acadians,

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52 Ibid., 37.
53 There have been many changes in recent years at the Gaelic College, which will be discussed in relation to the rising consciousness of the Gaelic decline in post-1971 Cape Breton.
continued to assert their presence and unique identities.\textsuperscript{54} Beyond this, the idea of the “folk” of Cape Breton, and more broadly of Nova Scotian culture, also comes into play. Most of the population of Cape Breton did not hold on to antiquated, rustic livelihoods; in fact, for the first half of the twentieth century, Cape Breton was the industrial center of the Atlantic provinces. The image of the folkish lifestyle was thus no more realistic in Cape Breton than it was on mainland Nova Scotia. The two industries that drove this industrial economy, coal and steel, however, were modernized in a manner that reduced the required manpower to next to nothing by the 1960s. Hence, like the rest of Nova Scotia, Cape Breton underwent an economic crisis during this period.\textsuperscript{55}

**Tourism in Cape Breton**

In 1967, the Canadian government created DEVCO (Cape Breton Development Corporation) for two purposes: to deal with the closures of mines, and to diversify the economic structure of the region. The basic outcome was an increasing dependence on the tourism industry, and the logical resultant emphases and manipulations of certain highlighted traditions. Similar to the tartanistic constructs in Nova Scotia more generally, “long before anyone had coined the phrase ‘invented tradition,’ Hugh MacLennan in

\textsuperscript{54} There are many communities that are predominantly Native, or Acadian (e.g. Membertou, Cheticamp). While we will see that these ethnic groups have engaged with Scottish Cape Breton fiddling, they also retained many of their own social practices. From the 1960s onward, the Cape Breton government encouraged these communities to promote their heritage for touristic aims (for example, the Fortress of Louisbourg, and the Grand-Pré National Historic Site). Nonetheless, Nova Scotia’s tourism cite is still dominated by “Celtic” (which is largely associated with “Scottish”) attractions. See *Nova Scotia’s Official Tourism Website*, novascotia.com (accessed 18 May 2007).

1964 recorded the ‘plain fact that the kilt was never worn in Cape Breton before the tourists came.’\textsuperscript{56}

As with the global antimodernist tourism movement, the exploitation of the “Celticness” (initially under the rubric of “Gaelicness,” in Nova Scotia) for commercial benefit engaged with a broader trend: the Celtic craze (a.k.a. the “Celtic boom”). The 1990s were the high point of this mania, but Schmidt states that “The current Celtic mania began in the 1960s and 1970s along with the folk music scene, gathered speed in the 1980s, and appeared full-force in popular culture by the 1990s.”\textsuperscript{57} As with the perpetuation of the Scottish Enlightenment images of Highlandization in mid-century Nova Scotian tourism, this late twentieth-century Celtic Craze continued to exhibit characteristics of the late-nineteenth century Celtic Renaissance (dubbed “Celtic Twilightism”). Ellis explains:

\begin{quote}
this cultural renaissance, of which [...] Yeats became the best internationally-known representative, was inspired by a significant movement of the Celtic peoples to restore their declining languages, and reassert their cultural identity and political independence.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

The “Celtic” label is prevalent throughout the tourist attractions and cultural centers of Nova Scotia generally, but in Cape Breton in particular. The largest music festival in Cape Breton is titled “Celtic Colours”; the original instruction centre is called “The Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts”; the recently founded interpretive facility in Judique has been named “The Celtic Music Interpretive Center”; and there are countless “Celtic” lodges and bed and breakfasts. Both the cultural promoters and the tourism industry seem to have accepted, if not advocated, this label. On the Nova Scotia tourism

\textsuperscript{56} This was likely an overstatement, but still held some validity in its claim to the exaggeration of the constructed tartanism. McKay, “Tartanism,” 13.
website, Cape Breton Island is announced as the “seat of ancient culture and hub of the Celtic folk music revival.”59 Thus, in buying into the “Celtic” wave, and promoting the island as a nugget of preserved “ancient” traditions, the Cape Breton tourism machine has accepted much of the associated Enlightenment “Scottish Spirit” ideals, the Creightonian folkishness, and the MacDonaldian “tartanism” into its projected cultural identity.

Nonetheless, although these Scottish images obviously convey an “invented” nature, the mythologizing surrounding what Jonathan Dembling calls the “Scottish Discursive Unconscious” has become so ingrained as a type of narrative reality that it has acquired a degree of cultural authenticity: “Highlandism has a long enough history, and has been so widely adopted, that it is difficult to argue that it is not real.”60 The plethora of Scottish-kitsch and originally constructed traditions have become a part of cultural practice. However, some purposeful gerrymandering within this Scottish Discursive Unconscious is evident. For one, although Nova Scotian tartanism may have been rooted in a genuine interest in the Scottish aspects of the province’s ethnic heritage, not acknowledging other cultural groups as part of the projected “Nova Scotian” identity underlines the constructed nature of Enlightenment “invented tradition.” Below I will examine how these manipulations – in their origins and in their eventually accepted “authentic” roles – have engaged with the discourse on Cape Breton fiddling.

“Social life is always symbolically constructed, never naturally given. All handing down, for example, depends upon the use of symbols and is thus continuously reinvented in the present.”

The etically-molded manipulation of Scottish “identity” apparent in both the context of Enlightenment Scotland and contemporary Nova Scotia fails to acknowledge the emic standpoint of identity, both from a nineteenth-century Scottish Highlander’s view, and from a twentieth-century Nova Scotian’s. Unfortunately, the predominance of oral traditions within the Gaelic culture, combined with the lack of study of minimal extant Gaelic writings (due to the above usurpation of Gaelic history by etic Anglophone proponents) disallows any historical anthropology of Enlightenment Highland identity. Twentieth-century Scottish Nova Scotian culture, on the other hand, has been widely documented, both from outsider and insider perspectives.

Although a complete understanding of Cape Breton cultural standpoints on innovation is not necessarily attainable, a grounding in the theories of discrete cultural behaviours may offer a more concrete perspective. When its cultural makeup and traditions are examined, Cape Breton is largely studied for its prominent diasporic Scottish population. This self-perception as an old Scottish diaspora has shaped certain elements of the narrative about the Cape Breton fiddling tradition; interestingly, notions of acculturation and innovation have been particularly scant.

**Diasporic Cultures and Acculturation**

Our notions of diasporas have changed with globalization and the inherent complexities of implied or real borders and communities. Originally, the term was mostly

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applied to exiled groups, most typically of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians. Interestingly, this original image is connected with that of the exiled Scot, forced out of his homeland by his modernizing clan Chief; this image of coerced departure and suffering has been a pervasive part of the narrative of the Highland Clearances. However, in recent years scholars have brought to light the reality of two stages of these clearances: pre-1815, when the Highlanders left of their own volition (now identified as the “People’s Clearances”); and post-1815, when they were forced from their homes. The essential difference between these two stages was that, in the first, those departing were of a higher class, and therefore wealthy enough to finance the voyage and resettlement; they chose to leave because they perceived the restructuring of their communities as a threat to their social positions. The Highlanders on the lower echelons of society could not afford that choice, and therefore only left when they were forced onto the boats, in the second stage of the Clearances.62

Our modern application of “diaspora,” however, “shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community.”63 Nonetheless, scholars still search for relatively concrete definitions of this term. Safran, for one, identifies the main features of diaspora as “a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship.”64 It seems questionable, however, that these very personal psychologies could necessarily be shown

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64 Safran qtd. in Clifford, “Diasporas,” 305.
to exist within the scope of entire communities – even ethnographically. As Clifford points out, these

“pure” forms […] are ambivalent, even embattled, over basic features. Moreover, at different times in their history, societies may wax and wane in diaporism. […] Whatever the working list of diasporic features, no society can be expected to qualify on all counts, throughout its history.\(^{65}\)

Clifford asserts that “the language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home.”\(^{66}\)

This view is particularly pertinent in Cape Breton Island, where there has been a continued evolution of the nature of the relationship with Scotland, vacillating between maintenance, revivification, and invention of their connection with their homeland. The Cape Breton role as a diaspora of Scotland has been integral in forming the narrative surrounding its cultural traditions – especially music and dance.

**The Cape Breton Scottish Diaspora: Authenticity Preserved**

As the story goes, Cape Breton, isolated from outside influences because of its separation from mainland Nova Scotia, held onto the practices and traditions of the original Highland settlers. While this narrative will be more closely studied in the next chapter, it is important to acknowledge here the authenticity that this diasporic isolation has allowed the Cape Breton community to claim. The narrative of the history of Cape Breton cultural practices suggests that Scottish Highland music and dance were drastically changed in the homeland, while being preserved in the isolation of the Cape Breton Scottish diaspora. In this view, up until the alterations that took place in the

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\(^{65}\) Clifford, “Diasporas,” 306.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 310.
twentieth century, Cape Breton traditions of music and dance sustained practices from
eighteenth-century Scotland.\(^{67}\)

The espousal of authenticity connected with this “preservation” is in line with
many other traditions wherein the oldest form of something is often held up as the most
valid and authoritative. What is fascinating about this claim, however, is that the older
idealized form only stretches back to the eighteenth century. This period has typically
been labeled the “Golden Age of Fiddling” (and, to some extent, a Golden Age for
Scottish music generally); it saw the burgeoning of the music print industry, and the rise
of some of the most revered Scottish fiddler-violinists, such as Niel Gow (1727-1807)
and William McGibbon (1690-1756).

The idealization of this period of musical achievement follows the general trend
within the Scottish Enlightenment to prize pre-1746 elements of Scottish culture. The
typical Lowland romanticization of Highland life after 1746 logically interconnects with
the ideology of “folk” music from the same period.\(^{68}\) This mythic idealization of
eighteenth-century fiddle performance practice, rooted in the Lowland manipulation of
Scottishness, was carried into the Cape Breton diaspora.

We may expect the diasporic movement of one cultural group into a new,
multiethnic setting to forecast a certain degree of acculturation; however, the nature of
the above preservation narrative obstructs our view of certain areas of possible

\(^{67}\) Respected scholar John Shaw frequently asserted this perspective: “Cape Breton was spared the
cultural erosion that had so devastating an impact on Gaelic tradition in the Highlands during the nineteenth
century, and whose effects are only now beginning to be fully realized. To this day the regional style and
repertoire in song, poetry and instrumental music reflect the culture of eighteenth century Gaeldom, with
subsequent influences from the nineteenth century being absent or negligible.” John Shaw, “Language,

\(^{68}\) This idealization also led to the usurpation of the historical narrative of the Gaels by this
appropriation/dictation of cultural traditions. This romanticization itself weakened the image of the Gaels
by fictionalizing their character.
acculturation. That is, if the broad community standpoint continues to be that the cultural traditions were maintained from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, a lack of extant documentation otherwise would prohibit an historical examination of the issue. In fact, the most common assertion in the discourse is that the Scottish tradition became so dominant in Cape Breton with the immigration of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that it usurped the traditions of other ethnic groups already established in the area.⁶⁹

While these conceptions of preservation are an integral to the Cape Breton fiddling narrative, aspects of these ideas are rooted in traceable realities of Cape Breton social-geographical history. Mobility between the island and mainland Nova Scotia proved challenging until the construction of the Canso Causeway in 1955. Scholars suggest that this physical isolation led to a degree of cultural conservatism. Gaelic scholar John Shaw asserted that

Cape Breton is the most recent and far-flung outpost of the Scottish Gaelic-speaking region, and it is a well-documented phenomenon that archaic survivals of social and cultural institutions are most likely to be found at the periphery of a given cultural area.⁷⁰

In their settlement, Scottish immigrants tended to follow a pattern of “chain migration”: settled relatives would encourage those in the homeland to join them in the New World.⁷¹ As a result, many of the communities were made up of related or socially connected peoples, thus creating an atmosphere conducive to cultural conservation.

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⁶⁹ With approximately 30,000 Scots emigrating to Cape Breton between 1802 and 1845, Scots outnumbered Acadian and Irish 2:1 by 1851. Kenneth Donovan, “Reflections of Cape Breton Culture: An Introduction,” in *The Island: new perspectives on Cape Breton’s history, 1713-1990*, ed. Kenneth Donovan, 1-29 (Sydney, Nova Scotia: University College of Cape Breton Press, 1990), 20. The musical acculturation of less statistically dominant ethnicities is evinced by their reputed Scottish fiddling. Some very prominent, respected fiddlers in the “Scottish” Cape Breton style came from various ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Lee Cremo was a Mi'kmaq native Canadian, Joe Cormier was of Acadian descent, and Winston Fitzgerald (whose moniker “Scotty” was added so that he could be identified by the commercial music industry as a Scottish-style fiddler) came from an Irish family.

⁷⁰ John Shaw qtd. in Donovan, “Reflections of Cape Breton Culture,” 3.

Liz Doherty translated this conservatism into the musical discourse, suggesting that there is a viable connection between accurate preservation and the diasporic Scottish culture in Cape Breton: “Associated with the immigrants’ disposition toward maintaining traditions of the old country, is the obligation to maintain authenticity. In music this translates as correctness.” However, these contentions also point to Blum’s explanation of protective visions in contexts of acculturation:

An insistence on the purity or uniqueness of one musical practice is a sure sign of culture contact (which includes all efforts to avoid, abort or deny contact). […] Questions about the nature of “our music” can only arise when those who pose them are concerned with problematic relations between “us” and “them.”

Indeed, the prominence of these assertions of cultural preservation in the narrative of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition grew out of an emergent fear in 1970s Cape Breton of possible influence from modern North American or European practices.

“The ‘Myth’ of the Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler”

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 a documentary produced by the CBC in 1971 entitled *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler.* The basic
assertion of the film was simple, but extremely controversial: there were no more young fiddlers coming up, and the fiddle tradition was going to die out with the older generation. The film, produced by a mainlander (or “from away” in Cape Breton terms), Ron MacInnis, had a jarring effect on the Cape Breton musical community. However, as Thompson explains, “a careful search of newspaper archives reveals no letters-to-the-editors of newspapers and no public protests.” Rather, countless culture-bearers calmly assembled to prove MacInnis wrong.

This film has continued to have a surprisingly prominent role within the community discourse about the continuity of the Cape Breton musical traditions – the evolution of which I will examine later in this chapter. In 2002, Marie Thompson produced another CBC documentary, intended to explore this discourse. Interviewees in the 2002 documentary from the Cape Breton musical community clearly still attached significance to VCBF film over 30 years after it was aired.

On July 26, 2007, I attended “The Beaton Family Concert” (also billed as “An Interpretive Performance of Donald Angus Beaton’s Music on the 25th Anniversary of his Passing”) at Strathspey Place in Mabou. Although most of this concert featured the combined performative forces of the many prominent Cape Breton musicians of close familial relation to the revered fiddler Donald Angus Beaton (including Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton, Andrea Beaton, Rodney MacDonald, Glenn Graham and Elizabeth Beaton), it also included a special guest: Ron MacInnis, who showed clips from the cutting room

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1989); and Marie Thompson, “The fall and rise of the Cape Breton fiddler: 1955-1982” (MA thesis, St Mary’s University, 2003).
76 The developments of the viewpoints on the contentions of this film will be examined later in this chapter.
floor and gave a lengthy talk on his 1971 documentary. The inclusion of MacInnis within a concert dedicated to the memory of one of the foremost Cape Breton dance fiddlers points to the prominent role that this documentary has continued to play within the community consciousness.

MacInnis spent most of his talk (positively) reliving his experience of producing the documentary. However, he also asserted his continued belief in what had been proclaimed in the film: in 1971 there were only two young fiddlers left on the island (Kinnon Beaton and John Morris Rankin). At this pronouncement, I heard little pockets of whispers throughout the crowd of audience members muttering to one another “that’s not true …” and “well, he didn’t look in the right places,” and “I could have shown him plenty more fiddlers,” etc. Yet, in keeping with the original reaction to the documentary, there was a polite acknowledgement of the outsider’s right to assert their view, but an emic displacement of it within parts of the community discourse.

That said, there are members of the community who have agreed that there were very few young fiddlers around in 1971 – including Kinnon Beaton, one of the two young fiddlers featured in the film. Thus, the discourse surrounding the VCBF film began, and clearly continues to be polemical. In some ways, this contentious tinge makes it difficult for informants to clearly state their perspectives; although each may have their own opinion, no one cares to offend. The discourse concerning the “vanishing Cape Breton fiddler” has seemingly become more controversial as time has passed, as scholars have

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77 MacInnis seemed just as surprised in 2007 about the original reaction to the 1971 show as he had been in a 2002 interview with Marie Thompson for her documentary, The Wake Up Call: “There weren’t any young fiddlers in Cape Breton. The program, originally, was just an expression of my sadness for the loss, and it turned out that it was inflammatory.” Ron MacInnis in interview with Marie Thompson, The Wake Up Call, VHS, directed by Marie Thompson (CBC, 2002).

78 Attendees at this concert were largely locals, as I recognized many of the audience members from community-oriented functions.
asserted their opinions and as elements of the tradition have been manipulated for commercial gain. For those practicing within the community, this has resulted in a reticence to assert their convictions. However, in the original context of the early 1970s, members of the community were quite vocal.

The 1973 Glendale Fiddle Festival and the creation of the Cape Breton Fiddlers’ Association, working interdependently, were two of the most significant results of the community outrage about the film’s claim. The Glendale Fiddle Festival, headed by Frank MacInnis, Fr. Eugene Morris, and Fr. John Angus Rankin, among others, was created with the clear intention of disproving the documentary’s assertion. Frank MacInnis and Fr. Morris spent the summer of 1972 traveling around Cape Breton finding fiddlers to see whether they would support the idea of a weekend event that would give them the opportunity to interact and join together in a massed-fiddler display. Although they were deeply supported by the musical community, the organizers had difficulty obtaining government sponsorship. Fr. Morris said, “At that time, the fiddle wasn’t all that important. Now they use it for advertising. You can’t sell two chickens without a tune. […] They looked down their noses on it. It was kind of hickish.”

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79 Since the Cape Breton musical community is fairly small and tight-knit, there is a likelihood that an individual’s comments will circulate, and possibly reflect negatively on him/her if the subject is contentious.

80 The clergy in Cape Breton has a history of involvement with the fiddling culture. They were known as fiddlers, stepdancers, and pipers. According to Frank MacInnis and Fr. Eugene Morris, after WWII, the clergy generally became more involved with the community life, organizing more parish picnics, dances, and concerts. It was with these established clerical connections that Fr. John Angus Ranking and Fr. Eugene Morris could justify the organization of a fiddle festival as part of their ministerial duties. Marie Thompson, “Fall and Rise of the Cape Breton fiddler: 1955-1982” (MA thesis, St Mary’s University, 2003), 152.

81 In the original conception of the Glendale Fiddle Festival, one of the instigators of the idea, Hugh John Gillis (a “kitchen fiddler” – i.e. one who would perform in casual contexts, predominantly in the home) “remarked at how impressive it had been to see the spectacle of 100 pipers marching and playing the bagpipes at the opening of the causeway in 1955. He suggested it would be a wonderful thing to hear one hundred fiddlers playing all at one time.” Thompson, “Fall and Rise,” 153.

82 Fr. Eugene Morris in 2002 interview in Thompson, “Fall and Rise,” 144.
Fr. Morris thus alluded to the duplicity of the heavy promotion of constructed Highlandism in Nova Scotia and the contemporaneous derision of actual living Gaelic culture in Cape Breton. His statement also points to the commercial role that Cape Breton fiddling developed toward the end of the twentieth century. The lack of import placed on Cape Breton fiddling both by the provincial government and by the tourism industry during the 1970s meant that the festival organizers had to rely on community support for their success.83

In order to drum up backing and publicity after the initial 1973 festival, the committee paid for a thirty-page newspaper, *Fiddlers to the Fore*, which included an article “Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler??? … Never!!!” by Frank MacInnis:

In the spring of 1971 the followers of Cape Breton style violin music were jolted by a CBC radio and television production entitled “The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler.” The theme of this production by Ron MacInnis of Halifax was the gradual phasing out and eventual extinction of this particular style of music. The immediate result of this presentation was an aroused Cape Breton public and the formation of a Committee by a group determined to disprove the myth of the Vanishing Fiddler. This they did, in convincing fashion in July 1973 when over one hundred and thirty fiddlers appeared in a three day Festival of Scottish Fiddling. This success was attained through the dedication of an organizing committee, the complete co-operation of local radio, television and newspapers and the enthusiasm and support of an endless number of volunteers.84

Marie Thompson examined the socio-political context of this documentary in a dissertation aimed at “demystifying” the “myth of the Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler.”85 She examined several reports produced by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council that pointed to a declining birth rate contributing to an overall decline in population growth,

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83 The lack of governmental support is evinced by the 1972 rejection of the festival’s application for funding as a Local Initiatives Project. Thompson, “Fall and Rise,” 142-44.
85 Thompson, “Fall and Rise.”
compounded by a massively increasing out-migration.\textsuperscript{86} This out-migration was largely based on the decline of the coal and oil industries, but there was also a parallel departure from rural Cape Breton during the same decade: from 1961 to 1971, the number of farms dropped from 1,975 to 640. Since these isolated rural communities had long served as protective enclaves from outside musical influences, the demise of rural lifestyles would have a deep impact on the fiddling tradition. The isolation and poverty of these rural areas of Cape Breton behaved as a dual agent, originally allowing for the preservation of the fiddling tradition, but eventually precipitating a necessary economically-driven out-migration.

Fiddler Sandy MacIntyre suggested that this immigration was what created the VCBF perspective of the decline of the fiddling tradition:

> It wasn’t that the music was dying in Cape Breton, it was that a lot of us had left Cape Breton to go to Detroit, Windsor, Boston, Toronto. And there was Bill Lamey, and Angus Chisolm, Donald MacLellan – the older fiddlers at the time […] Johnny Wilmott, Johnny MacDonald, Bill MacDonald. A lot of the fiddlers – John Campbell – the list goes on and on and on – I have a picture back in Toronto – a picture taken in Detroit in the 1950s, and there are about 100 fiddlers in the picture. And they had moved from Cape Breton to various parts of Ontario and the US.\textsuperscript{87}

Virginia Garrison’s study on the teaching and learning practices in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition produced a by-product of data on fiddlers’ ages, from which conclusions about the interest in fiddling throughout recent generations can be gleaned.\textsuperscript{88} Interpreting Garrison’s statistics, Liz Doherty noted “that those in the forty to fifty-nine category constitute the smallest numbers reflects the reality that certainly, in those

\textsuperscript{86}“Between 1991 and 1966 out-migration from the Atlantic Provinces numbered more than 100,000 people, or roughly 20,000 per year … It had reached alarming proportions.” APEC in Thompson, “Fall and Rise,” 44.

\textsuperscript{87} Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, August 19, 2007.

\textsuperscript{88} Virginia Garrison, “Traditional and Non-Traditional Teaching and Learning Practices in Folk Music: An Ethnographic Field Study of Cape Breton Fiddling” (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1985).
decades of the 40s, 50s, and 60s, numbers of young people taking up the fiddler [sic] were at their lowest.\textsuperscript{89} Doherty concluded that while there may have been an active, living fiddling tradition during the 1960s, the demographics point to fewer young fiddlers participating in this culture. Some of the most vocal counterparts that originally rebelled against MacInnis’ claim have even come to accept this suggestion in recent years.\textsuperscript{90} As many informants point out, this decline was not entirely due to a loss of interest in Scottish Cape Breton traditions (musical and otherwise), but simply a pattern of out-migration: “Between 1921 and 1961, Cape Breton lost 57,369 people. Between 1951 and 1966, one person out of every four between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four left the island and most of those who left were between the ages of fifteen and forty.”\textsuperscript{91} However, during this latter period there were also new industrial developments that bolstered the economy and offered jobs to many in the Inverness and Richmond Counties: a heavy-water plant, a Gulf Canada refinery and the Stora Forest Products pulp mill were set up in Port Hawkesbury and Point Tupper in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{92} The result was not only a migration away from the rural areas in these counties, but also a reversal in the previous trend of out-migration from these regions of the island. However, this movement certainly affected the locality’s musical makeup, as fiddlers moved from their close-knit rural communities to follow employment opportunities in new industrial regions. This relocation did not signal the loss of these fiddlers, but rather a rearrangement of the social structure surrounding their musical culture.

\textsuperscript{89} Doherty, “Periphery,” 70.
\textsuperscript{90} “I suppose, looking back now, it probably was in a state of decline.” Frank MacInnis in interview with Marie Thompson, \textit{The Wake Up Call}.
\textsuperscript{91} Lotz qtd. in Thompson, “Fall and Rise,” 46.
\textsuperscript{92} Thompson, “Fall and Rise,” 49.
Reformation of the Tradition: Social Remodeling

This restructuring in the 1960s is symptomatic of a continual reformation of the musical communities in Cape Breton since the early twentieth century. In her 1996 dissertation on the transformations of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, Doherty broke past the pervasive preservation narrative, noting that in contemporary Cape Breton (c. 1995), members of older generations attributed the changes in the traditional fiddling style to the younger players. However, she asserted that noticeable alterations to the Cape Breton fiddling tradition actually began in the 1920s, with the advent of radio and commercial recordings, and the increased ease of travel. Consequently, “the social reality of Cape Bretons [sic] increasing exposure to, and alignment with, the wider North American community since the 1920s, has resulted in – or perhaps caused – greater unity within the island.”^93

This claim of homogenization can also be traced to community recomposition during this period: as Cape Breton moved into its initial industrial phase of the 1920s (as was similarly noted in 1960s Inverness and Richmond counties), the population flocked to the urban regions. This movement raises the issue of regionalism within the tradition. Informants frequently refer to stylistic differentiation between areas of Cape Breton, including the Mabou Coal Mines, Sydney Mines, Inverness, and Washabuck. Regardless of whether these styles exist distinctly in these specific areas, there were likely regional differences. Some of this stylistic contrast may even be based in the variances between

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^93 Doherty, “Periphery,” 296.
the regions that Scottish immigrants originally came from.\textsuperscript{94} On these regional styles Kinnon Beaton commented:

To me, it’s like a language. An accent is a good word for it. You know, if you talk to somebody from Glencoe Mills, they’re going to talk different from somebody from Mabou, Somebody in Margaree is going to talk different from somebody in Mabou. And their music is the same. […] Each community has […] “regional” sounds.\textsuperscript{95}

The seeds of cross-pollination between these “regional” styles, sewn during these periods of geographical relocation, formed the basis of eventually more explicit innovation. I will consider here the idea of innovation, not only from the ethnographic perspective (i.e. what people have to say about innovation within the tradition), but also as a more abstract concept that shaped the narrative about the tradition. Moreover, the Cape Breton musical community’s views on innovation will be examined within the socio-economic pressures of commercial antimodernism.

Beyond the overarching fear of a loss of the tradition generally, the main concern in the post-VCBF atmosphere regarded the changes \textit{within} the Cape Breton fiddling practice. Both innovation and homogenization infer some kind of new influence; however, homogenization occurs \textit{within} the general cultural practice of Cape Breton fiddling, while mass-media-motivated innovations are imposed from \textit{without}. While informants do not explicitly state this distinction, it is nonetheless integral within the narrative, as it dictates whether innovation is accepted or proscribed within the tradition. Essentially, innovation is generally accepted as part of the “traditional” practice when it is performed for an emic audience, while it is derided when performed for an etic audience.

\textsuperscript{94} As noted above, it is documented that Scots who immigrated to Nova Scotia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to settle in community groups from their home regions.

\textsuperscript{95} Interview with Kinnon Beaton, August 21, 2008.
Innovation: Theories of Social Practices and Cape Breton Fiddling

While they have not frequently been applied to musical practices, many of Hobsbawm’s theories of the “social function” of the past are relevant to the Cape Breton fiddling narrative. Hobsbawm addresses the issue of revival within social practice:

“We ought to return to the ways of our forefathers” when we no longer tread them automatically, or can be expected to. This implies a fundamental transformation of the past itself. It now becomes, and must become, a mask for innovation, for it no longer expresses the repetition of what has gone before, but actions which are by definition different from those that have gone before. Even if the literal attempt to turn the clock back is made, it does not really restore the old days, but merely certain parts of the formal system of the conscious past, which are now functionally different.  

Within this formalized social past, however,

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.”

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.

These ideas of revivals, interstices and change are all integral to the study of the Cape Breton narrative about its fiddling traditions. There is a long-standing assertion within this narrative that surged forward most powerfully in the post-VCBF decade: Cape Breton fiddling was changing, and fiddlers were losing the “old style.” This contention is related to the preservation element of the narrative (which asserts that the “preserved”

97 Ibid., 4.
98 Ibid., 6.
performance practice, from eighteenth century Scotland, is the most “authentic”) in that it is based in socially-molded views of “old” and “authentic.”

The concern for the preservation of this “old style” grew out of the post-VCBF fear of loss. However, as Doherty points out, the fiddling community did not distinguish between the various stages in the fiddling tradition; instead, nearly every “master” fiddler from an earlier generation (i.e. active pre-VCBF) became a representative of the “old style.”

Interestingly, the figures that became idealized most in this narrative lived during periods of some of the most rapid transformations and innovations in the tradition, as we will see.

Although ethnomusicologists’ and anthropologists’ research and analysis may sometimes impact community conceptions, my fieldwork last summer revealed that Doherty’s ideas had not infiltrated the typical narrative about the history of Cape Breton fiddling. The community continued to identify some of Doherty’s innovators as “old style” players for the simple fact that they were from older generations. Doherty’s dissertation pointed to two approaches to Cape Breton fiddling: the “old style,” based in the earlier generations; and a “new style,” which developed with the innovations of the 1950s and 1960s. While it would be difficult for scholars to ignore the unabashed creative manipulations of the Cape Breton style by some of the most dominant fiddlers of these decades, the above-mentioned “change” — the move toward a homogeneous “Cape Breton sound” — that took place in the 1920s has frequently been overlooked. In 1995, Doherty noted that

100 For the most part, only those members of the community involved with scholarly work referred to Doherty’s ideas; largely, these few individuals agreed with her assertions.
101 Doherty also connects this “old style” with the “Mabou Coal Mines” style – an issue that will be addressed in chapter 4.
It is only over the last couple of years that the issue of change has become a controversial one in Cape Breton. Perhaps this reflects a certain amount of stability which has been assumed since the “vanishing” Cape Breton fiddler was retrieved and revitalized.\(^\text{102}\)

The most convenient way to examine the innovations that have occurred within the Cape Breton fiddling tradition is within the (vague) periods that informants often allude to: the 1920s-30s; the 1940s-50s; the 1960s; the 1970s (post VCBF); the 1980-90s (the Celtic boom); and the present generation. As with any temporal delineations, these serve only as a reference, as there are logically frequent overlaps. Nonetheless, there are musical innovations, socio-political and economic movements and developments that can be generally connected with generations prominently active in each time frame. After a general overview of developments in Cape Breton fiddling during these periods, they will be examined through the Hobsbawmean lens of revivals, interstices, and change, with reference to how these elements have developed within the narrative about Cape Breton fiddling.

**The 1920s-1930s: Records, Radios and the “Boston States”**

The period beginning in the late 1920s saw two interrelated elements burgeoning within the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, which would carry through (in various transformations) until the 1970s and beyond: commercial recordings and North American diasporic communities of Cape Bretoners. The initial commercial market that Cape Breton fiddlers were involved with relates to both the exoticization of the Scots and the importance of the diasporas.

The Columbia Record Company in New York developed an interest in marketing Cape Breton fiddle in the 1920s. Many of Columbia’s initial discs were aimed at

\(^{102}\) Doherty, “Periphery,” 274.
“ethnic,” immigrant markets, and included “foreign” performers. After World War I, however, many record companies began to rely on domestic performers of “foreign” music.\textsuperscript{103} Out of this phenomenon grew the Columbia Scottish series in 1928, which put together the Columbia Scotch Band and the Caledonian Scotch band. Both of these ensembles featured the Cape Breton fiddlers Hughie MacEachern and Charlie MacKinnon, who were living in the Northeastern United States at the time.\textsuperscript{104}

Interestingly, within this market for “ethnic” recordings, Cape Breton fiddlers floated between “Irish” or “Scotch” labels, depending on which company and series they were recording for.\textsuperscript{105} From the outset, then, Cape Breton was marketed under a blanket Celticism. The recording technology that these fiddlers were working with limited their performance options.\textsuperscript{106} The initial recording process restricted fiddlers’ timing and tune selection: because 78s were typically three to five minutes, fiddlers had to shorten their sets to three to five tunes. These early 78s became idealized within the community later in the century, reflecting Hobsbawm’s concept of revival. This will be explored in the context of the generations that sought to emulate these seminal recordings.

Early recording was more about self-aggrandizement than financial gain. Although these pioneering recordings affirmed the “master” status of the featured

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[103]{McKinnon, “Fortune,” 53.}
\footnotetext[104]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[105]{Many Cape Breton fiddlers were released on Decca’s 14000 series for Scottish music, while others, such as Colin Boyd and Dan R. MacDonald, recorded for the Irish series (on Columbia’s Irish series 33000, and Copley’s in Boston, respectively). McKinnon, “Fortune,” 53-4.}
\footnotetext[106]{“As valuable as these early audio sketches may be, the 78 rpm medium did not provide a complete picture of the Cape Breton fiddler. The average length of a 78 rpm disc recording was only around three and one half minutes. […] For Cape Breton fiddle music the duration was less than adequate. Unable to play their usual strings (medleys) of tunes, fiddlers would have to condense their settings into a three-minute setting of two or maybe three tunes.” Paul M. MacDonald in Bill Lamey, \textit{Bill Lamey Full Circle}, compact disc, 82161-7032-2, © 2000 Rounder Records, cover notes, 1.}
\end{footnotes}
fiddlers, they were by no means expected to be profitable. From the outset, besides Nova Scotians, one of the key markets for Cape Breton fiddle recordings were Cape Bretoners “living away.” As noted above, the economic hardships faced in Cape Breton forced out-migration in search of employment from the late nineteenth century onward; primarily, the regions sought out were Ontario and the “Boston States.” Campbell and MacLean explain that “by 1880 there were already 37,753 former Nova Scotians in the New England states, with 29,307 of them in Massachusetts. The term ‘Boston States’ became part of the colloquial language in eastern Nova Scotia.”

As with the original Scottish diaspora, Cape Bretoners formed communities of genealogically or socially connected groups within their newly adopted regions. As McKinnon says, “music romanticizes the homeland.” The symbiotic relationship between Cape Breton and the “Boston States,” along with other diasporic communities, fostered both an interchange of musical talent and the promotion of canonic figures. There were many fiddlers from Cape Breton living in the Boston States that were still considered to be Cape Breton fiddlers; these included performers such as John Campbell, Alcide Aucoin, and Alick [Alex] Gillis, all of whom were important in the early Cape Breton recording industry. Cape Breton fiddlers also traveled between the diasporic communities and their homeland to perform at dances.

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107 See McKinnon, “Fortune,” 93-6, in regards to the poor compensation from the larger record companies that produced the earliest commercial fiddle recordings.
110 “Cape Breton clubs that formed in places like Boston and Toronto have continually hired Cape Breton fiddlers to travel to their communities to play for dances.” McKinnon, “Fortune,” 113. Cape Bretoners living in the Boston States, such as Angus Chisholm, Dan Hugh MacEachern, and Alex Gillis also migrated between the two regions for fiddling.
Cape Bretoners “living away” appreciated the opportunity to hear Cape Breton fiddlers at dances; but even more so, they prized their recording collections:

They wanted everything that they could buy in the shape of records or get in the shape of tapes from any player who visited from Cape Breton. It became a link with their heritage and a link with their culture; and records in particular, because they would hear a player, say, playing at a dance up in Toronto or in Boston from Cape Breton, well they just heard him that night. […] So it was a real link with their heritage and culture […] they would pride themselves on their collections of records and boast about how many records they had. It was almost a status symbol to have the largest number of records.¹¹¹

Furthermore, from the outset, Cape Bretoners living away played integral roles in the development of the commercial recording market. As phonographs were initially introduced in the 1920s in Cape Breton, they were typically an unaffordable luxury. However, as prices dropped, “it [became] common for a son or daughter working in the ‘Boston States’ or in central Canada to come home with a phonograph for his or her family as a present.”¹¹²

The comparative ease of travel that had developed by the 1920s not only facilitated the movement between Cape Breton and its diasporic communities, but also allowed more circulation within the island itself. As noted above, the advent of the recording industry in this period also solidified a “Cape Breton sound,” and allowed more access to fiddlers from various regions of the island. These two aspects – travel and media – continued to have a deep impact on the tradition, through increasingly complex means.

**The 1940s-1950s: Promotion**

The period of the 1920s and 1930s saw the seeds of the commercialism that led to

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¹¹² Ibid., 106.
many more developments later in the century. Cape Breton fiddlers’ self-promotion through records and radio began in earnest in the 1940s and 1950s. A close marketing interrelationship developed between fiddlers’ recordings, radio shows, and dance playing: “In order to maximize the promotional value of the records and sell more, references to radio performing status were included in the names of the fiddlers’ back-up bands.”

The radio stations CJFX in Antigonish and CJCB in Sydney were integral in this promotion. However, performing on these radio stations did not tend to entail monetary gain. In fact, Robbie Robertson, an engineer and announcer with CJCB in the 1940s, noted that “People jumped at the chance to perform on radio and we had a waiting list of groups and artists that wanted to display their talents […] Most of them would have been willing to pay to get on the air.”

The same prominent fiddlers whose recordings and radio airings were cleverly promoted also used these radio shows to promote their dances. Bill Lamey, for instance, used his 15-minute show on CJCB to promote a regular dance that he played for in Sydney; when he moved to Boston he took the same tack with a program on WVOM, using it to promote his regular dance at the Roxbury. Bill Lamey’s self-promotion of his dances illustrates the continuing relationship with the Boston States in this period. Recordings in the Boston States also became integral during this period, as small companies there, such as Copley Records, picked up the slack after a virtual pullout by major record labels after World War II; this retreat had left a virtual void in the Irish and

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113 “Rodeo Records, for example, began to market Fitzgerald’s recordings in the 1950s and 1960s under the title Winston Fitzgerald and the Radio Entertainers.” McKinnon, “Fortune,” 90.
114 Robertson, qtd. in Ibid., 88.
115 Ibid., 88-9.
“downeaster” market.\textsuperscript{116} This venture was logical for Copley Records, given the continued reverence of fiddlers from “back home” (Cape Breton).

While large commercial recording companies continued to produce some Cape Breton fiddling albums, the importance of the smaller local companies like Copley Records grew.\textsuperscript{117} MacIssac’s aforementioned Celtic label continued to run into the 1950s, but it soon proved too costly for him, and he sold the label to George Taylor.\textsuperscript{118} Taylor’s company, Rodeo Records, had produced at least thirty-four 78s during the 1950s that featured Cape Breton fiddlers. However, as we will see, his practices would change in the following decades, under various labels – Rodeo, Celtic, and Banff.

Doherty noted that the 1940s and 1950s, a period of great musical activity, was also a phase of great musical innovation.\textsuperscript{119} At the forefront of these changes was Winston Fitzgerald, who was “everyone’s greatest influence in the 50s. […] He was the iconic Cape Breton fiddler. […] He was probably the biggest influence ever on Cape Breton fiddling.”\textsuperscript{120} Interestingly, the cleaner, sleeker style initiated by Winston and his peers became absorbed into the general Cape Breton style; we will see the ironic idealization of this innovative style in the post-VCBF period.

The 1960s: Television and Recorded Reiterations

The face of the Cape Breton fiddling industry was manipulated through two means in the 1960s to early 1970s: television and record reissues. Television provided a

\textsuperscript{116}Joseph Clifford McGann, “Dan R. MacDonald: Individual Creativity in the Cape Breton Fiddle Tradition” (MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2002), 91. “Downeaster” is mainly used to denote Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and PEI.
\textsuperscript{117}Decca continued their “foreign” series into the early 1950s.
\textsuperscript{118}McKinnon, “Fortune,” 57-9.
\textsuperscript{119}Doherty, “Periphery,” 293.
\textsuperscript{120}Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, August 17, 2007.
new means for fiddlers’ promotion, as fiddler Winnie Chafe explains:

> After *The Céilidh Show* went off the air, ’74, people were still able to envision what took place on the *Céilidh*. And I think that anything that we had television-wise was going to be a great help for us to distribute [records] because people will remember your face. They will remember who you are and what you did.\(^{121}\)

Several Cape Breton fiddlers were featured on television shows throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. *The Cape Breton Barn Dance*, running from 1962 to 1969, included Winston Fitzgerald as a weekly regular, as well as guest performers like fiddlers Carl MacKenzie and Buddy MacMaster. In the early 1970s, two national television programs also highlighted Cape Breton musicians: the aforementioned *The Céilidh Show*, and *The John Allan Cameron Show*.\(^{122}\)

In this burgeoning of new media, however, the production of new fiddle records was on the decline.\(^{123}\) Most of the major labels had generally turned away from Cape Breton fiddling in the 1940s and 1950s, as they were impelled towards less esoteric folk music. When Taylor left the Maritimes in 1962, he stopped recording Cape Breton fiddle music; instead, he reissued thirty-eight of his earlier recordings, and several fiddle anthologies that were also compilations from earlier recordings.\(^{124}\)

The mass media of television and (reissues of) records thus provided a concrete image of the model Cape Breton fiddler. Featuring fiddlers on television in the period of the aggrandized personalities like Andy Griffith and Pierre Elliot Trudeau had the effect of lionizing them. Reproducing records of fiddlers already held up as “masters” solidified their role within the narrative as representatives of an ideal. As I will explore below, this romanticization was linked to the elevation of the “old style” within the revivalist

\(^{121}\) Winnie Chafe qtd. in McKinnon, “Fortune,” 93.
\(^{122}\) McKinnon, “Fortune,” 91-2.
\(^{123}\) CJFX recorded numerous shows in the 1960s; however, these were not commercially released.
\(^{124}\) Most of these were originally Celtic 78s, although some were also from the Rodeo label.
mentality of the 1970s and 1980s. The tartanism triumphant in the rest of Nova Scotia from earlier in the twentieth century seeped into the touristic imagery selling Cape Breton in this period. In a form of contemporary acculturation, Cape Breton was pulled into the undertow of the Celtic wave; as home to many of MacDonald’s tartanistic feats (e.g., The Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts, The Cabot Trail), the commercial exploitation of the popular Scottish image was a necessary attribute of successful tourism. The promotion of stereotypical Celtic imagery infiltrated business-minded Cape Breton fiddlers whose tartanistic approach was often blatantly visible in their album covers. Winnie Chafe spoke openly about the use of this marketing image: “The tourists that come in here will look for the tartans […] and they’re going to look for an album that has the same type of thing on the cover or on the back of the album.” This period thus saw the development of a media-molded image of the Cape Breton fiddler: the earlier “master” fiddlers continued to be promulgated through reissued recordings; fiddlers became aggrandized as television personalities; and fiddlers became increasingly engaged in tartanism to market their Celtiness.

The 1970s: Where have all the fiddlers gone?

The Boston States continued their integral role in the Cape Breton recording

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125 The province spent copious amounts of time and money paving and preparing the Cape Breton trails (actually highways). Rebecca Mead, "Sex, Drugs, and Fiddling," The New Yorker, December 20, 1999, 48.

126 In 1989, McKinnon stated that “In Cape Breton, the tartan image has been feeding on itself for decades. Tourists come expecting to see tartan plastered over the signs and in the shops and restaurants, and those people involved in these industries do not disappoint them.” McKinnon, “ Fortune,” 81.

127 This tartanistic image has been pervasive in the recording industry since Taylor’s extensive use of photography from the Nova Scotia Tourist Bureau for his Rodeo label album covers. Ibid., 82. It became more widespread from the 1960s onward, however, with albums like Winston Fitzgerald’s It’s New: Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald (on the Celtic label), which features cartoon images of anthropomorphized instruments in kilts.

128 Winnie Chafe, qtd. in McKinnon, “Fortune,” 82.
industry, as folk revival companies blossomed in the Northeastern United States from the 1960s onward. Rounder Records was launched in 1971, and, like other US companies before them, began their Cape Breton recordings with releases of fiddlers living in the Boston area. In 1976, these recording ventures expanded through trips to Cape Breton to record resident fiddlers. In total, nine LPs were produced. The other American folk record company active at the time was Shanachie. This label continued in the reissuing tradition of Rodeo Records of the 1960s: rather than producing new recordings, the company remastered earlier 78 rpm recordings and released them as new LPs. Three LPs were produced in this manner, featuring Cape Breton fiddlers Bill Lamey, Angus Chisholm, and Colin Boyd.

As the recording of Cape Breton fiddling dwindled during the 1960s and 1970s, these earlier recordings became increasingly important within the musical community. In explaining the developments of the fiddling tradition in the later twentieth century, informants frequently point to the decline of the recording industry, as well as the dissatisfaction of fiddlers who had dealt with recording companies.

The program The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler thus aired at a time when new fiddle recordings were on the decline; however, older fiddle recordings were continually accessible through various re-releases. In reaction to proclamations about the loss of the tradition, the community became worried about youth involvement in the fiddling. The result of this concern was a push for educational programs. To maintain the fiddling style

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129 These fiddlers included Joe Cormier and John Campbell. McKinnon, “Fortune,” 66.
130 These fiddlers included Theresa MacLellan, Jerry Holland, Carl MacKenzie, Winnie Chafe, Joe MacLean, and the Beaton family of Mabou. Ibid., 66.
131 See McKinnon, “Fortune,” 93-6. Sandy MacIntyre also noted that when his “first album of fiddle music [Let’s Have a Céilidh] came out [in 1974], there were so few others on the market that the retailers were more than happy to pay for the records up front.” Ibid., 78.
that was threatened by modern influences, culture bearers and community members embraced stylistic ideals for the younger generations to emulate. The details of this pedagogical emphasis will be examined in the subsequent chapter. Here I will consider the chosen models, which were simply selected from older generations. The “old style” of Cape Breton fiddling was held up as an ideal, but this style began to encompass a broad spectrum of playing (including what, in reality, was a “new style” of playing).\textsuperscript{132}

The examination of the developments in Cape Breton fiddling in the decades from the 1920s to the 1970s has illustrated the importance of the recording industry. While fiddlers were already recognized within the community as “masters,” these roles concretized as the musicians were commercially recorded.\textsuperscript{133} This idealization became more exaggerated in the 1960s and 1970s as early recordings were continually reissued, and new recordings became less frequent.

Beyond the general Cape Breton audience for these old recordings, pedagogical use of earlier “master fiddler” recordings was widespread:

The use of the commercial recording as a tool in the primary stages of learning was mentioned repeatedly [by …] Cape Breton fiddlers. […] For [Jerry] Holland’s generation of fiddlers [Winston] Fitzgerald’s recordings were prized tools of instruction. His recorded music, in essence, became a “charter” for Cape Breton fiddlers of how to do it right.\textsuperscript{134}

The idealization of innovative fiddlers from Winston’s generation as proponents of the “old style” will be analyzed musically in chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{132} This term (“old style”) and its place in the discourse will be examined in chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{133} “To have produced a record in this early period was, in effect, a confirmation of the fiddler’s master status. In the 1930s and 40s being on record was a big deal.” McKinnon, “Fortune,” 85-6.

\textsuperscript{134} McKinnon, “Fortune,” 122. There is a conundrum that fiddlers face when aiming to play their tunes “correctly”: “A few fiddlers who had learned to read music expressed […] some dismay at having found in print one of the tunes immortalized by a Cape Breton fiddler who they revered, only to discover, after playing it, that it was different. The debate as to which should be considered ‘correct’ – the book or the ‘master’ – was most often resolved by the fiddler […] in favor of the ‘master.’” Garrison, “Traditional Teaching,” 190.
The 1980s-1990s: Boom!

Growing up in the 1980s in a musical household with Scottish-Cape Breton roots, I was aware of the context from which the rising fiddling stars of the 1990s originated. The meld of the mythological Celticism and the living traditions of areas like Cape Breton Island always struck me as peculiar. I attended *The Lord of the Dance* at the Canadian National Exhibition ("The Ex"), and I attended the West Mabou dances during the summers in Cape Breton. To a certain degree, I kept separate my experiences with mass Celtic culture and Cape Breton community culture; yet, the media insisted on their coalescence and interrelation.

For instance, during this Celtic boom one ingenious marketing tool was to combine the music, song, dance, and storytelling of "Celtic origins" into a musical. One of my Cape Breton fiddle teachers, Sandy MacIntyre, was featured in such a musical at the Princess of Wales Theatre in Toronto in 1998, entitled *The Needfire*; this show also included such famous Celtic musicians as John MacDermot, The Irish Descendants, Mary Jane Lamond, John Allan Cameron, The Ennis Sisters, and The Rankins. The musical followed the lead character’s memories as he awaits the arrival of the new flame ("the needfire") to rekindle the hearth. The result was a collection of vignettes constructed to display the talents of the various Celtic artists.: “According to the director/choreographer Kelly Robinson, the producer’s brief was ‘Kelly, we have a lot of really talented Celtic performers in this country. What do you think we can do with them?’” 135 At the climax, the production amalgamated musical forces in a rendering of the Celtic pub-band favourite, “Barrett’s Privateers.” The show thus melded the implied

rusticity of the “folk” musicians, and typical musical-dancing spectacles to appeal to the mass Celtic-fad audiences.136

My generation also saw the rise of the grunge-Celtic phenomenon, Cape Breton fiddler Ashley MacIsaac.137 Discovered by Phillip Glass, Ashley came roaring into the scene, kilted, and in 10-hole docs,138 with his CD Hi, How Are You Today in 1995.139 During the same period, Natalie MacMaster also burst into the international scene, with the albums No Boundaries (1996) and My Roots are Showing (1998).140 Also growing in popularity during this period were the Cape Breton musical ensembles The Barra MacNeils and The Rankins, both of which prominently featured fiddling and achieved international renown.

The depth of this Celt ic boom reached across Cape Breton, spurring on the commercialization of the culture. The recording industry took off, with fiddlers nestling into the new Celtic-fad culture market. As a result, perspectives on being a fiddler have changed. Previously, most fiddlers had alternative careers, since fiddling gigs offered minimal pay.141 Many younger fiddlers of the present generation, growing up under the

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136 Another show, Swingstep, presented in Toronto in 1999, also attempted this amalgam of trendy Celticism and Canadian talent; however, this was much less successful. While Needfire was revived for a second run in 1999, Swingstep ran only for three months, and failed at a second revival. Having seen both shows, the most noticeable differences were the degree of spectacle (with light shows and creative, artistic sets in Needfire, and simplistic sets and lighting in Swingstep), and the diversity of the music-dance content (with Needfire having much greater variety – as well as a huge cast of 70). With shows such as Riverdance (which became an international hit in 1995), Celtic-fad audiences likely expected a certain amount of fancy pageantry. Riverdance and Lord of the Dance included flashy sets, lighting, and costumes; the music, dance and narrative content also exaggerated typical “Celtic” characteristics. Often, scenes in these shows would narrate some idealized myth-like story (often a love story), featuring frequent appearances from fairy and nymph-like characters.

137 Fiddlers are typically identified by their first names within the Cape Breton musical community.

138 “Docs” are slang for Doc Marten boots, popularized by the grunge movement. Ashley also sometimes sported army boots, a similar fashion statement.

139 Ashley had actually released a traditional album in 1992, Close to the Floor.

140 Natalie had also released albums before this, including, Fit as a Fiddle, Road to the Isle, and Four on the Floor.

141 For example, renowned Cape Breton fiddlers Buddy MacMaster had various jobs with the Canadian National Railway; Carl MacKenzie was an engineer; and Stan Chapman was a school teacher.
influence of the internationally-oriented careers of Natalie, Ashley, and others, have
developed dreams of fiddling fame and fortune.

These trendy commercial developments also impacted how the music was
projected in the Cape Breton culture. In 1989, McKinnon explained:

Today, local radio shows like “Scottish Strings” […] and “Céilidh” […], both on CJFX radio, and Donnie Campbell’s program on CJCB’s Country music station, CKPE-FM, continue to lead their stations’ rating figures. All three hosts use commercial recordings now almost exclusively. All have achieved local celebrity status largely because of their respective programs.\(^{142}\)

**The Present: Awareness**

With the perspective of elapsed time, and the waning of Celtic faddism, the
currently active younger fiddlers are increasingly aware of the developments and
manipulations of their tradition. Doherty sees this as a consequence of globalization:
“The current fear of acculturation is fuelled by a greater musical awareness of other
traditions on the part of the musical community at large, so that now everyone can easily
identify what tunes, or elements of style, come from where.”\(^{143}\)

While accessibility plays a part, there is nonetheless a trend within the present
generation of younger fiddlers towards the promotion of their traditions and the
maintenance of their practices. Glenn Graham, for instance, a reputed dance fiddler, has
published *Cape Breton Fiddle: Making and Maintaining Tradition*.\(^ {144}\) In this work,
Graham asserts that the traditional style may be maintained through the concerted effort
by the generation to expose itself to recordings and performances of older player. Young
fiddlers have also been involved in many of the initiatives emerging during this decade

\(^{142}\) McKinnon, “Fortune,” 90.
\(^{143}\) Doherty, “Periphery,” 298.
\(^{144}\) Glenn Graham is Kinnon Beaton’s nephew, and Donald Angus Beaton’s grandson. Glenn Graham, *Cape Breton Fiddle: Making and Maintaining Tradition* (Sydney: CBU Press, 2006).
promoting the maintenance of fiddling as a living, developing cultural practice. For instance, in 2005, Natalie MacMaster, along with her husband Donnell Leahy, launched *Cape Breton Live Radio*, an internet radio show intended as “a platform for the musical community [of Cape Breton that] they belong to and from which they draw inspiration.” The show features Cape Breton musicians (primarily oriented around the fiddle) frequently throughout the busy summer season, and occasionally during the year. Several young fiddlers are also active within cultural institutions; for example, Andrea Beaton, Glenn Graham, Shelly Campbell, and Colin Grant are regularly employed for fiddle demonstrations and workshops at the Celtic Music Interpretive Center in Judique.

Some informants also suggest that the emerging generation of fiddlers has a deep interest in the “old style” of playing, and are immersing themselves in this approach in order to emulate it. Conveniently for these young fiddlers, the fiddle has become “cool” to play since the Celtic boom. Kinnon Beaton provided an anecdote that contrasts the perception of fiddle playing in his generation with that of the Celtic boom:

> I heard my wife, Betty Lou, talking about Natalie, which is her niece – when she went to school in Judique up here. And she was talking about her playing the fiddle on the school bus, going to school. And I says “What?” – and she says, “Yeah. Natalie had her fiddle on the bus, and she was playing her fiddle on the bus. And they were all clapping.” And I just said, “Holy God. If I’d took my fiddle on the bus going to school they would have squashed it, they would have crushed it – and me with it.” So, it really turned around.  

Renowned fiddler and teacher Stan Chapman explains the interest in the “old style”:

> I think that there are some [younger fiddlers] that are really aware of some of the older sounds. I can name some names, and probably miss some people. I know that a lady that I taught – Stephanie Wills – has a very traditional sound, to me. Some of the younger ones – Robbie Fraser, is a guy who really listens a lot to older tunes. A piano player that I know of – one of the older piano players – mentioned that Robbie sounds like he was born 50 years, 60 years too late – he should have been born half a century ago. And

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146 Interview with Kinnon Beaton, August 21, 2008.
they’re not the only ones – there are quite a few that are going back and listening and seem to be incorporating these bowings and these things into their music, which to me sounds a lot like some of the older fiddlers that I’ve heard.\(^\text{147}\)

Nonetheless, there are many fiddlers within this young generation that have continued to venture beyond the bounds of “traditional,” “old style” Cape Breton fiddling. The dual role that many of these young “professional” fiddlers have had to cultivate because of their international audiences will be examined in chapter 4.

**Revivals, Interstices, Legitimized and Proscribed Innovation**

The Hobsbawmean concept of revival (that a conscious return to the “old” ways, often perceived as continuation, is actually a transformation) can be observed in the concern for preservation that arose in the post-VCBF period. As the community became increasingly aware of impinging modernity, they actually changed their social practices related to fiddling in order to preserve the tradition in its pristine, “old” form. However, the models chosen for emulation were not necessarily conservers of unaltered stylistic interpretations, as innovative players like Angus Chisholm and Winston Fitzgerald were revered as “old style” fiddlers.

The recording industry from the 1920s to 1970s asserted the primacy of fiddlers from certain generations. To a degree, old recordings became the standard that younger fiddlers consulted for “correctness.” Old Cape Breton recordings behaved similarly to Curt Sachs’ interpretation of the (written) scripting of a tradition:

> As long as no written records interfere, the reproduction of something remembered involves production. […] Reproduction from memory is rarely mechanical; it has the prerogative of poetic license, reflects the personality of the relator, is often imaginative […] An actually scriptless tradition lives only in folkmusic. […] The backbone of a

\(^{147}\) Interview with Stan Chapman, August 30, 2007. Stan has instructed a phenomenal amount of successful Cape Breton fiddlers over the years, including Natalie MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, Wendy MacIsaac, etc.
scriptless culture is tradition and memory: both vanish under the impact of general literacy, and with them fade the imagination and creativeness of uneducated performers.

Literacy and folk art bloom in inverse ratio.\textsuperscript{148}

The iconic role that these early recordings played resulted in their romanticization in subsequent generations, particularly those in the wake of the VCBF. The legitimization of these older fiddlers’ innovations within the Cape Breton discourse points to the interstices within this tradition.\textsuperscript{149} The audience and contexts for which these fiddlers manipulated aspects of style dictated the acceptability of their innovations. First, the market these fiddlers intended their recordings for were mainly either Cape Bretoners, or members of the Cape Breton diaspora. Until the Celtic boom period, album covers may have been marketed for tourists, but the musical content was nonetheless intended for local audiences.

Second, the socio-historical context of the \textit{pre}-VCBF atmosphere allowed for innovation within the tradition, without the fear of impinging modern conventions. Nonetheless, these innovative fiddlers were largely experimental in contexts not related to other dominant social practices. That is, the tunes that they were most innovative with were what are called “listening” tunes, rather than dance tunes. While the performance of “listening” tunes is also openly critique within the discourse, unlike dance tunes, their performance is not associated with another ingrained cultural practice. Heather Sparling notes a similar instance of interstices in the practice of Gaelic song in Cape Breton, where innovation is culturally legitimized with a particular genre: “It may be that \textit{puirt-a-beul}...” \textsuperscript{150}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{149} McKinnon alludes to the borders of these interstices when he writes: “There is […] a hazy boundary of acceptance that [Cape Breton fiddlers] are conscious not to cross.” McKinnon, “Fortune,” 100.
\end{itemize}
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can be arranged and altered with less fear of recrimination from others within the culture.”

Innovations that do not fall into the interstices are logically proscribed within the tradition. As with legitimized innovation, the audience and contexts dictate the community approval or disapproval. First, innovation for commercial, international audiences does not justify manipulation of the tradition. Informants are quite aware of this type of innovation:

Natalie MacMaster – she’s adding a little more to it, of course, I guess to sell more tapes. Some people don’t like that – you know, they’d rather stick with the old style in Cape Breton. And, of course, Ashley MacIsaac adds some things to his music sometimes.

While these alternative stylistic approaches are tolerated, the post-VCBF context, along with the intended audience, disallows their acceptance as part of the “traditional” style.

Second, since dance remains an integral social element of the Cape Breton culture, there are certain conservative expectations surrounding dancing; further, experimentation within the performance practice of dance music is not only proscribed in the discourse, it is not viable due to the practical demands of dancing. These requirements will be explored in chapter 5.

The innovations of the older, idealized generations were “absorbed into the formalized social past in the form of a mythologized […] history […] by ‘stretching’ the framework.” Since these innovations fell into the interstices of the tradition, and did

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151 Interview with Norman Gillis (“master” fiddlers Alex Gillis’ son and Angus Allan Gillis’ nephew), August 7, 2007. Several members of the Gillis family (Norman, Joan, and Helen) recounted their experiences at the Gillis homestead in Upper Margaree, where countless céilidhs occurred with fiddlers like Angus Allan Gillis, Joe MacLean, Bill Lamey, John Alex MacDonald, Winston Fitzgerald, and Angus Chisholm. Helen, a pianist, and stepdancer, accompanied and danced for all of these fiddlers.
not interfere with other social practices, they were accepted as part of the traditional practice; in the post-VCBF period, they had been fully absorbed, and came to represent a part of the “old style” fiddling.
Chapter 3: Cultural Preservation and Tradition

The issues of innovation, interstices, and change, addressed in the previous chapter, relate to and interact with the concepts of preservation and authenticity in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. The term “preservation” itself connotes the opposite of innovation, or, more broadly, change. The Hobsbawmean concept of “interstices” suggests that a *perception* of the continuity and preservation of a cultural practice can exist while the actual practice itself undergoes some degree of manipulation. Shils elaborates on this idea: “The view of the past may be changed through self-conscious interpretation. […] The ‘perceived’ past is ‘plastic’ and ‘capable of being retrospectively reformed by human beings living in the present.’”

This chapter reflects on the concepts of authenticity and cultural preservation as they engage with the Cape Breton community’s narrative about the history of their fiddling. These issues fall under the umbrella of the Scottish historical narrative, as “at the heart of debates over Scottish history and identity is a preoccupation with authenticity.” As Dembling states, in Cape Breton this “authenticity” has a rootedness in the idealization of the old.

**Tradition: the Basis of Authenticity and Cultural Preservation**

Anthropologists have thoroughly interrogated the idea of authenticity, questioning its basis in unclear ideas about cultural behaviour. One such basis is found within the idea of “tradition,” which has had a role as both a “commonsense and a scientific category”; as a commonsense category, “tradition” has typically been accepted as “an inherited body
of customs and beliefs.”\textsuperscript{156} Handler and Linnekin explore this conception of tradition, concluding that it is wholly a symbolic construction, and that “as a scientific concept, tradition fails when those who use it are unable to detach it from the implications of Western common sense, which presumes that an unchanging core of ideas and customs is always handed down to us from the past.”\textsuperscript{157}

These authors address both the false dichotomy that has been created between “traditional” and “new,” and the consequent spurious implication that these are each bounded entities. These flawed ideas resulted in a conceptualization of tradition as an artifactual assemblage, rather than a continuous interpretation of the past; the ensuing notion of temporal continuity as a defining characteristic of social identity became ingrained in the Western anthropological tradition in the mid-twentieth century.\textsuperscript{158}

This conscious split between traditional and modern speaks strongly to the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. One of the key terms in the Cape Breton narrative is that of “old style.” This concept is imbued with such varied meanings that outsiders have to wade through seemingly contradictory references and terminology in order to arrive at a realization already iterated by Liz Doherty: that there are several kinds of old style in the emic Cape Breton fiddling discourse. Regardless, informants from the Cape Breton musical community (whether or not they are typically aware of the variances in their uses of this term) still distinguish between “old style” and “new style” approaches. Thus, there are clearly elements of “modernity” that are shunned within this tradition, in hopes of maintaining an “authentic,” “old style.”

\textsuperscript{156} Handler and Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” 273.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 273.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 274. In particular, see A. L. Kroeber, \textit{Anthropology: Culture Patterns and Processes} (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963).
In reference to Winston Fitzgerald, who is held up as an ideal of “old style” playing, fiddler Sandy MacIntyre stated: “He had the old style, and he had a newer, cleaner style.”\(^{159}\) Thus, while classifying Winston as an “old style” player, Sandy also identified modern aspects in his fiddling. Although the specifics distinguishing these modern influences frequently pass without comment, many informants are clearly aware of them.

As soon as traditions are idealized in “authentic” forms, a desire to preserve these cultural practices implicitly demands that the community statically perpetuate the traditions of the past. However, the dynamic nature of cultural practice means that the effort to perpetuate traditions results in their manipulation: “Tradition is invented because it is necessarily reconstructed in the present, notwithstanding some participants’ understanding such activities as being preservation rather than invention.”\(^{160}\) Indeed, the language of preservation has frequently been used within the recent narrative of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. While a concern for the continuity of the fiddling tradition was certainly a part of the tradition throughout the twentieth century, there was an increased preservational concern in the post-VCBF period. The more worried Cape Bretoners became about the loss of their tradition, the more they sought to bottle and conserve what they still had; thus, the musical idealization of older players, originally driven by the recording/radio/television industry, were concretized in the post-VCBF search for ideal fiddling models.

\(^{159}\) Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, August 19, 2007.  
\(^{160}\) Handler and Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” 279.
“From Away”: Insider/Outsider Folk Idealizations

Related to the above emic distinctions between “old” and “new” styles is the idealization of the folk. Perhaps within some traditions this is simply a product of modernity, and a rural reaction against the continual push towards global culture. Cape Breton, however, has been so consistently prodded by the Nova Scotian government’s tartanism since the 1950s that certain elements of the latter have become ingrained – at least in the Cape Breton approach to tourism. As the Gaelic language has come to represent an ancient, authentic archaeological object, elevated from its original portrayal as a living, barbaric language of the uneducated lower classes, so too has Cape Breton fiddling come to be portrayed within a mass-cultural ideal of primordial Celtic beauty.

In a parallel to Frank MacInnis’ reference to the “hickishness” attributed to Cape Breton fiddling pre-Celtic commercialism, Jocelyn Linnekin noted the morphing views of rural lifestyles in her study of tradition in modern Hawaii. Originally portrayed by outsider observers as “ignorant, uninstructed people […] the back-woods people,” the image of Keanae villagers became positively associated with authenticity and purity as they came to represent the upholders of Hawaiian tradition. Beyond the term “traditional” transforming from a negative into an idealized meaning, the conceptions of Hawaiian and Cape Breton traditions were also engaged with regional differentiation:

The evolution of Keanae’s traditional identity can be traced at least to the early nineteenth century, and the development of a country/city opposition – a contrast that is today embodied in the villagers’ use of the terms “inside” and “outside” to differentiate the rural countryside, inhabited primarily by Hawaiians, from the towns where whites and Orientals predominate.

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161 See “Tourism in Cape Breton” in chapter 1, and “The 1950s-1960s: Television and Recorded Reiterations” in chapter 2 for elaboration on the impingement of Highlandism on Cape Breton tourism.


163 Ibid., 285.
The broad geographical distinction that informants consistently use in Cape Breton is simply another version of the “inside” and “outside” of the Hawaiian villagers: anyone from outside of the island is referred to as “from away.” Likely deriving from the tight-knit sense of community alive in many regions of Cape Breton, the inhabitants there consistently ask you two main questions upon meeting you: what your name is, and where you are from. While these are typical questions in any context, by giving your full name in Cape Breton you identify your family lineage; in explaining where you are from, you clarify your regionality, or simply place yourself in the “from away” box.

Clarification beyond one’s own surname and place of birth to an expansion into your kin’s regionality and key surnames (e.g. grandparents) is also typical, if not expected. The amalgamation of this information provides a Cape Bretoner with a perspective on this stranger’s connection (or lack thereof) with the island generally and their community in particular.

This dichotomy between people from the community and those “from away” is carried over into the fiddling tradition; while eager outsiders are always welcomed to participate in the fiddle workshops and view demonstrations, there is a certain distance that is maintained. There are expectations that players “from away” have not had the prolonged exposure to the tradition required for its emulation.

This type of judgment relates to the broader characteristic of community participation that is integral to the Cape Breton fiddling tradition: informed discourse.

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164 There are variants of this term throughout areas of the Atlantic provinces.
165 Perhaps one exception is David Greenberg, who has immersed himself so thoroughly in the tradition (through ethnomusicological study along with his wife, Kate Dunlay), that he has come to be accepted as a Cape Breton player. In fact, David released a Cape Breton fiddling album, *Tunes Until Dawn*, with one of the most respected musicians (for his knowledge of the tradition, as well as his playing) and proponents of the “old style” on the island, pianist Doug MacPhee.
There is a clarity of opinion, a level of knowledge, and an awareness that many Cape Breton community members have about their fiddling tradition. As a child, I recall attending dances and house parties, and overhearing debates on the merits of the fiddler’s “timing,” the accompanist’s “lift,” or the stepdancer’s “drive.” Although I participated in a lively classical music culture in Toronto, I was awestruck by the critical acumen of the members of this musical community (and, admittedly, was quite intimidated by the idea of playing or dancing for such an audience).

Discussion of fiddling practice is thus an active element of the tradition itself; as such, it is not surprising that the elements of discourse that became pervasive in the post-VCBF frenzy of academic study on Cape Breton fiddling also infiltrated (whether previously, simultaneously, or afterward) the community’s ideas. These emphases were on the relationship between fiddling and two other Highland cultural practices: bagpiping and the Gaelic language. This perspective, and the socio-political influences in which it developed, will be examined below.

**Tradition and Tartanism**

Richard Handler’s study of folk festivals in Quebec in the 1920s and onward showed them to be inventions of a new past; the reconstruction of these historical cultural practices was so separate from current tradition that their practice was entirely invented. At the same time, these reconstructions became traditions themselves, temporally perpetuated as part of Quebec cultural practices.\(^{166}\) The symbols of these traditions, having been consciously elected, now had a completely different role than they originally did as part of dynamic cultural practice:

\(^{166}\) Handler and Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” 273-90.
Those elements of the past selected to represent traditional culture are placed in contexts utterly different from their prior, unmarked settings. […] Whoever danced those dances or used those toys in the past did not do so with a self-conscious awareness that such activity signified “quebecitude.”  

In Cape Breton one finds a juxtaposition of the unconscious continuation of tradition with the purposeful perpetuation and reconstruction of historic cultural practices. For me, the most vivid image of the latter element of re-creation during my fieldwork took place in the Celtic Music Interpretive Center (CMIC) in Judique. The “céilidhs” held at CMIC on Sundays and intermittently for special occasions throughout the summer are meant to recreate the kitchen parties that have occurred in homes throughout Cape Breton for decades. The stage at CMIC is constructed to resemble a kitchen, complete with an old-fashioned stove and kettle, and tartan drapes on the wall; it is intended to represent a domestic area from an older-generation home that would have hosted “kitchen céilidhs.” The typical “kitchen céilidh” presented here consistently includes two elements: fiddling (with piano and possibly guitar accompaniment) and dancing. While these céilidhs are set performances (thus creating a concert-like rather than a friendly gathering type of setting), they may also feature guest appearances and spontaneous social dancing sets – both of which Cape Bretoners would typically instigate.

Part of what made the display so poignant to me was the irony of this touristic pageant: within the stretch of road where the CMIC lies, there are homes that frequently host “kitchen céilidhs,” the dynamic, living social practices that continue in this region.  

167 Ibid., 280.  
168 See Allister MacGillivray, A Cape Breton Céilidh (Sea Cape Music: Sydney, Nova Scotia, 1988).  
169 “Céilidh” translates from Gaelic as a “gathering,” and though it has acquired various meaning through touristic manipulation, it used to connote a get-together with neighbours, family and friends, likely to play music, tell stories, sing songs, dance, and have a few drinks. Although this term has fallen out of usage for many of the younger generations, the practice (now frequently known as a house party, or
Further, at the CMIC there was a prominence of locals mixed in with the tourists, creating a social mélange of cultural participants (insiders) and avid observers (outsiders). Most of the tourists that I met in venues such as the CMIC were genuinely, often eagerly interested in the traditions; however, while some did have a perspective on historical issues with labour struggles and coal mines, few were aware of the tartanism that had played into the allure of their Nova Scotian holiday.

Like the aforementioned Quebec re-creations of tradition, some of these commercial, constructed events in Cape Breton have become a part of cultural practice. Although many members of the community may attend these “céilidhs,” there is still a community-tourist dichotomy: first, since places like the CMIC are featured in the guidebooks and tourist websites for Cape Breton, regardless of their other important cultural roles, they still remain a part of the tourist industry; second, after attending these show-céilidhs, insiders will often continue on to a spontaneous gathering of music, dance, song, stories, and drink at one of the community members’ homes.

While institutions like the CMIC emphasize the importance of education, research, and maintenance of tradition, they nonetheless construct elements of tartanistic, folkloric allure for the sake of touristic appeal. These institutions of course help to bolster the economy, and such touristic feats are a necessary element of their success. In the tartanism of 1950s Nova Scotia, two realms of extant social practice were glossed, suppressed, or denied: the ethnic diversity of the province in general, and the living

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session) continues. In 1988 Allister MacGillivray explained that a céilidh “has come to mean any event where people and music (traditional ‘Scotch’) are present: a house party, a festival or even a few avid musicians jamming in the running room at Glendale. To have a good céilidh you need a fiddler and an accompanist. But to have a real ‘corker’ you’d want to have fiddlers, dancers, singers, and a piper or two thrown in for good measure.” MacGillivray, _Céilidh_, 5.

170 Although it is not within the scope of this thesis, it would be worthwhile to examine, as in the case of folk festivals in Quebec, how some of these “traditions” that have been either invented or reconstructed for the sake of tourism have become part of the cultural practices of the community.
Gaelic traditions of Cape Breton in particular. Shils contrasts the idea of “fictitious” traditionality constructed for socio-political goals with “actually existing syncretic traditions,” which tend to be suppressed.\(^{171}\) Although Shils’ “spurious or genuine tradition” differed because it was part of a nationalistic movement, mid-twentieth century Nova Scotia saw “tradition” being similarly suppressed or molded.

**“Restoration”: Selection**

The possibility that the interest in Cape Breton fiddling in the 1980s may have been a “revival” has been debated in the scholarly literature.\(^{172}\) Generally, although there are elements that have been connected with “revivalist” efforts, the nature of the movement seems more identifiable as a “rejuvenation,” or perhaps a “restoration.” Nonetheless, these elements of “revival” are what have transformed the tradition, and, as Linton states,

> It is by now a truism that cultural revivals change the traditions that they attempt to revive. […] From the most self-conscious to the apparently unconscious, from the obviously reconstructive to those that seem to be naively inherited and therefore genuinely traditional.\(^{173}\)

From my perspective, the movement in the late-1970s and 1980s in Cape Breton was a “rejuvenation,” as the tradition remained vital, simply with a lack of younger generational participants.\(^{174}\)

As the Cape Breton musical community became increasingly aware of the threat modernity posed to their social practices, extant social customs became more clearly

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\(^{172}\) See, for example, Marie Thompson, “Fall and Rise,” and Liz Doherty, “Periphery.”

\(^{173}\) Handler and Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious,” 276.

\(^{174}\) “Music revivals can be defined as social movements which strive to ‘restore’ a musical system believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past for the benefit of contemporary society.” Tamara E. Livingston, “Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory,” *Ethnomusicology* 43 (1999): 66.
entrenched in ideals of “tradition.” The more pervasive this mindfulness of tradition became, the more practitioners aimed to emulate and recapture the old ways of their predecessors. Handler explains the conundrum of the goal of preservation:

In the limiting case we may unreflectively perform some action exactly as we learned it from our parents; yet the performance is never completely isomorphic with past performances and, more important, our understanding of the performance is a present-tense understanding, generated from the context and meaning of the present. To do something because it is traditional is already to reinterpret, and hence to change it.175

The emulation of one’s musical role model is of course a social practice in itself; thus this action is simply part of a naturally dynamic tradition (i.e. not consciously manipulated). Yet, the makeup of this social practice was drastically redefined as focus was drawn toward pedagogy. In the post-VCBF fear of the loss of the fiddling tradition, a push for younger players’ involvement led to a concern for fiddle instruction on the island. As Virginia Garrison discovered, the largest change was a move to formal teaching settings, and the advent of the “fiddle class.”176 While it is possible to emulate aspects of informal settings within the formalized classroom context, there are also drastic differences that would certainly affect how and what young fiddlers learn.177 Some teachers choose to make an effort to continue with “traditional” practices. Glenn Graham suggests that his classes re-create the function of a “céilidh house”: “It’s not as big of a deal as some people might think that it is. Because a lot of us teach us in that old fashioned way, a lot of us teach it by ear. […] It’s just a setting change – because, really, our approach is

175 Ibid., 281.
177 I recall my first class with Buddy MacMaster, where he sat in front of us and told us that we were going to learn a jig. He played the jig through, and then played it bit by bit as we played it back. There were no instructions or notated music; it was more so like a group that had stopped by an uncle’s home to learn some tunes.
pretty much the same.” However, the formalized nature of classes has often led to a greater degree of structure. Stan Chapman explained this phenomenon:

> Maybe some of the learning after *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* - maybe some of it became more formalized. Like, what I did was something – and other people at the same time – Winnie Chafe, and there were others teaching too – was more of a structured thing, rather than just somebody sitting down, and “show me, show me how that tune goes. Play that for me” - you know.  

Direct and immediate changes to teaching practices were visible in the wake of the VCBF panic. These included programs supported by the Nova Scotian government and new programs added to the Gaelic College. In 1972, the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association committee introduced formal lessons for young fiddlers with the older, established fiddler John MacDougall. From 1974 to 1975 the provincial Department of Education funded these classes; however, the support was always tenuous, and was eventually withdrawn. The Cape Breton Fiddlers Association also pressured The Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts to offer fiddle lessons. While the inclusion of fiddle in the curriculum does not seem out of place in a “*Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts*,” the reality was that this “‘Gaelic College,’ was from the beginning not really about the teaching of Gaelic but the promotion of tartanism.” McKay asserts that, in its invention, the Gaelic College was intended as a strange tartan fantasia of Clannishness.
and Gaelic Mods, attracting attention to the province and the purposeful MacDonaldian Scottishness.\textsuperscript{183}

While tradition bearers have likely always attempted to pass on their fiddling in the manner that they play it, institutionalization has meant a novel degree of rigidity. This pedagogical change exemplifies Handler’s statement that “one of the major paradoxes of the ideology of tradition is that attempts at cultural preservation inevitably alter, reconstruct, or invent the traditions that they are intended to fix.”\textsuperscript{184}

In its promotion of the fiddling tradition, the Cape Breton musical community had to negotiate the pervasive Nova Scotian tartanism; notably, the community narrative that has developed about the nature of the Cape Breton style continues to project tartanistic connections. The integral elements of style that have been identified time and again in the post-VCBF ethnomusicological endeavours have consistently been Gaelic and bagpipes, the pinnacles of tartanistic representation.\textsuperscript{185} It thus appears that, from a broader sociological perspective, the socio-political push toward tartanistic-Highlandism throughout twentieth-century Nova Scotia has infiltrated some elements of Cape Breton culture. With the combined post-VCBF climate of consternation, and an overbearing assertion of tartanistic ideals, the perspective on the fiddling practice has logically emphasized elements correlated with this tartanism. While this vision is real and valuable – like the Scottish Discursive Unconscious in general – it threatens to block the view of other integral elements in the tradition.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 36-9. Gaelic Mods are festivals of Gaelic song, arts and culture, often with nationalistic leanings.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 288.
\textsuperscript{185} “It is widely recognized that the old-style piping tradition has had a tremendous influence on the fiddle tradition of Cape Breton.” Doherty, “Periphery,” 181.
Dancing in Plain Sight

Informants and scholars alike have always acknowledged the connection between music and dance in the Cape Breton musical tradition; in fact, the phrase “music and dance” flows so naturally that it is not always clear where music leaves off and dance begins. Every discussion of fiddling ends up reflecting some element of its relationship with dancing – whether social dancing or solo stepdancing. The various institutions set up to preserve and maintain the musical traditions automatically include an emphasis on the interrelated dancing traditions. Why, then, has this integral connection never been thoroughly investigated in the greater part of the literature?\(^{186}\)

As mentioned above, the post-VCBF period saw several pamphlets and articles that addressed the issue of preservation and continuity in the fiddling tradition. One key recurring component was the connection with dancing: “Why has the expression lasted often into times when much has changed? One of the answers in Cape Breton is step-dancing. The old folk brought it with them from the Old Country – a Highland, Gaelic expression.”\(^{187}\)

Yet, somehow the discussion of dance fell out of the discourse; as time passed the aforementioned elements of bagpiping and Gaelic came to dominate the debate. In her examination of puirt-a-beul in her recent doctoral thesis, Heather Sparling explores the

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\(^{186}\) Discussions with ethnochoreologists at the NAFCo (North Atlantic Fiddle Convention) Conference suggested that the discipline has typically been sidelined, despite a continual acknowledgement of the integralilty of the music-dance connections within so many “traditional” cultural practices. In recent years, ethnochoreologists have done some in-depth examinations of Cape Breton dancing; however, these tend to focus largely on the dancing (often with emphasis on the historical Scottish-Cape Breton connections), rather than the symbiotic fiddling-dancing relationship. See, for example, Pat Ballyntyne’s “Closer to the floor: reflections on Cape Breton step dance,” in Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger, eds., Driving the Bow: Fiddle and Dance Studies from Around the North Atlantic, 135-43 (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, 2008), vol. 2.

\(^{187}\) John. G., Gibson, Fiddlers to the Fore, 7.
possible purposeful importance that Gaelic scholars and advocates placed on arts containing Gaelic, as the language hovered at the brink of extinction:

I perceive an imbalance and segregation between Gaelic music, song, language, dance, and folklore. [...] There now appears to be a widening divide: those arts requiring the Gaelic language (song and storytelling) are declining while those not requiring the Gaelic language (fiddling, piping, and step dancing) are at least being maintained, if not strengthening. If the Gaelic culture is to survive holistically, then the language-based components must be bolstered. One way to do that is to emphasize the connections between cultural forms, and to promote their integration as necessary. [...] The belief that Gaelic culture is integrated and holistic would seem to have been asserted only relatively recently, corresponding with efforts to protect and revive the Gaelic language. [...] [Puirt-a-beul] appear to have played a limited role in Cape Breton Gaelic culture until relatively recently.188

Sparling thus suggests that the emphasis on the Gaelic language’s importance in the fiddling tradition may have a basis in the valid concern for the survival of the Gaelic language itself. Although it exhibits many signs of change, the fiddling tradition appears to be both propelled strongly by younger generations’ interest and bolstered by older interested community members’ concern. The Gaelic language, on the other hand, was so drastically in decline by the VCBF period that it could not possibly have resurfaced as a living tradition.

It seems possible that insider writers and scholars have deemed the connection between music and dance too obvious to investigate. However, one of the most vital terms in the discourse on Cape Breton fiddling has a powerful association with dancing: “old style.” The connection with this term derives from several components, including the temporal continuity of the dancing-fiddling relationship, as well as the intimate interplay between fiddler and dancer.

188 Sparling, “Song Genres, Cultural Capital and Social Distinctions in Gaelic Cape Breton” (PhD diss., York University, 2005), 308-9.
Chapter 4: The “Old Style”

The Paradox of the Discourse on “Old Style”

In her use of the term “paradox” in her work on the evolution of Cape Breton fiddling in the twentieth century, Liz Doherty hit on a key issue: the paradoxical emic understanding of the tradition. While there are potentially many paradoxes, the foundational one is based on the preservation narrative: the perpetuation of nineteenth-century Scottish Highland playing in contemporary Cape Breton. Within the Cape Breton musical community, encompassing listeners as well as performers, there is a conception of an “old style.” The seeming simplicity of this term may imply an equally straightforward definition. However, while there is a general consensus of the existence of such a “style,” the varied application of the term nullifies the possibility of a unitary meaning from the community discourse alone.

Although Doherty analyzed essential elements of the tradition that have undergone manipulation or evolution, scholarly evaluations of Cape Breton fiddling have normally tended to focus on contemporary ethnographic perspectives, and have largely avoided venturing into historical anthropology. Thus, how the paradoxical terminology in the community discourse developed is examined through both perspectives below.

Duality in the post-VCBF Usage of the “Old Style”

As previously mentioned, Doherty discovered a dual usage of the term “old style” within the Cape Breton fiddling parlance: in post-VCBF culture, it had been applied generally to nearly any performer of preceding generations. However, it seems that the
term had not been applied so broadly before this time. One can witness remnants of a more specific discourse on “old style” in statements from informants.

Some emic explanations of “old style” refer to specific types of techniques. For example, Norman Gillis explained elements of the “old style”:

Bowing played a big part of it. The way that they handled the bow. Angus Allan [Gillis] had a very loose arm, he could really put a lot of “diddiums” and “duddiums” [i.e. “cuts,” or “trebles”] into that. […] And they’d sort of shake their finger [i.e. “warbles”].

Yet, informants also refer to many of the innovative fiddlers from previous generations as having the “old style.” As mentioned in chapter 2, this connection partly relies on the influence of the recording/mass media industry and on the perceptual crystallization of these “master fiddlers” as representing the supreme Cape Breton style. With the reactionary instinct in the post-VCBF culture, a romanticization of the “old” became intermixed with the idealization of these representatives of the Cape Breton style. Younger fiddlers are thus presented with a conundrum: individuality, innovation and tradition have all always been an integral part of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. Yet, in the post-VCBF context, with the fear of impinging global culture, the community has expected younger fiddlers to duplicate the performance practices of their predecessors. At the same time, the discourse also critiques younger fiddlers for not having their own, recognizably unique flavour.

Duality and Globality in Cape Breton Fiddling: Contexts

One of the issues explored in chapter 2 was the noticeable innovation in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition since the 1920s. Scholars consistently refer to accompaniment

189 Interview with Norman Gillis, August 7, 2007.
and repertoire as chief venues for innovation among tradition bearers since this period.\(^{190}\) The most drastic changes in the former occurred with the move to piano from organ, and the creative musical development of accompaniment styles.\(^{191}\) The most significant element of change to the repertoire resulted from the adoption of lancers and quadrilles, which required copious amounts of jigs. The solution was to appropriate jigs, primarily from the Irish repertoire or, eventually, to compose Cape Breton jigs. Some would argue that the prominence of tune composition in Cape Breton has also has an impact, which it surely has. However, the adoption of an entirely new genre would imply a complex adaptation of performance practice traditions. On the most simplistic level, jigs are in 6/8, thus employing a triple meter; such a meter did not previously exist in the Cape Breton dance repertoire (so far as can be traced), and would require the development of bowing and articulation styles suited not only to the dances, but also the Cape Breton musical constitution.

Fiddlers tend to be aware of their usage of tunes from traditions outside of the Scottish Cape Breton repertoire. Informants such as Glenn Graham suggest the manner in which they appropriate these tunes:

> Even if we adopt a tune out of another tradition, we just play it the Cape Breton way – most of us anyway. And I usually only ever play a tune from another tradition if it’s one that I feel has that “Cape Breton feel,” like a certain parameter that you can’t really go outside of. If you do, it will probably be weeded out rather quickly – people will say, ”well, that’s kind of a weird tune.”\(^{192}\)

Kinnon Beaton also explains:

> A [tune from] another style, I’d probably play it Cape Bretonly, if you know what I mean. Like, it could be an Irish tune, but it’s not natural for me to put the rolls in it, and

\(^{190}\) See, for example, Doherty, “Periphery” and Garrison, “Traditional Teaching.”
\(^{191}\) See Doherty, “Periphery,” 318-27.
\(^{192}\) Interview with Glenn Graham, August 28, 2007.
that, I’d really have to work at that. So, I just play it the way I would hear it, or put my own feel into it.193

The Celtic boom of the 1980s and 1990s not only exposed Cape Breton fiddlers to new means of musical expression, but also resulted in their own purposeful manipulation of both their images and their musical production. In certain ways, engineering one’s image follows in line with practices from previous generations. There are countless recordings that feature tartans, pictures of comical pipers, or rolling hills – all of which appealed to the tartanistic market. However, during the Celtic boom, performers and producers utilized these images as more blatant representations of particular ideals for the global market. For instance, Ashley MacIsaac played into the dirty, rustic, punk-Celtic image, while Natalie MacMaster stepped into the clean, sweet, Gaelic-nymph role.

The most drastic difference in this period was that the musical choices that these artists made frequently reflected the images and character that they were trying to portray of themselves. In a simplistic analysis, following his “grunge” image, Ashley’s performances tended to feature a distorted fiddle, an explosive drum kit, and a powerful bass line. Natalie, on the other hand, tended to “clean up” (i.e. play with slightly reduced fingered and bowed ornamentations) her style, and add numbers from different musical styles - often of a virtuosic nature. Hence, the stylistic approaches for different audiences in the global market, in conjunction with image manipulation, often led to alterations in the fiddling. While these adjustments could take a more radical form (as in Ashley’s experimental albums, *Hi, How Are You Today?* and *Helter’s Celtic*), the manipulations could also be more localized to specific aspects of playing.

193 Interview with Kinnon Beaton, August 21, 2007.
Wendy MacIsaac notes the difficulty of maintaining “old style” playing when performing for a modern, international audience:

There’s a lot of fiddle players my age who are trying to play that old style – and I think that one of the biggest problems is that when we’re doing a show - even with Beolach - like, if we just played the whole show with just straight jigs and strathspeys and reels the way that we always play them – it may not be as interesting if the way that we do it, by just changing up the accompaniment, and you know what I mean. It’s just more interesting for the audience abroad.\footnote{Wendy is referring here partially to more innovative accompaniment, both through stylistic manipulation, and through the addition of non-traditional instruments (e.g. drum kit); she may also be referring to the band’s choices of sound production when recording CDs. Interview with Wendy MacIsaac, August 28, 2007.}

Informants suggest that fiddlers from this global generation exhibit a duality in their performative ability: essentially, they can often still play in the “old style,” although they may fiddle with alternate stylistic approaches for various international audiences. Helen Gillis alludes to this duality after attending one of Natalie MacMaster’s concerts in Toronto:

She said “I’m going to play some old-style Cape Breton fiddling.” And she just wanted to audience to know that she still retains that old style. […] She’s very versatile – and, my impression from what she said was that she was never going to lose that old style. And, I think that, the fiddlers that [play in the old style], depending on the audience that they’re playing for, would play either or, or both.\footnote{Interview with Helen Gillis, August 7, 2007.}

Sandy MacIntyre further explained this duality in Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac’s performances:

[Natalie and Ashley are] quite capable of doing that - the traditional, old style of fiddling. Today, it’s all about marketing. And when you’re in a certain area, say, as Natalie or Ashley would be, say do in the States – they would need to do something really more commercial than traditional Cape Breton.\footnote{Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, August 19, 2007.}

However, context plays a recognizable role within these stylistic manipulations.

There are four contexts that I will explore relevant to performance practice across
generations of fiddlers: recordings, concerts, homes, and dances.\textsuperscript{197} Within these categories, informants refer to the first two (recordings and concerts) as sometimes requiring a manipulated approach, while the latter two (homes and dances) allow for a more traditional performance. There are two pertinent issues here: first, the audience for whom the practitioner is performing, and the expectations of said audience; second, the practical concerns of performing in this context. Beyond these, there is a basic socio-geographical delineation that can be made between these two groupings: the first two (recordings and concerts) take place, and are intended for consumption, both within and without Cape Breton; the latter two (homes and dances) take place, and are intended for consumption in a local setting within the Cape Breton community.

Consequently, one of the essential differences between the constructed contexts (recordings and concerts) and the more traditional contexts (homes and dances) is the manipulation of musical approaches in order to appeal to a distinct audience. Artists who have striven to reach a market beyond their home communities are often faced with consumers unfamiliar with the traditional Cape Breton style. Consequently, with recordings intended for these outsider markets, and concerts set in outsider arenas, fiddlers have expanded beyond their traditional performance practice in order to make their music more accessible to a wider audience. Thus, when the music moves outside of the Cape Breton context, it may more freely undergo innovation.\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{197} Another worthwhile venue to examine would be the re-creations of social practices for tourist consumption; for example, the “kitchen céilidh.” However, some of the approaches in this context would likely be similar to other performances that were manipulated for outsider audiences (such as some recordings and concerts).

\textsuperscript{198} That is, it may more freely undergo innovation beyond the typical practiced “traditional” performance of Cape Breton. There would likely be many restraining factors of performing for these outsider audiences, as well.
However, as noted, informants consistently refer to a musical duality that they perceive within these fiddlers, which interrelate with these contextual associations: a global, marketable performance practice, and a local, traditional performance practice. The former is used for recordings and concerts aimed at the global market, the latter for Cape Breton house sessions and dances. Fiddlers’ performance practice, though, differs between house sessions and dances, according to the practical requirements of the context.199 Many informants attest that house sessions are the most relaxed context, and allow the fiddler for the most freedom. Jackie Dunn states:

A house party. That would be almost the same feeling as playing at a pub or playing for a dance. I think it’s more relaxed – people are talking and hooting, and someone jumps up and dances. I think that people enjoy playing a lot for house parties, too.200

House sessions are particularly amenable to “listening playing”; that is, as in a concert, some attendees at the house may primarily observe the fiddlers. However, unlike a concert setting, there is much more flexibility as to the players, the tunes, and participation. Fiddlers and other musical collaborators (pianists, guitarists, drums, spoons, etc.) may play at their leisure. In a concert, a set of tunes is frequently planned ahead; at a house session, musicians may select tunes as they go. There are many tunes that have become traditionally linked, such that fiddlers would all recognize an expected grouping of certain tune sets. For example, “Anthony Murray’s” strathspey so typically follows “Christie Campbell” that it is frequently known as “Chistie’s Sister.”201 Otherwise, musicians will also either call out a tune (or at least the key) that they are about to play, or name the set before they initiate the performance. Participation is also more open, as

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199 “House sessions,” “house party,” or “céilidh,” etc. are reasonably interchangeable terms.
200 Interview with Jackie Dunn, August 26, 2007.
201 Dunlay and Greenberg, Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton (Toronto: DunGreen Music, 1996), 126.
additional musical collaborators may join in, or dancers may either decide to initiate a square set, or perform a solo step dance set. However, there is also more opportunity to perform tunes unrelated to dancing.

Since house sessions are performed by and for insiders to the tradition, and would seem the most open to artistic freedom, they should allow us a view into the emically allowable innovations in the Cape Breton fiddling community. In a dance setting, however, it is a rare event that a fiddler would perform anything but dance tunes.\textsuperscript{202}

Practical considerations in the dance context require that the fiddler perform tunes that are not only the correct genre of tune for the set (ie. jigs for the first two sets, reels for the third, and strathspeys and reels for step dancing sets), but also that they select tunes that are appropriate for dancing. Kinnon Beaton explained:

I think that a lot of it has to do with your tune choice – if you play a lot of hornpipes, rather than reels, then dancers will respond differently. [...] Or, its like with how there’s a slow strathspey, and a dance strathspey… I think that maybe that’s part of why I’m known as a dance fiddler, and some of the other fiddlers, who may be good players, and have a sweet sound, or whatever, if they play too many hornpipes, then the dancers don’t respond to their playing as well. [...] So, I think that it has a lot to do with tune choice.\textsuperscript{203}

Thus, the practicality of the dance setting demands the maintenance of certain traditional elements of fiddling. The specific issues of performance practice that are connected with dancing will be explored in the next chapter. While there are fiddlers who participate almost exclusively within Cape Breton contexts (homes and dances), those engaged with the global market tend to perform in a traditional Cape Breton manner when returning to these home/dance contexts.\textsuperscript{204}

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\textsuperscript{202} There is an exception in the half an hour or so before a dance starts, however, when the fiddler may play tunes for “listening” for early arrivals.

\textsuperscript{203} Interview with Kinnon Beaton, August 21, 2007.

\textsuperscript{204} For some players, like Kinnon Beaton, who are known as outstanding dance players, their concert venues tend to be within the island or the nearby diaspora, and are mostly directed at local community members.
Wendy MacIsaac, who toured as a band member with Ashley in the 1990s, suggested that Ashley’s musical deviations did not even breach stylistic aspects: “If you stripped down what Ashley was playing – you know, if you took all the backup music away – it would still sound like he was playing for a dance.”\textsuperscript{205} Particularly in reference to the present practicing generations, then, there is frequently a connection made between good dance playing and fiddling in the “old style.” The dance context is simply amenable to a continuity of elements of the performance practice emically associated with the “old style” of playing.

There are, of course, exceptions to these contextual classifications. For one, some fiddlers perceive their playing as constantly exemplifying the “old style,” regardless of context; largely, the community narrative generally situates these individuals the same way. Dave MacIssac is upheld as an exemplar of the “old style” throughout the Cape Breton community. When asked whether he does anything divergent for different contexts that he performs in (dance, recording, house session, concerts), he responded: “Just make sure I’m in tune, and drive ’er.”\textsuperscript{206} Glenn Graham, a younger proponent of the “old style,” also asserts that, in different contexts, “Generally speaking, […] I don’t really change the way that I play.”\textsuperscript{207}

**Innovative “Old Style”: post-VCBF**

As noted above, in the post-VCBF atmosphere, the term “old style” was applied freely to any “master fiddler” of a previous generation. Indeed, as Doherty discovered, as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{205} Interview with Wendy Maclsaac, August 28, 2007.
  \item \textsuperscript{206} Interview with Dave Maclsaac, August 28, 2007.
  \item \textsuperscript{207} Interview with Glenn Graham, August 17, 2007. Other informants share Glenn’s view of his own style: “Glenn Graham, of course, he’s got that [old] style.” Interview with fiddler Joe Peter MacLean, August 4, 2007.
\end{itemize}
fiddlers aged, they become representative of the “older” generation, and therefore also become embodiments of this “old style.” As indicated previously, interstices in the social practice of Cape Breton fiddling allow for the most radical innovations in performance practice when carried out for an insider audience. With the added pressure of post-VCBF anxiety, these interstices of allowable innovation do not exist when the creative developments are carried out for an outsider audience.

Some master fiddlers most frequently held up as ideals of the “old style” were in fact the most innovative within the Cape Breton style. In particular, Angus Chisholm and Winston Fitzgerald were both judged as “old style” players, and yet both purposely aimed to manipulate the traditional stylistic approach around their own subjective ideals.

Winston, for example, explains that he had actually wanted to play classical violin:

That’s what I wanted to play, I’ll be honest with you. That was the thing I was ever sorry for, that I couldn’t afford that type of music. (I’m talking to a man that’s considered perhaps the greatest living Cape Breton fiddler – and he’s sorry ’cause he can’t play Mozart!) That’s exactly right. Well, that’s what I always had in mind, but I knew I had to forget about it. My father couldn’t afford it, and I couldn’t afford it. […] Deeply, surely honest, yeah. My heart and soul were in it.

Both Winston and Angus’ desires to perform classical music informed their approach to certain aspects of their Cape Breton fiddling. The basic difference in their sound was a move towards a sweeter tone and a cleaner style – essentially, less “dirt” in the fiddle.

More particularly, Winston was selective about his usage of ornamentation, and tended to play with faster embellishments and more articulate bowing. My analysis of Angus’ approach to the tune “Mrs. Scott Skinner” in chapter 6 will exemplify the deep classical influences evinced by these innovative fiddlers.

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208 Buddy MacMaster is one of the figures that Doherty identifies as stylistically representing newer, cleaner fiddling (i.e. less or quicker ornamentations, and more articulative bowing), while at the same time being held up as an “old style” player.

While their unique approaches to the Cape Breton style certainly infiltrated all aspects of their playing, the most extreme of these innovations typically surfaced in “listening” tunes. As in the case of the musical duality in the global fiddlers of the Celtic boom generation (and onward), informants also suggest that players from the 1960s generation had a similar ability to move between their new, smooth style and an “old style” approach when the context demanded it.

Sandy MacIntyre, who brought Winston out to play for dances in Toronto in the 1950s, explained Winston’s versatility between stylistic approaches: “Most people today like the older style – with all of the extra ruffage in it. Well, he could do that as well – he had the knack of doing both.”\(^{210}\) Winston was, after all, the fiddler most in demand for dances throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Estwood Davidson, who performed guitar with Winston and Beattie Wallace (on piano) for 26 years, recalls that “we were the king of the square-dancers for about 25 years.”\(^{211}\) Certain elements of traditional performance practice (to be explored in the next chapter) would thus have been integral to his playing for dances. Although Winston had a generally smoother, cleaner style, regardless of contexts, those disconnected from dancing (i.e. in the performance of “listening” tunes) allowed for more drastic stylistic manipulations.

Interestingly, the current practicing generations (vs. pre-VCBF players) are regarded differently in terms of the adoption of exogenous stylistic aspects – particularly classical mannerisms. Although they may be acknowledged as outstanding players, these younger innovative fiddlers would never be held up as a proponent of the “old style.” Dwayne Coté is exemplary of this type of fiddler: while he is well-regarded across the

\(^{210}\) Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, August 17, 2007.

\(^{211}\) Estwood Davidson in interview with Caplan, Talking, 23.
island, informants typically distance him from traditional playing, let alone “old style”
practice. However, like Angus Chisolm and Winston Fitzgerald, Dwayne appropriated
elements of the classical sound, and included them in his Cape Breton style.212

Some tradition bearers have become aware of the specious nature of contentions
about and demands for “old style” from the present generation of practitioners, versus the
idealization of innovative fiddlers from previous generations. Kinnon Beaton, one of the
most in-demand dance fiddlers on the island, referred to a conundrum that he was facing:

Like Andrea [Beaton] and Troy [MacGillivray] and all them. If I put a CD of one of them
on compared to one of the older players – it’s scratchy. And, I don’t know, they
obviously have something in their sound that I much preferred what I was hearing off of
the younger CDs than the older players. […] It’s polished, and it’s appealing, and there’s
oomph, and it’s slick. It appeals to me – I like it. They can still put dirt in it and whatever
too. […] Years ago, some would say the smoother you played, the better you were.
Winston Fitzgerald, or Buddy was noted as a smooth player. […][Winston] was clean –
and he was polished. It’s true. Something that younger players are criticized for.213

Thus, an awareness of the modern manipulation of this ideal of “old style” has
begun to surface in the community discourse on Cape Breton fiddling. I suggest that,
furthering Doherty’s discussion of “old style” in the post-VCBF period, there are two
distinct usages of this term within the Cape Breton discourse: the universal application to
all playing by idealized fiddlers of the older generation, and the selective application to
ideal players connected with dance. The former follows from the preservationist leanings
of the post-VCBF narrative, while the latter is based in a contextual association with the
social practice of dancing.

212 Dwayne is proud to have studied “on scholarship” with classical violinist Joan Barrett (my own
violin teacher in high school) in Toronto; he is even described on the Ceilidh Trail School of Music (where
he teaches) website as using “a distinct Classical tone.” See http://www.ceilidhtrail.com/Instructors.html
(accessed 28 July 2008). He also features many virtuosic J. Scott Skinner tunes in his repertoire, and
frequently exhibits bowing fireworks and extended fingering techniques. Interestingly, however, his
performances of traditional tunes (such as “Christie Campbell” on his A Compilation album) exhibit less
innovation and more alliance with the “old style” techniques examined below.

213 Interview with Kinnon Beaton, August 21, 2007.
Chapter 5: Dancing and the Retention of “Old Style” Techniques

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.214

Writing in 1973, John Gibson was referring to the connection between two traditional practices that have nourished one another for centuries. Because of the assumed strength of the connection between fiddling and dancing, the prevailing Cape Breton narrative includes a belief in the perpetuation of dance practices from old Scotland. For instance, in 1988, Allister MacGillavray proclaimed: “The maintenance of Highland stepdancing must not be underestimated when reasons are sought for the long and successful survival of ancient Scottish music in the distant hills of ‘New Scotland.’”215 Today, this perspective remains prominent, as Harvey Beaton declares in an article on the Gaelic Council’s webpage that “Step dancing is an artistic expression older than our highland ancestors themselves who introduced the tradition to the new world in the eighteenth century.”216

The integral role that dance has played within the fiddling tradition continues to be acknowledged in the typical discourse; indeed, the two elements are thought to be so closely connected that one would be hard-pressed to engage in a discussion of fiddling that did not mention dance. Kenneth Donovan notes that

In order to appreciate the intricacy and historical significance of Cape Breton fiddle music, it must be examined in conjunction with stepdancing. With its complicated footwork and exuberant energy, Cape Breton stepdancing evolved because of the way in

214 John G. Gibson, Fiddlers to the Fore, 4.
215 MacGillivray, Céilidh, 24.
which the music is played. The formation is not predetermined, the step is not necessarily
determined; it’s spontaneous and moves […] according to the way the music is played.217

In the post-VCBF fiddle “revival,” scholars like McKinnon asserted that “A new
fire of interest in fiddle music was thus rekindled. Classes were organized and square
dances once again rose to the top of preferred week-end activities.”218 McKinnon thus
suggested the automatic association of the two social practices: if one burgeons, the other
follows suit. MacGillavray also asserted this assumedly symbiotic relationship in 1988:

Fiddling and stepdancing have had a real revitalization here since the scare of The
Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler film and radio program of the early 1970’s, and now we
are delighted to say that there is no fear of any disappearance for some time yet. We feel
confident and proud of the fact that our music is among the most stirring and ancient of
its kind.219

An Historical View of Social Dance and Step Dance from the Old to New World

Dancing has a unique role in the preservation narrative about Cape Breton’s
fiddling practices. Other elements that are perceived as influential to Cape Breton style,
namely piping and Gaelic, are recognized as having undergone drastic transformation: it
is difficult to ignore the obvious decline of Gaelic, and the restrictions and manipulations
of piping practices for competitions.220 Dancing, however, neither appears to be in decline
nor has it become entrenched within any established regulation.

Scholars have traced the connection between fiddling practice and social dance
traditions in Highland Scotland back to the rise of the fiddle in the sixteenth century.

Bruford and Munro explain that “References to the fiddle by the Gaelic poets Mary

217 Kenneth Donovan, “Reflections of Cape Breton Culture;” 5.
218 McKinnon, “Fortune,” 44.
219 MacGillivray, Céilidh, 25.
220 Bagpipe playing came under specific strictures in the nineteenth century, as piping competitions
were formalized. See John Gibson, Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping 1745-1945 (Montreal: McGill Queens
MacLeod and Roderick Morison, who know Dunvegan at this period [in the late sixteenth century], make it clear that it was played for dancing. What little we know of Scottish Highland dancing traditions in the period preceding and surrounding the Highland Clearances generally comes from the memoirs or (Enlightenment-style) anthropological studies by outsiders touring the Highlands. One such visitor was General David Stewart of Garth, who noted the connection between fiddling and dancing in the Highlands in 1822:

> The fiddlers played to the dancers in the house, and the pipers to those in the field. [...] Playing the bagpipes within doors is a Lowland and English custom. In the Highlands the piper is always in the open air; and when people wish to dance to his music, it is on the green, if the weather permits; nothing but necessity makes them attempt a pipe dance in the house.

Rare accounts actually document attributes of the dancing itself. Colonel Thornton, for example, an Englishman who toured the Highlands around 1804, recounted a dancing-master’s ball at an inn in Dalmally:

> They were dancing a country-dance when we entered. The company consisted of about fourteen couples, who all danced the true Glen Orgue kick. I have observed, that every district of the Highlands has some peculiar cut; they all shuffle in such a manner as to make the noise of their feet keep exact time. Though this is not the fashionable style of dancing, yet, with such dancers, it had not a bad effect. [...] It gave me great pleasure to see these poor people as innocently amused, and to observe with what spirit they danced, after the fatigues of the day, which evidently proved the strong inclination the Highlanders have for this favourite amusement. How much more rational is this conduct than that of our labourers in England, who, in their way, would be intoxicated and riotous.

Social dancing remained a prominent part of Scottish culture into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as did the association between violin and dancing. Many of the

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222. Garth was a village in Llangollen, England.
224. Dalmally was a village in Argyll, east of Oban in the Scottish Highlands.
important dance masters were also violinists and violin teachers; J. Scott Skinner, the foremost Scottish fiddler of the nineteenth century, “was a professional dancing-master before he achieved fame as a fiddler.”\textsuperscript{226} However, while this dancing-master-fiddler connection may be a remnant of earlier traditions, the dance sets in practice during this period had changed dramatically from those of the eighteenth century.

While these Enlightenment-era views must be taken with a grain of salt, as Frank Rhodes noted, there is nonetheless an important lineage that can be traced between these Highlanders’ “shuffling in such a manner as to make the noise of their feet keep exact time,” and the step dancing practices in Cape Breton, which are emically viewed as perpetuations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Highland social dancing.

As scholarly attention was focused on Cape Breton dancing, questions arose as to its origins; folklorists were taken aback by the drastic difference between the contemporary forms of Scottish folk dance and Cape Breton dance. This divergence became apparent in 1939 when the Gaelic College in St. Ann, Cape Breton began teaching modern Highland Dance and modern Scottish Country Dance; the disparity between these dances and those extant in Cape Breton was obvious. For a period of time, it was asserted that, since the forms of dancing in Cape Breton were so different from Scottish dancing, they had to have been an importation from Ireland (or Irish diasporas), Virginia, or France (or French diasporas). However, as the transformations of Scottish “traditional” dances were uncovered, it became possible to trace the lineage of the Cape Breton dances back to Scottish roots.

\textsuperscript{226} Flett, \textit{Traditional Dancing}, 24.
Rhodes points out the similarity between these descriptions of Highlanders
dancing in 1804 and the present-day practice in Cape Breton during his work in the
1960s:

The majority of the steps used in the various solo dances […] on Cape Breton Island […] employ a form of stepping in which the dancer marks the rhythm of the music with the
toe and heel beats and brushing movement, the feet being kept close to the ground
throughout. […] The style of stepping used in the Cape Breton Island Reels is thus in
close accord with the style seen by Colonel Thornton in the Scottish Highlands in 1804,
where the dancers “all shuffle in such a manner as to make the noise of their feet keep
exact time.”

While Rhodes acknowledges the possibility that some of the above ethnic styles
(Irish and French/Acadian) may have influenced Cape Breton dancing over the years, he
asserts that “it is certain that the roots of the step-dancing lie in the solo dances and Reel
steps which were brought from Scotland early in the nineteenth century.”

Moore also contends that “today’s solo step-dancing developed out of the stepping within the old
reels.” According to her interpretation, the complexity of the steps in the formal dances
brought over from Scotland resulted in their eventual decline. Rather, “the relatively
greater freedom of expression in choosing and dancing steps, which was available in the
context of the old Reels, became the vehicle for solo dancing also, and as a result solo
step-dancing in Cape Breton today consists almost entirely of extemporized strathspeys
and reels.”

227 Frank Rhodes, “Dancing in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia,” in Traditional Dancing, eds. J.F. and
228 Ibid., 273.
230 Some of these dances included the Fling, Seann Truibhas, Flowers of Edinburgh, Tullochgorum,
Jackie Tar, Irish Washerwoman, and Princess Royal, all of which are documented as popular in the
nineteenth-century Highlands by the Fletts in Traditional Dancing in Scotland.
231 Moore, “Scottish Step Dancing,” 5. The “Scotch Reel” or “Scotch Four” (i.e. “old Reel”) is
frequently referred to as a popular dance in the twentieth century in Cape Breton in MacGillivray’s A Cape
Breton Céilidh.
developed out of the improvised stepping in nineteenth-century Scottish traditional social dancing, the Scotch Reels.

In recent years, writers from the community like Sheldon MacInnis, originally fervent advocates of the Scottish origins of the dancing tradition, have become open to the possibility that there may have been other influences: “It might well be that this Cape Breton dance, ‘step-dance,’ does not belong to the Scots after all. It might be an extension of the Irish tradition.”232 Typically, however, the tradition is generally still perceived as Scottish in origin, with influences likely seeping in. This general view within the discourse aligns dancing with the preservation narrative on the history of Cape Breton fiddling. In any case, regardless of the perceived origins, there has remained a traceable, integral connection between Cape Breton fiddling and dancing throughout the twentieth century.

**Transformations of the Dancing Tradition in Twentieth-century Cape Breton**

Like the fiddling tradition, social dancing in Cape Breton has been refashioned in various ways throughout the twentieth century; in fact, some of these changes were symbiotic between the two interrelated traditions. Perhaps the two most important changes were the introduction of the quadrilles and lancers dances, and the development of dance halls.

The impact of the quadrilles and lancers was mentioned in chapter 4 in relation to the transformations of the fiddling repertoire. Sets of the quadrilles and lancers are

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232 Sheldon MacInnes, “Cape Breton Step Dancing,” *Cork-Cape Breton Festival*, http://www.ibiblio.org/gaelic/Albanuadh/4.2.html (accessed 12 May 2008). Sheldon Macllnnes is an activist for the maintenance of the cultural traditions in Cape Breton, having published several books from ethnographic standpoints, and working for Cape Breton University, and as the Celtic Music Researcher for the Beaton Institute, an affiliate institution of CBU.
danced to a compound duple metre (6/8), which did not exist in the known dancing repertoire brought over by the Scottish immigrants. Thus, the importation of these dances between circa 1900 and 1920 necessitated both the importation of jigs from other ethnic fiddling repertoire (mainly Irish), and their composition by Cape Bretoners. These dances were not wholly accepted in their typical forms in Cape Breton, however; the community molded them to their manner of dancing, with its emphasis on marking “the rhythm of the music with the toe and heel beats and brushing movements.” Instead of essentially walking through the quadrille and lancer sets, as was typically done elsewhere, Cape Bretoners step danced throughout them.\(^{233}\)

Referring to this issue in 1964, Rhodes asserted that “It will be noticed that the step-dancing classes closed down soon after the square sets were introduced – the step-dancing was no longer required for use in the fashionable social dances. Now only a few people occasionally step-dance in the square dances.”\(^{234}\) Perhaps the increased numbers of step dancers in square sets in contemporary Cape Breton can be attributed to the growth of pedagogical emphasis on step dancing in the post-VCBF concern for cultural preservation.

As Addison has pointed out, dance halls have become a “main focus of the cultural practices [in Cape Breton].”\(^{235}\) Before the turn of the twentieth century, most dances were held at home gatherings or during weddings. Gradually, dances were held in schoolhouses (normally to raise money to maintain the school), in parishes, and

\(^{233}\) Not everyone step dances throughout the sets; however, this tends to have more to do with energy expenditure than knowledge of the steps. Most local attendees at a dance know at least the basic jig step and a few reels steps. See Emily Addison, “The Perception and Value of Dance Halls in Inverness County, Cape Breton” (BA thesis, Trent University, 2001).

\(^{234}\) Rhodes, “Dancing in Cape Breton Island,” 274.

\(^{235}\) Addison, “Dance Halls in Inverness County,” 1.
community and private halls. The first of these public halls was likely built sometime in the 1930s or 1940s.\(^{236}\) The change over to public halls created a systematization and routine previously not present: dances were held consistently on particular evenings of the week, and, up until the late 1960s, most dance halls typically employed a primary fiddler.

The dance hall tradition was particularly popular as Cape Bretoners returned home for the summer from working “away” in Ontario or the Boston states. This era saw the rise of fiddle masters such as Winston Scotty Fitzgerald and Bill Lamey. However, by the later 1960s and into the 1970s, the popularity of organized dances began to wane. Addison calls this period the “Pig and Whistle” era, as Pig and Whistles (pub-nights with a variety of music played and alcohol served) have been attributed in part to the decline of organized dances in this period.\(^{237}\)

The revitalization of the dance hall tradition seems to have been connected to the same general post-VCBF reaction of cultural preservation and revivalism, as dances resurfaced in popularity in the 1980s. However, the rejuvenation of these dances came with some changes: a prompter, common in the pre-Pig and Whistle era, was no longer used, and alcohol began to be served at some dances (thus restricting the age of attendees).

Kinnon Beaton recollected the effect of this change:

> They went to what was called a Pig and Whistle then. So you had to be 19 years of age to get in, because of the liquor – they were serving liquor there. So there was a period there – say, when I was 12 to 19 – that I couldn’t go to any dances. Because I couldn’t get in. I used to bring my father’s amplifier over for him when he’d be playing, and I’d just stay in the hall somewhere. More or less hide in the corner somewhere, and hope that the collector never saw you, eh.\(^ {238}\)

\(^{236}\) Emily Addison’s and my own informants contradict scholarly information on the subject. Rhodes states that the first hall was built around 1900, while informants assert dates as late as the 1940s. Rhodes, “Dancing in Cape Breton Island,” 270.

\(^{237}\) Addison, “Dance Halls in Inverness County,” 22.

\(^{238}\) Interview with Kinnon Beaton, August 21, 2007.
Also, consistent with changes in the post-VCBF fiddling pedagogy, step-dancing classes became more formalized, possibly leading to a gradual standardization in Cape Breton step dancing. Nonetheless, this pedagogical shift cannot be perceived as an isolated circumstance. Historical accounts inform us that there was a noticeable change in dancing pedagogy in the early twentieth century.\(^{239}\) The original Scottish immigration to Cape Breton in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had brought with it several dancing masters who set up schools throughout the island; however, as some aspects of the social dancing tradition changed, the importance of these schools began to wane.\(^{240}\) There was thus a shift *away* from formalized dancing schools in twentieth-century Cape Breton long before the move back *into* formalized step dancing classes.

The changing social makeup of the dances in the post-VCBF atmosphere has also altered certain aspects of the dance. Since the 1980s there has been an increased attendance of tourists at dances.\(^{241}\) Dances have become promoted as part of the tourist industry; they are advertised in the Inverness Oran (the local paper), and posters are frequently put up in the tourist centers. In general, the community seems to take well to these outsider participants, as they are integral to the continued financial viability of the dances. Elizabeth Beaton, who is involved with the Glencoe Mills dances asked: “I mean, what would we do without the tourists?”\(^{242}\)

However, the resultant impact tourists have had on the actual dance sets is not always seen in such a positive light. The number of participants in dance sets has

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\(^{239}\) See Rhodes, “Dancing in Cape Breton Island.”

\(^{240}\) Ibid., 269-73.

\(^{241}\) “When asked specifically about tourists, most people did not remember tourists attending dances dating back prior to the 1970s. […] Most of the responses suggested that tourists really began attending dances somewhere between 1985 and 1990.” Addison, “Dance Halls in Inverness County,” 84.

\(^{242}\) Elizabeth Beaton qtd. in Addison, “Dance Halls in Inverness County,” 84.
increased dramatically in recent decades. Four couples to a set was typical into the mid-century; this restriction was often enforced by a “caller,” who controlled access to the
dance floor. Dave MacIsaac prefers playing for four couples in a set, and feels that the
mushrooming of set size is unfortunate: “It’s getting out of control – it’s a shame, too. It’s
not fair to the musicians, either – they have to play long figures.” Although locals
pleasantly guide tourists through dance sets, the confusion resulting from so many
outsider participants can sometimes overwhelm dance sets, and lead to their
deterioration.

Thus, it may be likely that fiddlers feel a greater sense of communion with solo
step dancers. However, the emic language used to describe the interaction between
dancing and fiddling implies some overlap between the discourse on social dance sets
and solo step dancing. When Kinnon Beaton explains the relationship between dancing
and fiddling, he vacillates between references to solo dancers (“My father used to tell me
– when you’re playing for a dancer, give it that little bit extra”) and square sets (“If you
can get the dancers going, they’re going to keep you going, too”).

However, these dance forms (set and solo) would place different demands on the
fiddler. Historically, social dance sets have required great sound projection and emphasis

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243 The disappearance of the “caller” is probably associated with these changes. In contemporary Cape
Breton, callers are almost never used, with the exception of an occasional dance in Baddeck. For instance,
at a dance in The Red Barn in the late 1990s, I was taken aback by the presence of a caller. In some ways,
as Baddeck is the most touristic town on Cape Breton Island, the use of a caller may be partly to corral the
tourists (particularly since he was announcing all of the figures in the sets, which most tourists would
require assistance with).
244 Interview with Dave MacIsaac, August 28, 2007.
245 There are several loyal returning tourists, however, who have a vested interest in the tradition.
These outsiders are typically informed and capable of participating comfortably in dance sets.
246 There is also a point in the third set figure (danced to a reel) when men and women line up to face
one another, and have to opportunity to show off their solo reel steps. This is a less explicit exhibition,
however, and many of the participants stick to basic steps.
247 Interview with Kinnon Beaton, August 21, 2007.
so that fiddlers may be heard clearly over the great number of dancers. I would suggest that this bygone requirement resulted in stylistic attributes that have been retained in “old style” playing. Solo step dancing, on the other hand, involves a more intimate interaction between the dancer and fiddler, as the dancer’s steps imitate and play off of the rhythms in the fiddler’s tunes, and the lilt and articulation of their style. In reference to both social and solo dancing, it is stated time and again that

In Cape Breton, step dancing and square dancing […] has a lot to do with the way we play, to make it livelier for the dancers, and playing the strathspey for stepdancing. You have to give it a lift or a lively feel to make the dancer feel like dancing or performing better, you know.248

Dancing and “Old Style” Performance Practice

It thus seems possible that aspects of performance practice from the “old style” may have been retained in association with 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 Gaelic flavour – their perpetuation has been demanded by the practical needs of dancing. Some of the techniques that are associated with the “old style” are almost exclusively employed in dance tunes. For example, the “up-driven” bow, “high bass” tuning, “cuts,” and “cutting.” In particular some of these techniques – “up-driven” bows and “cuttings” - are generally only used in the performance of strathspeys. Thus, this “old style”-dancing relationship seems particularly close with solo step-dancing, which necessitates the use of strathspeys.

248 Buddy MacMaster qtd. in Buddy MacMaster, Judique Flyer, compact disc, SMPCD1012, © 2000 Stephen McDonald, liner notes.
While the perpetuation 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 by dance fiddlers.\(^{249}\) Further, the prominence of dancing as a social practice has resulted in a generally conservative performance practice for dancing. Glenn Graham referred to the adherence to tradition that dancing demands:

I see consistency [where the old style continues] because, for one thing, step dancing has lasted, and is going on with the fiddling. So as long as that step dancing 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, you have to keep that tempo, you have to keep that swing that matches the dancing. And that comes out… to do that, there are certain things that you’re doing with your bow to compliment the dance. So, tempo, and bowing patterns and things.\(^{250}\)

As Doherty has pointed out, for some informants, the use of “old style” and “Mabou Coal Mines style” is synonymous.\(^{251}\) Informants also typically associate Inverness County, the region that bred the Mabou Coal Mines style, with dancing. These connections may be related to the dominance of Scottish diasporic communities in Inverness County; further, it may be rooted in an integrity of dance within these community practices. In her 2001 thesis on the dance halls of the region, Addison stated that “at present, the highest concentration of music and dance culture is in central Inverness County.”\(^{252}\) Indeed, the primary weekly social dances held in halls in Cape Breton continue to take place in Brook Village (Mondays), Glencoe Mills (Thursdays),

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\(^{249}\) Indeed, as mentioned, there are some fiddlers that generally approach all of their playing of dance tunes as if they were playing for dancing, regardless of the context.

\(^{250}\) Interview with Glenn Graham, August 17, 2007.

\(^{251}\) Doherty, “Periphery,” 296.

\(^{252}\) Addison, “Dance Halls in Inverness County,” 24.
Southwest Margaree (Fridays), and West Mabou (Saturdays), all of which are located in Inverness County. Within the Cape Breton community’s discourse, “old style” thus seems to be allied with both dancing and idealized dance fiddlers. Again, the relationship between dancing and fiddling is so intertwined that this statement would likely sound redundant to most Cape Breton ears.

**Practical Demands of Dance Fiddling**

Playing for both social dance sets and step dancing alike requires three integral elements, identified consistently by informants: “timing,” “lift,” (or “drive”) and repertoire. By “timing,” informants are 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.”

Doherty 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.” Timing has been identified in recent years as one of the aspects in the tradition that is changing. In his extensive interviews with musicians throughout Cape Breton Island, Joey Beaton, a

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253 Because of the economy, many Cape Bretoners seek work “away” during the year, but return home during the summer months. Because of this influx (combined with the surge of tourists in the summer), these weekly dances at halls only operate during the summer season (excepting West Mabou).

254 Interview with Andrea Beaton, August 22, 2007.

255 Doherty, “Periphery,” 357.
prominent step dancer and pianist, prodded his informants for statements about the increasing tempo in the younger generation of players. For instance, in an interview with John Archie Gillis (JA), Joey Beaton (JB) leads Archie toward the issue of tempo:

“The tempo has really been changing, hasn’t it?” (JB); “Yeah, and it seems to be a bit better than a few years back – we have more music now.” (JA); “Do you like it, though, played faster, or do you think that people should be very time-conscious?” (JB); “Well, I think one speed it pretty good. Like I just stay on one speed … I just keep it at the same speed, like Buddy and some of the older fiddler – that’s how we learned.”

After a comparative study between recordings (both home and commercial) between older and younger generations, Doherty concluded that there was no verifiably consistent increase in tempo in recent decades. Further, Glenn Graham stated that

They say that they’re playing too fast. […] We’re not playing any faster than they were then. Some of the [younger] fiddlers have recorded at a slower speed. And I’ve listened to the recordings of some of the older players, and they’re playing just as fast, or faster. And it really is on a kind of individual basis.

Although there cannot be a definitive conclusion about increasing tempi, it appears that informants’ concern for this changing trait outweighs the level of change that tempi may actually have gone through (particularly in comparison with the transformation of other aspects of performance practice throughout recent decades).

256 Interview between John Archie Gillis and Joey Beaton. February 2, 1994, cassette tape, Beaton Interviews, CMIC Archives, Judique, NS. While there may be isolated instances of faster tempi, these contentions have been made since the nineteenth century in reference to the Scottish fiddling tradition. In 1887, Keith Norman MacDonald railed against tempo increases in the foreward to his Skye Collection: “One word of caution may here be given against the tendency that exists at the present day to play this class of music a great deal too fast.” Keith Norman MacDonald, The Skye Collection of the Best Reels and Strathspeys (Edinburgh, 1887), preface.

257 Rather, she suggests that it has been a gradual acceleration through the century. Doherty, “Periphery,” 360.

258 Interview with Glenn Graham, August 17, 2007. Another popular young fiddler who asked that their opinion on the issue remain anonymous, stated: “It’s funny, because a lot of the older people will say ‘oh, the young people play too fast,’ – but then you’ll hear a lot of the old tapes, and they’re fast!” The fear of recrimination for suggesting the existence of up-tempo playing in earlier generations is an interesting social pressure within the post-VCBF atmosphere.
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.  

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.”

Nonetheless, there are certain fiddling techniques that can be associated with the idea of lift, in particular the up-driven bow and cuts. Up-driven bows are described by Scottish fiddler J. Scott Skinner as a “loop” in his *Guide to Bowing* of 1900. James Hunter described up-driven bows as consisting of “one down-bow followed by three up-bows. Extra pressure is put on the third note of the phrase [the second up-bow, falling on the second beat of the measure] to re-emphasize the rhythm.” In their analysis of Cape Breton fiddling, Dunlay and Greenberg describe the Cape Breton up-driven bow in a like manner, but with stronger accent on the second up-bow than the first; also, it is generally

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260 Interview with Andrea Beaton, August 22, 2007.
used for strathspey playing on the rhythms $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{2}{4}$ but it may occasionally be applied to reels as well. Dance players like Andrea Beaton associate “lift” with up-driven bows: “Sometimes people will do two up-bows, and you know that it’s not down/up, that’s it’s two ups, because it’s got that extra lift.”263 The nature of the up-driven bow will be examined below in relation to bowing techniques facilitating dance fiddling.

When asked what made a “good dance player,” several informants referred to “diddiums,” or cuts. This technique is also related to the lift that a fiddler plays with, for the application of cuts energizes a tune, particularly when performed crisply. Buddy MacMaster perceives “cuts” as integral to the tradition: “if you’re not able to put the ‘cuts’ in, you’re not considered a good player.”264 Norman recalls the “old style” fiddlers that gathered on the Gillis homestead: “Bowing played a big part of if. The way that they handled the bow. Angus Allan had a very loose arm, he could really put a lot of “diddiums” and “duddiums” into that […] very articulately.”265 The application of cuts will also be examined below in relation to ornamentation techniques facilitating dance playing.

Lastly, dancing requires a certain set of repertoire, and, as Kinnon Beaton stated above, what can make an outstanding dance player is knowing how to distinguish appropriate tunes for dancers. Sandy MacIntyre explains the functional awareness required for dance playing:

The fiddler should always be playing with the dancer. When you’re going through grand-chains and all that you play nice, regular tunes.266 And when you line up for stepdancing,

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263 Interview with Andrea Beaton, August 22, 2007.
265 Interview with Norman Gillis, August 7, 2007.
266 “Grand-chains” occur in square sets, and entail the dancers moving in a circular motion, with the women going clockwise, and the men going counter-clockwise. Dancers take the right hand of each dancer (of the opposite sex) in a shaking-hands motion as they swing by.
you switch on tunes, to some good step-dance tunes.\textsuperscript{267} What you’re doing, you’re feeling out the dancers. You’re not just playing a bunch of tunes.\textsuperscript{268}

Although the conceptions of the ideal repertoire vary, the tunes performed by older generations, combined with tunes from the Scottish fiddle collections from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, form the basis of the valued repertoire. Informants frequently refer to the “old books” (i.e., eighteenth and nineteenth, even early twentieth century Scottish collections) as the prime site for acquiring repertoire.\textsuperscript{269}

Interestingly, informants also include these three practical demands of dance on fiddling (timing, lift/drive, and repertoire) in their definitions of the “old style.” For instance, Jackie Dunn suggests what the old style entails: “I think that it’s a bit of bowing. […] A lot of it is the style, the tempo […] and type of tunes.”\textsuperscript{270} Glenn Graham also explains:

I think that the old style refers to certain bowing things – with some emphasis on some upbows, that kind of thing – powerful up-bow. The old style would refer to using a lot of ornamentation and drones – but not excessive drones, but tasty droning and […] grace notes, and these other little fingering techniques […] like the “warble.” […] It’s got kind of a rollicking feel to it, the old style. And a lot of higher stringed drones.\textsuperscript{271}

Thus, the emic perspective of this “old style” is wrapped up in practical demands of the dance practices. The nature of these demands, and the resultant techniques will be examined below.

\textsuperscript{267} Sandy is referring to the point in the third figure (reels) of a square set when the men and women are lined up on opposite sides of the dance hall, and have a chance to exhibit their step-dancing (this is the only moment for solo-style step-dancing within the current square sets).

\textsuperscript{268} Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, August 17, 2007.

\textsuperscript{269} For example, Dave MacIsaac iterates: “Stuff like the Gows, [Niel and Nathaniel Gow, father and son fiddlers who published collections in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries] and the old Scottish stuff, and that? I don’t think that that should be forgotten – that was the foundation of the music that came over to Cape Breton. Certainly don’t forget that – you know, you can add on to it, but that’s the roots of the music, right there.” Interview with Dave MacIsaac, August 28, 2007.

\textsuperscript{270} Interview with Jackie Dunn, August 26, 2007.

\textsuperscript{271} Interview with Glenn Graham, August 17, 2008.
Techniques Facilitating Dance Fiddling

Like other vital terminology in the Cape Breton discourse, discussions about the interrelationships between dancing and fiddling overlap in many ways. Here, they actually refer to two different forms of dance: social dance sets, and solo step dance. While these two dance forms are intertwined (as discussed above), their practical demands differ. I will clarify the contextual implications of solo versus social dancing as I examine the techniques that fiddlers have employed to facilitate dance playing. Nonetheless, since solo step dancing likely developed out of older group dances (“Scotch reels”), it is logical that some of the techniques employed for solo step dancing are also apparent in playing for social dancing; the nature of these correlations will be explored below.\footnote{One simple relationship is the point in the third figure when dancers in a square set have the opportunity to exhibit their solo step dance (to a reel).}

The projection of sound has historically been a primary demand on Cape Breton dance fiddlers. This need resulted in the development of several techniques, particularly scordatura tuning and double fiddlers. In Cape Breton, the primary type of scordatura employed is called “high bass” tuning, requiring a retuning of the instrument to a, e’, a’, e”. The result of this tuning is a booming resonance, as sympathetic vibrations from all of the open strings respond to many of the notes in A major or minor.\footnote{This tuning would also respond to one of the “modal” variants of A minor so prominent in Cape Breton dance tunes. For details of the “modality” of Cape Breton tunes, see Dunlay and Greenberg, \textit{Traditional Celtic}, 6-8.}

When fiddlers would pair up to play for dances, scordatura tuning also assisted in performance, as they would often perform with one fiddler playing the tune in the upper octave (on the upper two strings, a’, e”), and the other playing in the lower octave (on the
lower two strings, a, e’). Logically, before the advent of amplification systems, two fiddlers performing together for a dance would simply have produced twice the acoustic sound - a necessity with a large crowd step dancing on wooden floors.

Allister MacGillivray refers to the importance of high bass:

> For a fiddler playing alone, this would be a tremendous advantage. It would stimulate dancers, to hear all this sound roaring out of the violin. When a violin is tuned in this scordatura tuning, it’s just chucking out these extra notes all the time. All of these notes parallel to the harmony. Some of them are legitimate harmonies as we look at them now. A lot of them are clashing dissonances, like a bagpipe note that’s held through even though it doesn’t fit sometimes.

Two other technical areas are partially connected to sound projection, but they also play into other aspects of dance fiddling: ornamentation and bowing. The manner that dance players apply ornaments supports their lift and timing. That is, the placement of these ornaments in dance tunes tends to emphasize strong metric pulses, or provides an extra “kick” to up-beats. This is likely why there are certain “traditionally” applied ornaments in particular tunes, as they would occur in places that naturally accentuate the lift or timing.

Bowed ornaments pertinent to this kind of emphasis include drones and cuts. Dunlay and Greenberg state: “drones […] are basic to the old-style sound.” Drones are additional notes sounding along with the melody; most often they are open strings, but integral harmonic tones that are not open strings are also employed. Generally, drones are consonant with the melodic pitches; however, dissonant drones are also used, particularly when a note is droned in an ostinato fashion throughout a phrase. In relation to dance

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274 This makes the tune much simpler to transfer to another octave, as the same finger pattern can be kept with this tuning.


276 I have included some of their “bowed ornaments” as “bowing techniques,” as they do not include the addition of notes. However, they may validly be identified as “bowed ornaments” as well, as they manipulate sounding notes.

277 Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic*, 16.
playing, fiddlers use drones both as a tool to amplify their sound, and to accentuate integral beats (both strong beats and pick-ups, as noted above).

Cuts (also called “triplets” or “trebles” – or sometimes “diddiums” and “duddiums” in emic terminology) are rapid repetitions of the same pitch “in the place of a quarter-note to create rhythmic variety in strathspeys and reels.”\(^{278}\) Scottish fiddler J. Scott Skinner connected cuts (which he called “doodles”) with the “old style” by stating that in early twentieth-century Scotland a cut is a “quaint but senseless feature of the past ages.”\(^{279}\) Cape Breton cuts are almost always three-note repetitions, closer to two 16\(^{\text{th}}\)-notes and an 8\(^{\text{th}}\)-note than a triplet. Each note is distinctly articulated, and informants often praise the clarity of cuts in the “old style.”

Cape Breton fiddlers often “cut up” strathspeys as well, which is a completely different technique. “The technique consists of the (often spontaneous) replacement of one note by two strokes of the same note; thus a dotted eighth-note is split into two notes, and together with the following sixteenth-note, forms a triplet consisting of two identical notes and one different note.”\(^{280}\) Depending on the place where it is applied “cutting up” strathspeys again provides either energy to up-beats, or an emphasis on strong beats.

Fingered (left hand) ornaments are often used similarity to the above bowed ornaments for the promotion of sound production and rhythmic accentuation. The fingered ornament most obviously employed for sound production, the unison, tends to

\(^{278}\) Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic*, 18.

\(^{279}\) J. Scott Skinner, *A Guide to Bowing*, 15. Having developed a refined, clean (classically-oriented) style in the twentieth century, Skinner purposely derided aspects of older traditional practices. Interestingly, in this instance, it allows us a vision of what was perceived as “old style” within nineteenth and twentieth century Scotland.

\(^{280}\) Dunlay and Greenberg give examples of how fiddlers integrate cuttings into strathspeys: attached to a “loop” (a J. Scott Skinner term, where the second note in a pair of notes of the same pitch is re-accented through bow pressure), preceded by a slur, as a pick-up, and as a down-bow with a slur. Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic*, 19.
be used concurrently with a bow technique that also increases the dynamic, and another
fingered ornament; that is, it is normally accented with a “bow-push,” (a term explained
below) and sometimes graced with the first finger on the open string. The unison
simultaneously sounds the same pitch on two strings: the fourth finger and the above
open string (i.e. the fourth finger on the a’ string, which is an e”, played in unison with
the adjacent open e” string).

Three types of left hand gracing also prominently serve to emphasize and
amplify for dancing: grace notes, warbles, and vibrato. All graces in Cape Breton fiddling
are slurred into the melody notes. Grace notes appear as single notes, double-graces, and
occasionally even triple-graces; they may be subsidiary, quick, and iterated before the
beat, or they may be prolonged appoggiaturas, sitting on the beat. The latter are typically
also emphasized through a bow-push. Single graces are most often one scale-degree
above or below the melody note, but they may also extend to two scale degrees away;
ocasionally also, the open string below a melody note is used. Double graces consist of
“the same pitch as the graced melody-note and [ … a second pitch] one scale-degree
higher” (i.e. a turn). Triple graces surface most often as scalar runs, typically as a pick-
up.

The “warble” is related to vibrato, as it employs a similar movement. Indeed, “a
short burst of vibrato usually facilitates this action.” For this ornament, the fiddler
sounds the melody note, partially releases pressure with the finger playing this note (thus

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282 This has confused several scholars over the years who have documented that Cape Breton fiddlers
tend to “prefer instead to use the little finger on a string whenever playing an open-string pitch.” Garrison,
“Traditional Teaching,” 129. In fact, what has likely been observed is a fiddler amplifying the note by
playing the same pitch on two strings.
284 Ibid.
285 Ibid., 21.
faintly sounding the note below), and then returns pressure to the finger, resounding the melody note. Stan Chapman explained this type of ornament and its implications for the “traditional” violin posture employed by Cape Breton fiddlers:

Well, there’s a type of grace note. […] I know that it’s mentioned in the DunGreen collection – they use the term “the warble.” Ok, basically, you have a note, like a G, and Cape Breton fiddlers will sometimes grace it using the note below it rather than the note above it. But, Cape Breton fiddlers, they’ll grace the note below it by releasing the pressure just a little bit. So, when you’re holding your fiddle up like this [violin up, wrist flat, away from neck], I find, to do that ornament is a little more difficult than if I held my hand like this, and flat [wrist against neck]. Because […] the ornament is done – it’s almost like the two fingers are down here, and it’s like the vibrato is happening with the two fingers moving. So that, when this finger [second finger] releases, you hear this note [first finger]. As opposed to lifting your finger off – it’s not an independent movement of one finger. […] And that’s why it’s much easier to do if you hold your hand flat. So it’s much easier to do that, and that’s why it has kind of a warbling sound to it. 286

In the dance music of Cape Breton, vibrato is also used as an embellishment. 287 However, in this usage, the line between vibrato and warble is difficult to distinguish. This type of ornamental vibrato tends to be strong and fast for dance tunes, thus serving to emphasize the melodic pitches being embellished.

Many of the bowing techniques described by Dunlay and Greenberg as “vital to the classic old style sound” are also necessary for proper dance playing. 288 There are five elements of the bowing style particularly pertinent to dance fiddling: “choppy” bowing, “up-driven” bow, “dig” bowing, “sunk bow,” and “whip-bow.” Frequently, twentieth-century Scottish scholarly descriptions of Cape Breton bowing deride its “hacking,” or separate bowstrokes for each note. 289 Andrea Beaton, one of the most prominent Cape

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286 Interview with Stan Chapman, August 20, 2007. Dunlay and Greenberg suggest that “the warble may be unique to Cape Breton fiddlers.” Dunlay and Greenberg, Traditional Celtic, 21.
287 This was obviously not always the case in the “listening” music in the interstices of the tradition, however, as noted in the analysis below of Angus Chisholm’s performance of “Mrs. Scott Skinner.” As previously stated, players like Angus, Winston, or Dwayne Coté strive to imitate classical playing in tunes where it is acceptable.
288 Ibid., 15.
Breton fiddlers of the present generation, in frequent demand for dances, and reputed as having the “old style,” explained this type of bowing in contrast with other Celtic styles:

Our bowing is so up and down – choppy, you know. And, we’re on the [pushes down with her bow arm] […] the backbeat is usually on the down bow. But over there, [in Scotland,] they do a lot more of a couple of notes in a bow, like slurring and stuff. […] In order to play – sometimes [Scottish fiddlers] would play super-fast – and this [motioning quickly up and down with bow arm] doesn’t work for super-fast. This [choppy] bowing is, you know, dance-beat bowing.

In the preservation narrative, published scholars and community members frequently refer to Niel Gow’s style of bowing in the nineteenth century as exemplary of the contemporary form of Cape Breton bowing. A relevant quotation comes from Alexander Campbell, a contemporary of Gow, who wrote in 1802 that

[Gow’s] manner of playing his native airs if faithful, correct, and spirited. He slurs none, but plays distinctly, with accuracy, precision, and peculiar accentuation; hence the excellency of his touch and intonation, so essential to true taste and just expression, the very soul of reels and Strathspeys.

Scholars also connect Gow’s bowing with a practice current in Cape Breton through another reference, to the “up-driven” bow. Mary Anne Alburger quotes from “A brief biographical Account of Niel Gow,” in the Scots Magazine in 1809:

His bow-hand, as a suitable instrument of his genius, was uncommonly powerful, and when the note produced by the up-bow was often feeble and indistinct in other hands, it was struck in his playing with a strength and certainty, which never failed to surprise and delight the skilful hearer.

Others, such as Dunlay and Greenberg, have suggested that this may simply have indicated that his bow-stroke was generally powerful. Nonetheless, this interpretation is

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290 Andrea Beaton is the granddaughter of Donald Angus Beaton; she is also the daughter of Kinnon and Betty Lou Beaton, the fiddle and accompanist pair likely the most in demand for dances on the island.
291 Interview with Andrea Beaton, August 22, 2007.
293 Mary Anne Alburger, Scottish Fiddlers and their Music (London: Gollancz, 1983), 96.
still consistent with the preservation narrative, as it “makes sense in light of Cape Breton fiddling, where equal force is given to both down-bows and up-bows.”

The up-driven bow allows for a bow distribution amenable to dance playing. As the first beat of the measure is naturally emphasized (whether it is a 16th- or dotted 8th-note), the length of bow pulled on this initial beat is typically substantial. As mentioned above, the up-driven bow is based in the bowing pattern down-up-up-up. This technique not only facilitates a re-articulation of the 2nd beat of the measure, but also offers a bow distribution that positions the bow closer to the frog (its natural heavy point) for the 3rd beat of the measure, thus helping to accentuate the fiddler’s timing (see Figure 1 for bow distribution). In any basic step done for strathspeys, the exchange of feet and the consequent repetition of the same stepping pattern on the opposite foot occurs on the third beat of the measure (see Figure 2 for a basic strathspey step). Consequently, up-driven bows naturally emphasize the beats of the measure reflective of the dancing patterns.

**Figure 1: Up-driven Bow Distribution**

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294 Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic*, 13. This bow technique is also described by Alan Bruford and Ailie Munro in “The Fiddle in the Highlands,” 4-5: “The bowing of the strathspeys in the North-East of Scotland, […] emphasizes the difference between the Scotch snaps with the short semiquaver first and the pairs of notes with the longer dotted quaver first, by playing with two strokes of the bow (down-up) and the second with only one. From this develops the strikingly unconventional bowing, characteristic of the strathspeys, where the opening semiquaver is played with a violent down-bow, and the rest of the half-bar (seven times as long) with a lingering up-bow.”

295 The symbols in Example 3 have the following meanings: L=left foot; R=right foot; F=forward (in front) motion; B=backward (returning toward) motion. The rhythmic transcription of continuous 8th-notes is not entirely accurate, as there is a certain amount of swing in the performance of this step.
Figure 2: Basic Strathspey Step

The “dig bow,” or “bow-push” technique also aids in this metrical accentuation for dancing. In this technique, “extra pressure and push is applied at the beginning of the stroke so that the speed of the bow is initially fast and the bow is deep in the string; then the force is relaxed to normal.”\textsuperscript{296} It is applied to many of the strong pulses, typically on lengthier notes in dance tunes: quarter-notes in reels, dotted-eighth-notes in strathspeys, and quarter and dotted-quarter notes in jigs.\textsuperscript{297} Because of the ingrained dance-oriented nature of the fiddling, the expectation for emphasized strong beats is such that: “a little bit of bow-push is applied to so many of the notes that it is really part of the basic Cape Breton sound.”\textsuperscript{298} In relation to Dunlay and Greenberg’s term “bow-push,” I would also identify a “sunk bow” technique, where the bow pressure is slightly more continuous.

With a similar function as the “dig bow,” the “whip-bow” technique is “vital to the classic old-style sound.”\textsuperscript{299} This technique begins with a bow-push, after which the bow speed and pressure are decreased. The speed and pressure are then increased again “to gain momentum for the ‘whip’ feeling into the up-bow.”\textsuperscript{300} While creating a slightly different effect, the whip-bow serves to accentuate beats, but is used most frequently in strathspeys, rarely in reels (sometimes at the very beginning), and not typically in jigs.

\textsuperscript{296} Dunlay and Greenberg, \textit{Traditional Celtic}, 15.
\textsuperscript{297} The transfer of the technique onto jigs is logical, as dancers in social dancing would require emphasis on the strong beats.
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
All of these bow and finger ornamentations and bowing techniques are generally employed in either strathspeys or reels (or both), the dance tunes we know to have been brought over from Scotland. While they may occasionally be applied to jigs, their usage is much more frequent and obvious in strathspeys and reels. The prominent use of these ornamentation techniques in association with the original Cape Breton dance tunes emphasizes their importance both to the “old style” and to dance playing. The less frequent use of these techniques in the newer type of dance tunes (namely jigs) highlights this connection. In contemporary Cape Breton, there is also an apparently integral connection between the solo step-dancing and “old style” techniques, since several of the techniques explicated above are performed solely on strathspeys – the step-dancer’s genre.

Of all of the above techniques facilitating dance playing, informants most often complain about the loss of the approaches that were employed to provide amplification: scordatura tuning and double fiddlers. These grievances are typically iterated in relation to the loss of the “old style.” Indeed, it is rare to see either practice in the current dance tradition. Helen Gillis recollected:

If there were two fiddlers playing together – like Angus Allan Gillis, and John Alex MacDonald (who we called “the big fiddler”) – one would play in high bass, and the other would play in low bass, and it sounded so wonderful. […] The music would come out, it would just get under your feet, you couldn’t sit down. […] Fiddlers aren’t doing that] like they used to years ago.302

However, while some of the less typical scordatura tunes and tunings have fallen out of practice, high bass tunings still surface with ever-popular dance tunes, such as the

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301 The phenomenon of using some of these ornamentations on a style of tune adopted from outside of the tradition (jigs) is similar to the approach to the social dance also adopted from outside of the tradition (quadrilles). In these jig sets, the dancers tend to step throughout (rather than walking or shuffling), but there are very few jig steps, and they are not as openly exhibited.

302 Interview with Helen Gillis, August 7, 2007.
The decline of these practices, originally introduced to increase sound projection, can be tied to the use of amplification systems. However, amplification systems did not affect fiddlers’ need for “lift,” “drive” and “timing” in their playing. Thus, the associated bow and finger ornamentation and bowing techniques have continued with dance fiddling performance practices. All of these elements will be examined through comparative analysis in the following chapter.

303 In my interview with Dave MacIsaac, considered one of the integral culture bearers, he demonstrated various “old style” tunings in conjunction with the tunes used in these tunings. The result of these tunings for the keys of the respective pieces was a drastic amplification of the sound, and a vibrant response from the instrument, booming with sympathetic vibrations. “Christie Campbell” is spelled “Christy Campbell,” or “Cairistiona Chaimbeul” in Gaelic.

304 Doherty has suggested that some of the ornamentation in fiddling has been cleaned up because of the increasing complexity in the piano accompaniment. Doherty, “Periphery,” 318-27. Some of the reduction in ornamentation could just as likely be linked in the lack of need for the amplifying ornaments because of the use of electric amplification. Some fiddlers have also been playing with reduced ornamentation before pianists’ playing became progressively more intricate. While these issues cannot be fully addressed in this thesis, hopefully the comparative evaluation of the subsequent chapter will point to some of the similarities in fiddling performance practices across the generations, retained in connection with dancing practices.
Chapter 6: Comparative Case Studies: Step Dance Tunes Necessitating “Old Style”

Generalizing a communal “old style” in the Cape Breton fiddling tradition implies the exclusion of many valuable perspectives. The narrative surrounding the tradition frequently emphasizes the individuality of each fiddler; this uniqueness of individual style is often portrayed as one of the defining characteristics of Cape Breton fiddling. Nonetheless, informants tend to conceive of an overarching “general Cape Breton sound,” under which the unique styles of communities, families, and individuals reside. Kinnon Beaton iterates this idea succinctly: “There’s a definite Cape Breton sound, I would say. But there are still a lot of individual ones.”

The discourse on the tradition suggests that this “Cape Breton sound” became much more homogeneous after mobility between communities became more viable. This homogeneity increased after the advent of recordings, as repeated exposure to the playing of “master fiddlers” became accessible. Some members of the community, like Carl MacKenzie, suggest that the younger generations of Cape Breton fiddlers are losing their individuality altogether:

They were all tremendous players [when I was young] – and they all had their little style differences. I find today the field is leveling off – that many are becoming the same. […] I listen to the music now, over in Antigonish – generally, I can’t tell who’s playing. […] I don’t tend to see a tremendous difference that there used to be between players. They don’t seem to develop their own particular style.

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305 See, for example, Joseph Clifford McGann, “Dan R. MacDonald: Individual Creativity in the Cape Breton Fiddle Tradition” (MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2002).
306 Interview with Kinnon Beaton, August 21, 2007. Countless other fiddlers asserted a similar opinion. For example, Glenn Graham also stated: “You can still keep your own style – but all of these things that you’re taking from [old style players] are the core characteristics that make the core Cape Breton sound, that make it what it is. There is still is a general Cape Breton sound – I think that you could safely say that.” Interview with Glenn Graham, August 21, 2007.
307 Interview between Carl MacKenzie and Joey Beaton. September 17, 1997, cassette tape, Beaton Interviews, CMIC Archives, Judique, NS.
Interestingly, Carl also criticizes the decline of “listening” playing - an area of the tradition that actually allowed for the greatest innovation without the community’s recrimination. The fiddlers that he idealized were also among the most experimental in their stylistic approach (e.g. Winston Fitzgerald, Angus Chisholm). Several informants, including Glenn Graham, Kinnon Beaton, and the Gillises, suggest that this viewpoint was rooted in a lack of familiarity with younger players. For Carl’s generation, the “master” fiddlers were heard consistently on the radio. While occasionally exposure through means other than gigs and CDs (e.g. Cape Breton Live Radio) is available to young players, the media lacks the impact and pervasiveness that it had in mid-century Cape Breton.

Nonetheless, informants like Andrea Beaton also speak of the “old style” in the younger generation of players, across regional divides:

> We were surrounded by it, and we were brought up with old tapes, and new tapes. […] There’s just so much awareness of it. And people are just going all over – people like myself, we want to visit the old people, and play with them you know, and hear what they have to say about it and preserve it. So, I guess young people that I know anyway, are trying to preserve the old style.  

Because the community largely proscribes innovation in dance fiddling, the “old style” elements are evident in most dance tune performances. In particular, certain tunes, entrenched in the Cape Breton consciousness as “traditional dance tunes,” are approached with “old style” techniques, often regardless of their contextual performance. The importance of the interconnections between “old style” and dance fiddling will be further elucidated through an intergenerational study of fiddlers playing dance music – specifically that for solo step-dancing. While acknowledging the importance of players’ individuality, this comparison will focus on similarities in performance practices.

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<sup>308 Interview with Andrea Beaton, August 22, 2007.</sup>
Therefore, following from the community discourse surrounding the “old style,” the first area of study aims to identify how players make use of “old style” techniques to support and interact with the dancing. The second area of this study examines the interstices of the tradition through the analysis of an innovative, idealized pre-VCBF fiddler’s retention of and divergence from “old style” techniques.

**Fiddler and Tune Selection**

Due to available resources, the performances chosen for this study have come from recordings; while this is not ideal for exemplifying the contextual association, certain tunes demand a dance-oriented stylistic approach, regardless of actual performative context. Further, the tunes chosen for this study are prototypical exemplars of standard step-dancing tunes; their performance is thus automatically associated with step-dancing practice.\(^{309}\) The fact that most of the sets that fiddlers perform on Cape Breton recordings are oriented around dancing points to this linkage. Although these tunes are intended for “listening” (in that they are recordings), few of the tunes themselves can be separated from dancing.

The tunes for comparison are a traditional strathspey and reel, the fundamental tunes for solo stepdancing. Both tunes are associated with “the whole string of George tunes.”\(^{310}\) The strathspey “King George IV” can be found in several Scottish collections,

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\(^{309}\) On tunes associated with those in this study, some fiddlers have even included a step-dancer on their recording. For example, Ashley MacIsaac’s “Miss Lyall’s Strathspey” set in his *Close to the Floor* album. Tunes within Ashley’s set (e.g. “Miss Lyall’s Strathspey,” “Miss Lyall’s Reel,” and “Sandy Cameron’s”) are also frequently performed in a set with the tunes used in the comparative study below.\(^{310}\) Dunlay and Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic*, 38-41. These include “King George IV Strathspey,” “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.” Ibid., 42.
and may have been composed during King George IV’s reign (1762-1830). The reel, “The King’s Reel,” also appears in several Scottish collections. This “reel is a favourite in Cape Breton; loud whoops of excitement are often heard at dances when the fiddler changes into this tune during a medley.” Thus, this tune is partially connected with the general idea of “lift” as explained above by Sparling.

The aforementioned emphasis on uniqueness within the Cape Breton fiddling tradition is amplified when it comes to recording: “Cape Breton fiddlers who record generally place a great importance on originality. They strive to present a good percentage of tunes which are fresh to the ears of their audiences.” Fiddlers, then, tend not to record the same material. Again, an ideal situation would afford the cross-comparison of a broader scope of fiddlers; however, the sample selected is diverse, both in terms of historical context and each fiddler’s social role. The four recordings compared represent four points in the twentieth-century Cape Breton fiddling tradition: mid-century, post-VCBF, the Celtic boom period, and the present young generation. Although all four fiddlers, Bill Lamey, Buddy MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, and Robbie Fraser, 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 recording of Bill Lamey comes from the compilation album *Bill Lamey Full Circle*. 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

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311 “King George IV” appears in the Skye and Lowe’s collections. Ibid., 40.
312 “The King’s Reel” appears in the Kerr’s, Skye and Athole collections. Ibid., 42.
313 Ibid., 42.
dances and house sessions. This is particularly important in Bill’s case, as his generation continued to witness the restrictive practices of recording for 78s.\(^{315}\)

Bill Lamey is upheld as a “master” Cape Breton fiddler, and represents many of the aspects of the 1940s and 1950s generation: he was involved with the recording industry, had a radio show, and participated in the Cape Breton-Boston states interconnection.\(^{316}\) 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 living “master” fiddlers (such as Jerry Holland and Dave MacIsaac) as an outstanding specimen of traditional playing.

Bill’s fiddling is clearly associated with dancing, as he played for Cape Breton dances for almost 20 years, largely within the Boston states: “Bill took his unique Cape Breton style with him to the Boston area. The dances in Brookline were legendary and were simply the best dances the Boston area has ever had.”\(^{317}\) Mairéad Ni Mhaonaigh referred to some of the technical aspects of Bill’s much-admired dance fiddling:

> It was Bill Lamey’s bowing techniques that really struck me [...] his use of double stops, drones, triplets and double triplets, played at will to emphasize the dance rhythms. It was obvious that he played frequently for dancers as you could nearly visualize them.\(^{318}\)

Recorded during the 1950s, this selection exemplifies the idealized mid-century Cape Breton fiddler active in the Boston states.

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\(^{315}\) “They had no sophisticated recording equipment […] I recall starting – rehearsing. […] I wasn’t allowed to play but the tune I was going to record. Now if you play the same tune for three hours, wouldn’t you be pretty sour, eh! And make no mistakes! Watching the clock! Couldn’t go back. [The disc recordings were one-offs with no re-recording.] They were tough days at making recordings.” Bill Lamey qtd. in Paul M. MacDonald, *Full Circle*, cover notes, 2.

\(^{316}\) Bill was instrumental in introducing Boston audiences to countless Cape Breton fiddlers (e.g. “Little” Jack MacDonald, Winston Fitzgerald, Donald MacLellan, Theresa MacLellan, Angus Chisholm, Buddy MacMaster, John Allan Cameron, Joe MacLean, Donald Angus Beaton, Jerry Holland, Cameron Chisolm, Dan J. Campbell, John Campbell, and “Little” Mary MacDonald).

\(^{317}\) John Allan Cameron (folk singer/guitarist/songwriter from Cape Breton who achieved international renown; he also played fiddle, but rarely used it in performance) qtd. in Kate Dunlay, *Full Circle*, liner notes, 20.

\(^{318}\) Mairéad Ni Mhaonaigh, qtd. in Kate Dunlay, *Full Circle*, liner notes, 22.
The recording of Buddy MacMaster comes from his first album, *Judique on the Floor*, released in 1989. Now 84, Buddy is distinguished as one of the older generations of “master” fiddlers. As noted above by Doherty, although there are aspects of Buddy’s playing that exhibit newer stylistic attributes, in the post-VCBF atmosphere he was grouped into the older generational representatives of “old style.” According to Paul MacDonald, Buddy was reputed as an “old style” player long before the VCBF, however: “Buddy’s reputation as an up-and-coming fiddler would soon spread along the Judique line from Troy through Inverness. The older fiddlers quickly recognized the old-time values in his playing.”

As a delegated culture bearer of the preservation narrative, Buddy is “a unique connection to a world left behind. […] His playing is a living breathing tribute to centuries of tradition.”

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.” In particular, he is associated with the Glencoe Mills dance, held in a tiny parish hall that is packed with community members and interested outsiders throughout the summer season. He is connected to a different dance and social circuit than Bill Lamey, however, and he also did not become involved with the recording industry until after the VCBF period.

The recording of Ashley MacIsaac is from his *Fine Thank You Very Much* album, released in 1996 (and re-released in 2004). This “traditional album” followed directly

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319 Paul MacDonald, *Judique Flyer*, liner notes. All of the above are communities in Inverness County, Cape Breton.
320 Paul MacDonald, *Judique Flyer*, liner notes.
322 One needs to be motivated to go the Glencoe Mills dances; the better part of the trip is down a dirt road in the pitch black of night. Without proper directions (which tend to include: “You’ll feel like your lost – but just keep going until you see the light”), an uninformed traveler may give up.
behind his triple-platinum 1995 grunge-Celtic CD *Hi, How Are You Today?* As mentioned above in connection with the Celtic boom of the 1990s, Ashley exhibits a duality in a more pronounced way than any of the other internationally successful Cape Breton musicians. The Cape Breton fiddling 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. In fact, he became involved with the music through step-dancing before he began to play: “I became a step-dancer - the music that I liked to dance to the most, and who I always wanted to dance to was Buddy MacMaster. From that I got familiar with Buddy’s music.” Ashley himself became active in the dance circuit at a young age: “I started playing square dances I guess maybe when I was 12 or 13 […] within the next few years, I started to play at dances all over the place, and it kind of snowballed from there. By the time I was 14, I was playing dances every night of the week during the summer, and every weekend during the school year.”

The recording of Robbie Fraser comes from his *Hear this … here it is* album of 2004. 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, he was identified as a bearer of the “old style.” Conversations revolving around the “old style” typically include some reference to Robbie. Gaelic fiddler Joe Peter MacLean declared: “Robbie Fraser – he’s got the old music. He’s got the old style.” Pianist Helen Gillis also recalled: “Robbie Fraser says that he likes the old style. If you stay in that type of

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323 Interview between Ashley MacIsaac and Joey Beaton, December 21, 1993, cassette tape, *Beaton Interviews*, CMIC Archives, Judique, NS.
324 Ibid.
325 Interview with Joe Peter MacLean, August 4, 2007.
music, stay in that – that’s what he told me once.”

Fiddler Wendy MacIsaac also discussed the “old style”: “I can see how it can be lost – I can see how the whole way that they were playing could be lost. But there are people like Robbie Fraser who are playing the old style – more true to the old style.”

Lastly, prominent fiddle teacher Stan Chapman suggested: “Some of the younger ones are really aware of the older sounds – Robbie Fraser, is a guy who really listens a lot to older tunes.”

Robbie Fraser is thus doubtlessly connected with the discourse on “old style.” He continues to perform frequently at venues throughout the Inverness region, most typically with his brother, Isaac Fraser, at the piano.

“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 “old style” technical retention related to step-dancing. The relevant features, as explained in chapter 5, include bowing techniques (drones, cuts and cutting, choppy bowing, up-driven bows, dig bows, sunk bows and whip bows) and left hand techniques (unisons, grace notes, warbles, and vibrato). There is, of course, a great variety of approaches to performance practice; this diversity is related to the prized individuality within the Cape Breton style. The relevance of some of these individual touches will be noted in relation to the general techniques being investigated. Nonetheless, there are consistent practical motivations to these stylistic maneuvers that relate back to the “old style” concepts of

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326 Interview with Helen Gillis, August 7, 2007.
327 Interview with Wendy MacIsaac, August 28, 2007.
328 Interview with Stan Chapman, August 30, 2007.
329 In a few circumstances, some aspects of rhythmic manipulations will be explored, as they may be pertinent to phrasing, emphasis and articulation – integral elements of performance practice.
“lift,” “timing,” and “drive.” For a key to ornamentation and style notations, see Appendix K. Each performance is transcribed below: Bill’s in Appendix A; Buddy’s in Appendix B; Ashley’s in Appendix C; and Robbie’s in Appendix D.

My relational analyses 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. These above ideas of “lift,” “drive,” and “timing” serve as overarching principles to the application of the above techniques; while each player applies the “old style” in a different way, each approach is 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 “lift” and “timing.”

Although some fiddlers give an impression of a standard “correct” way to bow tunes, the bowing techniques that informants attribute to “old style” allow for varied approaches. Indeed, each fiddler here employs a unique bowing pattern to the tune in its entirety; however, there are also many similarities. Broadly, they all adhere 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 three fiddlers employ prominently in the A section (mm. 1-8) is the up-driven bow. As noted in chapter

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330 For instance, Sandy MacIntyre suggests a standardized bowing approach; “It sounds so good, when you’re playing a square set, and the proper bowing are being used. It makes you want to dance.” Sandy may have been referring to a consistent dance-oriented emphasis here. However, he also refers to a “correct” way of bowing more explicitly: “If you were to get, say, myself, and Buddy MacMaster, and Natalie, and gave us a tune to play, almost 100% of the time, we’d bow it exactly the same […] just by natural feel of the tune.” Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, August 19, 2007.
5, this not only helps to accentuate the fiddler’s timing, but also interacts with the dancer’s basic movements. Bill Lamey also employs a combination of other “old style” bowing patterns throughout the A section. For example, in m. 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. Each fiddler also changes their 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 8th-note, and a hop on the second beat (see Figure 2, p. 107). 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).

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. There is also a rhythmic-articulative feature that is most noticeable in the B section: the falling 16th-note runs sound ornamental, as the first 16th-note is marked, while the rest roll downward more gently. This feature, while present throughout, is most apparent in m. 13 with the double grouping of falling 16th-notes. The emphasis in this pattern leads to an auditory impression of \( \uparrow \downarrow \), thus accentuating the beats, rather than the virtuosity of the run. Nonetheless, all fiddlers employ a sautillé type (or similar bounced bowing)

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331 This appoggiatura, on G, bears obvious resemblance to the repeated pattern (G-A) in the following reel, “The King’s Reel.”
332 This pattern is not quite as marked in Bill Lamey’s playing; however this may be rooted in his faster tempo.
bow stroke on these runs, allowing each note to be articulated. The decorative, but forward-driven approach to these runs also projects a movement toward the second phrase of this section (at m. 14). Again, this interacts with the dancing, as the second phrase would likely signal the change to a new strathspey step.

Similar to the pervasive usage of “choppy bowing,” dig-bows (or “bow-pushes”) are so frequent throughout that, as Dunlay and Greenberg suggest, “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.” A notably energetic accent occurs on the first beat of m. 13 in Buddy’s and Ashley’s performances. These are conspicuous because of their isolation from other emphatic techniques; however, dig-bows are more obvious 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. Nonetheless, the same accentual compulsions are apparent in Robbie’s B section; although he does not use the left-hand ornamentation prominent with the other fiddlers, he accents the same strong beats through the use of a dig bow, and frequently a drone.

Bill dually applies emphatic techniques on the first beat of m. 13, with an open a’ string drone under the g”, in combination with a dig-bow. While Bill uses this drone in

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334 “Sometimes the old fiddlers are judging the younger fiddlers before they have had the opportunity to mature … you know, they’re criticizing fiddlers when they’re 18 or 19, or so - when they haven’t necessarily incorporated all of the ornamentation and bowing associated with the ‘old style,’ or ‘Gaelic’ sound, if you will, that they may develop 10 or 15 years down the line. If I listen to recordings of myself playing when I was 18 or 19, I hear that, it was there, these aspects were apparent, but they were not as prominent as they eventually would become.” Interview with Glenn Graham, August 23, 2007.
order to accentuate a downbeat, there is a great deal of droning throughout that is likely rooted in the bygone need to amplify.\(^{335}\) That is, most 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.\(^{336}\) 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 prominence of this droning seems to be a continuance of an older dance playing necessity: amplification.

That said, each fiddler approaches these drones in a different manner. Ashley’s and Bill’s are the most consistently audible, while Buddy’s and Robbie’s are gentler.\(^{337}\) All 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 (e.g. mm. 10, 12) are also generally droned more emphatically, in conjunction with ornamentation investigated below. The application of various techniques is thus often combined to articulate important beats and phraseologies – contributing to the accentuation of the fiddlers’ “lift” or “timing.”

This phenomenon is also apparent in the usage of ornamentation. Largely, the left hand embellishments in this tune fall on the strong beats of the measure. For example, all of the fiddlers tend to ornament the third beat of the measures throughout the A section;

\(^{335}\) This prominent droning may also be related to the imitation of bagpipes, of course. In any case, adopting drones from bagpipe practice may likely have been based in an attempt to increase the sound.

\(^{336}\) Robbie is the exception here, again, as he generally uses a lesser degree of ornamentation in this young recording.

\(^{337}\) Ashley’s deviance here from Buddy’s performance practice is notable, as he has often referred to his idealization and modeling of Buddy’s fiddling. This connection is normally quite apparent, as in Ashley’s introductory run (not in the transcription), which is almost identical to Buddy’s.
the first beats here do not require additional accentuation because of their natural accent through the rhythm of the “Scotch snap” (\(\rightarrow\)). 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 way, there is obvious overlap in the usage of certain “old style” embellishments; in particular, they all use either vibrato or the warble for these strong beats. As noted in chapter 5, these ornaments are difficult to distinguish, as they are based in the same motion (the warble is simply a more exaggerated movement). The choices of ornamentation, then, vary only slightly from fiddler to fiddler; and as in the approach to bowing, the resultant phrase patterns and emphases are similarly oriented toward the necessities of dance playing.

“The King’s Reel”

Bill Lamey’s performance of this tune is transcribed in Appendix E; Buddy MacMaster’s in Appendix F; Ashley MacIsaac’s in Appendix G; and Robbie Fraser’s in Appendix H. Since “The King’s Reel” is musically and practically related to “King George IV Strathspey,” it is not surprising that many similar devices are employed across the tune performances.\(^{338}\) Some techniques are particular to the performance of reels, and some stylistic applications are particular to this specific tune; nonetheless, some of these similarities and peculiarities overlap with the strathspey performances. For one, as occurred in the strathspey, a similar bowing pattern in the A section is applied by all four

\(^{338}\) Both are what Dunlay and Greenberg call “double tonic” tunes; that is, they have a dual emphasis on G and A. They are also both old Scottish step-dance tunes, and are employed quite frequently within the same set of tunes.
fiddlers. As with the practicality of up-driven bows in the A section of “King George IV,” this bowing serves to return the bow toward the frog to strongly emphasize the third beat of the measure; thus, this universally applied bowing pattern accentuates the “timing,” and helps to build the “drive.” Further, the standardized application of appoggiaturas on the first beat of mm. 1-3 in section A is a striking feature that both “drives” the tune and helps to emphasize the “timing.” Most of these appoggiaturas are approached through bow-accents - namely a dig-bow (of varying degrees of emphasis), a sunk bow, or a thrown bow; Bill, Ashley and Robbie further emphasize this beat through their use of drones, examined below. All of the fiddlers also prominently employ some type of bowed accent in m. 4, and relax into the following falling motive (beats 2-4). While emphasizing the strong beat of the measure, this practice also signals the end of the phrase. Again, for a step dancer, this would either denote the switch to the alternate foot, or the beginning of a new step (depending on the length of the step).

Like other shared features, the drones employed by all fiddlers in this tune are similar to those used in “King George IV Strathspey.” There is a prominent usage of a/e drones (that suggest a similarity with “high bass” tuning, as above) on both the g/d’ and a’/e” strings throughout all three sections. While these drones are likely rooted in the original need for amplification, they are also used to accentuate particular beats. For

339 In Bill’s first performance of the A section (mm. 1-4), however, his second beats of mm. 1-3 are much smoother than the repetition (mm. 5-8). Unlike the bounced hooked bowing in mm. 5-8, these are likely what Dunlay and Greenberg call a “straight slur”: “the sound and feel of the straight slur is something between that of two consecutive up-bows and that of a smooth slur. [...] There is a slight lifting or slowing of the bow after the first note.” Dunlay and Greenberg, Traditional Celtic, 16. There is a practical basis to this differentiation, however: Bill is transitioning from the previous tune, a strathspey (which is slower), and is accelerating into this reel. Thus, the first statement of the A section is slower, and thus allows for less articulatory bowing for the double up-strokes.

340 Interestingly, but not necessarily pertinent to this discussion, all fiddlers also distinguish between their approach to the downbeats of mm. 1 and 3 versus m. 2: mm. 1 and 3 emphasize the g appoggiatura, while m. 2 emphasizes the melodic pitch, a.

341 As above, the dynamic of these drones differs between players, with Buddy’s and Robbie’s again being the least audible and most gentle (especially during the A section).
instance, Buddy sinks into the a/e’ drone on the down beat of m. 2, thus giving a “lift” to one of the weaker measures of a 4-measure section. Bill uses a similar approach in m. 4, as he combines an accented sunk bow with a drone on the first beat of this measure, also providing a “lift” to a weak measure.

In general, the fiddlers prominently ornament the first beat of this m. 4, for the same result. Each fiddler has a unique approach to this emphasis, however: Bill graces the g’ with a lengthy f# (which may be identified as an appoggiatura); Buddy does a warble (or possibly vibrato); Ashley embellishes the g’ with a quick, but accented f#; and Robbie does a slight vibrato. Beyond this embellishment, as in “King George IV,” most of the ornamentation is applied to the strong beats of the measure, and the same notes tend to be emphasized by all players.

Regarding the basic structural organization of the tune, it is interesting that Bill, an exponent of the “old style,” does not play the C section that includes the cuts (or trebles) so deeply associated with the “old style”; instead, he plays ABAB. Doherty’s suggestion that there has been a noticeable decline in the use of “cuts” is not evidenced in Buddy’s, Ashley’s, or Robbie’s performances. Rather, their playing brightly articulates these cuts. Another “old style” trademark that emerges in these performances is the incorporation of the rhythm \( \rightarrow \). Doherty contends that the use of the “Scotch snap” within reels is an “old style” attribute. Both Bill and Buddy apply this rhythm to the first beat of m. 12, while Ashley uses it on the third beat of mm. 25 and 29. In its

\[\text{342 Again, as is the ornamentational applications in “King George IV Strathspey,” Robbie’s left-hand ornaments are less prominent, but his bowing accents (dig-bows) are quite emphatic.}\]

\[\text{343 A notable ornament that does not fall on the beat is used by both Bill and Ashley. Bill uses this on the sixth 8th-note of mm. 9 and 13, while Ashley uses it on the sixth 8th-note of m. 27. While this ornament does not serve to emphasize a strong beat, it can be seen as providing “lift” on an off-beat.}\]

\[\text{344 Doherty, “Periphery,” 374.}\]

\[\text{345 Ibid., 372.}\]
appearance on these beats, this rhythmic configuration provides a “lift” to the performance through the accentuation of the disjunct melodic leap.

The above comparisons point to a continuity of certain “old style” techniques in the performance of step-dance tunes. Although there are deviations in how individuals chose to accent notes and phrases, the emphasis placement is consistent. This accentuation is accomplished through a combination of bowing and fingering techniques, most of which are connected with the emic conception of “old style.” As Kinnon Beaton has noted, “I’ve noticed that I do more emphasizing when I’m playing for dancing.”346 Although it is not possible here, comparing specific performances in conjunction with the actual practice of step-dancing would provide greater insight into these practices. Since informants continually stress the symbiotic relationship between the dancer and the fiddler, it seems likely that these above musical characteristics that facilitate dance playing would become exaggerated or more abundant in practical performance with step-dancing.

**Conservatism versus Innovation in Idealized “Old Style” pre-VCBF Fiddlers**

The post-VCBF discourse embraces a large realm of older fiddlers as representative of the “old style.” As previously noted, the interstices that allow for innovation within the Cape Breton tradition were stretched more broadly in the pre-VCBF period, and were contracted in the post-VCBF age. Jackie Dunn commented that her generation, the young fiddlers after the post-VCBF era, but prior to the Celtic boom, was

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346 Interview with Kinnon Beaton August 21, 2007.
really under the microscope when we started playing – I know that they talked about it in Kinnon’s day – “oh, you know, they’re not playing the old style.” But it really came out, because there was so many of us starting playing. And that’s all that we were hearing – they’re not playing the music correctly, and it’s not how it used to be, and they’re playing it too fast. And, we really took the criticism.347

That said, while fiddlers may have experimented with the Cape Breton sound from the 1940s to the 1960s, elements of the “old style” necessarily remained in dance fiddling. The association of “old style” with dance playing can be seen by comparing a pre-VCBF innovative fiddler’s approach to tunes employed for dancing, and tunes disconnected from dancing. This contrast is evident in Angus Chisolm’s performances of “Mrs. Scott Skinner,” a “listening” strathspey, and “Christie Campbell,” a dance strathspey.

Angus’ interpretation of “Mrs. Scott Skinner” (Appendix I) 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. First, Angus 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 *deccelerandi* oriented around the shapes of runs. For instance, in m. 1, the top of the run in beat 3 is stretched out, while the scalar descent from it accelerates into the fourth beat. Angus also frequently ritardandos into the ends of phrases, and pauses on their culminatory points – another typical technique in the Kreisler style. This is apparent in mm. 4, 6, 8, etc. Angus’ 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

347 Interview with Jackie Dunn, August 26, 2007
are normally falling patterns) are relaxed with use of a diminuendo (corresponding to a ritardando). For example, see mm. 1-4.

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. In Angus’ performance of “Mrs. Scott Skinner,” these include vibrato, shifting, and non-traditional chords. While vibrato is normally an ornament in Cape Breton fiddling, Angus applies it more continuously; furthermore, in the moments when the vibrato is exaggeratedly audible, it is wider than traditional fiddling vibrato. Position playing is rarely demanded in traditional tunes. Although this tune is a J. Scott Skinner composition (which do 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 Angus does. Beyond the use of upper positions (likely only the third position in this tune), Angus’ shifting approach imitates the quintessential Kreislerian schmaltzy style, or what Simon Fischer identifies as a “Romantic shift”: he does an audible, gooey slide into the final moment of the shift (particularly discernible in the last semitone of the motion). Lastly, Angus’ frequent use of non-traditional chords is most apparent in association with his shifts. For instance, the recurring motive in m. 6 is performed with a simultaneous “Romantic shift.”

These above gemütlich stylistic attributes are apparent in the many recordings of Fritz Kreisler’s performance practice. All of these techniques could similarly be

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348 Yet, 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.
349 “The speed of the shift is fast-slow: shift quickly to just below the arrival note, and then slow down into the note.” Simon Fischer, Basics (London: Edition Peters, 1997), 158.
350 “Non-traditional” here mainly implies chords that are not generated through droning on an adjacent string or by stopping the strings in a fifth.
connected to the playing of J. Scott Skinner himself.351 Skinner is viewed as having developed a Classical violin, smoothed-out style of Scottish violin; his models would have been from the Kreisler generation.352 Either way, the style that Angus chose to emulate in this “listening” piece stretched far beyond the realm of the traditional Cape Breton style.

As a “master” fiddler in the pre-VCBF period, Angus’ 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 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” (Appendix J) is a favourite “old style” tune among Cape Bretoners, particularly because it is one of the few remaining tunes that fiddlers continue to play in “high bass” tuning (a/e’/a”/e”). The tune itself bears such similarity to “The Miller of Drone” that Dunlay and Greenberg have identified it as the “Gaelic version of ‘The Miller of Drone.’”353 Even Angus’ choice to perform this tune in

351 “In Scotland, a lot of the Highlanders figure that Scott Skinner changed and ruined music, because he was a classical player and so forth first – that he took away from the old style of fiddling.” Interview with Sandy MacIntyre, August 17, 2007. Possibly, this type of playing could also be tied to another Scottish fiddler, Hector MacAndrew (1903-1980); however, Hector did not have the same traceable impact in Cape Breton as J. Scott Skinner seems to have had.

352 The gemütlich style is distinctly audible throughout his recordings, particularly those of “listening” tunes.

353 “The Miller of Drone” was published by John Pringle in 1801. Dunlay and Greenberg, Traditional Celtic, 124.
the traditional “high bass” tuning is representative of “old style.” Throughout his
performance of this tune, while Angus’ style may be identified as smoother and sweeter
than some traditional players, he also employs many of the “old style” techniques - and
avoids extreme technical innovation.

The most pervasive “old style” bowing that Angus 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). Angus also employs a
regular “cut” at m. 12. While this may seem sparse for the use of cuts in a strathspey,
comparison with Dunlay and Greenberg’s transcriptions of fiddlers’ performances proves
otherwise. It appear that “cuttings” are amenable to this tune, while “cuts” are less so: out
of four fiddlers transcribed by Dunlay and Greenberg, only one (Carl MacKenzie) makes
prominent use of cuts. Further, their transcription of Mary MacDonald, one of the
undisputed “old style” players, shows copious usage of “cuttings” throughout.354

In particular, she employs nearly the same pattern of “cutting” as Angus in m. 12
(beats 1 and 2), and identical “cuttings” in m. 16 (beats 1 and 2). While some of these
“cuttings” are ornamental (or perhaps reflective of the intangible “Gaelic in the fiddle”),
those falling at the ends of phrases (or sub-phrases) serve to energize the pick-up into the
following phrase. For instance, in m. 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

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354 “Everyone who knows Cape Breton fiddling puts Mairi Alisdair Ruaidh [Mary ‘Hughie’
MacDonald] in a class by herself. What makes her so important is that she was, and is, a player in the really
old traditional style of fiddling, and she is one of the few left whose Scottish music is faithful to the ways
of Gaelic speaking, thinking, living people among whom she was raised.” John Gibson, *Fiddlers to the
Fore*, 7. Born in 1897, Mary’s great-great-grandfather was one of the pioneer settlers of the Mabou Coal
transcription.
the new phrase, through the acceleration of the bow. Thus, these phrasal pick-ups with “cuttings” help to “drive” the tune.

Several of Angus’ embellishments also fall on the third beat preceding the “cuttings.” These aid not only in the emphasis of the strong third beat, but also to provide a denouement into the end of the phrase; this relaxation allows the “cuttings” on the fourth beat pick-up to appear particularly energetic by comparison. Interestingly, Mary MacDonald also applies the same disjunct ornament in all of the same phrasal endings.355 Angus’ drones generally follow a similar pattern to those of the above fiddlers, falling most prominently on strong beats of the measure. These drones thus help to emphasize the “timing” of the tune; in certain cases, they also serve to articulate elements of the phrase. For instance, the warble applied to m. 14, beat 3 not only emphasizes the strength of the third beat, but also articulates the termination of a phrase before a codetta-like ending (mm. 15-16).356 The notable difference in the melodic character of the final two measures may be a feature that the step-dancer would want to interact with; thus, signaling the end of the antecedent phrase (aided by the emphasis of the ornamentation) would help to clarify this moment to a dancer (who would, no doubt be familiar with the basic makeup of this “favourite” Cape Breton tune).

Perhaps the most obvious feature that relates to the “old style” of playing is Angus’ use of drones, which largely parallel the prevalent usage in “King George IV” and “The King’s Reel” by the above fiddlers. In essence, Angus 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 likely

355 See Dunlay and Greenberg, Traditional Celtic, 123. Hughie MacDonald also uses identical ornaments for these beats. See Ibid., 122.
356 I use the term “codetta-like” here only to denote a final flourish before the end of the tune.
largely based in the prior need for fiddlers to amplify their sound. However, there are also
certain instances where the drone is used emphatically to accent a strong beat, as occurs
on the third beats of mm. 8 and 12.

In contrast to the above “listening” tune, “Mrs. Scott Skinner,” Angus’
performance of this step-dance tune, “Christie Campbell,” not only avoids creative
stylistic experimentation, but also projects qualities associated with the “old style” of
playing. These techniques are particularly important not only in emphasizing Angus’
“timing,” but also in aiding his “drive” and “lift” – all features emically identified as
necessary for both the “old style,” and for ideal dance fiddling.

**Inter-Generational and Cross-Role Continuation of the “Old Style”**

Many of the techniques employed by the above fiddlers produced two main
elements that aided in aspects of their “timing,” “drive,” and “lift”: emphasized strong
beats, and energized pick-ups. Although there are certainly other purposes and bases for
these techniques, the resulting association of the above is clearly useful for dance
fiddling.

While there are likely many contexts that have facilitated certain aspects of
performance practice associated with the “old style” of fiddling, the combination of the
practical connection with dancing and the community participation in dance fiddling has
resulted in a certain conservatism in fiddlers’ approaches to playing dance tunes. Beyond
the above examinations of solo step-dance tunes, this is likely also evinced in playing for
square sets. The nature of the engagement between a step-dancer and a fiddler, however,
combined with the critical, captive audience typically present for step-dancing solos,
seems to emphasize these elements more strongly. Further, as noted above, some of the techniques associated with the “old style” are generally only employed in the performance of strathspeys; as a result, their connection is automatically with step-dance.

Although many of these techniques may have a basis elsewhere, their continuity has been viable through the combined elements of a conservative context and performance practicality in association with dancing.
Conclusion: Preservation, Innovation, and Social Contexts

In examining the basis and development of the emic narrative surrounding the Cape Breton fiddling tradition, we have found that it has engaged on various levels with socio-political movements and perspectives. This narrative developed a strong bent towards authenticity and preservation in the wake of the 1971 VCBF documentary, essentially emerging as a bipartite formula that has persisted in some ways into the twenty-first century. First, eighteenth-century Scottish fiddling practices had been preserved until late- (or mid)- twentieth century Cape Breton; second, these practices were being lost or manipulated by the present generations. 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.”

There are two attributes about this narrative that have received particular attention in this thesis: the conceptions and realities of innovation within the Cape Breton discourse; and the idea of “old style” as it has engaged with broader social forces and varied musical contexts. In particular, dancing has continued as a dominant force within the conception of “old style.” Until recent years, the concept that innovation had occurred in pre-VCBF generations was generally not accepted; indeed, some informants continue to attribute any transformation within the tradition to the young generations of fiddlers. However, Doherty has pointed to gradual changes within the tradition beginning in the late 1920s. In fact, some of the fiddlers who became the idealized models of the “old style” in the post-VCBF concern for preservation were some of the most innovative players within the traceable past of the practice.
However, the interstices within the tradition did not allow these players a free rein on creativity within all social contexts; community critical acumen and social practices limited the legitimization of these players’ innovative impulses. Nonetheless, these pre-VCBF fiddlers became absorbed in their entirety (innovative practices included) into the projected post-VCBF “old style.”

The idealization of “old style” engaged with and developed out of previous 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. The resurgence of these ideals in twentieth-century Nova Scotia continued the romanticization of the “old” customs – supposedly the most ancient practices, but in reality, primarily those of the post-Battle of Culloden period of the militarily and socially threatless Highlander.

As this folkloric mystique entered Nova Scotian identity through the clever machinations of MacDonaldian tourism, Cape Breton was brought under the Celtic labels and triumphs of tartanism. The pervasiveness of these Enlightenment constructs within the Cape Breton image had a bearing on the idealizations of the post-VCBF discourse. As Doherty has noted, it is ironic that awareness that the island had been an enclave for the maintenance of older Scottish traditions blossomed during what was likely the period of greatest transformation. Under this tartanistically-oriented touristic imagery, however, living cultural practices continued in communities throughout the island. Indeed, the period when tourism began to be marketed within Cape Breton was likely the most culturally active phase of this century – particularly for fiddling.
One of the most dominant social traditions that flourished alongside fiddling was dancing. This practice demanded a particular manner of performance from the fiddler, in order to emphasize the integral aspects of “timing,” “drive,” and “lift” – elements that overlap and interplay. Further, the community involved with the dancing actively participated in the critical discourse surrounding the social practices of dancing and fiddling. Community involvement and awareness has created a conservative leaning towards the maintenance of some stylistic aspects integral for dancing; the above two elements have resulted in certain technical traits of the “old style” continuing in connection with dance fiddling. Because fiddlers particularly respond to solo step-dancers, these above features are especially dominant in connection with the solo step-dancing tradition. Further, some of the tunes that are performed for step-dancing feature opportunities for “old style” techniques not generally found elsewhere.

In particular contexts, fiddlers throughout the twentieth century have engaged the interests of varying audiences and market types, resulting in experimental approaches. 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 has shown that, despite their varying roles in the tradition, and their (often period-based) divergent performance contexts, they tend to display techniques of performance practice emically associated with the “old style” when playing step-dance tunes. Further, an analytical perspective on Angus Chisholm has contrasted elements of conservatism with experimental traits, depending 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 innovation in the tradition.

While informants may not directly point to dancing as the contextual association that maintains technical elements of the “old style,” their continual references to the prized elements of “old style” fiddling (“timing,” “drive,” “lift”) are themselves connected with dance playing. In tandem, the community emphasis on the integral connections between the fiddling and dancing traditions itself implies this stylistic association.

In summary, the traditional musical practices of Cape Breton cannot be viewed in isolation from the socio-political bases from which they have been generated and by which they have been influenced. The deeply-rooted Scottish Discursive Unconscious grew out of the Scottish Enlightenment idealizations of supposed folkloric practices and burgeoned into the commercial antimodernist Celticism in the twentieth century. First seen in marketing for Cape Breton fiddle recordings, the discourse on traditionality gained a new depth in the post-VCBF reactions.

Nonetheless, the connection between Cape Breton traditions and broader social movements and forces does not discount continuity in traditional practices. While it may not be possible to show the preservation of eighteenth-century performance practices throughout twentieth-century Cape Breton fiddling, analysis has shown a continuity between aspects of the emic discourse on the “old style” and the performance of dance tunes. Although socio-political forces may have molded views of the Cape Breton tradition, there still exist integral social practices that continue to flourish in tandem and nourish one another. While these connections themselves may have undergone
development throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, their social integrity has promoted and enforced some degree of technical continuity – if only out of practical convenience.
Bibliography

1. Cape Breton and Fiddling


———. “Song Genres, Cultural Capital and Social Distinctions in Gaelic Cape Breton.” PhD diss., York University, 2005.


2. **Scotland and Celticism**


3. Narrative and Tradition


Discography

Fraser, Robbie. *Hear this ... here it is.* Compact disc, 7 7859 14660 2 1. © 2004 Robbie and Isaac Fraser.


APPENDIX A:

Bill Lamey – “King George IV Strathspey”
APPENDIX B:

Buddy MacMaster – “King George IV Strathspey”
APPENDIX C:

Ashley MacIsaac – “King George IV Strathspey”
APPENDIX D:

Robbie Fraser – “King George IV Strathspey”
APPENDIX F:

Buddy MacMaster – “The King’s Reel”
APPENDIX G:

Ashley MacIsaac – “The King’s Reel”
APPENDIX H:

Robbie Fraser – “The King’s Reel”
APPENDIX I:

Angus Chisholm – “Mrs. Scott Skinner”
APPENDIX J:

Angus Chisholm – “Christie Campbell Strathspey”

Transcribed as the pitches sound, rather than in scordatura notation.
APPENDIX K:
Ornamentation and Style Notation Key

**Bowing**

“up-driven bow”³⁵⁸
[Extra pressure, stronger accent on third note; often lift between first and second up-bows]

articulatory lift
[Extra lift (earlier release)]

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”³⁵⁹
[Fast, ornamental shake of finger]

“turn”
[Melody note, pitch above, return to melody note]

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

weighty rubato
[Extra weight and time taken]

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³⁵⁸“Quotations” placed around emic terminology. See Dunlay, Kate and David Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton* (Toronto: DunGreen Music, 1996) for elaboration on Cape Breton techniques.

³⁵⁹Angus 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.
APPENDIX L:

BREB Ethics Approval Form

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6196 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:
Alexander Fisher

INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:
UBC/Arts/Music

UBC BREB NUMBER:
M07-01563

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

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Other locations where the research will be conducted:
Informants' homes, concert venues, dance venues

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Jessica Herdman

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
UBC SSHRC No! Funded Development Grant - "Cape Breton Fiddling - master's thesis project conducted by Jessica Herdman, under my supervision. Funding awarded to her through SSHRC."

PROJECT TITLE:
The Preservation of Baroque Performance Practice in Cape Breton Fiddle Performance Practice

CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: April 22, 2009

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL: DATE APPROVED:
April 22, 2009

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The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Daniel Sathani, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair