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a case study of Cape Breton fiddling

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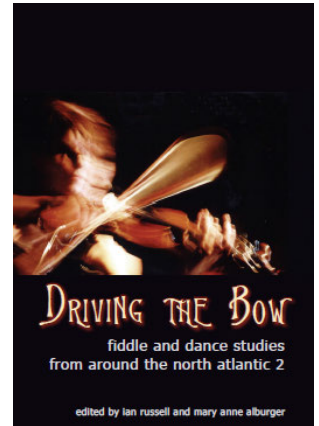
Driving the Bow

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The formation of authenticity within folk tradition: a case study of Cape Breton fiddling

GREGORY J. DORCHAK

The ability to appear 'authentic' is important within many cultures and traditions today. An Internet search for the term 'authentic Irish pub', for example, reveals that nearly every major city in North America proudly claims one. Amongst 'experts' in a tradition arguments often result over what specific stylistic standards determine actual authenticity. This paper focuses on how objective standards of cultural authenticity dictated by these 'experts' ignore the true nature of cultural practices. Boundaries of traditional community practices are determined neither through appearances, nor stylistic standards. Instead, these boundaries are actively determined by community participation.

However, to think of cultural practices only via stylistic terms can hamper the ability of a tradition to adapt to the inevitable changes that occur within a community. These changes can be, for example, demographical, economical, or sociological. If cultural practices fail to adapt to these changes, they will also lose their ability to represent the contemporary community, and eventually be phased out.

This paper will examine the cultural practice of fiddling on Cape Breton Island in order to illustrate the natural evolution of the tradition. It will show how expert dialogue that seeks to delineate the boundaries of tradition can be out of touch with the community's actual practice. It will also show how a great number of changes occurred in Cape Breton during the mid-twentieth century, changes that threatened to totally extinguish the practice of fiddling in the community. That this outcome was prevented was due to the many actions and innovations made by participating members of the community.

Rhetoric, style, and the public

The idea of 'style' has long been a concern of rhetoricians. Rather than answer the question 'what is that sound?', style answers the question, 'what does that sound like?' To examine something's style is to look only at the superficial appearances of how it is expressed. All performing arts are mediums for expression, conveying messages within a culture through the use of culturally accepted standards of style. Artists draw from the stylistic material available to them in order to create their

intended performance, and in order to effectively convey this performance the artist needs an understanding of how his or her audience interprets style. All audiences have differing notions of interpreting style. In the relationship between the artist and the audience, rhetoric becomes an important factor. If the artist understands how his or her audience interprets this rhetoric, then he or she will understand the available means to express themselves to the audience. The artist's choice of expression then becomes a rhetorical choice that reflects on the stylistic requirements of that audience.

In acting as a medium of expression, art does not exist for its own sake, nor does it exist for the sake of the artist alone. Rather, performing arts acknowledge that the world contains many as opposed to one.¹ A cultural practice such as fiddling exemplifies this feature of art through its enactment in a public setting, for the sake of the public. In order to understand the aesthetics of the public, one must understand the stylistic standards of where and when the performance occurs.

In this, 'when' is just as important as 'where', since the make-up of a certain community naturally changes over time. While this can be observed through the various beliefs and other aesthetic factors of the community, the most obvious changes come from the new generations: children born into a community, in time, will bear newer children into the community, creating a constant cycle. Meanwhile, older members of the community leave the community through death. Despite the ever-changing individuals within the community, human interaction occurring within this cyclical community ensures relative stability. Fiddling within the Cape Breton community is an example of human interaction that allows the community to be maintained.

The importance of noting this cycle is to point out the obvious (but often overlooked) fact that newness must always enter a tradition. As more and more individuals enter a community, they make their mark upon that community's tradition, which in turn adapts to the innovations. This paper will trace how, within the Cape Breton fiddle tradition, individuals have shaped the musical style over time. Because newness constantly enters a tradition, understanding within a tradition is by necessity a retrospective one. When one examines the Cape Breton fiddle tradition, it is clear that each generation of fiddlers represents a different historical period. Individuals are subject to the norms of the tradition that they have been born into, but they also make their own mark on this tradition. Winston Fitzgerald, Dan R. MacDonald, and John Morris Rankin, are examples. They were born into a pre-existing tradition. However, in each case, Cape Breton fiddling would be remarkably different today if they had never taken part in the tradition. It is this evolution that I will discuss.

Cape Breton

Cape Breton, in Nova Scotia, experienced a great influx of Scottish Highland settlers during the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth. These Highlanders brought their traditions, alongside their Scottish Gaelic language, and

their music, replicating their old way of life in a new land, with their aural traditions as their principle sources of entertainment.²

After settling in the harsh land of Cape Breton, the Scots remained largely isolated. The island itself remained separated from mainland Nova Scotia until the completion of the Canso Causeway in 1955. As well as being separated from the mainland, communities in Cape Breton, also remained separated from each other. Very few roads existed on the island, and the roads that did were often in poor condition. MacGillivray notes that 'there existed isolated pockets of music – such as Mabou, Iona, Queensville, and Margaree, and the poor conditions of early roads prevented much communication between these villages,'³ and forced the locals to rely on their own music for entertainment.

The home has always been central to the traditions of Cape Breton. More than fifty of the fiddlers profiled in Allister MacGillivray's *Cape Breton Fiddler* cited some sort of family influence on their playing. Each of MacGillivray's fiddlers' profiles revealed similar stories. Either a father or an uncle had played the fiddle, and they in turn taught all of their sons and daughters, with as many as seven or eight siblings taking turns to learn on the 'family violin.' Due to the preponderance of fiddling dynasties, there is a notion that these families had fiddling 'in the blood'. Liz Doherty points out that the more likely reason that fiddling was kept alive by these families came from traditional music, 'ever-present' during the formative years of the musician's life.⁴

Most fiddlers learned to play their instruments not by learning to read music, but through aural transmission, the ability to listen and learn 'by ear.' Graham notes that it was not until the mid-1940s that learning by note became popular in Cape Breton.⁵ During this time, fiddlers who had fought in World War II returned home to Cape Breton, and brought with them collections of dance tunes from Scotland. At a time when recorded music was a rarity, these collections acted like jukeboxes for Cape Breton musicians, providing them with many new tunes for performances. Despite the introduction of musical texts, learning by ear was never phased out; the written notes simply provided an aid to aural transmission.

Evolution and setting

Cape Breton fiddle music is intended primarily as dance music. Since the first Scottish settlers landed in Cape Breton, step dancing and fiddling have been linked. This differentiates Cape Breton fiddling from other fiddling traditions where musicians gravitate towards session music. In Cape Breton, these musical sessions are a rarity, and the predominant setting for fiddle music is the square dances, in village halls.

There are also other settings where the music is especially important. Traditionally, one of the first settings for the music was in the home. House parties were once frequent, and lasted from the evening into the hours of dawn, although they now take place less frequently. One of the primary reasons for this probably comes from the availability of other venues, such as the weekly pub ceilidhs, as well as the many concerts, dances, and festivals that take place on the island. Pubs, like

the Red Shoe in Mabou, serve as everyday gathering places for the community and supply informal venues for the musicians. In these settings, musicians take turns performing, even though no actual event is scheduled.

Aural culture

Many fiddlers from Gaelic-speaking backgrounds are praised as having a Gaelic sound in their music. Graham describes this praise best as a 'continuum between the rhythms of the spoken language and Gaelic singing and the way they are both mimicked to produce a Gaelic sound and flavour in instrumental music.'⁶ Cape Bretoners have always been very active in performing *puirt a' beul* (literally translated as 'mouth music').⁷ *Puirt a beul* is a type of music where the singer 'jigs' or sings the tune with the mouth, using Gaelic words, as well as nonsense syllables, to create song. Many traditional tunes are multipurpose, with some instrumental tunes having words added, or the vocal music being added to the others' repertoires, and many fiddlers originally learned their tunes from this method of 'jigging'. MacGillivray cites many fiddlers who acknowledged learning tunes from their mothers, who would rock them to sleep as babies while 'jigging' the mouth music.⁸

But the transmission that occurs directly between the Gaelic language and the instrument is dying out as the Gaelic language disappears from the island. However, Graham points out that this does not automatically mark the loss of the language characteristics of the music.⁹ Recently this aural method was improved when recording devices were introduced to Cape Breton. Now, contemporary fiddlers can learn tunes from fiddlers who lived a half century ago, and, in the process, learn the stylistic elements unique to the older fiddlers. Since fiddlers mimic other fiddlers' styles, one fiddler mimicking another who had already developed a style based on certain aspects of the language, would adopt the first fiddler's style and the linguistic elements included therein.

Repertoire

Cape Breton fiddlers have a certain repertoire of tunes that has evolved and grown extensively since the first settlers. This repertoire mostly contains tunes used for dances such as the jig, strathspey, and reel, alongside the march and the air. Many tunes still played today were composed in Scotland prior to the settlement of Cape Breton. The tunes played within Cape Breton created after the settlement of Scottish immigrants, have varied sources of origin. Certainly, composing tunes has always been a vibrant Cape Breton tradition, and, as Doherty points out, this tradition has been most active since the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Older composers include Dan R. MacDonald, with some 2,000 tunes to his credit, as well as Dan Hughie MacEachern, Mike MacDougall, and Donald Angus Beaton, and today Cape Breton fiddlers such as Jerry Holland, Brenda Stubbart, and Kinnon Beaton keep the tradition alive.

Cape Bretoners perform in a variety of keys, with A being the most popular. Originally, the first fiddlers on the island stuck with the simple keys of G, D, and

A, along with their relative minors. However, when Scottish tune collections from the 'Golden Age' of Scottish fiddling made their way to Cape Breton in the mid twentieth century, tunes from these collections in alternative keys, such as B^b and F, became popular on the island, and soon local composers such as Dan R. MacDonald, and Dan Hughie MacEachern, began to compose in these keys.

Accompaniment

Many aspects of the Cape Breton sound have evolved since the first Scottish settlers, but none have changed as much as the accompaniments to the fiddle music. Often in the nineteenth century, the scarcity of pianos and parlour reed organs ('pump organs') on the island meant that fiddlers usually played unaccompanied. Occasionally a second fiddler would join in, playing the melody an octave lower, in unison, providing a type of accompaniment. The combination of the two fiddlers also provided more volume, which they needed in order to perform in crowded dance halls.

The piano, according to Doherty, did not become the established accompaniment for the fiddle until the 1940s and 1950s, although it took some time to gain popularity.¹¹ Musicians usually used any form of accompaniment available. For example, Marie MacLellan sometimes accompanied her sister Theresa by playing a Hawaiian guitar, simply due to the lack of any other available instruments.¹² The guitar was also a popular instrument, with artists such as Winston 'Scotty' Fitzgerald arranging entire ensembles of musicians as accompaniment, with his band, including piano, bass, guitar, and drums, while percussion can also be heard on an LP recorded by the MacLellan family in the 1940s.¹³ This variety shows that the musicians never felt stylistically constrained in what instrument they could choose for accompaniment. Today, many see the piano as the default companion to the fiddle, with the guitar usually being the secondary accompaniment instrument.

Accompanists' techniques on their instruments have also evolved. Most Cape Breton piano players had no formal training, and without a background of music theory, these pianists possessed limited techniques, usually choosing an elementary three-chord (I, IV, V) progression. This lack of knowledge also hampered the piano players in what they could add to the music, since they were limited to rhythmic variations rather than melodic or harmonic.

This simple style began to change in the mid 1950s due to contributions made by various piano players attempting to raise their skill levels. Most innovations within the Cape Breton piano style can be traced to specific individuals, such as Marie Jessie MacDonald, a piano player from New Waterford, who lived in Boston during the big band era. Here she learned jazz chords as well as a more mature technique, and Cape Bretoners recall that MacDonald was one of the first to implement a walking bass line in the left hand.¹⁴ Carl MacKenzie, a fiddler from Washabuck, elaborates on these technical advances in accompaniment: 'Twenty years ago they wouldn't understand that A minor and C were relative keys and you could interchange them. They figured that as a complete no no. We had poor

accompaniment generally. Now the piano player can go about any tune.¹⁵ This is a natural progression, since musicians, with time, are bound to learn more about the potential of their instruments.

Individual artists

Aspects leading to the evolution of Cape Breton music can usually be traced to specific individuals. Winston 'Scotty' Fitzgerald is the perfect example of a fiddler who popularized advanced techniques within the Cape Breton style. A majority of Winston's contemporaries considered him as the fiddler who left the greatest impression upon them.¹⁶ Winston was one of the first fiddlers to bring James Scott Skinner's tunes into prominence on Cape Breton, tunes that utilized difficult classical techniques, such as advanced position playing. Dan R. MacDonald of Mabou exposed Winston to these tunes. MacDonald was familiar with the music of many Scottish composers, and did much to introduce many of their collections into Cape Breton. He introduced Skinner's music to Winston, who perfected Skinner's more difficult tunes, and in the process also removed much of the 'dirt' from his own interpretation of the Cape Breton style, playing with a smoother and more precise style than others on the island, such as the Mabou Coal Mines style, known for its 'dirt and grittiness'.¹⁷

This smooth style was such a novelty to Cape Breton that Winston's playing left his mark on many. As Mabou fiddler John Morris Rankin described Winston's impact, he 'is like a household name around here. And he was such a slick player that who wouldn't be influenced by him? He took everything by storm'.¹⁸ Winston's popularity on the square dance circuit, as well as his extensive air-play on CJCB and CJFX during the 1950s had an island-wide influence on style. Minnie MacMaster, mother of Natalie, notes how she heard Winston perform on the radio long before ever seeing him perform in Inverness County.¹⁹

Winston, and players such as Angus Chisholm and Dan Hughie MacEachern, greatly influenced the newer generation of Cape Breton fiddlers. These three men concerned themselves first and foremost with advanced technique, and relished playing difficult tunes. They also popularized a smoother approach when performing Cape Breton tunes. Most players who perform in this style today cite Winston, Angus, or Dan Hughie, as their direct influences, and today technically advanced tunes or difficult variations to tunes are no longer a rarity on the island, but rather are tackled by many fiddlers.²⁰

Threats to the tradition

Cape Breton remained relatively isolated for many years after the first Scottish settlers arrived, and hard economic times eventually forced some of Cape Breton's youth to leave the island looking for work. The Canso Causeway (1955) and improved roads allowed for more modern transportation, and quickly eroded the island's isolation. Marie Thompson notes that the changes in transportation, along with the consolidation of schools, mass media (television and radio), and the development of

an adolescent sub-culture, led to many changes within Cape Breton in a relatively short period of time.²¹ She points out further the fact that between 1961 and 1971 the number of farms in Cape Breton dropped by two thirds. This rural population was the backbone of the island's fiddling community, but, while older fiddlers continued to fiddle, no one inspired the newer generation into taking part in the tradition.

There were large changes in the rural areas of the island with people either moving off the island, or closer to the urban area of Sydney. These changes coincided with the arrival of rock and roll in the mid 1950s, and with musicians such as Elvis Presley and the Beatles gaining in popularity with the Cape Breton youth, who once would have idolized the local fiddler. New liquor laws limiting the square dances to the older generations didn't help matters.²² In limiting dances to only those old enough to drink, the youth were prevented from attending many dances. Since they were not brought along with their family to the dances, they were not as involved with the tradition. Dave MacIsaac, a fiddler and guitar player, acknowledges rock music's influence on him: 'When I was six my parents got me a little tin fiddle, but I lost interest in it when I got my first guitar at age nine. I suppose it was kind of a peer thing, none of my friends were into Scottish music, however I played with my father at parties and the like.'²³

The younger generation no longer took part in traditional music with each other. Instead the music moved from the public sphere to the private sphere, relegated to a 'family only' activity. Kinnon Beaton (b. 1955), a fiddler from Mabou, points to John Morris Rankin as the only child his age playing the fiddle, and also admits that it was 'not cool' to play the fiddle: 'You'd get a lot of flak for playing the fiddle from some of the kids at school. They were into rock and I hadn't a clue what they were talking about. It was pretty well all fiddle at our house.'²⁴ Square dances lost popularity to the more inclusive round dances, which included horn bands playing tunes other than the traditional jigs and reels, and allowed for dance styles other than step dancing. These changes in the vernacular traditions of the Cape Bretoners influenced the way that the traditional music of the Scottish settlers was experienced.

This change in demography was brought to light by the 1971 CBC documentary *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* produced by Ron MacInnis.²⁵ This film proved to be very controversial to the people of Cape Breton, who refused to believe that the fiddler was vanishing. MacInnis did not aim to say that fiddlers were disappearing. Rather, he intended to point out that the lack of interest in the music by the youth would eventually lead to the demise of the tradition. MacInnis's documentary was so controversial because many misperceived the film as a judgment against the quality of Cape Breton fiddling in general. The overwhelming reaction was that MacInnis was wrong and that Cape Breton fiddling was alive and strong. Father John Angus Rankin, who was featured on the documentary, noted that it did not matter if every Scotch fiddler died, because both the French and the Micmac first nation tribe of the area had also picked up the music. This common sentiment overlooked the fact that while those of non-Scottish heritage had indeed picked up the fiddle, the all-

important youth had failed to do so. In Inverness County, MacInnis could only find two young people fiddling at that time, John Morris Rankin and Kinnon Beaton, both from musical families living in Mabou.

Some fiddlers from Inverness County decided to make a stand against MacInnis's claim. They responded by organizing the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association.²⁶ The original aim of this association was to create a fiddle festival that would display over 100 fiddlers on stage. This goal was met by the creation of the Glendale Festival of Scottish Fiddling. At this festival Father John Angus Rankin, from the stage, said, 'If Ron MacInnis is in the audience, I want him to know that the fiddlers are alive and well'.²⁷ There were many fiddlers who emerged from different parts of the island, most of whom had never performed outside their kitchen. This demonstrated the numbers of fiddlers, but the overall point of MacInnis's documentary proved true. There were very few young fiddlers on the stage.

While the initial aim of the Fiddlers Association was to organize a festival, their further actions made a larger mark on the development of Cape Breton fiddling. The practice of fiddling that had become a private, familial activity moved back to one held within a public setting. The association actively pressed for the recruitment of youth into its ranks, changing the transmission process – how fiddlers learned their art. The activity of encouraging the youth to play, once only prominent within homes, became a community activity. Doherty points out that in a short amount of time, formal lessons went from unheard of, to the normal environment for students to learn, even in children of musical families.²⁸ One only has to look at the list of Stan Chapman's students to note that many came from notable musical families, such as Natalie MacMaster and Jackie Dunn MacIsaac.

Had the Fiddlers Association not made this change to the method of transmission, Cape Breton fiddling probably would have continued to vanish. Instead, altering both the performing environment and learning environment from a private one to a public one opened up the fiddling community to the island's youth. One no longer needed to be from a musical family in order to learn the instrument, and therefore no longer needed to be from a musical family to take part in the musical community. Children were exposed to the community through the radio, recordings, classes and programmes on the television. This resurgence in youth interest led to a boom within the fiddling community. No longer is playing the fiddle considered 'un-cool' by the current generation of youth. In fact, to this younger generation, traditional music and pop culture co-exist without a problem. Natalie MacMaster admits that she is just as likely to have a recording of Donald Angus Beaton playing in the car, as she is to have an AC/DC album playing. The natality produced by allowing the newness to enter the community has, in fact, preserved the community. The generation of musicians taught by those such as Stan Chapman in the island's first formal classes, is now the generation passing on the tradition to newer generations allowing for a cycle to maintain itself.

Romanticism

When preservation of the objective stylistic qualities within a tradition is perceived as more important than the community interaction within a tradition, these features can be quick to take on a romantic aura. One of the first big steps in the revitalization of the tradition was the establishment of the Glendale Fiddle Festival, in the early 1970s. Editorials soon appeared in the local paper, praising the fiddlers who had participated. In these editorials, it was noted that everyone who inhabited the island, including the Micmac first nation tribe and the French Acadians, had taken up the music. Some responses to these editorials, however, suggested that players of non-Scottish ancestry should not take up the fiddle. Some correspondents went on to say that fiddlers of today's generation would not stand up to the fiddlers of the past, and that the original style of the music was not being maintained.²⁹ The notion of who can play this traditional music has persisted into the present day. In the 1990s, the American David Greenberg immersed himself in the Cape Breton music and, in collaboration with his wife, Kate Dunlay, put into words every stylistic nuance of the Cape Breton sound, so that musicians might be able to read about how to perform certain embellishments.³⁰ This was such a successful undertaking that many Cape Bretoners would refer people to their book when asked to explain certain techniques. Greenberg could mimic individual musicians with great precision, and released an album, *Tunes until Dawn*, that displays this mimicry.³¹ In a review of this album in a Cape Breton magazine, John Gibson initially challenged whether Greenberg should label his music as 'Cape Breton'. Gibson shunned Greenberg's music for having no Gaelic influences.³² The reviewer then took the opportunity to denigrate Scottish composers such as James Scott Skinner and Hector MacAndrew for being 'Gaelicisable, but in essence, modern Scottish music.'³³ However, after lamenting the fact that Greenberg does not possess the Gaelic sound, and could never be qualified as a Cape Breton fiddler, Gibson performed a quick about-face, praising Greenberg's ability to mimic Mary MacDonald, a Cape Breton fiddler whom, he claimed, had a sound that was 'deep, rich, so Scotch, part of countless Highland lives and almost inseparable from them'.³⁴ If ever there were a fiddler on Cape Breton who would be unanimously praised for the Gaelic in her fiddle, Mary MacDonald would be that fiddler. And Gibson in turn praises Greenberg, saying that he doubts if anyone else could have mimicked her so well. Yet Greenberg, according to Gibson, could not play Gaelic music, pointing to a romanticization of the Gaelic-style fiddler.

A series of editorials written back and forth between Alexander MacDonald, of Mabou, and Seamus Taylor, of the United States, in the *Celtic Heritage* magazine in the 1990s also exhibit this romanticization.³⁵ Taylor first denounced what current musicians were doing to traditional music. In his eyes this music is not theirs to alter, but rather is the 'tribal music of our ancestry, preserved and revered for many centuries.'³⁶ He continued by stating that within the Gaelic tradition 'reliance on printed words or music is a sign of a weak mind'.³⁷ MacDonald responded that the music has always been evolving, and needs to evolve or else it might die out.³⁸ Taylor replied, in quite romantic terms, that if the music needs to change or die he

would prefer it die out.³⁹ This notion ignores the newness that must always enter the tradition. Should Taylor have his way, contemporary traditional musicians would exist as museum curators playing the same tunes over and over in the same style, rather than as involved individuals in a greater community.

However, there is a preoccupation concerning the role of Gaelic within the fiddle tradition. Hard-line Gaelic language supporters fear the loss of language, and point to the possibility that if the language disappears then the idiosyncrasies within the language of the fiddle will also disappear. John Shaw, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Scottish Studies, pushes this claim even further, saying that the late twentieth century, 'barring a series of miraculous linguistic, cultural, and political reversals, will see the end of most, if not all orally transmitted Celtic traditions'.⁴⁰ Yet both Doherty and Graham note that since much fiddle music is from an aural tradition, stylistic idiosyncrasies pass down through the fiddle music, as well as the language.⁴¹ Since recordings of these older players exist, their influence upon further generations will not die away as long as the youth listen to them.

As for what the Gaelicness within the fiddle sounds like, this is another aspect that has been somewhat romanticized. Doherty and MacDonald both point out the elusiveness of such definitions.⁴² Yet this term is often thrown out as a normative distinction, praising players as having the Gaelic in their fiddle. Most often this designation is placed upon those players who emulate the Mabou Coal Mines style of fiddling. Yet fiddlers such as Buddy MacMaster and Angus Chisholm, from places like Judique and Margaree where Gaelic was also spoken, also receive praise as having 'Gaelic in their fiddle'.⁴³ These fiddlers, however, play in a much smoother, and very different, style from that of Mabou Coal Mines. The logical conclusion is that, if there is Gaelic within the fiddles, then there are different strands of Gaelic to be heard, expanding beyond the 'dirty' style of Mabou and including the smoother styles of both MacMaster and Chisholm. If this were not true, then it would seem that the use of 'Gaelic' is really an endorsement of one person's preference towards that particular style.

These opinions that emanate romanticism, when placed on a public stage, come across as expert fact rather than opinion. Magazines such as *Celtic Heritage*, and the former *Cape Breton Magazine*, as well as newspapers such as the *Inverness Oran* have a great deal of credibility. When an article or editorial is printed within these periodicals, the author gains authority, and many readers see the author's opinions as objective facts, rather than subjective opinions. A columnist who might not be an actively participating musician within the tradition still might publicly criticize the tunes of Scott Skinner for 'not being Gaelic enough'. Meanwhile, a musician who is active within the tradition might consider the Skinner tunes to be an important part of his or her repertoire. Since the columnist's subjective opinions appear as facts, and they are considered to be 'expert', the fiddler might be perceived by some as playing tunes not authentic within the culture. This presumption is made despite the fact that it is the musician, rather than the writer, who actively participates and shapes the tradition.

Implications

Authenticity is decided by those who actively engage within the tradition, rather than by the few individuals who try to objectively define it. Within Cape Breton, the musicians, the dancers, and the audiences who attend the concerts, the dances, and the house parties on a regular basis, determine the nature of authenticity. It is the participation between the audience and the musicians that reflect the dialogue of authenticity within the tradition. Therefore, authenticity can only be determined by those actively involved within the community. Stylistic observations simply reflect a temporality of that community, rather than a constant standard. Cape Breton fiddlers are musicians first and foremost. They should not be expected to act as museum curators, guarding a mythical past. Participation, rather than a perceived style, is the only constant that can be standardized. It is this participation that ensures whether or not the tradition survives. If there is no active participation within a community, the tradition will not evolve to represent that community.

A tradition that fails to evolve to reflect its community will die as a tradition. Cape Breton shows that the music has kept itself alive by adapting to new settings, new instruments, and new players. When the community faced a large demographic change in a relatively short time, it adapted drastically to encourage more youth participation. It no longer relied on the traditional familial transmission method, but shifted to formal transmission. This change was a direct acknowledgement of the new situation. This paper has traced the evolution of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition over the last two centuries. Throughout this time the tradition has evolved extensively, ensuring its survival. This evolution has progressed despite the attempt by some to romanticize and delineate the tradition. The fact of survival through adaptation makes it apparent that individuals do not decide what belongs to the tradition, but the actions of an entire society are what construct authenticity.

Notes

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 175–274.

² Allister MacGillivray, *The Cape Breton Fiddler* (Marion Bridge, Cape Breton Island: College of Cape Breton Press, 1981), p. 1.

³ MacGillivray, p. 2.

⁴ Elizabeth Doherty, 'Paradox on the Periphery: Evolution of the Cape Breton Fiddle Tradition c.1928–1995' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Limerick, Ireland, 1996), p. 89.

⁵ Glenn Graham, 'Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Making and Maintenance of a Tradition', unpublished master's thesis, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2004, p. 135.

⁶ Graham, p. 11.

⁷ Doherty, p. 179.

⁸ MacGillivray, p. 1.

⁹ Graham, p. 13.

¹⁰ Doherty, p.185.

¹¹ Doherty, p. 258.

¹² MacGillivray, p. 148.

¹³ MacGillivray, p. 149.

¹⁴ Doherty, p. 324.

¹⁵ Doherty, p. 250.

¹⁶ MacGillivray, pp. 86, 106, 126, 129, 153.

¹⁷ Many believe that the 'dirt' in the music replicates the guttural sounds of the language. Burt Feintuch describes the music as 'full of "flavour" or "dirt" – the ornamentation that adds further complexity to the sound. "Cuts" or "cuttings" – three or four rapid notes played in the space of one beat – are very typical of the music. Bowing is vigorous, and the model is one note per bow stroke, down-bows accentuating the strong beats.' In *Cape Breton Fiddle and Piano Music: The Beaton Family of Mabou* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2004), liner notes p. 7.

¹⁸ Doherty, p. 301.

¹⁹ Doherty, p. 147.

²⁰ Fiddlers such as Dwayne Cote, Kimberley Fraser, Dougie MacDonald, Troy MacGillivray, Ashley MacIsaac, Carl MacKenzie, Natalie MacMaster, and Kyle MacNeil (amongst others) are known for routinely playing tunes in the keys of C, F, Bb, B, Eb, as well as higher positions.

²¹ Marie Thompson, 'The Fall and Rise of the Cape Breton Fiddler: 1955–1982' (unpublished master's thesis, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2003), p. 58.

²² Doherty, p. 119.

²³ MacGillivray, p. 128.

²⁴ MacGillivray, p. 83.

²⁵ Ron MacInnis, *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* (Halifax: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1971)

²⁶ See Thompson, pp. 131–45, where she details how Father Eugene Morris, Father John Angus Ranking, Hugh John Gillis, and Frank MacInnis conceived of the idea for the Glendale Festival and the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association.

²⁷ Thompson, p. 150. The first Glendale Festival took place 8 July 1973, and was held annually thereafter.

²⁸ Doherty, p. 100.

²⁹ Thompson, p. 177.

³⁰ Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg, *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton: The DunGreen Collection* (Toronto: Dungreen Music, 1996).

³¹ David Greenberg, *Tunes Until Dawn* (Toronto: Marquis Classics, 2000).

³² John Gibson, 'Tunes until dawn recalls older fiddle styles', *Am Braighe* (Mabou, Nova Scotia, Spring 2000), p. 22.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Seamus Taylor, 'Standing up for Gaelic Culture', *Celtic Heritage*, June/July 1997, p. 5; Seamus Taylor, 'In which we learn more of Gaelic music', *Celtic Heritage*, December/January 1998, pp. 5–6, 26–28; Alexander MacDonald, 'Gaelic Music: What Is It?', *Celtic Heritage*, February/March, 1998, pp. 32–33; Alexander MacDonald, 'The Gaelic in the Fiddle: Debunking the Myths', *Celtic Heritage*, August/September 1997, pp. 5–6.

³⁶ Taylor, 'Standing up for Gaelic Culture', p. 5.

³⁷ Taylor, 'In which we learn more of Gaelic music', pp. 26–28.

³⁸ MacDonald, 'Gaelic Music: What Is It?', pp. 32–33.

³⁹ Taylor, 'In which we learn more of Gaelic music', p. 28.

⁴⁰ John Shaw, 'Observations on the Cape Breton *Gàidhealtachd* and its Relevance to Present Day Celtic Studies', in *Proceedings of the First North American Congress of Celtic Studies, 1986*, ed. Gordon W. MacLennan (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1988), pp. 75–87.

⁴¹ Doherty, p. 304; Graham, p. 90.

⁴² Doherty, p.305; MacDonald, 'The Gaelic in the Fiddle', pp. 5–6.

⁴³ Ashley MacIsaac, *Fiddling with Disaster (Clearing the Past)* (Toronto: Warwick Publishing, 2003), p. 57.