

MÉTIS FIDDLING AT THE BORDERS OF CANADIAN TRADITION

by

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Abstract

The tradition of Métis fiddling in Canada is an integral yet relatively unknown historical practice that has been handed down through the generations. The rich combination of European culture and Aboriginal culture of Western Canada created a new and distinct group of people, the Métis, who played an important role in shaping Canada's history. Through a combination of Aboriginal dancing and drumming traditions, mixed with the Celtic and French fiddle, what is known today as Métis fiddling emerged. The tradition has been kept alive by the dedication of the older generation who pass it down orally to those willing to learn it, and through festivals and competitions that are becoming more widespread every year. In this thesis I will examine the history of the Métis and their fiddling tradition, the important role it plays in their culture and the close relationship between the fiddle and dance. My research is a combination of ethnographic, historical, cultural and musical analysis that combines to create a comprehensive study of Métis fiddling in Western Canada. As the Métis population is comparatively small in Canada, and often forgotten, there has not been extensive research conducted into the musical culture of the Métis, particularly the fiddling tradition. Recordings and books which examine this music are not numerous or easy to find. My goal, therefore, is to explore this vibrant musical world with the hope of creating a new awareness and study of the Métis that will add to the previous research done and open new doors for further research in this area of ethnomusicology.

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Introduction

I wake up to mountains of snow outside my window on this unusually frosty November day in Vancouver. With fear I phone the local bus company, praying silently that the bus services are still operating. I've been invited to attend a Métis dance performance at a Catholic church fairly nearby, and I don't want to miss it. I even phone the director of the group and he assures me, "Oh yah, it's still on. We're all here! See you soon!" I set off in my winter jacket, cozy toque and gloves, and after an hour-long journey through snowy banks and on unreliable public transit I arrive at my destination, five maps in hand, address neatly printed, with no sign of any Métis dancers anywhere. I enter the church and walk right into the middle of a Catholic Mass and glance around at what appears to be an entirely Filipino congregation. I quietly ask the usher if he knows where the Métis dancers are, but he stares at me blankly and points to his friend. Once again I ask, hoping that the light of recognition will shine in his eyes. In confusion he shrugs his shoulders, and I'm nearly ready to break down and cry after my long, cold trip here.

Suddenly, though, I hear music coming from the hallway, and I run out to follow the sound. Down the stairs I go and there I discover the cultural hall, and a group of young Métis dancers practicing their steps. I shyly wait at the door and watch as they diligently rehearse their steps, sometimes in enjoyment, and other times in frustration. Eventually I gather the courage to enter the hall, and introduce myself to their instructor. He welcomes me in and tells me to pull up a chair so I sit down to observe, and slowly the congregation trickles down from upstairs. Eventually the hall is filled with people and

food and the young group of dancers put on a show for all of us. At one point I feel a small hand grab mine, and I'm thrown into the middle of one of the dances, along with any other willing volunteers. Dressed in my best Sunday clothes I hop along, and keep up the best I can, fervently hoping that I'm not making too big of a fool out of myself. After the performance I excitedly walk up to the musicians, a guitar player and a fiddler, and introduce myself. Suddenly the fiddle player pauses, and with the look of recognition that I've been waiting for he says, "I know your name...you e-mailed me, didn't you? I'm so happy to meet you! I can't believe that I'm meeting you here!". Immediately I discover that he is one of the regional directors for the Métis Nation B.C., a fiddler and a more than willing participant in my research.

It was moments like this one that propelled me forward as I began my journey into the world of Métis music, dance and culture last fall. Although I have been studying this topic for many months now, and have contacted numerous people, getting a foot in the door proved to be more of a challenge than I would have thought possible. From my perspective, I had the best of intentions, but that does not change the fact that I am still an outsider, I am not Métis and I have never been a part of the Métis community. I slowly made connections through the many forms of communication that I tried, but my breakthrough came from a referral from a Métis family friend. Through that connection I was able to set up an interview with B., a Métis dancer and instructor who became one of my primary sources of information.

To jump back even further, about a year and a half ago, a very musical family friend of mine asked me what topic I had chosen for my master's thesis. There followed the usual pause as I collected my thoughts and contemplated what I might say to give her

some sense of any idea of something that most piqued my interest. This time I chose to tell her about my interest in fiddling in general, but with no specific avenue to ramble down yet. She immediately piped up and with enthusiasm asked, “Have you heard of Métis fiddling?!”. I believe my response was something along the lines of, “Métis what?” At that moment I discovered not only that she was in fact Métis and had only recently discovered it, but that the Métis people of Western Canada have a vibrant fiddle tradition that spans hundreds of years. Since then I have begun to discover the rich cultural heritage of the Métis and their music and how, unbeknownst to most people, the Métis are thriving once more, particularly in Western Canada. Their music and dance traditions are being taught to future generations and play a significant role in maintaining Métis culture today.

Once my interest was sparked I began to research which Métis fiddlers were out there, where they were, where they played and why they played. Suddenly a whole new world opened up to me, full of Métis festivals, gatherings, dancing, fiddling and a fascinating, as well as saddening, history of an “invisible people”, as they are often called. Although the Métis have existed long before Canada became a country, their traditions have been pushed aside, their identities were often hidden for many years and they were lost in the shuffle of this newfound country. They were a people stuck between two worlds: that of the European settlers and that of the First Nations people. They were never accepted by either group, and maintained their culture through determination, isolation and a fascinating amalgamation of musical and cultural characteristics.

I began my research with the following three questions that I felt were most important:

1. What is the role of fiddling and dance in solidifying feelings of nationality and cultural pride?
2. How do the Métis enact a sense of community through these activities?
3. Is the Métis fiddle and dance tradition still alive and well today, and if so, how is this demonstrated?

These questions evolved slightly throughout my research, and many more were added, but I continued to use these particular three questions as an overall guide in shaping my research plan. In my thesis I will explore how Métis culture has been maintained partly by their strong fiddling and dance traditions, and that today they are still thriving due to the pride that these traditions instil in their participants. I will discuss aspects of Métis fiddling, dance, history and culture and their interrelationships with each other.

In this particular thesis I will not explore other forms of Métis music making, but this does not imply that Métis songs, for instance, are somehow less significant than fiddling. The fiddling traditions of various cultures are a specific interest of mine. I am fascinated by the fiddle and/or violin and how it appears, in one form or another, in musical cultures throughout the world. Whether it is due to the close resemblance that the sound of a fiddle has to the human voice, the flexibility — both physically and stylistically — of the instrument or its material accessibility, it resonates with people in every continent and is therefore to me a fascinating musical specimen, so to speak.

For the past year or so I have had the opportunity to take fiddle lessons, though unfortunately not with a Métis fiddler since they are not easy to come by in Vancouver. Learning Irish fiddling, though, has helped to broaden my knowledge of the origins of Métis fiddling in how it emphasizes the oral nature of teaching tunes, the importance of style in determining the type of a fiddler you are and the various techniques which are used in fiddling. I have also attempted to learn various Métis fiddle tunes, specifically,

the *Red River Jig*, and have had to force my traditionally trained musical mind to allow for irregular bar lengths and time signatures, and a feel to the music that makes it “Métis.”

In the first Chapter I will begin by exploring the fascinating and turbulent history of the Métis in Canada, and how the fiddle remained a unifying factor throughout the changing years. It is vital to understand the history of the Métis in order to understand their musical traditions and how their nation exists today. I will briefly explore the history from first contact here on the North American continent, to the formation of the Métis people and the major role they played in the development of Western Canada, to the dark years of their persecution and invisibility, and finally to the re-emergence of their culture. Through this rocky history springs the history of the Métis fiddling tradition, built from European and Native traditions, to a new hybrid art form with its basis in old-time fiddling.

The second chapter will delve into the histories of two members of the Métis community in British Columbia. Both of these informants, one a fiddler, the other a dancer, come from large Métis families in Western Canada, and although they grew up relatively far from each other, their experiences have many marked similarities in terms of their cultural and musical lives. I found that the interviews that I conducted added a new dimension to my research up to that point, and that the richness of the stories, experiences and histories of each informant opened up a whole new door to an understanding of the fiddling and dance traditions. What was exhibited clearly was the passion and interest that these cultural traditions held for both of them and the significance this played in their own self-identification as Métis. In a way, the rest of my

thesis is wound around these interviews, and they become a stepping stone for theoretical arguments, as well as a confirmation of Métis historical and cultural development.

Chapter 3 will place my research in a theoretical framework and explore how concepts of acculturation, syncretism, and hybridity are displayed in the Métis fiddling tradition. There is a common misconception that certain musics are “pure” and untainted by outside influences. Although I will argue that Métis fiddling is a hybrid art form, this also raises issues of the purity in its musical parentage. How do you determine what is hybrid and what is not? What influences are measurable once the Anglo-Celtic fiddling traditions began to mix with French Canadian fiddle styles? To add an even thicker layer, how much influence did the First Nations cultures have on these traditions? Lederman argues strongly in her MA thesis on Métis and Native fiddling that these resulting traditions are examples of a syncretic music. I will explore this concept by analyzing a well-known Métis fiddle tune.

In the fourth chapter my musical analysis will continue with an in-depth study of the *Red River Jig*. I will first present the various histories that have been circulated most widely concerning the jig, and eventually move on to a musical analysis of two different version of it. *The Red River Jig* is arguably the most well known and frequently played Métis fiddle tune, and I believe that the significance of this makes it necessary to dedicate an entire chapter to its analysis. I will attempt to uncover aspects of it that make it so widely popular, whether these are musical, cultural or historical indicators. Is there something inherent in this tune that captures its audiences? What stylistic aspects make it unique and yet recognizable despite the many variations of it that now exist?

My fifth and final chapter will examine the current state of Métis fiddling and the Métis nation, and what it now entails to be recognized by the Métis nation as a member of this community. There have been numerous changes that have taken place rapidly in the last 25 years, and this has impacted all of the traditions. Throughout the last century there has been a shift in venue for the fiddling tradition, and I will explore how the related changes that have occurred have impacted the music. There has also been a re-immersion of Métis culture, and those who once hid themselves culturally under the guise of European or sometimes First Nations are now discovering their histories and embracing their Métis heritage. I will examine how teaching the traditional fiddling and dancing styles has become a means of instilling cultural pride in the new generation of Métis.

My thesis will attempt to showcase the many fascinating cultural and musical aspects of the Métis people that have been hidden or disregarded for so many years. Although this research cannot hope to be comprehensive or conclusive, my hope is that it will be a guide for those who will continue researching Métis fiddling in the future. The various research that has been done before now has helped me to draw many of the conclusions that I came to at the end of each chapter, and so each new research project helps to build on the previous one. The following five chapters are a glimpse into the world of Métis fiddling and dance, and the fascinating history that accompanies them.

Chapter One

The History of Métis Fiddling

1.1 A Brief History of the Métis

Who are the Métis? Where did they come from? Why is their history important? How did their music originate? In some ways it seems strange to write a brief history of the Métis, since in the past their traditions have been passed down orally in a similar way to the First Nations people of Canada. Their music, stories, language, traditions and histories were passed from one generation to the next mainly without a written record. The books that are available on Métis history are based on accounts from Métis people today, interviews with those who may have seen a lot of history in their time, and government documents. Much of the written history of the Métis people centres on the fur trade, the famous (or infamous) Louis Riel, his rebellion, his persecution and martyrdom and the various battles and wars that involved the Métis. Although these are significant markers in Canadian history, they do not tell a comprehensive story of the Métis. It is impossible to cover the history of the Métis people in this chapter, but I do hope to give an overview that will set a backdrop for the history of Métis fiddling and how these histories are inseparably connected and reflective of each other.

It is impossible to determine the exact date that the first Métis person came into existence in Canada, but what is clear is that the unions that took place between the First Nations women and the European men (mainly Scots, Frenchman and Englishman) were crucial to the establishment of the fur trade and the economic and social development of

what became Canada. I will refer to the new country as Canada, even though it was not recognized as such until much later in time, for the purpose of clarity.

The majority of those brave enough to travel to Canada in the early 16th century were explorers and men who saw better fortunes for themselves in far off lands. At this time in Europe, fur was in high demand and so sources outside of the overly hunted animal populations of Europe were sought out. Explorers such as John Cabot and Jacques Cartier discovered a land rich with resources upon landing in North America, and most importantly, they discovered the beaver. The felt hat became a fashion craze during the 16th century and its popularity continued for hundreds of years. The finest quality felt hats were made from the soft, “underfur” of the beaver pelt, and North America offered a seemingly endless supply of fur for these merchants. The result was boatloads full of young men arriving in North America, completely unready for this cold and unforgiving land, and hungry to make money and to find beavers. The First Nations people were the optimal guides for these men in this harsh, new wilderness. Many of them were even forewarned of the arrival of the white man through visions and dreams(Ray 2005:38-42). Although the men who arrived originated from imperialist countries, early on they recognized their dependency on the First Nations people and quickly began to form alliances with the various tribes.

1.2 The Influence of the Hudson’s Bay Company

The Hudson’s Bay Company was established in 1670, and with it, policies on intermarriage were also established. In a letter written to Governor John Nixon in 1682, the HBC’s views are clearly stated:

We are very sensible that the Indian Weoman resorting to our Factories are very prejudicial to the Companies affaires, not only by being a meanes of our Servants often debauching themselves, but likewise by embeazling our goods and very much exhausting our supplies...It is therefore our positive order that you lay your strict Commands on every Chiefe of each Factory upon forfeiture of Wages not to Suffer any Woeman to come within any of our Factories. (Ray 2005:88)

This order was unrealistic and impracticable, and so relations between the men and women continued. HBC headquarters were in England, far removed from the realities of existence in Canada, and therefore blind to the social and political necessities of their employees. Strong racial prejudices against the Native people played a significant role in forming these policies. The Europeans were immediately dependent on having strong relations with the various Native tribes, and when these relationships could be cemented by marriages they were even more advantageous.

It is interesting to see a history where roles become reversed in a matter of a few centuries. The state of dependency which was felt by the European fur traders would eventually be felt by the First Nations and Métis people due to a lack of understanding from the government, language, cultural barriers and a clash of lifestyles, to name but a few problems. Initially, though, these “fresh off the boat” Europeans felt their lack of knowledge and experience keenly and required the expert opinions and guidance of those First Nations people who chose to help them. It is only natural that many of these men formed alliances with First Nations women, through cohabitation, or “country marriages” as they were referred to (Ray 2005:88).

Alliances were beneficial to both parties, for the most part. The First Nations women knew their families would benefit from trading partnerships with the European men, and the European men were able to find comfort from loneliness, and a wealth of knowledge and care that they would have otherwise never found. The womens’ skills and

roles were endless; from the making of clothing, to food preparation, to medicine making, as well as their important roles in the economy in terms of the production of leather and buffalo robes. They were also involved in trading and were known to be even tougher negotiators than the men (Ray 2005:115-116). Unfortunately many of the men eventually returned to Europe, leaving behind heartbroken wives and often children as well, but others were eventually officially married, and thus began the formation of the Métis people.

The term Métis derives from the latin *miscere*, and literally means “mixed” (from the *Handbook of Indians of Canada*, 1913). The Métis were also known as the *bois brûlé* (burnt wood), which originated from the Ojibwa term *wissakodewinmi*, meaning “half-burnt woodmen” in reference to their mixed skin colour and their lifestyles as *coureurs du bois* (runners of the woods). Originally, though, the most commonly used term for the Métis was “half-breed”. The majority of European men who intermarried with First Nations women were of French and Scottish descent, but there were also Englishman, Irishman and Scandinavian men amongst them. These men would travel great distances in order to trap, and transport beavers and other animal pelts, which in turn resulted in alliances with First Nations tribes all across Canada. This also meant that their wives and children would be left behind for long periods of time, and were left to fend for themselves, which created a strong and self-sufficient group of women.

Approximately 100 years after the HBC was established, the Northwest Company grew to become its largest competition. In contrast to the HBC, the Northwest Company’s headquarters were much more central in relatively nearby Montreal and they were much more tolerant of mixed marriages. The NWC hired voyageurs, composed

mainly of Frenchman or French Métis, to make the long treks from Montreal to distant outposts. Through these difficult treks over land and water, they became a hardy, adaptable and independent group. This was also when the Métis sash first began to be recognized as a symbol of the voyageurs and eventually a symbol of the Métis. This initially red, woven sash, often referred to as *La Ceinture L'Assomption* (the Assumption Sash), was used for keeping jackets closed, hauling wood or other heavy loads on the back, as rope, a towel, and/or a saddle blanket, and the frayed ends would even be used to sew items in an emergency. The sash was symbolic of the versatility and adaptability of the Métis people. Although the sash was used by other First Nations groups and French Canadians, it meant and means the most to the Métis people, and the colours used in the sash became symbolic of Métis history.

As the Métis people began to become more recognized as a new cultural group, so did their skills and the assets they brought to the various companies. Since they were often familiar with a variety of languages, they worked as interpreters at the forts. Many of their European fathers (the wealthy ones) insisted on educating them, often sending them back to Europe in order for them to receive this education therefore they subsequently were able to serve as clerks and record keepers as well. They became familiar with both native and European cultures, and were relied on for effective communications and the continuation of trade relationships. They were also tied to the various religious communities that began to establish themselves during this time and for the missionaries this was advantageous and gave them immediate connections with many of the First Nations communities. The French Métis were mainly Roman Catholic, the English were Anglican and the Scottish were Presbyterian (Harrison 1985:21).

By the early 1800s a large population of Métis had settled in the Red River area (present day Winnipeg, Manitoba), where they continued to hunt and trap, but soon became famous for their buffalo hunting skills. The Métis became known for the protein-rich and durable First Nation food made from dried buffalo meat and berries, called “pemmican”. This food became a staple for the Métis as well as a steady and reliable source of trade good that was constantly in demand. They would often pay for supplies from forts entirely with pemmican. The buffalo hunting lifestyle required the Métis to travel from home for approximately two-month periods, twice a year. For those involved in the hunt, it was a way of life, integral to their livelihoods, cultural practices and the freedom that was held so dear to them. For the French Métis in particular, the agricultural way of life did not hold much interest to them since many of them were voyageurs or trappers and were not accustomed to a sedentary lifestyle. They loved the freedom of hunting and trapping and being able to choose where they would make their homes. When combined with the native way of life, which in many cases was very similar in its transient nature, problems were bound to arise with the Europeans who preferred and encouraged the agricultural lifestyle.

One historical marker that indicated that a national unity was forming among the Métis was the Battle of Seven Oaks. I will not go into much detail in describing this battle, but it is important to mention this time in Métis history. In 1811 Lord Selkirk attempted to establish an agricultural colony in the Red River as a means of forcing the Métis out of this area and creating a community of settlers who would support the farming lifestyle that was so important to the British. The North West company knew that if this colony was established their trade routes across the plains would be

threatened, so they cleverly encouraged the Métis at Red River to establish themselves as a group, and to stand up to Lord Selkirk. In 1816 the Métis chose Cuthbert Grant as their Captain after having their pemmican supply routes cut off by Governor Semple of the Red River colony. In an attempt to re-open these routes, Grant set off with a group of men and met Governor Semple and his men along the way. The governor and twenty-one of his men were killed, with just one casualty on the Métis side, and thus the Métis asserted their independence and made the bold statement that they were a force to be reckoned with.

Throughout the next 70 years the Métis continued to fight for their rights, for land, and for their identity as an important peoples of Canada. Louis Riel became the leader behind this movement and was part of the group of men (along with Gabrielle Dumont) who pushed the government to create the Manitoba Act of 1870 and the establishment of the province of Manitoba. Due to many of the disturbances as well as the prejudices that occurred during this time, many Métis moved farther west to Alberta or Saskatchewan or south to the Dakotas. Still, a huge population remained in Manitoba and as the Métis continued to grow in strength and numbers, the government became continually more fearful of their potential, and eventually in May of 1885 the Métis were defeated after a series of battles, ending at Batoche. Riel surrendered and was found guilty of treason and was hanged on November 16th, 1885.

From 1885 onwards, the Métis suffered greatly through severe prejudices, poverty and abandonment from the government. In an attempt to solve issues with the Métis, land and money scrips (a certificate entitling the bearer to either land or money) were used in order to appease them. The majority of the Métis took the money scrips since so many of

them lived transient lifestyles. Many Métis were tricked out of their land by land speculators who would buy the scrips from the Métis at extremely low prices. At times speculators would pick up the scrips on behalf of Métis families and simply disappear. Other Métis took the money, not realizing that as the value of the land increased their money scrip became worthless. Many of the buffalo hunters and trappers were gone when scrips were issued and returned to find that they had nothing. Many more simply did not hear about the scrip commissions and never knew to pick up their scrips. In essence, their Aboriginal title to the land was bought from them, and they were left to be squatters or forced to move away from their homes (Harrison 1985:73-74). The scrip process was an attempt to fit a square peg into a round hole. It did not take into account the Métis lifestyle, their title to the land, their familiarity with paper work (especially for those Métis who were illiterate), the relationship between the value of a money scrip as opposed to a land scrip, differing concepts of ownership and the lack of communication in disseminating this information to the general Métis population. They were a people caught in the world of the bureaucrats and government officials, agencies that had enough problems knowing how to “deal with” the First Nations populations, not to mention the “mixed-breeds.”

A prophetic quote by Louis Riel demonstrates what occurred to the Métis in the upcoming years: “My people will sleep for one hundred years when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back” (Riel: July 4th, 1885). The repression of the Métis that happened over the next hundred years or so was due to a variety of factors, many of which I have already referred to. After 1885 the Métis scattered all around Western Canada, and a sense of national unity disappeared as prejudices increased. Many

Métis attempted to pass off as strictly European settlers, often changing their names in the process and hiding their native ancestry. For other Métis who could not so easily hide their ancestry, they would at times return to Native villages or reserves. Unfortunately the Métis were never fully accepted by either the Native or the European communities. Those who attempted to fit into the European lifestyle were still seen as unequal to a European settler, and yet they were also not considered Aboriginal people.

Despite the stigma that was attached to an identity as a Métis or a “half-breed”, Métis culture did not die alongside Louis Riel. Although for a time the term “Métis” was avoided, and Métis people hid their heritage, their traditions survived and were nurtured continually throughout this period. Dances were still held, fiddlers continued to play and pass on their musical traditions, and Métis pride and spirit remained quietly burning while they found a way to find their place in a society that did not know how to accept them. How and why did these traditions survive so strongly? In the following section I will explore the history of Métis fiddling and dance specifically, and how they played a major role in maintaining a Métis national identity, whether or not that was fully recognized by those involved.

1.3 The History of Métis Fiddling

“It is said that the way to drive a Métis crazy is to nail his moccasins to the floor and play the *Red River Jig*” (from Whidden 2001:171). This often quoted saying encapsulates the spirit of Métis fiddling and dance and the integral role it played in the lives of the historical Métis of Canada. In this section I will discuss the historical development of this unique style of fiddling and the significant role it had in the

development of Métis culture. This new musical style evolved from a synthesis of cultures with influences from the native side as well as the strong European characteristics that are familiar to so many Canadians.

It is difficult to pin down a particular date that Métis fiddling came into existence, as the process was gradual and occurred at various rates and times across Canada. As I discussed earlier, the first explorers and voyageurs began to come to this new, foreign land in the mid 16th century in search of prosperity and new opportunities and subsequently married Native women, creating necessary and beneficial ties with the native communities. Naturally, the European men brought their traditions with them, including the ancient fiddling tradition. As the early settlers were traders and '*coureurs de bois*' they traveled extensively, therefore their music was instantly influenced by countless sources around them. One fiddler, for example, could hear a French folk song in one town, a Scottish jig in another, and a traditional Ojibwa song in yet another place. The concept of a "global community" which is so widely known today was reflected to a small degree in the early life of these men. They were exposed to a plethora of stylistic differences in music which gradually developed into its own, unique style and culture.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the fiddle (and/or the violin) has been an important instrument for many cultures. It is historically the most important instrument in a symphony orchestra, it is central to Eastern European gypsy music, it is integral to Bluegrass and country music, it is the heart and soul of the Celtic repertoire and it is the vibrant, lively voice of French Canadian music, to name just a few examples. For many of these cultures the fiddle is valued for the soulful manner in which it is able to produce sound. The sound of a fiddle is often compared to that of a human voice and

consequently tells a story when it is played. On the practical side, it is also very light, easy to carry long distances and extremely versatile and adaptable. It is a unifying factor in countries throughout the world and has the ability to break down cultural barriers amongst groups that at first might not appear alike. Cultural exchange is enabled when various groups are able to establish traits in common. "When two human groups which are in sustained contact have a number of characteristics in common in a particular aspect of culture, exchange of ideas therein will be much more frequent than if the characteristics of those aspects differ markedly from one another." (Merriam 1955:28)

In this case, it is the fiddle and the fiddle repertoire that was the cultural glue that made possible the frequent exchange of ideas between the various ethnic groups in Canada at the time of contact.

The fiddle was originally a solitary instrument in its early days in Métis life, although it was occasionally accompanied by a drum or the spoons. It was the equivalent to a sound system and the source of music for all social gatherings and dances that were held by the Métis, which were many. In an account from Lederman's thesis, there is a brief description of a dance at York Factory in 1843:

The sound of a fiddle struck upon our ears....on a chair, in a corner near the stove sat a young, good-looking Indian, with a fiddle of his own making beside him. This was our Paganini; and beside him sat an Indian boy with a kettle-drum on which he tapped occasionally, as if anxious that the ball should begin. We each chose partners, the fiddle struck up and the ball began. Scotch reels were the only dances known by the majority of the guests, so we confined ourselves entirely to them. (Bassett 1941:20)

From a variety of accounts of that period, it is clear that dances and parties were an integral part of Métis culture. Often gatherings would spring into being if someone simply picked up a fiddle and began to play. Soon, chairs would be moved aside to clear

a dance floor, people would hear the sound of the fiddle and the party would begin and could last all night long. Even in the poorest Métis settlements a fiddle could normally be found. If a musician couldn't afford to buy a fiddle, he would make it by hand from maple trees and birch bark. The strings for the bow were made from horse hair, as quality bows still are today, the rosin for the bow came from tree sap, and the bridge could even be made from animal bones (from the documentary *How the Fiddle Flows*, 2002).

Due to the rough construction of many of these fiddles, the tuning would have necessarily differed greatly from fiddle to fiddle, which could have been another factor in the solitary nature of the fiddle at the time. Pianos and guitars did not appear for many years, therefore the tuning of the fiddle was entirely dependent on the fiddler who, depending on his background, may have had little or no training in the specifics of tuning. In an account from *The Other Natives: The Métis*, "Some travellers sarcastically noted that lacking other instruments with which to tune their fiddles, the Métis used the cry of the loon and the bellow of a rutting moose" (Lussier and Sealy 1978:18). In the early 1900s it became far more common to purchase a fiddle, and this was also around the time when other instruments began to be introduced.

The original accompanying instruments were the hand drum, spoons, bones, the mouth harp and the concertina. Eventually, between the 1930s and 1950s, the guitar was introduced as rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment and nowadays it is common to see a piano accompanying the fiddler as well. But the fiddle always remained central and carried the tune, as well as the story.

According to Rene Therrien every fiddle tune was first a song, perhaps a folk tune of French origin or a newly composed Métis folk song (personal communication with

Rene Therrien: 2006). If no fiddler was available for a Métis gathering, someone would fill in by humming or singing the fiddle tunes. In French this is referred to as *turloter*, roughly translated as “mouth music” (Kennedy 2007). Party-goers would then take turns filling in as the entertainment and the spoons might be pulled out as the rhythmic accompaniment. This vocalizing technique was also used to teach young fiddlers new tunes, especially by those who couldn’t play the fiddle. Songs were also part of the musical entertainment found at parties. In this description, a clear picture is drawn of what a typical Métis party would have been like at the turn of the century:

The setting for most Métis music was the home. Despite hard times, the Métis families in communities such as Ste. Madeleine, Manitoba fathered frequently in homes for late nights of singing and dancing. Joe Venne recalled the women sitting in one room and the men in another. The men took turns singing for each other. Sometimes the furniture would be pushed against the walls and they would dance. Joe could play the fiddle, mouth organ, accordion, spoons, comb and mouth harp and was a caller for the square dance. Their vivid songs were full of humour and description of the joys of drink and women. (personal communication with Joe Venne, from Whidden 2001:173)

Fiddling, like the majority of folk traditions, was handed down orally through many generations of Métis families. This is one of the reasons why it is so difficult nowadays to accurately transcribe and record “authentic” Métis fiddle tunes. When a tradition is based on oral knowledge, there is much more freedom for improvisation and change throughout the life of a fiddle tune. These changes can reflect the changes that occur in a culture, and therefore become a type of historical record. Philip Bohlman describes it this way:

Oral tradition is also a measure of a community’s sense of itself, its boundaries, and the shared values drawing it together. Folk music can be a repository for these values and a voice for their expression. Oral tradition often determines the social acceptability and limitations of these values through its continuous process of sifting and winnowing. Some values gradually become stylized or vestigial; others enter and exit quickly from tradition; and still others consolidate to form a

cultural core that oral tradition undergirds through many generations. Changes in a community's social structure thus influence not only its folk music repertory but also the ways in which this repertory is transmitted. Musical change reflects—indeed, becomes a metaphor for—cultural change. Together, these two types of change animate the oral tradition of folk music. (Bohlman 1988:15)

Métis culture was shifting and changing throughout this period, therefore according to Bohlman's explanation of oral tradition, this would be reflected in their music. Simultaneously a core set of fiddle tunes and dances survived the changes, and became the "traditional" set for many Métis. The oral tradition also enables and forces the repertoire to develop more freely and to be more highly influenced by outside sources. When a tradition is passed down in this manner, the fiddlers often do not understand how a tune is put together, or why it is they use certain techniques. They play it that way because their fathers played it that way, or their grandfathers played it that way and so on and so forth. They learn the techniques needed to play the music, learn the tunes, and learn how to communicate their music effectively to the audience or participants. It is therefore very difficult to create one historical account of Métis fiddling from the fiddlers themselves, as each has his own story and his own tradition and was taught to play the tunes in a particular way by his family members. I refer to all historical Métis fiddlers as male since the tradition was originally exclusively male dominated. Even today the majority of fiddlers are still men, although that is slowly changing.

The mark of a true Métis fiddler is his ability to take a familiar tune and make it his own. One problem that arises when a musical tradition is recorded and written down is that musicians often feel constricted to play exactly what is written on the page, with little room for creativity and individuality. Since the Métis fiddling tradition is very much a dance-based tradition, there is an "in-the-moment" aspect to the music that enables and

forces a musician's creativity, dexterity, flexibility, sensitivity and sense of time. There is an obvious problem with a tradition based solely on oral knowledge, of course, and that is the fear of losing it completely. The ties from one generation to another become more and more frayed, particularly as traditions change drastically through the onslaught of technology. Fortunately technology also has the ability to foster a record of oral knowledge through recording. But what are the results recording these fiddle tunes? Often for a young fiddler, one recording of a tune will be the only "authentic" version for him, and instead of creating his own individual style, he will learn one specific version from one performance. I will explore more fully how the tradition has changed in the last century in the final chapter.

1.4 Clogging and Dancing

The repertoire is derived from a variety of sources from the Scottish and French sides, and was altered by each fiddler. Many of the tunes were originally folk songs, brought over by the immigrants in the 1600s. The vast majority of Métis fiddle tunes are lively, upbeat and suited specifically for dancing. Traditional fiddlers played in a seated position and would tap their feet rhythmically; this highly coordinated musical activity is called "clogging". The clogging tradition originated with the French Canadians and was the original rhythm section for the fiddler. The fiddler keeps one foot tapping the beat while the other foot taps the off beats or particular rhythms that match the tune. Essentially a fiddler's hands and feet not only had to work independently of the upper and lower limbs, but also independently of each individual limb while simultaneously keeping a close watch on the dancers and adjusting and improvising as they went. One

theory as to why fiddlers began to tap their feet was that it was the only way to keep themselves warm during wintertime dances (from *How the Fiddle Flows*, 2002). The clogging tradition came from the French Canadians and has continued to the present day.

The style of dancing derives mainly from its Scottish heritage, although influences from First Nations circle dances are reflected in the formations of many Métis dances. The most well known Métis dances are the Rabbit Dance, the Duck Dance, the Heel and Toe Polka, La dance du crochet or the Hook Dance, also known as Drops of Brandy, and of course the Red River Jig. Other popular forms of dances were waltzes, quadrilles, reels, square dances and fox trots. Dancers often wore moccasins while performing, and nowadays are often decked out in full Métis regalia, which consists of bright, Métis colours and a sash. For men, the sash is tied around the waist, and for women it is tied across the shoulder. Dances would also normally have had a caller who would shout out in English and French:

The jig steps were incorporated into the square dances and even the French and English languages were intermixed in the directions shouted by the caller to the dancers. 'A la main gauche' became 'A la main left' and at dances all over Western and Northern Canada today it can be heard in the distorted form 'allemande left'. (Lussier and Sealy 1978:8)

It is also possible that the Michif language could be heard at these dances and parties. Michif is the language of the Métis that originated from a mixture of Cree verbs, French nouns and a variety of other Native words mixed in. Michif is different than most Creole languages in that it is not a pidgin language, but a complete synthesis of Cree and French, created as a distinguishing marker of Métis identity. Although there aren't many Michif speakers left in Canada, the Métis Nation continues to promote the language and hold workshops and classes in order to keep it alive. A distinguishing language is just one

more marker of the distinct culture that was created by the Métis throughout their history in Canada.

Chapter 2

Entering the Field

Expectations are an inevitable aspect of ethnography, figuring into the way we make judgements on a daily basis. Upon entering the field, I expected to immediately find many willing participants, an enthusiasm for their musical culture, and similar cultural experiences and musical knowledge. For the most part, my expectations were met, but it took much longer than anticipated to make the necessary contacts and cohesion that I had expected. The following interviews give only a glimpse into the world of Métis music and dance, but through conversations with others in the community as well as through my own research I have found that these interviews present important themes from my research. In order to have a comprehensive background on all musical knowledge within the Métis populations of Western Canada I would have to spend years conducting this research, but I believe these interviews give an informative and fascinating glimpse into Métis cultural life within the last 40-50 years.

In order to more fully understand Métis culture and music I had hoped to be able to observe a number of performances and events, but due to the sporadic locations of the Métis population in the lower mainland, as well as the musical performances, I could not simply immerse myself in it and experience endless hours of participant observation over a short period of time. My observations, therefore, came from a variety of performances that was able to attend, the interviews, and the various people that I met at the interview venues.

The two interviews that I reference in this chapter (and use throughout the remainder of my thesis) were both semi-structured, open ended and meandering in nature. My informants were fully aware of my research interests before beginning the interviews, therefore they were prepared to speak almost immediately. Generally, I would simply have to start the interview with, "So, tell me a little bit about your background" and they would proceed to answer most of my questions before I had to ask too many more. I attempted to direct the interviews at times towards points that I was most interested in, but I would also let my informants speak freely of their experiences. This would occasionally result in tangents, but these inevitably were fascinating and broadened my knowledge. What I found frustrating was my inability to videotape all of the facial expressions and hand movements that occurred during the interviews. Often B. or Rene would be describing a particular aspect of music or dance to me by using elaborate hand or foot motions, and these types of descriptions cannot be captured in a transcription, but only in my memory. As Paul Kutsche notes, "The heart of your fieldwork is in your memory, while the material record you have compiled is best thought of as a mnemonic device to call it up" (1998: 98). I remember the look of pleasure in B.'s eyes when she spoke of dancing, and I remember the "air fiddle" which Rene played for me on numerous occasions in order to demonstrate what he meant. Despite these challenges, the interviews offered me a wealth of information on the histories of each informant and their musical and cultural backgrounds.

2.1 Backgrounds

My first informant, B., was born in the 1960s and grew up in an extremely large Métis family of 22 in a small town in Northern Alberta. Her father was a trapper, and her mother stayed at home and raised the children. It wasn't an easy life, but B. remembers the house filled with "love, laughter and music". The community was also comprised of many other Métis families, but B. never knew them as such when she was growing up. Her cultural experiences, the music she heard and the dances she learned were never named, but simply a part of who she was. Her experiences with music began from very early on and were an integral aspect of her upbringing.

Kristi: So did you have any fiddlers in your family?

B: Oh, I grew up with them...I grew up with that music since I was a little girl...I remember even now I look back when they talk about our Métis culture and history and I look back and I think about the things that happened as a little girl. I was always a listener and a watcher. All the time, I was always that little girl hiding behind the thing and listening and looking at these people and...we used to have parties and I remember, as a little girl they used to throw the furniture...all the furniture would be out of the house and people would come home...come over and we'd have these big huge parties and I remember it going on for two days.

K: So, were your parents, were they dancers and musicians as well then?

B: They were just dancers. But we grew up with brother-in-laws, brothers that played the guitar and sang and there was always fiddlers...like the whole community they would come over and there was fiddle players, there was the Lasotte family...Narcisse Lasotte from Buttertown and he had boys...all 5 boys played fiddle.

B.'s musical life, therefore, started from infancy and was never formally instilled, but was learned through family and friends within the community. Later in this chapter I will describe more of her later experiences with Métis music and dance, but what is

important to note is the central role that these arts played in her early life, and how later on they became sources of strength and self-recognition for B.

I also had the privilege of meeting with Rene Therrien, one of the Regional directors for the Métis Nation B.C. and an avid fiddle player who grew up in a little village in Manitoba. There are many parallels in B.'s and Rene's experiences that demonstrate the strong connections and similarities within Métis communities, despite differing locations. Rene was born in 1945, and lived in Manitoba until he was 15, at which point he moved to B.C. in order to log. He worked as a logger for 25 years, and was forced to retire when logging practices began to decrease in the province. Throughout that time he played the fiddle, teaching himself the tunes he had heard growing up and through watching others perform. Within the last six years he began work for the Métis Nation and through this experience he has had the opportunity to become an advocate for Métis culture and how best to educate those within the Métis Nation on this knowledge. He has also had the opportunity to learn from many other Métis fiddlers throughout the last 25 years, though he still doesn't consider himself a true fiddler.

Rene: I just call myself a wanna-be fiddle player. I'm not a fiddle player....really.

K: What makes you say that? What do you think it takes to be a real fiddle player?

R: To me I think it's because my...my goal is set too high and I'm not there yet and I think it's because...everybody says I can carry a tune and I'm pretty good at it, but for me, it's ...I'm not there yet.

K: Perfectionist?

R: It's not that I'm...well, maybe on the fiddle I am. Well usually on other things I'm hay wire. Being a logger you gotta be hay wire because you've gotta make do

with what you have today and patch it on the weekend, right? I've learned to be hay wire, right? But on the fiddle, on the violin, fiddle, actually, yah, I wanna be best as I can, and I haven't reached there so perhaps that's why I'm saying I'm a wanna-be fiddle player. And there's so many tunes that I'd like to learn, and I don't even have a clue how it goes. I could listen to it but they're so fancy and yet there's tunes, that they're very tough and I pick them up. And there's others that so easy I can't get it...it's just my brain just doesn't want to pick it up, and I could go back to it and it's so simple, I can't get it. And something else that's hard, I dunno why. There's lots of tunes like that, yah. And Métis actually, you gotta be in the groove. In the mode, actually because Métis is you know, (taps rhythm with his feet), they got that.

Rene was referring to foot clogging tradition, so common in French Canadian music, as well as in Métis fiddling. According to Rene, the clogging was simply a time-keeping mechanism, when another rhythm instrument was absent. As a fiddler became more skilled at foot clogging the steps could become more complex, with even cross-over steps involved. Rene continued by explaining his musical history:

I picked it (the fiddle) up for the first 25 years...I just picked it up and of course I made so many mistakes. I wouldn't say mistakes but I've learned the wrong way. And when I came...now I'm starting to play with other musicians ...it didn't work. Just because I've learned the wrong way so I took some lesson...3,4 years ago, maybe 5 years ago now at Gavin Lake, that's one week a year. And there was a fiddle player/instructor there and I've learned quite a bit, actually. I wanted to learn the theory. How to handle the bow and really...the notes and I was told, this is fiddling, and fiddling is you could add your own, you could slur your notes, you could put your own feeling and on and on, and it helped me quite a bit actually to take lesson. The lesson that I was...I learned the most is not during the day when he was teaching us a tune...is at night when I was able to stop and ask, "now why you doing this, show me this, show me that, why this work and why this doesn't work" and I've learned lots on...by one on one and I'm still learning. I'll never quit learning.

2.2 Outsiders in Their Own Country: Facing Prejudice

Métis fiddling combines aspects of the Scottish and French traditions, which creates a unique blend of "choppiness" (as B. refers to it), liveliness, individual creativity and openness to improvisation. The dancing is an integral aspect of the music, and is

closely related to Scottish step dancing although more free and relaxed in movement. Underlying all of these stylistic features is the influence in which the First Nations traditions must have played a part. It is difficult to say to what degree Métis music and dance were influenced by First Nations culture, but it inevitably was important in its development. In describing herself, B. said:

But that is me, being a dancer and having a connection to the fiddle. Like they say pow wow and the beat of the drums, there's a connection there too. I feel the same way about the fiddle. Same way, and I teach that...all the time.

Later she describes a circle dance that she teaches which is closely related to the cyclical nature of First Nations music and dance. I will explore the impact that the First Nations music may have had on the development of this fiddle style in another chapter. It is important to note that the Métis were not the only ones fiddling at this time, and many First Nations groups have similar traditions, both in music and dance which developed alongside each other.

The Native aspect of Métis culture also determined how many Métis people were treated. They were caught between two worlds, that of the First Nations people and that of the European settlers. They were never status Indians, yet they were often discriminated against, particularly those Métis who had darker skin and therefore looked more "native". One of the many problems with attempting to categorize a Métis person by sight is that the ethnic diversity of their families creates a plethora of possible outcomes in their physical appearance. The prejudices which the Métis faced remained a part of their struggle all the way through to the 20th century, and even so today. Rene vividly remembered how the Métis were treated:

See, there was a reluctance there because of her (his mother's) background because at one time, Métis...you couldn't vote, you couldn't go in the beer

parlour, and that's not all that long ago, that's in 1955... '54. I remember that, they weren't allowed to vote and in the bar, natives weren't. My dad used to go to the beer parlour and I used to wait in the truck outside, because kids were not allowed, but I see, Indian knocking on the door and he'd come out with a case of beer because they weren't allowed inside.

B. also remembers that to discuss the colour of your skin or your ethnicity was not allowed:

B: So in our area, yah, there's a huge [Métis population]...but there was no settlement there it was just a Métis community...everybody, a lot of them tried to hide it too. Now these...they wrote a book about the Métis people there, more than half of the population was white skinned but they...there was a hidden taboo thing...don't talk about it.

Later on she described how not knowing her ethnic and cultural identity created a feeling of loss:

I moved away....19...I would say 77. I almost finished my grade 10...I had two months left in my grade 10 and I left. And my mother and father of course...they actually sent me, believe it or not they sent me away because I was drinking too much. So they sent me away to live with my sister in Dawson Creek and that's how I ended up coming south...all the way here. I call it the Beaver trail (laughs) because my name is B. so that name ...believe it or...I look back in history now and I smile because I hated the name, I hated them teasing me in school about it, and I hated that being pulled in different directions when I was in school. I wasn't First Nations and there was a hole missing...there was a hole in me and growing up...it was horrible because I knew something was missing but I didn't know what and it turns out now I'm figuring out the culture and stuff like that... And because of my dark skin, right, there was dark and light skin in my family too, right. There was the conflict there.

It took years for B. to finally discover that she was Métis and that she was allowed to be proud of who she was. The idea of a people caught between two worlds, sharing cultural features from all of them but accepted by none, fascinated and compelled me. Another theme that emerged from my research unexpectedly was the concept of a culture which is experienced and inherently known by its participants, but is never labelled or spoken of. B. described her experiences with this:

I remember when I was young that my dad he was trying to show me just a fancy step. They're called fancy steps...there's a basic jig step and then there's the fancy steps and I remember my dad showing me "you gotta go like this" and he'd show me like (she taps a beat on the table) and I'd think like to myself "that's not how to dance" and here I'm finding out now, learning the traditional steps it was called the Side to Side and he was trying to show me but they never, I guess themselves they didn't know the style of dancing they were having was actually a culture that was developing. Passed on from generation to generation, growing up because we did have a separate culture. But we just didn't know it.

None of my research questions focused on this point, but it stood out as a feature of each interview. For both Rene and B., this was the case. B. had no idea that she was Métis until 1990 when she received a phone call from a family friend:

And I got a call from ..Fred was in the Métis at that time and he was a close friend with the Lasotte family so Fred is like a father to me, a father figure, so he had given Jody my number to call me to help with the election and I was like... "Métis? What are they talking about?" (*laughs*) "I never heard of you guys before!" Click. (*laughs*). No. I said No, I said I'm busy right now basically told them.

Up until 1982 the Métis were not recognized as an Aboriginal people, and for many Métis it was easier to describe themselves as French or European, in order to escape discrimination and be treated more fairly, or in some cases, to simply protect families from being torn apart. Rene told me of an experience, which left a mark on him throughout this life.

R: Well, that's it. And of course she was using more French ...she lost her accent and one thing that I remember...if somebody would ever knock on our door, like you know, there's not a whole lot of people, all her kids had to go hide under the bed, because I think, it took me a while...long time to think about that, it's because in them days, if the man wasn't around the house, if there was kids, they'd come to get them. And she'd...you know. So, if there was no kids showing anywhere they're not going to search the house. Many times she said "you guys, go hide". She'd open the door...

K: Were the Métis children sent to residential schools as well?

R: Well, of course. Of course they were, they were no different, the Métis or First Nations...that's why...my brothers, they're as dark as BD (*referring to another*

Métis) is. Darker...my dad is the same as BD. But I've got another brother, when we were born we had blonde hair...just like my mother. So, no, it's for a good reason that my mother perhaps, still a bit reluctant to say that she's an aboriginal person.

The Métis have also been known as the "road allowance people" in the past due to the cheap, roadside plots of land that were allotted to them by the government. Rene remembered that not many people would come to visit his house along the road. He also did not even realize that the first language that he had learned was not French.

You know I was raised Michif...when I started school, of course there were Catholic nuns, I failed the first grade because I couldn't speak...I thought I spoke French, I thought everybody spoke the same language as I did, but then the nuns used to slap my hand... "That's not how you say this!" And I didn't realize that the French...that the language I spoke wasn't the correct one. But it was part French and part Michif, already the Michif was down because of my mother. She's 85 now, and five years ago I said, "Oh, I joined the Métis." "Oh," she says, "I'm glad you did, because I'm not."

Even at 85 years of age Rene's mother still does not openly admit that she was Métis or Aboriginal. Being forced to hide my cultural heritage is not something which I've ever experienced, and so for me this was an eye opening experience. When both Rene and B. spoke of this there was a matter of fact tone to their voices, but it makes me wonder if the rest of the Métis Nation experienced similar challenges, and how this is impacting this sudden re-emergence of Métis culture.

2.3 Oral Traditions

The following section includes excerpts from the interviews that describe how the musical traditions were taught or learned by both Rene and B.

K: Now did you grow up in a family that was very musical?

R: No, no, I was the only one actually. My mother knew a tune, or half a tune on the fiddle, but her dad, my grandpa played the fiddle very well, actually. I never met him. He passed away in 1945, and I was born in 1945 so I never met him. But when I was fairly young, 6, 7 years old we always had an instrument in the house. And I used to pick it up and I used to scratch on it and scratch on it, and mom, my mother said don't give up, just keep it up. Back home though, they used to, people used to have dances once a month...once every three months. Everybody would come to {invade} a house, and that family would cook and you know all of the sudden there was cakes and pies but I remember when I was very young and when the fiddle start, and when the dancing start I was sitting in one corner and just listen and listen and that's where I determined that I was going to learn how to play...the fiddle. And I stuck with it till now, and now I'm ...I know a few tunes.

K: The tunes that you first learned, were they what you'd call Métis tunes or were they more French Canadian tunes?

R: It was the tune that I first started with was the tune that my mother used to hum for me. That's how I learned the music. Of course there was no music sheet, there was no (*K: did you listen to any recordings?*) There was no recording in them days...there was them old gramophone that you had to wind. I remember them. But I would have to say, where I learned the basic tune was from my mother, yah. She hummed it to me and of course she used to sing it. You know, every fiddle tune is actually a song. And she used...she said, "no, no, just listen and try and follow me". And she really encouraged me, and even if I was just scratching she said "oh, you're doing good, you're doing good" and to me her inspiration is where I'm at today because otherwise I would have give up, but I didn't, I just kept on going.

K: Well, B. was mentioning the way she teaches the tunes, she often tells a story with it (R: yah) so that you know, you can remember each step and each...do you think a lot of the fiddle tunes have stories that are associated with them?

R: Oh, yah. To me I think every fiddle tune that my mother used to hum, there was a song and a story to it, and the fiddle came...after. I don't think it was the fiddle, and then the story, and then the song. I think...in years ago, Métis used to make their own fiddle, so fiddle was hard to come by. But I think they used to, I can't do it, but my dad used to do it is...do you speak French? (*K: Yep, a little bit*). Do you know how to do in French they would use it...*turloter...turloter*. They didn't play the fiddle they'd do "dum da da leedalum" back then. And my dad used to be there and you swear that there's a fiddle because he's there with his feet and that's how he'd do it and the fiddle player I guess would take from...

K: So that's how they would teach the tunes?

R: That's how they'd teach, yah, without a fiddle. You know, I've been to a party, you know, dances when I was 10, 12 years old and there was no fiddle player but everybody would take their turn to do it and that's what you call *turloter*. But anyway, I remember that...yah, my dad was good at it. My dad couldn't play the fiddle, encouraged me but he could...

K: It sounds like your parents were musical even if they couldn't play instruments.

R: They loved...well, they grew up with the fiddle because in them days there was nothing else. There was no radio hardly to speak of and every weekend...every two...every month there'd be dances and it was quite common when I was growing up. Every month, every two months it was one family, the next family. There was one room...all the kids went in one room. All the young ones, anybody like 9, 7, 8 years old they were allowed to take part or to dance, but I just sat beside the fiddle player and the guitar and I just listen and listen, and I said "one day..." and I just enjoyed it. So, I can't dance today because I always enjoyed listening, and then otherwise I was playing, so I'm not a dancer at all.

B.'s thoughts:

K: Well, a lot, the majority of it is oral history, right? (B: Yah), and that's how it's handed down through the different families and there are, I think, people are starting to recognize oral history a little bit more as actual truth and fact because before it was not even accepted, it had to be written down, right? But that's the same with the musical tradition as well, right? You didn't have sheets of music.

B: No, no...it was all by memory...because I'm a dancer I totally honour our fiddle players and our musicians because without them I couldn't...I could never dance. It was their own style, and the style goes about...the one story that I have heard is that there was Scotsman on one side of the river and there was actually some Scotchman playing the bagpipes on one side and on the other side of the river there was some Métis people and what happened is they were sitting around, right and the bagpipe started playing and the thing blowing through the trees...there was a windy day, and as it came through the trees it put breaks in the music so the fiddle player on the other side, that's where they got the choppy, they started playing the fiddle and it was choppy, it wasn't coming through real smooth like the fiddle is a long...classical style is a long bow. Métis music...fiddle is very choppy and there's always a 1-2-3, 1-2-3, breaks in the music, and that's how the Red River and Métis fiddle...so they say...the legend of it is that it came through the wind...blowing through the trees and that's how they got the break...and they picked up the fiddle and that's where they started jigging, the one guy got up and started jigging and that's how the *Red River Jig* apparently started so, and that's just one...that made sense. To me it made sense how it came about.

From both of these descriptions one of the key themes that emerged was how integral the family was in preserving and teaching musical traditions. Rene's musical heritage came from his grandfather, but it is evident that both of his parents were passionate about music and had musical knowledge, whether they were aware of it or not. His father's mouth music was so effective in its imitation of a fiddle that there is no doubt that Rene was able to learn numerous tunes this way. The monthly or bi-monthly house parties were also important venues for music and dance, and were places of inspiration for Rene and B. All of their early experiences with music were from family and friends and were based entirely in oral tradition. B. was not even aware of what the dances or steps were called that she learned as a young girl until much later in life. The social bonds of family and close friends enabled a musical environment that was free from too many outside sources, and allowed constant participation from its members.

2.4 Music as a Personal Experience

Both Rene and B. showed an evident passion for Métis music and dance, and spoke of the personal connection that they felt for it. Rene explained to me the emotional connection he has to music:

When I moved to BC and I started meeting friends, and of course I had to work for a living, you know, like 14 hours a day. And I only picked the fiddle up on the weekend, or at night...because I enjoyed it. You know I was tired, but I still went to the fiddle for 20 minutes a day, half hour a day, and it's something that was in my blood and I just wanted ...it was relaxing for me. And anytime that I had a bad day, or I had a bad day at work, at night I just went to the fiddle and relax, instead of watching T.V. I just played my fiddle and the mood showed in the tune that I was playing. You know if I felt sorry for myself, well I was playing slow stuff, and if things went good you know, then I'd jazz it up a little bit. Yah, you could actually tell the mood of a person by the fiddle playing, I think.

Later on he described the joy that he felt when performing his fiddle:

I enjoy playing the fiddle, at dances I like when people are having fun and they're just out going and that's good. Or if I go and usually I get asked to go to the old folks home and some of them they're just sitting there but I could see their feet moving, that's all I need. Then I'm just...ready to go, because I could see that they're enjoying themselves. That's...to me that's being paid ten times over.

B. spoke of the spirituality of the music directly:

In order to dance you have to feel the music. You can't just go out there and dance. I like to see people do their own individual thing. But if you don't...when you teach dancing if you don't try and capture them...if you don't try and reunite the fiddle with the spirituality of the music and feel that music, you're not teaching...to me, there's something missing. And to me when I'm dancing, I say that "Dancing is like dreaming with your feet". And when I heard that phrase it was just like..."that's me", because it's just like I can't do it without doing it that way. You have to connect, there's got to be a connection with the music because too many times you're just thrown out there and okay, here's your fancy steps...there's no feeling in it. And to me, Métis music and fiddling is so spiritual.

Another example of the spirituality of Métis music is exemplified in a quote from the anthology *Drops of Brandy* by the well-known fiddler, Richard Lafferty:

I've heard the Elders tell the stories and I've heard all of those stories from time to time and in some ways when I look at my fiddle, it is a little bit of a spooky instrument. You know, it's not like I'm afraid of it or anything, but I take a little bit of extra care with it. I've always kept it in the safest spots, where my guitar rides behind the seat. There's just something about it that, I don't know, I really believe that it is much more of a spiritual instrument than most people give it credit for. Just like the drum, I mean, you don't just see the Dene (a group of First Nations people from the Arctic) just flailing their drums around. It's a special instrument and they take care of it. (Lafferty 2001)

John Arcand explains it this way: "Each fiddle has its own personality. That fiddle will sing with you, it will laugh with you, it will cry with you. Believe me, it will tell you if it wants to be played or if it doesn't" (from *Drops of Brandy* 2002:12). Whether it is the very human-like nature of the fiddle, its ability to create an enormous range of sounds and timbres, its closeness to the human voice, its connection to nature in the very body of

the instrument or the sound of the horse hair bow gripping the strings, it is evidently an instrument with which many Métis people find a close and even spiritual connection.

2.5 Summary

What is it that really creates a community of people? This was one of the questions that stimulated my research, and I believe I was just beginning to receive some answers to it through my interviews. The experiences of youth played an important role in shaping Rene and B.'s cultural identity, and often in determining how they relate to the people in their lives and communities. They shared many similar cultural experiences, such as attending community parties that would go on for days, listening to fiddle players, learning through stories and social events, and of course for B., through dancing. Yet throughout these experiences there was an unspoken knowledge that you did not discuss your nationality. For both of them, this meant searching later in life for their cultural identities. Through making these discoveries, and learning more about their particular skills in music and dance, as well as who they are, they are now able to make connections of their own within the Métis community, and pass their traditions on to both the old and the young. They are finding that the "hybrid" nature of their culture allows them to make connections on a variety of levels. Instead of being caught in between two worlds, as they have been in the past, they are now beginning to become the glue first of all in their own families, and communities, and then eventually in the community at large.

Fieldwork has the ability to humble you, frustrate you, test you and force you to open your mind, as well as be patient and grow as an individual. It also encourages you

to be more introspective and critical of yourself and your own culture. New questions spring to my mind that did not exist at the beginning of my study such as: What makes a community? What proportion of the Métis community feel a stronger sense of unity through their music and dance traditions? And are these the most significant factors in creating this sense of community? If not, what factors are most important to members of a culture? Unfortunately, these questions will have to be examined at another time.

Chapter 3

Métis Fiddling as a Hybrid Art Form

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the theoretical concepts that are exemplified in Métis fiddle music. Métis fiddling and culture clearly demonstrate aspects of acculturation, syncretism and hybridity, particularly in the adaptation and adoption of cultural and musical traits. I will also examine Margaret Kartomi's concept of a "hybrid" musical culture and how this relates to acculturation, or musical transculturation, as she sometimes refers to it, in order to situate my study in an academic dialogue. This new musical style evolved from a synthesis of cultures with influences from native culture as well as the predominantly European characteristics. Lederman suggests that there is a definite correlation between Ojibwa song structure and Métis (and Aboriginal) fiddle tunes. The circumstances and the diversity of cultures that were synthesized during the development of the Métis as a nation were unique. Depending on the family itself, their location and the status of the European fathers, some Métis children may have been exposed to their native heritage more than others. The very isolation that many of the Métis faced actually became an important factor in the development of a distinctive culture.

The resulting tradition of Métis fiddling became a force in the unity and establishment of a nation. Although music may not be the universal language, for the Métis it became an enabling factor in establishing strong social relations as well as an important cultural language that solidified the unity and pride of a highly downtrodden

people. The results of this musical tradition can be seen in the efforts that fiddlers today are making in keeping it vital and alive. I will discuss this aspect of Métis fiddling in the final chapter.

3.2 The Process of Acculturation in Métis Fiddling

The process of transplanting and synthesizing a musical culture leads us to such terms as “acculturation” and newer terms such as “transculturation”. Kartomi proposes the term “musical transculturation” (1980:233) for the process whereby a new musical tradition comes into being, but not in the end result. How do these concepts relate to Métis music and culture, and should it be placed in this type of theoretical framework?

Kartomi states that:

There is a strong likelihood that all musics are syntheses of more than one cultural (and in some cases, class) influence. If this is so, then it is unhelpful, even meaningless, to speak of an acculturated music (as a *result* of contact) on the one hand and a non-acculturated one on the other. Intercultural musical synthesis is not the exception but the rule. Conflict and change are part of the nature of reality, even in seemingly timeless, static societies. (Kartomi 1981:230)

How does this relate to Métis fiddling? I find this statement interesting because on the one hand, it distinguishes that there is such a thing as acculturation, and on the other hand it implies that all culture is a result of a synthesis of others. Kartomi argues that acculturation may not be the most accurate or appropriate term to use when describing a hybrid culture, due to the various connotations associated with it and the variety of definitions attached to it. She describes the etymology of the word as meaning “adding cultures together” in Latin (Kartomi 1981:232). This becomes problematic for her since it emphasizes the origins of the music more strongly than the end result. I would have to disagree that examining the origins of a hybrid music takes away from the

new musical creation. The unique blend of Scottish, French, First Nations, Irish and English musical characteristics is what makes Métis fiddling so fascinating and worthy of close study in many regards. Kartomi explains that:

To look at a child and see only the resemblances to its parents is “adultcentric” and deprecatory of the child. The opinion that a child “has its mother’s eyes,” for example, tells us little about the identity of that child. Nor will a recognition of, say, the Portuguese elements in Malay *ronggeng* music, for example, necessarily enhance our appreciation of that music, which has its own autonomous unity and idiomatic peculiarities. (Kartomi 1981:232)

This seems to negate the idea that music with a mixed background can both be examined through its origins as well as the end musical result. What *is* difficult to determine is to what extent each parent culture influences the new offspring culture. In terms of Métis culture, it is dependent on the specific European and First Nations culture that intermingled, and later on, to what extent the Métis were able to connect with and practice their First Nations traditions. As a result of the discrimination that many Métis faced due to their Native backgrounds, that aspect of their culture was often hidden, and all traces of it may have seemingly disappeared.

According to the Canadian Oxford dictionary (1998), to acculturate is simply to “adapt to or adopt a different culture”. In this respect, Métis culture is the very definition of acculturation. It both adapted and adopted styles, instruments, tunes and characteristics of all of the cultures that were originally united together. The Métis have shown a resilience and strength that has kept their culture alive for hundreds of years, despite all of the opposition they faced. They have adapted to change, to difficult circumstances, to discrimination, and through all of this they have found connection, a sense of community and a national sense of pride through their music and dance.

According to *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (1976), another definition of acculturation is "a process of intercultural borrowing marked by the continuous transmission of traits and elements between diverse peoples and resulting in new and blended patterns." The cultural diversity found amongst the Métis people in Western Canada is extremely broad. This diversity is threefold: first, it is found in their First Nations ancestry; secondly, it is found in their European ancestry; and thirdly, it is found in their own Canadian cultural context. Therefore, although Kartomi makes an important point that all cultures display aspects of acculturation, the very diverse ancestry of the Métis people, their unique blend of contrasting cultures and the situation that they find themselves in within their own country creates a strong case for identifying the Métis as having a "hybrid" culture and music. Jerrold Levinson explains how art forms can attain the "hybrid" status:

An art form is a hybrid one in virtue of its development and origin, in virtue of its emergence out of a field of previously existing artistic activities and concerns, two or more of which it in some sense combines. Hybrid artworks always manifest significant structural or dimensional complexity to be sure, but *that* they are hybrid works, and what *manner* of hybrids they are (i.e., what they are hybrids *of*), can be made clear only by reference to historical conditions at the time of creation and in terms of media that have already been constituted as such. The components of a putative hybrid must be locatable somewhere in the preceding culture and must be plausibly seen as having come together in the result. In short, *hybrid art forms are art forms arising from the actual combination or interpenetration of earlier art forms.* (Levinson 1984:6)

One of the problems with emphasizing the fact that Métis music is a hybrid, and therefore unique in that sense, is that it assumes that the two or more musical cultures that created this mix were "pure" in the first place. As I mentioned earlier, the European influences in Métis music appear to dominate over the native influences, but this does not signify that the native influences were not important in creating a new style of fiddling.

Kartomi suggests that a type of mixed or hybrid music can actually be a stronger one.

“The term ‘hybrid music’ might be defended in the light of the analogy with animal husbandry and agriculture, in which parent stocks are often mixed to create ‘hybrid strength’ that may work to the advantage of the offspring” (Kartomi 1981:229).

Unfortunately, throughout European history anything “mixed” was impure and tainted.

The purer the bloodline, the stronger the breed. This line of thought was brought over to

North America along with the Europeans who settled here, and in the United States,

where Métis do still exist, this duality is hardly recognized, let alone assigned a title.

Racial dualism seems deeply embedded in Anglo-American thought. Folk biology assigns people firmly, for example, to the category of either Black or White; the gradational distinctions found in Brazil and in some parts of the Caribbean never established themselves in American thinking. A similar duality has characterized American categories of Indian and White. Although the term “half-breed” threatened for some decades to become locally established in parts of the American Northwest, and although “mixed-bloods” form distinct groups of numerous American Indian reservations, there is no separate term in common American usage to designate people who combine the two ancestries. (Brown 1993:21)

It is evident nowadays that contrary to a once popular belief in racial purity, “mixed-breeding” in fact produces stronger breeds. Then why not apply this concept to music? By mixing musical cultures, by borrowing, sharing, adapting and adopting new musical techniques, a new vitality is added to a music that might have been destined to become a “dead music”. The point that I am trying to emphasize is that although Métis fiddling is indeed a synthesis of various cultural groups and could appear seemingly unstable or somehow “impure”, it is actually through this synthesis that a new strength and vitality is added to the music, as well as an endless amount of new possibilities in future musical creations.

3.3 Syncretism

According to the *Oxford Canadian Dictionary*, the linguistic definition of syncretism is “the merging of different inflectional varieties in the development of a language” (1998). What is appealing in this definition is the reference to “inflectional varieties” in the development of a hybrid language. This definition can be placed on music in terms of stylistic variations originating from differing musical traditions. Inflection also implies a subtle change. It could be something as simple as the attack on a note or the style of vibrato.

On the other hand, the 1840 definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines syncretism as “attempted union or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices”. In an interpretive definition, Merriam described syncretism as “the blending together of elements of two cultures, changing the original values and forms” (1964:313). A significant development to Merriam’s definition is the conclusion that syncretism essentially “changes the original values and forms.” As a music evolves in a new cultural setting, it is only natural for it to develop new meanings for its participants.

Merriam’s definition most accurately applies to Métis fiddling as it relates to its process of development. In the culture of music, there are values attached to music that are most readily understood by the participants of that culture. What is fascinating about Métis culture is the speed with which it solidified, which often occurred because of historical circumstances, and the unique blend of cultural values that it borrowed or created in this process. Because symbols are so important in unifying a culture, it is clear why traditions such as fiddling and the Michif language became cultural glue, so to speak. It is not simply the music that the fiddle produces that is the cultural glue, but the

symbols, the values and the social context that is attached to the production of this music. For instance, the fiddle for the Métis would have been associated with dancing, which would have been situated in an important social setting where friendships were made, families bonded, courtships began and competitions arose. In an account from Redbird's *We are the Métis* (1980), the following anecdote relays the importance of the fiddling tradition to Métis culture:

The spokesman for the British Columbia delegation disturbed by the inclusion of cultural activities at a convention whose theme was unity and aboriginal rights, stated, "Our homes are going to be torn up by pipelines, Hydro developments and various other things and we're fiddle-farting around with jigging contests. I just don't understand." Another delegate from Alberta responded immediately, "As far as jigging and contests-I'm for that. I'm a jigger, I'm a fiddler and I don't want any sucker to tell me that I can't do that at any time, any place. That's part of my culture and I'll fight anybody that says it's not part of my culture". (Redbird 1980:47)

For this man, fiddling and jigging was a deeply entrenched symbol of his culture and of his identity and to strip him of that would have been a step backwards in his fight for recognition. The Métis drew from numerous cultural sources in order to create and establish one that was set apart from both the First Nations people as well as the European settlers.

It appears that the definition of syncretism has changed over time and has taken on new roles in evolving fields. Kartomi suggests the word "synthesis" instead of syncretism in order to avoid any related connotation. I am interested in evaluating the usage as it is important to how one would apply it to Métis fiddling and culture.

Lederman freely uses the term syncretism in her thesis in order to illustrate the impact that native music and culture would have had on the development of Métis fiddling.

From her argument it is clear that there are definite examples of syncretism between both

European and native cultures. The strong influence of symmetrical bar lengths and standardization comes from the Anglo-Celtic standard. So where did the asymmetrical phrases come from then? Although asymmetry can be found in French Canadian fiddling, Lederman argues that Métis and Native fiddling was strongly influenced by Natives tribes, such as the Ojibwa and their song structures. She uses examples from an Ojibwa song called *One Wind*, which was recorded in the early 1900s.

There are strong similarities with *One Wind*, which suggest the concept of syncretism that Lederman discusses. For instance, the phrase lengths are also uneven, ranging from 5-7 beats, the intros and cadences are lengthened, the overall structure is a gradual descent and there is no fixed tuning. Lederman uses an Ojibwa example since this particular tribe is the one most closely related to the Métis fiddlers who she researched ¹, but she also suggests that many native groups, particularly from the plains, have similar song structures and stylistic features.

I will list some of the key stylistic features that she suggests are a result of syncretism. First, to iterate, phrases are often varying lengths within one tune; secondly, there are often uneven phrase groups within a particular motif, which is in direct contrast to Scots-Irish (or Anglo-Celtic) fiddling; thirdly, tunes don't always have the standard AA/BB form; fourthly, there are often extended intros and cadences; and lastly, the older tunes are often descending in nature, rather than ascending, unlike Anglo-Celtic tunes which normally have a "low" part and a "high" part. It is also important to note that there was no concept of tempered tuning (initially started with the inception of the piano), and fiddlers were by no means constrained to exact pitch.

¹ Lederman studied the Métis fiddlers of Ebb and Flow and Camperville, Manitoba.

In a recent article, Byron Dueck discusses similarities that he found in Métis and Native music in other areas of Manitoba. He supports Lederman's arguments that asymmetry, and irregularity in bar lengths and meter are found in much old time fiddling, as well as many songs (Dueck 2007:42). He continues by pointing out that Métis and Native fiddling are not the only traditions that display these characteristics, but the point is that these characteristics appear to be a unifying factor in Native fiddle traditions across North America. Dueck uses the example of *McAuley's Creek Breakdown*, played by Emile Spence, in order to illustrate the stylistic features of Aboriginal fiddling. According to Dueck, this tune represents a "series of musical gestures of uneven length" (ibid.:42) In the transcription of the tune, bar lines are not indicative of metrical units necessarily, but simply of chord changes. This is similar to the transcription that I will use for my analysis of *Drops of Brandy* later in this chapter.

Through the influence of modern music, many Métis fiddlers are standardizing the tunes in order to fit them into the broader genre. Andy Dejarlis was one of the first Métis fiddlers to begin making commercial recordings. He was born in Woodbridge, Manitoba in 1914 and came from a long line of Métis fiddlers. He became a household name amongst fiddlers, both within and without the Métis community, and won numerous fiddle championships. By the time he died in 1975, he had recorded 38 albums, and composed over 200 tunes. Dejarlis would "straighten out" the old fiddle tunes in order to make them appeal to a larger audience. Today, fiddlers such as John Arcand are taking the straightened out versions and making them "Métis" again. Dueck explains that one of the reasons for the changes in fiddle tunes nowadays is the change that is occurring in social context for fiddling:

In much of the traditional aboriginal ensemble music made in Manitoba, metrical irregularity points to intimate forms of musical acquaintanceship quite distinct from the stranger sociability characteristic of musical publics.... In contrast to public modes of musical acquaintanceship, which connect strangers to one another by means of recordings, music notation, tablature, and imagination, intimate familiarity developed in the context of face-to-face musical interaction. (Dueck 2007:44)

The original settings for musical interaction were, therefore, normally between family and friends and those who were completely familiar with each fiddler's idiosyncrasies, their personal styles of playing, rhythmic irregularities and their sense of time. As the setting for Métis fiddling changes, so does the opportunity for non-standardized tunes. The question that comes to mind with this issue, then, is how do these fiddle tunes remain "Métis" if they become standardized? If the rhythmic irregularity and asymmetrical phrases are characteristics of Métis fiddling, then what happens to the tradition if this changes? Are there other stylistic features that make a fiddle tune "Métis", or is it simply a matter of who is playing the fiddle, the repertoire that is played and the social setting in which it is played?

There are many Métis fiddle tunes that exemplify these stylistic qualities found in much First Nations music. The tune that I will examine in this chapter is titled *Drops of Brandy*, a common tune found at Métis gatherings. The transcription I will use is from the anthology of fiddle tunes that were transcribed by Trent Bruner.

3.4 Analysis of *Drops of Brandy*

There are as many versions and histories of *Drops of Brandy* as there are names for it. Some of the names include *Braoinini Brann*, *Drops of Whiskey*, *A Drop of Whiskey*, *New Drops of Brandy* and *Oh, Mary Take My Advice*. The Métis sometimes refer to it as *Le Brandy*, *The Hook Dance* or *La danse du crochet*. Its origins appear to be

in Scotland, but various tunes with similar titles are also found in Ireland and England. Most of the Anglo-Celtic versions are jigs, and are transcribed in either 6/8 or 9/8. In Scotland, the title of the tune described the manner which pipers were paid for their services at the end of the night. The “drops of brandy” left in the glasses was all the payment they would expect to receive (from: <http://www.betsyhooper.com/id5.html>.) The title and sometimes the key signature seem to be one of the only similarities to many of the Métis versions of the tune. B. explained the dance *Drops of Brandy* to me this way:

Drops of Brandy, from what I understand, it was a dance that was done to get everybody up and to introduce everybody. It was almost like a warm up dance where everybody, you know...talking as you're going. A lot of it is just swinging your partner...coming back to the centre, swinging your partner and going back to the other one, and in the meantime...it was a good way, people didn't feel uncomfortable dancing. It was just “hi, how are you?”. It was structured, it was just a social dance, I would call it.

I had the opportunity to participate in *Drops of Brandy* while attending a dance rehearsal, and it occurred just as B. described it. The dancers lined up on two sides and each couple took turns dancing down the line. The steps themselves didn't seem to matter as much as simply moving your body as much as you possibly could and as fast as you could in order to keep up with the musicians.

The Métis version of the tune is a reel, mostly in 2/4. Depending on the fiddler, the tune may shift to 3/4 at various points, but it remains in 2/4 for the most part. The version that I will discuss was played by the Métis fiddler Garry Lapine, with chords and notation by Trent Bruner. The form is the first indicator that this is not a typical Anglo-Celtic fiddle tune. The form goes as follows: AA, BB, CC, AA, BB, DD, EE; section A (which is also the introduction) consists of four bars, two in ¾, and two in 2/4. The ‘B’

section switches into a definitive 2/4, and has a repeated five-bar phrase². For a traditional, Anglo-Celtic fiddler, the third seems strangely out of place, a little off-kilter and slightly awkward. This is one of the characteristic moves of an old-time Métis fiddler. The 'C' section has new material, but follows the same general shape of the 'A' section. The typical return to the beginning commences with the familiar 'A' section followed by the 'B' section, but the surprise comes when instead of 'C', an entirely new 'D' section arrives and is rhythmically quite different than the three previous sections. 'D' is marked by four 16th notes in the first beat, followed by an 8th and two 16th notes (see figure 3.44). The 8th note creates a halt to the otherwise fluid and fast pace of this tune. Although this section is symmetrical in bar numbers, the fourth bar creates a direct break in the phrase and gives the impression of asymmetry.

Fiddle tunes are not known for their harmonic complexity and this tune is no different. It is set in the key of G, which is reaffirmed numerous times through the alternating V (or sometimes V7)-I chords that permeate the entire tune. IV chords are also interspersed throughout. Originally Métis fiddle music was completely unaccompanied, and therefore harmony was probably not a serious consideration for most fiddlers. It wasn't until accompanying instruments such as the guitar and the piano were introduced in the 1930s and 40s that chords were even added to many of these fiddle tunes.

Since the majority of fiddle tunes are harmonized by 2 or 3 chords, it's clear that these compositions fit within a harmonic framework, and this can be said for new fiddle tunes that are composed today. Although some tunes stray from the typical major or minor keys with few accidentals, there are always exceptions to the rule.

² In fiddle tunes all sections are normally repeated.

Figure 3.1 Transcription of *Drops of Brandy*

Drops of Brandy

Traditional-Based on a Reg Bouvette version
This melodic version from Garry Lapine
Chords and Notation by Trent Bruner

Chords and Notation by Trent Brun

Fiddle

5 11 17 21 27 33 39

A B D E

D7 G C G D7 G D7 G D7 G C G D7 G C G D7 G

D.S.

The melodic material in the 'A' section follows a standard rise and fall within each bar, but the overall phrase finishes a fourth higher than it started. Without exception every section ends on the tonic, specifically the 'G' within the staff, although this note is occasionally doubled by the lower octave.

Another significant aspect of fiddling that adds interest and unpredictability is its improvisatory nature. Rene explained how improvisation is an important part of what makes a tune Métis.

K: And when you started to improvise did you just play what sounded good to you or did people say "no, you should play it like this..."

R: It's mostly what sounded good to me, and then what I wanted to get out of it. Really, it's...I'm known to play double string. Double string...you know, double stop? And everybody said, and even with other fiddle players they said "You know, you're one of the only fiddle players that play double string all the time..." "Oh," I says. But there was a reason for that, because. having these fingers cut off³ and not knowing where to put my fingers...trying to memorize where to put my fingers, not by sound but memorize. If I had my finger here...am I in the right place? But if I put my other finger here and I harmonize...now if it doesn't harmonize I'm not on pitch. If it harmonize I'm on pitch, so I harmonize all my tunes, all my notes, I mean double string, right? And I got used to double string, double string everything. And people likes it because it has...in a tune if you gonna play a tune you gotta have...you gotta have a tune, you gotta have the drive. If there's no drive, you know, the tune is no good, and of course you've gotta have the Métis style and the drive in the tune otherwise your tune's not going to come out. So I try to double string and every time I can I put something in...a little, there's a name for it in French ...*des fions*, *fion* means...I'll think of it, what it means in English. It means, not slur your notes...it's, put feelings in it, I think..just little things. That's what *fion* means.

K: Or like adding little grace notes or things like that?

R: Could be grace notes, yah, I mean, it wouldn't be in the book, though, it's something that you would, you know, add, and one thing about playing by ear is everybody, take the *Red River Jig*, I don't think I've met one fiddle player that does the same. And I've met lots...let's say right off the bat, 10 or 15, and not one of them plays the same. And yet, they're all nice. They're all...if you gonna learn

³ The tips of Rene's fingers were cut off in a logging accident and he therefore couldn't feel his fingers on the fiddle strings but learned to adapt his style accordingly.

how to play you've gotta create your own style and there's, I've started with Don Messer and all them guys, but after a while, you just, I just wanted to do...and it just happens that I create my own double string, you know, and not putting that in, like a lot of fiddle players they run the bow and they shouldn't. So I guess I created my own, and I dunno...a lot of people says..."you're not the best fiddle player but I like what you do with it, I like your style." So, okay, you know.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter I attempted to place Métis fiddling and culture within a theoretical framework that would help to shed light on the complex musical and social processes of this people. It is evident that Métis fiddling is the result of a combination of musical and cultural factors, and it is therefore easy to attach to it terms such as hybrid or accultured. I discussed some of the possible implications of labelling a music as "mixed" or "hybrid", but in the 21st century, the mixing of culture and music is now beginning to be seen in the light of something positive and new, rather than something tainted and weak. I presented Gary Lapine's version of *Drops of Brandy* as an example of these combined cultural and musical traits, and in the following chapter I will further explore these qualities.

Chapter 4

The Red River Jig

4.1 History

The *Red River Jig*, or *Oayache Mannin* as it is called in Michif, is often referred to as the unofficial Métis anthem and symbolizes the unity that is created by the music and dance of the Métis. Although there are hundreds of versions of this jig, it is still recognizable in all its forms and it is the most played, danced to and celebrated of all Métis fiddle tunes. In this chapter I hope to uncover the aspects of this tune that have made it such an emblem for the Métis over the past two centuries.

There are as many histories of the *Red River Jig* as there are ways of playing it, and both are a challenge to record. It seems to have appeared in the mid-19th century, and became a hit with the Métis from the Red River colony all the way from James Bay to the North West Territories and Alaska (Whidden 2001:171). From the many stories that I found, three histories appeared most frequently and are widely circulated concerning the jig.

In an account of the *Red River Jig* from the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 1966 the story goes as follows:

The tune, first played on the strings of a fiddle that had been bought with furs, was born at the Forks, where the Red and Assiniboine Rivers meet. Here the melody that was to express the heart of the Red River came into being in far-off years when the first people settled along the Red-Scots on the west bank, French and Métis on the east...In the early years, so the story continues, Scots used to sit by the river on fine evenings and listen to the music of the bagpipes. Often the folk across the water listened, too. One night, in springtime, a man over on the east bank fingered the bow of his fiddle, then played a cadence slowly, in

imitation of the pipes. He listened, then repeated the strain. There was a sadness in the thread of the melody, a yearning for home across the waste of the seas. So then-because it was spring and the river was open, and because the prairie was wakening into new, green life-he brought his bow down on the string and swung into a rollicking beat. So infectious was the rhythm that people nearby began to dance. 'And thus', Andy De Jarlis says, '*The Red River Jig* was born'-that tantalizing melody, with its mild, irrepressible gaiety combined with a haunting undercurrent of sadness. (from *Drops of Brandy* 2002:19, originally by Mary Mindess in *The Winnipeg Free Press* 1966)

A similar story is told in the documentary *How the Fiddle Flows* (2002) of a group of Voyageurs that were camping on the river one night when a bagpiper's tune came floating across the water from a nearby Scottish settlement. A fiddler was among the group of voyageurs and as he listened to the tune he began to play it, but changed it and made it his own. Fairly soon another voyageur stood up and began to create new dance steps to the tune, and thus the *Red River Jig* came into existence.

Another possibility is that the *Red River Jig* was originally the French Canadian tune *La Grande Gigue Simple* or *La gigue du Bas Canada* (The Jig from Lower Canada), which was altered over the years into the present day *Red River Jig*. Roy W. Gibbons used twenty different recordings in order to compare these two tunes and discover if their identities were similar. Gibbons found that both tunes were created from two sections of unequal length, the first being played on the high strings and the second on the low strings (Gibbons 1980:1). There are also marked differences, such as the differing meters of the tunes, the symmetric phrases found in *La grand gigue simple* as opposed to the asymmetric ones found in the *Red River Jig* and the contrasting opening patterns. It is natural for repertoire in a particular genre, particularly the folk genre, to be very similar to its brother and sister tunes or even its cousin tunes, therefore it is difficult to say if one tune is the originator of another or not. The very nature of oral tradition creates hundreds

of possibilities for the histories of tunes. It is, therefore, nearly impossible to prove that one of these histories of the *Red River Jig* is in fact the “truth”, but it is likely that the tune originated from a combination of factors described in each story.

In another account from *The Beaver*, there is yet another possible story of the *Red River Jig*:

You danced the *Red River Jig*, the *Soldier's Joy*, *McDonald's Reel*, the *Buffalo Girls*, the *Rabbit Dance*, *Six and Eight Hand Reels*, the *Duck Dance*, and the *Four-Hand Reel*, took a rest and danced again... Genthom was 82 when he was asked to play his fiddle so that a recording of the beloved jig of early Red River would be forever preserved, to keep intact another link with pioneer days... Genthom's explanation of the origin of the *Red River Jig* that he (Fred) learned the jig from his father who in turn had learned it in Winnipeg after it had been brought west from Montreal soon after the advent of the 1800's.
(Randall 1942:17)

This claim by Genthom was disputed by Mr. Patrick Pronteau, who claimed to have heard the tune at a wedding in 1860, written and played by the fiddler Mr. Macdallas and named by Father Brocher (Bolton 1961:1). As I mentioned, the number of stories and versions of the *Red River Jig* simply reflect the qualities of oral tradition as a means of recording history. These particular histories are simply moments in time, glimpses of what could have been the origin of a tune, or possible historical settings for the creation of like tunes. Change was inevitable, and is also a necessary part of the folk tradition, contrary to popular beliefs:

A remarkable range of cultural, musical and psychological factors animates and stems the processes of change in oral tradition. Whereas theories of folk music transmission stressing replication attribute change to flaws in perception or memory, it seems more likely that a number of factors combine to forge the direction of change. Psychological factors inevitably have ramifications in musical structure; cultural factors may lead to specific psychological attitudes toward change. (Bohlman 1988:19)

Folk traditions represent two different perspectives: that of a tradition frozen in time, a people only at a particular point in history; and that of a tradition passed on via broken telephone, and apt to constant change and constant flux. It is very possible that the original version of the *Red River Jig* hardly resembles the current versions played across the country. When I asked B. about learning the dances and about the history of the *Red River Jig*, she confirmed that it was all through oral tradition.

B: No no, it was all by memory...because I'm a dancer I totally honour our fiddle players and our musicians because without them...I could never dance. It was their own style, and the style goes...the one story that I have heard is that there was Scotsman on one side of the river and there was actually some Scotchman playing the bagpipes on one side and on the other side of the river there was some Métis people and what happened is they were sitting around, right and the bagpipe started playing and the thing blowing through the trees...there was a windy day, and as it came through the trees it put breaks in the music so the fiddle player on the other side, that's where they got the choppy, they started playing the fiddle and it was choppy, it wasn't coming through real smooth like the fiddle is a long...classical style is a long bow. Métis music...fiddle is very choppy and there's always a 1-2-3, 1-2-3, breaks in the music, and that's how the Red River and Métis fiddle...so they say...the legend of it is that it came through the wind...blowing through the trees and that's how they got the break...and they picked up the fiddle and that's where they started jigging, the one guy got up and started jigging and that's how the *Red River Jig* apparently started so, that's just one...that made sense. To me it made sense how it came about.

From this description it is clear that this particular history, no doubt told to her through family and friends, was the one that fit with her cultural upbringing and her own set of beliefs. To use Bohlman's terminology, the "psychological and cultural factors" that shaped B.'s understanding of the tune as well as the dance also reflected her beliefs about what made Métis fiddling unique. The "choppiness" that she describes, in this case created from the wind blowing through the trees, creates a vivid imagery of Métis fiddling, reminiscent of a gifted story-teller. Story telling is a significant aspect in the oral traditions of the Métis as well as the First Nations people (from *How the Fiddle Flows*

2002). Rene mentioned that all fiddle tunes had stories: “To me I think every fiddle tune that my mother used to hum, there was a song and a story to it, and the fiddle came...after. I don’t think it was the fiddle, and then the story, and then the song”

In any case, whether the *Red River Jig* came from a Scottish piper, a French Canadian fiddler, or from the Red River settlement itself, it became a musical symbol of the unification of the Métis people and is still today the most famous Métis fiddle tune.

4.2 Analysis of the *Red River Jig*: An Introduction

I will first examine the general structures and features found in the *Red River Jig*, and then contrast and compare two different versions found in the *Drops of Brandy* anthology. It is important to first note that all Métis fiddle music is inextricably connected to the dance tradition and is normally played for that purpose. If a tune doesn’t make you want to get up on your feet and dance, then chances are it’s not a Métis fiddle tune. The *Red River Jig* epitomizes this ideal, and therefore a full analysis of it must include a discussion of the dance. Although I do not have an expertise in dance, I will describe the basic steps and formations that are relevant and necessary for a comprehensive study of the *Red River Jig*. Also, the transcriptions that I will use as an analytical tool are by no means the only versions by each fiddler. The transcriptions represent one version of the jig, from one performance transcribed by one person. Due to the improvisatory nature that I described in the previous chapter, tunes vary, not only from fiddler to fiddler, but also from performance to performance or even moment to moment. One of the markers of a true fiddler is his ability to embellish, improvise and

make a tune his own, every time he plays. This is yet another factor that makes it nearly impossible to find an “authentic” version of the *Red River Jig*.

4.3 Defining a Jig

First of all, it is interesting to note that although this fiddle tune is called a jig it does not necessarily follow the musical characteristics of one. According to the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998), a jig is “a. a lively dance with springs and hops b. the music for this, usually in triple time.” Generally jigs are in compound time, most often in 6/8, 9/8 or 12/8. The three most common types of jigs are the single jig or slide (in 6/8), the slip jig (in 9/8) and the double jig (continuous eighth notes in 6/8). The general overall structure is two repeated sections in an AA/BB form. This may vary from tune to tune, but as a beginner, fiddle players quickly become familiar with playing each section twice, with little variation from this in the standard tunes. Often tunes will also start slightly lower, or in the mid-range of the fiddle, and in the ‘B’ section they will move to the upper strings. In a session, tunes will be strung together in tune families, such as three reels played in succession, or jigs, etc. The repetitive nature of fiddle tunes allows a flexible timeline for accompanying dances, as well as the opportunity for other fiddlers to pick up new tunes more easily by ear. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, fiddle tunes tend to stay within the key of ‘G’ or ‘D’, and sometimes ‘A’, in order to facilitate the use of open strings, as well as allow the fiddlers to remain in first position. The use of open strings also enables a fiddler to freely use double stops in order to fill out his sound. In fiddling, hitting another string accidentally can be a new innovation.

4.4 Red River Tuning

Before even picking up his fiddle to play the *Red River Jig*, the fiddler normally tunes the 'G' string of his fiddle up to an 'A' on the lowest string, giving him the ability to create a drone like quality, not unlike the sound of a Scottish bagpipe. It is not necessary to tune the G string up, which I've learned through playing a version of the tune myself, but the majority of Métis fiddlers will tune up to give them the option of creating that drone and freely using double stops. Essentially, though, it is entirely up to the fiddler.

Kristi: Now, for instance in the Red River Jig you have to tune one of the strings up, don't you?

R: Now you can. You don't have to because if I'm playing on stage, like tonight, I'm playing one tune, then I jump up on *Red River Jig*, then I don't stop I jump on another one and if...I would have to..(K: *Yah, you'd have to stop*). But you tune the G to an A, so that gives you two A's on there. Somebody wrote it or played it with the G tuned to an A, because it was his style and I don't. I've done it a few times, turned it down, down, down, but you're using it as a drone. There's no fingers on it because...it's got that low drone, right? Because you gonna go down from the G, you going to an A, so you're using it as a drone, and I do it...I've done it, but in dances, it's not recommended, I don't think. If you were listening, you could tell the difference, you know, but I would play my style and say "oh that one's good too, and that one's good too" so really, to me they're all good. It doesn't matter if it's G tuned to an A or if you leave it the same. I leave it the same because once my fiddle's tuned I keep it in tune. With my ears, oh, I could tune it, but quite fussy, you know. Because tuners are so cheap now, everybody should be able to afford a tuner. And I keep tuning...another thing too that people are doing...they're actually playing through their tuners. You know, you've got a tuner, you plug in, you plug out, go to your amp, and while you're playing your stuff you could actually see. Otherwise you're just....chchchc...tune it.

According to Rene, tuning the 'G' to and 'A' is not important, especially in the middle of a dance, when a fiddler doesn't have much time to tune. For many of the old-time

fiddlers, tuning would have been an issue, especially before the technology of tuners. Before pianos and guitars, what would they have had to tune their fiddles against? It was all done by ear and by feel, and naturally some interesting tunings must have resulted. Rene remembered having his fiddle tuned early on in his fiddle career and instead of re-tuning, he would slowly move his fingers on the finger board in order to stay in tune. Nowadays his adapted finger position sometimes makes it a challenge for him to tune to other players. Also, with the advent of amplification it is not as necessary to use double stops in order to fill out the sound of the fiddle.

4.5 Form

In this analysis I will examine two different transcriptions of the *Red River Jig* by two well-known Métis fiddlers, John Arcand and Emile Lavallee. This is not to say that these particular versions are more important than any of the others, but they are two versions that exemplify particular stylistic qualities that I would like to discuss. Also, I have had the opportunity to see John Arcand perform his version, and felt that it would be beneficial to have one version from a fiddler that I was familiar with. The *Drops of Brandy* anthology contains 13 different recordings of the jig, this being the one tune that is consistently found in each of the 11 fiddlers' set lists. Evidently, from the numbers, there are two fiddlers who have two different recordings of the jig within their sets.

The *Red River Jig* (see figures 4.55-4.56) consists of two contrasting sections that are directly related to what is occurring in the dance. There is a short, 2-3 bar introduction (the length depends on the fiddler), which normally consists of double stops between 'A' and 'E', as well as the dotted eighth-sixteenth pattern which is found

throughout the rest of the tune. The first section is the 'high part', and remains for the most part on the upper strings, while the second section sticks to the bottom two strings. This is in direct contrast to Scots-Irish fiddling, where the lower part is normally played first. As Lederman points out, this is due to the First Nations influence on the fiddling tradition (Lederman 1988:208). Through her analysis of Ojibwa songs, she found that they have the tendency of starting in the higher range and gradually work their way down. The traditional dance formations are often circular, and this can be found in the Métis tradition. The circle has always been a significant shape for many First Nations people:

Regarded as the most basic shape in nature—the shape and path of the earth, sun, moon and stars; the trees' rings; the footprint of a tipi, the motion of a sound wave or a ripple produced when a stone is thrown in the water, the limbs of the body as well as the head (to name some instances)—circularity is a basic tenet of Anishnabe and Innu thinking and living...A central icon for Haudenosaunee is the symbol of a circle of chiefs, holding hands, encircling the tree of peace—an image made tangible by the chiefs' wampum, a circle of shells which represents the confederacy of the Six Nations. (Diamond, Cronk & von Rosen 1994:127)

Many fiddle tunes have a feeling of continuity, and easily slide from one section back to the next, but with the *Red River Jig* this is particularly noticeable. The first section starts on the upper two strings of the fiddle and the tune is initially harmonized with an A major chord, and displays an A major key signature, according to Bruner's transcription. Interestingly, the only 'G's that are played are natural, therefore diminishing 'A' as a tonal focus. The overall tonal centre of the tune appears to be D major, but the emphasis on 'D' is stronger in Lavallee's version than in Arcand's version in the B section (although they are both clearly centered in D).

The B section is on the lower two strings and because of this has a much more grinding and deep sound. On the fiddle, especially a homemade one, the upper strings

have a tendency to squeak and sound tinny and shallow, whereas the lower strings often sound like a fiddler has dipped his bow in molasses. This analogy does not reflect the speed of the *Red River Jig*, as the tempo is normally very quick and upbeat. It is difficult to assign the *Red River Jig* a time signature, as each fiddler's versions are each so irregular in their bar lengths and timings. It has a duple feel with a strong beat every other beat, but the length of the opening and closing has no standardization. The closest thing to a standard from of the *Red River Jig* in the world of Métis fiddling is the version by Andy Dejarlis, one of the most well-known Métis fiddlers in history who I briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. Through his many recordings, he would play Métis fiddle tunes but "straightened them out" in the process. He altered the tradition in order to make it more acceptable to the public. ("*Red River Jig*" in *Andy Dejarlis and His Early Settlers* London EB 44, nd.)

In Arcand's version, the 'B' section creates an impression of instability through never fully developing a musical phrase. This could be caused by short and "choppy" phrases, such as in bar 10 and 11. In bar 11 the sixteenth note pattern is stopped suddenly in the middle of the bar by the eighth note. This starting and stopping pattern is repeated six times before it changes slightly to lead back into the 'A' section. In the Emile Lavallee version the phrase is slightly more fluid, as is shown in bars 13 and 16. Depending on the version, in the 'B' section there are often two short phrases that give the impression of returning to 'A', but then quickly move back down to the lower strings. The last time that the material from bar 10 returns in Arcand's version (now in bar 19) the fiddler returns to 'A', and this allows the jiggers a rest before trying their fancy steps again.

Figure 4.1 Transcription of the *Red River Jig*--John Arcand Version

The Red River Jig

Traditional
Version by John Arcand
Chords and Notation by Trent Bruner

Intro-Tacet **A** A

Fiddle

5

10

16

22

3

3

3

3

Figure 4.2 Transcription of the *Red River Jig*—Emile Lavallee Version

The Red River Jig

Traditional
This version by Emile Lavallee
Notation by Trent Bruner

Fiddle

5

10

15

To Coda

D

4.6 The Dance

Traditionally, the dancing began with two dancers standing approximately six feet apart, facing each other. There could have been a line of partners, or simply one couple. The jig was a type of challenge, and determined who could out dance the other. In a personal account with a member of the Métis nation, I was told that sometimes the Métis sash would be thrown at the feet of a dancer, as a challenge, and the challenged dancer

was forced to accept or admit defeat. If the challenge was accepted the dancers would create as many “fancy steps” as they could until one of the dancers finally gave up (personal communication with Bruce Dumont, 2006).

Each section in the jig marks a change in dance steps and dancers know exactly when to shift as they hear the contrast in pitches. For the dancers, the first section consists of a standard jig step, reminiscent of Scots-Irish jigging, combined with aspects of pow-wow dance formations. The goal is for the dancer to keep their upper bodies as still as possible, while their legs do the work. The dancers begin by throwing themselves into the jig step. Nowadays, in performances the dancers will often all be in a line while they dance the jig step, and when the shift occurs, individual dancers or pairs will step forward to perform their challenge or fancy steps. The fancy steps involve rapid foot movement and as elaborate moves as they are able to dance. I’ve heard a plethora of numbers for the amount of fancy steps known by one dancer ranging from 30-75, but I have yet to find a member of the Métis community who knows positively that a certain amount of steps exist. It becomes even harder to pin down when you take into account the improvisatory nature of the dancing as well. Some of the steps that can be found in the *Red River Jig* are as follows:

1. Back step four times
2. Front step four times. Double.
3. Triple tap four times. Single.
4. Triple tap four times.
5. Triple tap four times, accented right.
6. Triple tap four times, accented left.
7. Triple tap four times, accented right and left.
8. Triple tap four times, accented double.
9. Time tap.
10. Cross over hand clasp with triple tap.
11. Right tap turn.
12. Triple tap four times.

13. Double tap four times.
 14. Heel toe step four times, right foot.
 15. Heel toe step four times, left foot.
 16. Heel toe step four times, double.
- (Bolton 1961:1)

Although there are certain steps expected in each type of Métis dance, there is also flexibility, similar to that found in fiddling, which allows a dancer to create their own steps. B. described what dancing meant to her and how it is essential to have a connection with the music, in order to truly feel the spirit of Métis dancing:

You can take the basics of any dance, and that's jigging and *Drops of Brandy* or anything. There's the basics and there's your own way of doing it. You can change everything in the dance and lots of communities did that. Because when I was growing up that's all I heard, "That's not the way to dance!" And of course, I quit dancing because of that. I was always criticized that my style was different. So now I teach..."you dance the way...I'll show you the basics and you take it and put your own personality in it. I want you to be who you are." And some people that are teaching and training for dancing and stuff, there's more...keeping timing. There's timing in these traditional dances that they have at Batoche. A lot of it they watch the feet and they watch the timing of the music and they watch all that. If you want to get a dance group, that's fine, but I just go out there and teach them to have fun and because of what I went through I have to teach it that way. I have to teach...just have fun. Forget about that there's people watching you...maybe your ancestors are watching you (laughs)! Every community had a different way of doing things, and there's no right way and there's no wrong way, even for fiddle music and dancing or anything like that....And so the *Red River Jig* is another story. So, I teach that way too. That for the *Red River Jig* I teach that a long time ago they did...sometimes they didn't have fiddlers and they didn't have the music so they would hum. They would hum....what's that little French way..."dee da dee dedeleetle leetle leet." They would put their babies on their lap.

[A comment from the background: *Yah they would come and they would make a beat. Or use spoons.*]

B: yah, they'd use spoons...anything...washboards, spoons...anything. And that's their instruments...anything to entertain or get the kids and that's where the bounce comes too, from your kids...they'd always practice with the kids, put them on your lap and just bounce, bounce, bounce. And I teach that way too, you know, baby steps and you go up and up and up and lots of times I use my hands on the floor to show them the *Red River Jig* and then I'll graduate to a chair and then I go from a ...even having an air band when you're teaching and that. Just

because music...fiddle music...that's why I honour these fiddlers is because, you have to feel, in order to dance you have to feel the music. You can't just go out there and dance. I like to see people do their own individual thing. But if you don't...when you teach dancing if you don't try and capture them...if you don't try and reunite the fiddle with the spirituality of the music and feel that music, you're not teaching...to me, there's something missing. And to me when I'm dancing, I say that "Dancing is like dreaming with your feet". And when I heard that phrase it was just like..."that's me", because it's just like, I can't do it without doing it that way. You have to connect, there's got to be a connection with the music because too many times you're just thrown out there and okay, here's your fancy steps...there's no feeling in it. And to me, Métis music and fiddling is so spiritual and I still hear my brother in law, we lost him, Howard Lasotte. I still hear him and Art Burd, we lost him too, and they were very special to me. Not to hear that music...you can hear it, you can still hear it when I dance, even when other fiddle players are playing. I can still hear them. So, to me the fiddle player and listening to the fiddle is ...there's got to be a connection there.

B.'s connection between herself as a dancer and the fiddlers is crucial to her "authentic" experience. When music and dance are so essentially connected, are they able to stand as strongly on their own? Do the fancy steps ever become more important than the music and vice versa?

The speed of the dance depends entirely on the fiddler, the abilities of the dancer and the individual situation. Some of the recorded versions that I listened to are incredibly fast-paced and naturally would be much more challenging for the dancers. The point of the dance isn't simply to be able to quickly dance through each movement, but to show intricate steps and a feel for the music. In the following chapter I will more closely explore the competition that exists at festivals nowadays and what impact this has on the dancing tradition. As I mentioned, the formations found in the dance have influences from pow-wow dances. Don McLean whimsically describes this fascinating account of the potential multi-cultural origins of the dance:

In the intricate steps of the *Red River Jig*, moccassined feet created patterns of rhythm borrowed a thousand years ago by the Plains Indians from the incredible mating dance of the male prairie chicken, a dance so full of wild and perfect

rhythm that once seen can never be forgotten. In the wild skirl of the Métis fiddle the mind's eye can also detect the swirl of the kilts and the panorama of the brilliant Highland plaids. One can also see the flourish of the full black skirts and the bright homespun shirts of the Quebec *habitants*, as rich and full-bodied in the spirit as their homemade maple syrup. So much social prestige was bound up in one's ability to jig well at Métis social events that tongue-in-cheek stories abound concerning those who sold their souls to Lucifer in return for power to out-fiddle and out-dance all other competitors. (McLean 1989:1)

Dancing was originally part of the frequent house parties that were held by Métis families throughout a community and were the social settings for young men and women to meet and flirt under the cautious glances of their parents. Dancers would wear moccasins on their feet instead of step shoes, although nowadays you can see both, and would dress colourfully and proudly in order to attract the attentions of the opposite sex (from *How the Fiddle Flows* 2002). The Métis were known for their beautiful beadwork, and for decorating everything from moccasins and dresses to horse-drawn sleds and saddle pads (Harrison 1985: 27).

As the house parties died out and other forms of music became popular, the venue for dancing changed from houses to festivals and official celebrations. The dancing was no doubt influenced by the change of venue, and its very function changed. One feature that seems to have remained constant throughout this period of flux is the inter-generational participation. Dancers from three years old to ninety-three years old still participate in dance. The strong family bonds, and the inclusion of all ages among the Métis, is very similar to many First Nations groups. Dancing is not the right of only the young and agile. Old-time dancers, just like the fiddlers, are held in high regard for their historical knowledge as keepers of the old traditions.

4.7 Summary

What makes a particular tune an anthem? Is it possible to conclusively say why it is that the *Red River Jig* has remained so widely popular for the Métis and will this always remain so? Certainly, many fiddle tunes have unique histories, but it is possible that the historical timing of the *Red River Jig* played an important role in its initial popularity. As I mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, it appeared in the mid-19th century, at a time when Métis pride was finally blossoming amidst the political turmoil of this newly developing country. It came at a time when national pride was becoming an important concept for those who considered themselves Métis, and having a jig named after the influential and geographically and politically important Red River region created a musical beacon that any Métis could associate themselves with. Its unique synthesis of Scottish, French and First Nations styles created something distinct that became a symbol of this new culture. Its rhythmic drive, asymmetrical phrases and endless variations make it musically interesting and worth preserving. The strength of this tune is also cemented by its strong ties to the dance, and the significant role both of these had within their social context. The setting for the *Red River Jig* has shifted over time, but it has remained important to the Métis, a fact that can be seen at any gathering or festival, and on any recording of Métis fiddle tunes.

Chapter 5

The Future of Métis fiddling

5.1 Self-Recognition and the Government

What does it mean to be Métis today? Who considers themselves Métis? Does the Métis fiddling tradition have a future? In this final chapter I will explore the current state of the Métis as a peoples in Canada, and how recognition from the government has allowed a resurgence of culture. Although I will be discussing various political actions and organizations that exist or existed, I will not have the opportunity to explore this aspect of the Métis in much depth. The information that I will discuss will give an overview of what is currently happening, and how this impacts Métis culture and music.

Until 1983 the Métis were part of the Native Council of Canada, but at this point they separated themselves in order to form the Métis National Council. This new organization hoped to be able to improve the situation for the Métis and encourage the government to recognize their rights. According to the Métis National Council website, the estimated population of registered Métis is approximately 350,000-400,000. Recently the rules for registering as a Métis have become stricter. Now, in accordance with the council, "Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation" (2002: www.metisnation.ca/who/definition.html). Slowly, more and more people are discovering their Métis roots and finding that their histories were often hidden due to discrimination. I have spoken to many Métis who had no knowledge of their background

or nationality until much later in their lives. Their parents or grandparents hid their identity, often passing themselves off as French or various other European nationalities. It was not acceptable to acknowledge this side, but nowadays this is changing and many people across Western Canada are discovering their missing heritage.

In 1982 the Métis were finally recognized as one of the three Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Section 35 of the Constitution Act re-affirmed First Nations and Inuit rights but significantly it added the Métis as one of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. The event that tested the integrity of this Act came in 2003 through the well-known Powley court case.

In the words of the court:

The respondents, who are members of a Métis community near Sault Ste. Marie, were acquitted of unlawfully hunting a moose without a hunting license and with knowingly possessing game in contravention of s.46 and 47(1) of Ontario's *Game and Fish Act*. The trial judge found that the members of the Métis community in and around Sault Ste. Marie, have under section 35(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, an Aboriginal right to hunt for food that is infringed without justification by the Ontario hunting legislation. The Superior Court of Justice and the Court of Appeals upheld the acquittals. (R. vs. Powley 2003, SCC 43)

This seemingly small victory has helped to bring further recognition from the federal and provincial governments and helped to boost the resurgence of Métis culture. It was an important step in establishing the Métis as one of the founding peoples of Canada, entitled to rights they had long been denied. Since the *Constitution Act* of 1982, and events such as the Powley case, the Métis Nation has begun to regain strength and a national sense of unity and pride. It is no longer taboo to call yourself Métis. B. explained how self-identification and recognition from the government is opening new doors for the Métis youth, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

B: But I find that our Métis are still getting lost. I really want to focus on that. I really would love to go and teach over there in the Aboriginal centre and that ...what happens is, we end up getting more First Nations children and I find

that...the Métis are still getting left out. So I think what my focus is going to be is staying with Métis locals and doing the dancing in Métis local offices or wherever it is. And phoning the Métis on their youth lists. And now I know...I'm getting out there to the Métis youth because there's still a lot of them that are out...even with the parents...am I First Nations or am I Métis? There's still a lot of confusion whereas when you go to the Métis locals they've got their citizenship, they've got their card...they're recognized by the Métis local. There's a self-identification there, and I figure that by promoting that and keep going. The direction that the Métis Nation is going is...I'm so happy for it because there's a structure there and we can finally get the kids saying "yah, we are Métis" and not like "I'm not sure". So that's going to make a big difference. They're so structured with the new Métis Nation Governance. The way everything is set up. It's going to make the kids and the government pay more attention to us because there's plenty of them out there, and they had a conference and I think it was the first or second time they had invited the Métis as a different Aboriginal group. I was so proud of that. So, like I say, we're all in it for the same reasons. We want our kids to be proud of who we are. What difference does it make if you're First Nations you say "I'm proud to be First Nations" or you say "I'm proud to be Métis" or "I'm proud to be Inuit". Our children need to know who they are and they need...that's going to make a difference in who they are when they grow up.

So, how is this pride being transmitted and established? Some of the avenues include: education, youth programs, festivals and gatherings and through passing on the musical traditions. The old time Métis fiddlers have a huge responsibility to teach younger generations traditional styles before they're lost. Since the majority, if not all of these fiddlers, do not read or write music, all the teaching must be done orally, either through direct one-on-one contact or through recordings. The problem, of course, with recordings is that a young fiddler learns just one version of a tune from a very particular performance. Many fiddlers will play Andy Dejarlis's version of the *Red River Jig* from a specific recording, and consequently 100 young fiddlers are learning the exact same version. From the research I've conducted, it's clear that a true Métis fiddler has to be able to make a tune his own, and embellish and improvise extensively.

K: Do you find that the music, the traditional Métis fiddle tunes does it connect the young audience as well? Do you find that the young Métis are picking it up or is it becoming an old tradition?

R: Well, to me I think definitely they're picking it up because right now they're ...well, the Métis at one time they weren't quite recognized. It's only the last 20 years so now as the cultural minister, there's more workshops. Even our language, the Michif language, there's workshops now and there's more people that's picking up the fiddle, even across Canada. Manitoba, I think, last time I talked to the president there he had bought about 100 fiddles and he gave it to all the schools for the young kids to have an opportunity to learn the Métis style fiddling. Otherwise people...you gotta start young. I started a little too old, you know about 15, 16, but I still enjoy it and I found time after work just to keep up, and keep the energy up and it has to be in your blood. They didn't have to coax me to practice at night or even now, I've been in that room now for two days, and I'm fine playing all day. I could sit there...it's actually...how I do it, is I let my mind wander, on the fiddle. And you'd be surprised what...I guess that's where song comes from. You know you just play...oh, that's a nice little piece, do it again and it could be a tune, right? But anyway, I do that once in a while, yah.

Members of the Métis community such as B. and Rene are essential to maintaining and furthering fiddling and dance traditions. Through their passion for their traditions, and their love of music and dance, they encourage future generations to involve themselves in their cultural practices. Like B. mentioned, involvement in dance and music allows the youth to do something productive with their free time, and can help to keep them away from the temptations of alcohol and drugs that so many youth unfortunately become involved with.

5.2 The Vancouver Métis Community

The Métis community in Greater Vancouver consists of about 12,000 scattered all around the lower mainland. The Métis in this region often gather during festivals, conferences, workshops, dance rehearsals and within the Métis organizations. Many

performers will also travel across Western Canada to attend various festivals and therefore have a chance to meet members of Métis communities throughout the country.

The Métis Nation BC headquarters is located downtown in a beautiful 9th floor office building overlooking the ocean, also home to the CEO of MNBC ⁴, the president, and a variety of other employees. Incidentally, all of my contacts were in one way or another connected to or working for MNBC, and strong supporters of this organization. Due to their involvement with MNBC they are also promoters of their culture, and leaders in their communities.

Although B.C. has one of the smaller Métis populations in Western Canada, it is still a vibrant community that promotes the traditional arts in its various organizations. Just recently I stepped outside on my lunch break in downtown Vancouver to find a Métis festival going on right outside my door. The stage was set for the fiddlers and dancers, there were booths with First Nations and Métis art, there was a historical booth explaining who the Métis are and where they come from, and there was even a medicine wheel with numerous onlookers involved. Slowly but surely they are emerging within their communities and letting the public know that Métis culture is alive and well.

5.3 From the House to the Stage: Changing Venues

During the last century traditional venues for Métis fiddling and dance have changed from houses to festivals and various other gatherings. Although old-time dances are still held in towns across Western Canada, it appears that the future stage for these traditions is not necessarily at a community hall. Instead, fiddling and dancing can be found on the stage of festivals such as *Back to Batoche*, *Aboriginal Days*, *Festival du*

⁴ All of my informants referred to the Métis Nation BC as MNBC.

Voyageur, Red River West, Festival du Bois, the John Arcand Fiddle Fest, the Métis Arts Festival, the Calvin Vollrath Fiddle Camp, Treaty days, ceremonies, and many more.

The shift that occurred from house-based performances to stage performances effected the fiddling tradition on many levels. At house parties, the qualities that were most important in a fiddler were not necessarily the same as those that are found at competitions or festivals. Dueck discusses the shift found in the playing of the Frontier Fiddlers, a group of Aboriginal and Métis musicians, at the *Festival du Voyageur* in Winnipeg:

But the performance stood at some remove from the intimate rural sociability it celebrated in a number of respects. First, and perhaps most obviously, the intimacies being performed for the audience were not exactly “kitchen country music”: the students might perform such tunes at dances or in their homes, but it was clear that they had learned them at school, under the tutelage of instructors who did not necessarily hail from their communities. (Dueck 2007:37)

Thus one of the results is a repertoire that does not always reflect the origins of the fiddler. Traditionally a fiddler’s style and repertoire were indicators of his town or region of origin, but now as young players learn many different tunes from diverse areas in Canada they can no longer be associated with one geographical region. Does this have an impact on the fiddling tradition? On the one hand, it has the ability to cross boundaries of distance and sociability that would have impeded the sharing of certain styles in earlier years. When a large group of people are connected through a particular repertoire it immediately builds a relationship that could possibly not have been formed before. The original relationships of kinship and neighbours within a performance setting shifted to strangers — albeit mainly Métis or First Nations ones — and fellow musicians, or, in Dueck’s words, “the performance also brought together fiddlers who may never have seen one another or played together before; thus in some respects, the musical intimacy

on display may have been a sudden one between former strangers...the performance oriented the musical intimacies of rural indigenous life to a public of strangers; it took place in a venue that was open to all comers" (Dueck 2007:37).

The new venue, therefore, allows for a wider range of audience members who are not always Métis or First Nations and may have very different musical and cultural backgrounds. Is the music then communicated differently? It is highly likely that the majority of the audience have past experiences with the particular music performed, and are very familiar with the standard tunes that are played at such events, but the factor of a "complete outsider" attending a performance changes the dynamics to some degree. Another feature of the new performance venue is that it allows styles from particular areas to be changed and influenced at a much higher rate, thereby slowly moulding each style into a more standardized form, or incorporating musical styles that change the social meaning of the music (Bohlman 1988:59).

A significant aspect of festivals are the competitions that are now becoming prevalent throughout these gatherings. There are competitions for jigging and fiddling within a plethora of categories. This immediately raises the bar for performance standards, and encourages young fiddlers or dancers to become more technically proficient, as well as quick fingered (or footed). On the down side, competition has the potential to destroy individuality and the joy that is experienced in the music and dance.

B: You can take the basics of any dance, and that's jigging and *Drops of Brandy* or anything. There's the basics and there's your own way of doing it. You can change everything in the dance and lots of communities did that. Because when I was growing up that's all I heard, "That's not the way to dance!" And of course, I quit dancing because of that. I was always criticized that my style was different. So now I teach..."you dance the way...I'll show you the basics and you take it and put your own personality in it. I want you to be who you are." And some

people that are teaching and training for dancing and stuff, there's more...keeping timing. There's timing in these traditional dances that they have at Batoche. A lot of it they watch the feet and they watch the timing of the music and they watch all that. If you want to get a dance group, that's fine, but I just go out there and teach them to have fun and because of what I went through I have to teach it that way. I have to teach...just have fun. Forget about that there's people watching you...maybe your ancestors are watching you (laughs)! Forget about...and a little boy came up to me one time and he said, "But I don't want to dance..." he said, "they're laughing at me." And that hurt me so bad I was like "oh my goodness". So little stuff like that, the kids help you to teach dancing by comments like that. And I was like "(oh my God) I've got to tell these kids that they're not laughing at you, they're laughing with you." They're remembering when they were a little girl or a little boy one time. Tears were coming out of their eyes because they were watching their culture come back again. Because it wasn't...it was getting lost, and so that's why I like to teach the traditional way and then show the basic because every kid..it's like the sash. Every community had a different way of doing things, and there's no right way and there's no wrong way, even for fiddle music and dancing or anything like that.

B. teaches her student to simply enjoy the dancing and have fun, regardless of competition, but many others are fierce competitors. At the John Arcand Fiddle Fest, the rules for competition are as follows:

5.4 Fiddle Contest Rules and Regulations

John Arcand Fiddle Fest
August 9th - 12th, 2007

1. All contestants must register before their category begins - there is no charge for this.
2. Classes are: Novice 1 & 2* (12 & Under); Junior 1 & 2* (18 & under); Senior (60 and over), Open 1 & 2*, Championship*, Traditional Métis and Andy DeJarlis.
3. You do not enter the Championship Class - Judges advance the top five contestants from Open into Championship.
4. Contestants may move up in category of age - but cannot go down
5. Contestants may only enter 1 class - plus Traditional Metis and Andy DeJarlis Class.
6. Order of play is posted by the stage entrance. Contestants must be ready when called and all fiddles must be tuned.
7. Players may have their own accompanist, but not more than two, who may chord only. Piano accompaniment is provided.
8. No mutes or pickups can be used.

9. Contestants must play three tunes in the old time style: a waltz, a jig and a reel or hornpipe in that order.
10. Time Limit - no more than four (4) minutes.
11. In case of accidents (broken string etc) contestants may replay.
12. If a contestant survives the preliminary round - they may not play the same tunes again - with the exception of the Novice Class.
13. Judges advance contestants in all classes to the finals on Sunday.
14. There will be a play-off in case of a tie. The contest judges will decide the format as per class in the contest.
15. Judges decisions are final.

* The "2" Categories are an effort to "Level the Playing Field". In many cases, people who have just started playing or have only played awhile, are competing against more skilled players, making it impossible for them to place. This is an effort to encourage rather than discourage them, and allows them to compete with others at the same playing level. The Judges will place competitors into the "2" categories - you do not enter them!

Andy DeJarlis Class

- each contestant must play two Andy DeJarlis compositions
- You must provide the names of the tunes at registration
- one must be a waltz, the other a tune of their choice
- judges will combine the total points for both tunes

Traditional Metis Class

** Traditional Metis has different judges than the regular contest

- contestants must play 3 traditional Metis tunes
- one with regular tuning (eg. Drops of Brandy)
- one with C#, A, E, A tuning (eg Duck Dance)
- one with the G string tuned to A (eg *Red River Jig*)
- player must keep time with their feet (with or without accompaniment)

(from: http://www.johnarcandfiddlefest.com/competitions_fiddlerules.html)

Evidently, from the rules, there are strong efforts made to preserve the traditional Métis style of fiddling as well as showcase talented young fiddlers. John Arcand is known for his promotion of the old time fiddle style, but festivals such as this one offer a range of opportunities for fiddlers and dancers to showcase their abilities and knowledge

in a variety of categories. It is on the stages of festivals such as these that Métis fiddling is finding a new home, and where it will change and adapt to its new surroundings.

Conclusion

How do you capture the essence of a culture's music and its importance in the written word? In this thesis I have explored the fascinating world of Métis fiddling (and dance) through a variety of means. The history of the Métis is like their sash, full of colours, each representing a different part of the story. Some colours are bright and lively, like traditional Métis dress, and others, such as black, represent the dark aspects of their history such as residential schools, land scripts and prejudice. In each story there is woven the crucial thread of a musical tradition that strengthened and sustained a culture fraught with "bumps in the road", as B. would say. From the moment the first fiddle was brought to North America, it became an integral part of what is now termed Métis culture and it came to represent a national unity among the Métis, along with other key cultural symbols such as beadwork, dancing, the Red River Cart and Buffalo Hunting.

Throughout each chapter the concept of a nation caught between two worlds continued to return. As human beings we constantly need to categorize, and if something falls outside the box, this leads to uncertainty and fear of the unknown. At the time that the Métis were beginning to establish themselves in Canada, many people simply did not know how to deal with this combination of cultures and practices as a new whole. It has taken the Métis hundreds of years to overcome these prejudices and fears, and it is still very much a work in progress.

In the second chapter I focused on the interviews that were so vital to my research and the wealth of information that sprung from them. What emerged from both was, two members of the Métis community who grew up never really knowing what culture or nation they belonged to, but having a strong love and passion for their arts nonetheless. This concept fascinated me throughout my research, and I discovered that there are many such cases throughout Canada. Slowly more and more people are discovering their Métis heritage and the prejudices that buried this knowledge. Despite the persecution that many of them faced, or in some cases, their parents and grandparents faced, the fiddling and dance traditions withstood these forces and were a part of their early family lives. B.'s love of dance and music allowed her to reclaim her Métis identity in a way that now influences so many people positively and effectively. Her lack of self-identification and her struggles with not knowing where she fit, growing up, have now developed into a resource for helping children and youth avoid making these same mistakes and of being proud of who they are.

A musical theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of freedom and improvisation in traditional Métis fiddling. The Métis were always a fiercely independent, strong willed and freedom-loving people from the moment the first Voyageurs travelled through the wilds of Canada, and this spirit carried into their music. I've heard from quite a few members of the Métis community that you can't tell a fiddler what to do. It is essential that the old time fiddlers teach their styles and tunes to the future generations in order to demonstrate this freedom and independence. If all young fiddlers only learned from books the tradition would abruptly change and the Métis character of the music could easily diminish.

It is these syncretic qualities that I discussed in chapter 3 that are found in the fiddling tradition that set it apart from Anglo-Celtic fiddling. I found the concepts of “mixed” as opposed to “pure” in terms of music exemplified in the Métis fiddling tradition. Although Métis fiddling has its roots in Scottish and French fiddling and sounds very similar to much old time fiddling throughout North America, it has stylistic features from all its influences that combine to create a synthesized music. The Métis have been forced to fight the title of “mixed-breed” ever since they came into existence, and their mixed music was therefore seen as weak as well, and simply a folk tradition from an “impure” nation. This rise from obscurity, and the relative quickness of the development of Métis culture, has created a unique situation for the processes of its fiddling and dance traditions. Some of the characteristics found in *Drops of Brandy*, such as irregular bar and phrase lengths, and non-traditional form lengths are results of these processes.

In chapter 4, I focused on the history, form and significance of the *Red River Jig* within the Métis community. It has become an important signifier of Métis culture, specifically music and dance, and its hypnotic, cyclic nature, both within the music and in the dance captures any Métis audience. I attempted to discover what historical, social and musical factors contributed to its status as an icon. If compared to a popular song on the radio, features such as a catchy melody and pulsing rhythm would most likely be demonstrated. One of the fascinating aspects of the *Red River Jig*’s “catchy melody” is that it differs from one version to the next, and is never quite the same. Nevertheless, it is immediately recognizable to those who are familiar with it, and the shift to the ‘B’ section always signals a shift in the dance, as well as the familiar grinding sound of the

lower strings. Although I have not come to a decisive conclusion as to the exact reason this tune is so popular, I believe that it is a combination of factors, ranging from a rich and unique history, woven around tales of the Voyageurs and house parties, to the unique musical characteristics combined with a dance that involves all aspects of Métis cultural heritage.

One of the reasons I feel that the fiddling tradition is so vital to the Métis today is that it provides an arena where members of the Métis community can solidify bonds, cultural practices and unity. Not only that, but by performing in festivals that are slowly becoming more known to the general populations of Canada, they are educating their country and reminding them that the Métis traditions are still alive and kicking.

Many of the conclusions that I came to were drawn from the interviews or conversations with members of the Métis community. Looking back on my initial research questions, I felt that I received many responses that not only answered them, but also expanded upon them. They may not have been answered directly, but answers could be inferred from the interviews. In response to my first question: What is the role of music and dance in solidifying feelings of nationality and cultural pride? One of the key themes that I discovered in my interviews was the concept of connection, whether it was between the performer and the music, the performer and the audience, or the instructor and her students, as a type of cultural glue. For both B. and Rene they were able to connect with members of their community through the use of music and dance.

Rene and B. vividly remember the large house parties which all the Métis families would hold every month. They remember these events as regular occurrences in their upbringing and as the venue for the sharing and confirming of rituals, traditions, music

and dance. Naturally, at these parties there would also be an abundance of food and alcohol, but according to B., things never got too far out of control because everyone would dance instead of fight. Unfortunately many Métis people enjoyed alcohol over abundantly and for B., her love of music was the key in bringing her to the bars. Now B. is trying to draw the young Métis people away from bars by teaching them traditional dance. So, to answer my third research question, how is it being done? For B., teaching children is her way to pass on the traditions:

So when I got the Métis, I realized that I was a teacher myself, being that I can pass it on through what I've learned, not through school so much but through dancing and the Métis music and why I went in that direction. So taking us from the past to the present and getting rid of that judgemental, and then giving us the tools to open the other doors is a total, complete life skills that I'd like to see all over... that's what I teach now, through the jigging and the dancing is, helping people realize their history. Through teaching the jigging I also want to teach the...not the history part of it, but letting them know that history is your key, and I love dancing so I guess that was...that's what I'm supposed to be doing. Little B. supposed to travel all over now and spread some good cheer and do it the old fashioned way, through Métis...you know talking to people. Just sitting down talking to them...talking to children mostly. And letting them in the door through music and dancing.

It is not simply about passing on a musical tradition for B., but also about helping the Métis children learn to be proud of their cultural heritage and who they are. She believes that knowing their history helps to shape their self-identities, how they perceive themselves in the world, and why they should honour those who have gone before them. As I mentioned earlier, B. calls them her "bumps in the road" and teaches her young dancers that by learning about their culture and by dancing they can avoid many of the pitfalls that she experienced.

In the past year and a half my eyes were opened to a whole new musical and cultural world that had been right under my nose for many years without my knowledge.

Throughout my research I had the opportunity to meet with several members of the Métis community, specifically those involved with music and dance, but I feel in some ways as though I just scratched the surface. Other ethnomusicologists or academics who have studied the Métis musical traditions enabled me to create a framework and a basis for my research, but the field is still very newly researched and in further need of documentation and analysis. I believe that in the next 20-30 years more and more Canadians will discover their Métis heritage, and hopefully this will mean an even further strengthening of the musical traditions. Although I was able to attend various Métis festivals, and meet with a few Métis, I think that it would be beneficial to have been able to immerse myself in the Métis community while conducting this research and to have had the opportunity to take lessons from a Métis fiddler. It is not always possible to have the ideal situation while conducting research, especially ethnographic research, and this was a disadvantage for me. Despite the difficulties at times, my fascination with the culture and music never waned, and I felt honoured to study such a newly researched field of ethnomusicology.

From the research that I conducted, I believe that there is a strong and lively future for Métis fiddling in Canada. There are up-and-coming young Métis fiddlers, such as the talented Sierra Noble, being taught and performing throughout Western Canada, new compositions by many Métis fiddlers, and numerous festivals which are dedicated to preserving and promoting Métis culture through fiddle and dance. John A. Macdonald was not successful in wiping out the Métis people as he had hoped. I will conclude with these two thoughts from Rene and B.

Rene: As an aboriginal organization, yes, yes. We signed....(*K: It's taken this long...*). It took...well, Louis Riel, you know...that's 130 years he got...he got hung, he said, in his notes, "The Métis will sleep for a 100 years" and you know what? He wasn't too far off. The last 20 years we've been across Canada...and

look at now...BC acknowledging. The federal government is acknowledging Métis but the provincial didn't. And now all of the sudden, we've been asked to open a health session...that's great. I just hope that, you know, there's more deals like that and if we could get invited more often and participate more often, just to bring the Métis awareness and even to bring our, our you know, culture out, but anyway, I feel honoured to be there today and with B. and with the rest of the jiggers.

B: The more our kids know about their culture, the more they're going to understand about their personality. And because I always say it's a balance too, it's like a scale, if you think of your life, what you are, as a lawyer or a doctor, whatever, but who you are, there's a big difference there, because really, when you die you can't...you're not going to take any of that with you. Who you are, your values and your respect, and that comes from your culture. Who you are comes from your culture and without that balance...you need your education on this side, but who you are, a big difference, on the other. So we need balance. And Amen. Woo hoo! Can I say it? "I'm proud to be Métis!" (*she sings and laughs*)"

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The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nathan Hesselink	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Arts/Music	UBC BREB NUMBER: H07-01217
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution	Site	
UBC	Point Grey Site	
Other locations where the research will be conducted: Métis Nation B.C. Offices (both in Surrey and downtown Vancouver)		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Kristi Fuoco		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A		
PROJECT TITLE: Métis Fiddling in British Columbia		

CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: June 12, 2008

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:	DATE APPROVED: June 12, 2007	
Document Name	Version	Date
<u>Consent Forms:</u>		
Consent Form	N/A	June 7, 2007
<u>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</u>		
Interview Questions	N/A	May 18, 2007

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. Peter Suedfeld, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair