

‘I don’t want to sound like just one person’:
individuality in competitive fiddling

Sherry Johnson

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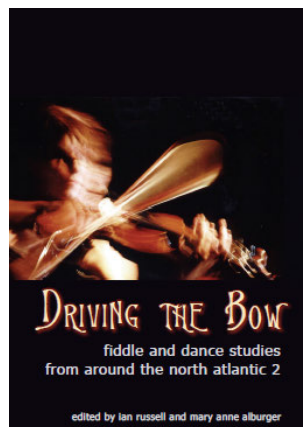
Driving the Bow

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About the author:

Sherry Johnson completed her doctoral dissertation, *Negotiating Tradition in Ontario Fiddle Contests* (2006), based, in part, on her thirty years of experience as a Canadian old-time fiddler and step dancer. She is currently assistant professor in Fine Arts Cultural Studies at York University in Toronto. Her current research interests include gender, identity, and the interrelationship between music and dance.

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'I don't want to sound like just one person': individuality in competitive fiddling

SHERRY JOHNSON

Fiddle contests may be discouraged in some parts of Canada, but they are a vital, dynamic context for Canadian old-time fiddling in Ontario. Competitors, their families, and fans travel a well-developed 'circuit' throughout the province each weekend from mid-May to mid-September. While some critics refer dismissively to contest fiddlers who 'all sound the same', most Ontario contest fiddlers agree that in order to be considered seriously and to be successful in contests, one has to make the tunes one's own. As Dawson Girdwood, a fiddler in his mid-70s and occasional judge, told me:

I think one thing that any musician has to learn is that you can't copy anyone; you will spend the rest of your life being a poor copy. Rather, it's quite something to take someone's music and learn his way of playing that, and then apply your own: 'I know the tricks, now this is how *I* play this piece. I have to learn so much of his technique and then I have to play what *I* feel is what I want to do.' The few musicians, no matter what stage they're at, that excel and have something to say, are the people that are taking it to that point and then they're playing with some feeling or with some creation within themselves.¹

While competitors develop individual styles to make themselves stand out in the minds of both judges and audiences, in order to win the top prize or develop a supportive fan base, I believe that their prime motivation is simply to play in a way that pleases their own personal aesthetic. Shane Cook, three-time winner of the Canadian Open Fiddle Championship held annually in Shelburne, Ontario, says: 'It's a big goal of mine to have an individual sound [...] I don't want to sound like just one person.'² Judges, too, such as Robert Wood, at the Shelburne contests in the 1970s and 1980s, like to see each fiddler's personality come through in his or her playing: 'Personality is important to old-time fiddling [...] Once we get past the technical aspects of the fiddle playing, then the fiddle player's personality, translated into the music, is what makes the difference.'³

Most of the fiddlers I spoke with emphasized the importance of individuality and creativity to fiddling;⁴ however, there are mixed feelings about whether

individuality is becoming more or less important. Shane Cook mentioned above that he is disappointed in the 'clones' he hears at fiddle contests – fiddlers who sound exactly like their teachers. At the same time he says, 'I think recently there is more of an effort from each of these players to find their own style [...] I don't think there's any doubt that there's more of an emphasis placed on individuality, well, an individual style.'⁵ Chad Wolfe agrees: 'When [fiddlers] reach the Open, or even the 18 and under [classes], you start to see their personalities coming out in their performances. So you get to see what turns them on.'⁶ Dan Schryer believes that fiddlers ten or more years ago had more individual styles than fiddlers today, although he says that individuality should be easier to develop now than in previous generations because of better access to multiple influences:

Let's say one generation before me, they have one idol. They love that person's playing and so they copy that one person, and that was the only person they had available that they can idolize. When I was growing up I had, let's say, five that I could idolize. I take those five players and they all have different styles to a certain degree, so just from copying their music I learned those five styles. Those five styles are put in the blender and mixed all up and I have my own style.⁷

Don Reed believes that fiddlers today have styles equally as individualistic as twenty to thirty years ago when he was competing: 'I don't think [individuality] was a goal, necessarily. I think we all just sounded different naturally. Like even now, you could probably blindfold yourself and tell who the different players are, just by listening to them. And I think the same thing applied back then.'⁸ He suggests that some people's perceptions that fiddlers are less individualistic now than in the past may be due to their degree of involvement in the circuit.

Despite the fact that everyone with whom I spoke considers individuality to be important to contest fiddling, both successful Open class fiddlers Shane Cook and Mathew Johnson agree with critics of contests that contests do inhibit individuality. As Shane told me:

This is one of my big hang-ups about contests, and I don't think I realized it until I got away from the contests and realized what else is out there in the world. There's just so many, I guess you could call it, clones [...] The students sound so much like the teacher, which I guess can be a really good thing, especially when there's an effort to preserve the style, but at least for me, that's not the point.⁹

And Mathew said:

I would say that doing well at contests removes individuality. As far as the contest itself, you can do whatever you want [...] As far as doing *well*, because quite often there are the same few judges who are everywhere, they prefer a

certain style of playing, so if you don't get that style of playing, then you're not going to do as well.¹⁰

I asked Mathew if and where he found any leeway in conforming to the playing style(s) necessary to win fiddle contests and being himself as a fiddler at the same time, and he replied:

If you mean conform so that you get first, there's very little leeway. If you mean conform so you're in the top five or ten in the Open class, then there's a fair amount of leeway, [since you can distinguish] each person's individual playing. So, you can stick to your own style as much as you want, and still do well, but if somebody's doing the style that the judge happens to like, and you're not, you're doing your own style, then you're not going to win.¹¹

Mathew explains that his individuality as a fiddler is more apparent when he is doing shows or jamming, as opposed to playing in contests: 'I do a lot of things [in shows] that I would never do in a contest, like extra cuts here or there, or extra runs all over the place, or double stops, but I wouldn't do those things in a contest.'¹² Many fiddlers echoed Mathew's comments regarding judges. Linda Maldonado says, 'I think there should be [room for personal innovation] but, once again, depending on who's judging, personal flare sometimes rides and other times it doesn't',¹³ and Shane Cook tells me that who is judging is 'a big factor on how much of my own style is going to come out. You really do have to play to the judges, at least to be successful, I think.'¹⁴ When I ask him if he plays to the judges, he responds, 'Every contest'.¹⁵ And yet contest fiddlers do not all sound the same, and particularly the most successful Ontario contest fiddlers have developed easily recognizable, unique styles, at least to those of us who hear them regularly, and they prepare the tunes they play onstage to reflect something of their own personalities.

In the remainder of this paper, I examine how fiddlers in Ontario contests express their individuality in competitive performances. My discussion is based on an analysis of 66 performances of the top three fiddlers in the Open class at the Canadian Open Fiddle Championships, spread evenly over the period from 1955 to 2003, as well as interviews with participants in the Ontario contest circuit. I focus, in particular, on two performances of the 'Red-Lion Hornpipe'. The first example was played in 2002 at the Canadian Open Fiddle Championships by Shane Cook (Appendix 1); the second example was played in 2003 at the Canadian Grand Masters Contest, in Nepean, Ontario, by Scott Woods, also a former Canadian champion (Appendix 2).

Tags

The most obvious difference between the two performances of 'Red Lion Hornpipe' occurs in the ending: Shane adds a complex and technically difficult four-bar tag (Appendix 1, bars 49–52, and Figure 1), while Scott incorporates an ending into the

last four bars of the A section (Appendix 2, bars 37–40). Both tags, two-bar to four-bar endings that are ‘tagged’ onto the end of the tune, and built-in endings, are prime opportunities for fiddlers to display their personal creativity. Many tags are formulaic, consisting of ascending and descending step-wise and gapped scales, scalar patterns, and arpeggiated patterns based on I, IV, and V chords. Commonly played within the circuit, these tags are easy to transpose and to add to the end of any tune.

Some tags, however, stand out from the others for a variety of reasons: harmonies, combinations of melodic ideas, and rhythms. Fiddlers use these tags to make a final impression on the audience and the judges, just before they leave the stage. As I was talking with Shane Cook about one of his distinctive tags that begins on a diminished chord, he said to me, ‘It stood out, you heard it, and that’s the point’.¹⁶ When I heard Shane’s 2002 reel tag (Figure 1), my first reaction was, ‘Wow, that’s neat’. It was only after I had transcribed it that I realized there is really nothing new in the tag. All the elements had been used before by other fiddlers at Shelburne and other contests: the repeated triplet rhythms by Michelle Lubinecki in 1991 (Figure 2) among many others; the descending series of leaps of a sixth (bar 3) by Louis Schryer in 1995 (Figure 3, bar 3); and displacing the resolution on the tonic chord to the second beat of the last bar by Ed Gyurki in 1958 (Figure 4), again among many others. What makes Shane’s tag distinct, then, is the way those elements are put together into one package. His 1998 tag (Figure 5) and Louis Schryer’s 1995 tag (Figure 3) are also appealing, just slightly different enough from commonly played tags to catch the listener’s attention.



Figure 1 Shane Cook, ‘Fern’s Reel’, 2002



Figure 2 Michelle Lubinecki, ‘Trip to Windsor’, 1991 – repeated triplet rhythms



Figure 3 Louis Schryer, ‘Fern’s Reel’, 1995



Figure 4 Ed Gyurki, ‘Snowflake Breakdown’, 1958

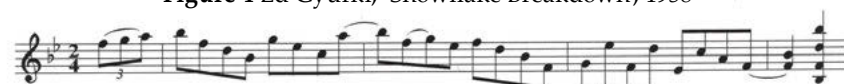


Figure 5 Shane Cook, ‘College Hornpipe’, 1998

Another interesting tag is one used by Ned Landry in 1962 (Figure 6), in which he finishes on the sixth degree of the scale. Just two years later Johnny Mooring used a tag (Figure 7) that rests momentarily on the sixth degree of the scale, but then resolves in the last bar from V to I. Don Messer was famous for the two-bar tag he added to nearly every reel he played, which ended on a vi chord; Canadian fiddlers today call it the 'Don Messer' ending (Figure 8). Since all three of these fiddlers are from the Maritimes, one might think that this is a regional influence; however, by the mid-60s, Messer was receiving enough national radio and television exposure that his influence was reaching from coast to coast. Fiddlers across Canada would have been exposed to the Messer ending, and yet according to my sample, few incorporated the distinctive vi (minor) chord into their own endings. To me, the use of the vi chord automatically implies Don Messer; it is not too surprising then that fiddlers trying to create their own identity in the contests would choose not to use this distinctive ending that is so connected to such a well-known fiddle personality.



Figure 6 Ned Landry, 'St. Anne's Reel', 1962



Figure 7 Johnny Mooring, 'Pembroke Reel', 1964



Figure 8 Typical Don Messer tag

While Scott's built-in ending (Appendix 2, bars 37–40), incorporating scalar movement and arpeggiated patterns, is not particularly attention-grabbing, it adds a nice finish to the tune, and has become a hallmark of Scott's personal style. He is well known on the contest circuit for varying the last four bars of the tune to create an ending.

Intros

Introductions to tunes played in contests are strictly functional; they set the tempo for the accompanist.¹⁷ While two- and four-bar intros are more common on recordings, fiddlers play the same tunes in contests with only a beat, or at most a bar, pickup. My only examples of longer reel intros are played by Sleepy Marlin in 1954 and Ed Gyurki in 1958. Sleepy, whose personality and Kentucky fiddle style made him a very popular performer the first few years of the Shelburne contest, plays the the old-time reel intro now commonly called 'four potatoes', for both his reels (Figure 9).



Figure 9 Intro played by Sleepy Marlin, 1954

Ed Gyurki is the only Canadian fiddler also to play this intro in his second year in the contest. To me, this intro sounds stereotypically ‘old-time’, and, in fact, ‘American old-time’, because of this particular bowing pattern and open-string drone. When non-fiddlers are imitating fiddlers in jest, this is often the rhythmic pattern that they sing or hum. Before speaking with Ed, I wondered if, coming from a classical background, he played this intro because he thought it was expected at an ‘old-time’ fiddle contest, and/or if he used it strategically to attempt to counterbalance his more classical sound. Significantly, he did not use this intro again in his 21 years of playing in the contest. When I asked Ed about the intro he seemed a little embarrassed by it. He said that in his first few years at the contest he was very impressed with the professionalism of Al Cherny’s playing, particularly how he played clean beginnings and endings, without the ‘diddling around’ that many fiddlers did in front of the microphone before they got started. Ed said that the ‘four potatoes’ intro would have been one of those gestures that he was trying to move away from in emulating Al Cherny’s ‘professional’ beginnings and endings.¹⁸

There is slightly more room for creativity in the intros to the waltzes because the fiddler can play with the length of usually up to three quarter notes, divided into eighths, triplets, and dotted rhythms. The intro to ‘Shannon Waltz’¹⁹ has become part of the tune; in fact, I often think of it as the ‘Shannon Waltz intro’ (Figure 10); however, it was also used for other waltzes in the 1960s and early 1970s. Alfie Myre plays a slight variation of the intro by adding two eighth notes before the triplet, making it into a four-beat intro (Figure 11). Ed Gyurki plays the only other example of a four-beat intro for ‘White Rose Waltz’ in 1966 (Figure 12).



Figure 10 Intro to ‘Shannon Waltz’, played by Al Cherny (1958)



Figure 11 Intro to ‘Shannon Waltz’, played by Alfie Myre (1974)



Figure 12 Intro to ‘White Rose Waltz’, played by Ed Gyurki (1966)

It is surprising to me that there is not more use by competitive fiddlers of the obvious opportunity for personal creativity that intros could provide. Mathew Johnson suggests that in contests fiddlers want to establish the tune and the beat as quickly as possible. A complex intro may sound like nothing more than a bunch of notes until listeners know what tune is being played. Also, the three or four-minute time limits at contests may prevent fiddlers from adding anything extra to their performances.²⁰ Mathew did not dismiss the idea of creative intros outright, however; he concluded by joking that maybe he should start the fad next summer. Perhaps once tags have been pushed as far as they can go, fiddlers will turn to innovative intros to further personalize their arrangements of tunes for competition.

Ornamentation

Ornamentation is another obvious way that Shane and Scott create individual renditions of the tune; however, compared to many other fiddle traditions, these fiddlers use very little ornamentation. According to the literature,²¹ lack of complex ornamentation is a hallmark of Canadian old-time style²² In fact, removing the ornaments from a tune from another tradition has been called 'Canadianizing'²³ the tune, and prominent Canadian fiddlers agree with the scholars. 'There are no ornamentations added in the Canadian style,²⁴ where the Irish and the Scottish do have more',²⁵ and 'I think we basically played the tunes pretty straight, as I remember. If anything, you'd put in little trills [double grace notes], nothing too out of the ordinary.'²⁶ An analysis of the 198 tunes in my sample demonstrates that, at least in competitive fiddling, there are few performances that use no ornamentation at all; rather, the amount and type of ornamentation varies according to the individual player, the tune itself, and the time period in which it is played. Some tunes, for example, 'Red Lion Hornpipe', are already very full, leaving little room for fiddlers to do much more than add a few grace or passing notes.

Shane adds a number of passing notes that become triplets, both bowed, for example in bars 8, 32 and 40, and slurred, in bars 12, 16, 19, 20, 24, 27, 28, and 44. The frequent use of triplets, which breaks up the steady, almost relentless 16th note patterns of the tune, is certainly unique in performances I have heard of this tune. Shane credits his use of triplets to the influence of Irish fiddling, but adds that he is careful not to add too many triplets, and never in conjunction with other Irish ornaments, such as the roll, so that the tune does not become more Irish-sounding than Canadian old-time. Scott also uses the slurred triplet from the dominant up to the tonic (bars 20 and 28), which is a typical ornament in Canadian old-time fiddling; he further adds just a couple of auxiliary notes in bars 2 and 37.

Although there is a tendency within my larger sample toward the increasing use of ornamentation over time, there are enough exceptions that I would hesitate to call it a trend. Ironically, Graham Townsend, quoted earlier as saying there were no ornaments in 'Canadian' fiddling, and who was well known within the circuit for his opinion that fiddling in contests was moving too far away from the old-time style, has one of the most ornamented styles of any of the fiddlers in my examples.

His version of his own 'Rocking Chair Jig' in 1964 (Appendix 3) uses single grace notes, two kinds of double grace notes, passing note triplets and auxiliary note triplets; nearly every bar has some sort of ornamentation. Personally, I feel that the ornaments overpower and take away from the melody; yet, Graham is an icon in Canadian old-time fiddling and is certainly a model for many other fiddlers. Fiddler, Dan Schryer, comments:

I remember Graham Townsend would take this one piece and add a run down; he'd just run it down to fancy it up. So you know, as a kid, you'd hear that and think, 'Wow that's neat', and you'd learn it, so the traditional pieces today have evolved to the point where they all have fancy licks and everything.²⁷

There are several examples in my sample of a fiddler ornamenting two tunes of the set, but not the third, or vice versa. This inconsistency leads me to believe that individual decisions about ornamentation have as much to do with the tune itself as personal aesthetic preference for certain kinds of ornamentation. As I described previously, some tunes, such as 'Red Lion Hornpipe', are already very full, leaving little room for fiddlers to do much more than add a few grace notes. While one might think that tempo would have an effect on the amount of ornamentation used, this does not seem to be the case.

While ornamentation is an individual decision, depending on both the tune itself and the aesthetic preference of the fiddler, there are certain conventions or trends that do influence the type of ornamentation and where it is used. One influential trend is the increasing use of Irish ornamentation, specifically rolls and bowed triplets. Pierre Schryer is generally credited within the circuit with bringing Irish influences (ornamentation, bowing, repertoire) into Ontario fiddle contests in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Other young fiddlers, for example, Mark Sullivan, continued the trend to the present day. Of course, Pierre was not the first to be influenced by Irish fiddling. Irish fiddling is the primary influence on fiddling in the Ottawa Valley,²⁸ although it has been adapted enough in this region for it not to be called Irish-Canadian fiddling. As early as 1955, Jean Carignan played his unique Irish-influenced French-Canadian fiddling at Shelburne.²⁹ That he was placed third out of the top three is believed by some to be a direct discrimination against French-Canadian fiddling in Ontario contests;³⁰ however, the fact that he made it into the top three, from an initial field of 76 fiddlers, suggests that his style was acceptable enough to get him into the finals in the first place.

Even though Cape Breton fiddling has become quite popular since the early 1990s, there are no examples in my sample of the quintessential Cape Breton rhythmic ornament called a 'cut' (Figure 13). In fact, although 'Mason's Apron' is almost always played with the cut in the first bar of the A part, even in Canadian old-time circles, neither Wilf Mitchell nor Rudy Meeks play the cut in their Shelburne performances in 1954 and 1977. When asked to describe old-time fiddling, Tammy Yakabuskie cautions that an occasional cut may be acceptable, but not too many,

as they are considered too Scottish.³¹ Mark Sullivan says that he would never use a cut in contest fiddling.³² Mathew Johnson believes there has been little transfer of elements of Cape Breton fiddling into contest fiddling because the aesthetic of the two styles is so different. He describes Cape Breton fiddling as having more energy, and less finesse.³³ In contrast, the most important element of Ontario contest style, arguably, is cleanliness. While some contest players do play Cape Breton tunes, including the 'cut' ornament, in campgrounds and shows and for step dancers, they are not common as contest repertoire.



Figure 13 The Cut

Ornamentation can become the hallmark of an individual's personal style. A prime example is Scott Woods, who inserts an ascending scalar passage in many of his tunes (Figures 14–16), leading into the repeat of a section, or a change to a new section.



Figure 14 'Red-Haired Boy' (1995), bars 15–17



Figure 15 'Blackthorn Stick' (1995), bars 8–9



Figure 16 'Lori's Waltz' (2002), bars 15–17

Although this ornamental device is quite effective, adding some excitement going into the new section, no one else in the circuit has adopted it. There is a tacit understanding that it is Scott's special ornament and no one wants to be seen 'stealing' it.

While ornamentation can be used to individualize a tune or a style, like the melodic variation discussed below, it can also become part of the tune. A prime example occurs in the B part of 'Buttermilk Mary', where it has become conventional to add double grace notes to bars five and six of the repeated B part (bars 29 and 30 of the tune; see Figure 17).



Figure 17 'Buttermilk Mary', bars 29–30

Some tune collections even print the grace notes in the notation for 'Buttermilk Mary', although most ornamentation is left out of notated versions.

Reification of ornamentation also occurs on a more personal level in the versions played by particular fiddlers on stage. Most of my examples show the same ornamentation used in the same places on each repetition of the tunes, and often even on the same tune played by the same fiddler several years apart. Although ornamentation on stage is seldom varied, in less formal contexts, for example in campgrounds or in shows, fiddlers are more likely to change the ornamentation on each repetition of the tune. In group playing situations (jam sessions), ornamentation is often inspired by what one hears from other fiddlers, contributing to and feeding off of each others' creativity.

Bowing

Bowing also contributes to differences in overall feel between these two performances. Shane's playing is somewhat smoother, created in part by the frequency with which he bows over the bar-line (for example bar 16 into bar 17) and the beat (bars 2, 4, and 8). Shane also uses many more 3-note slurs than does Scott. The smoothness created by this particular use of slurring, contrasting with the bowed triplets Shane uses as a pickup to the A sections, certainly catches my attention. Scott's bowing is more typical of an older Canadian old-time style: a combination of straight bowing and two- and three-note slurs, seldom over the bar-line. The result, to my ear, is a little less smoothness, and a little more drive. That Scott considers himself to be, first and foremost, a dance musician, despite the fact that he has grown up on the competition circuit and been quite successful in contests, then, is not surprising.

Melodic variations

Melodic variation is a further opportunity for fiddlers to express themselves. Shane Cook cautions, though, that too much variation is not acceptable on stage in Ontario contests:

Depending on who the judge is or who the judges are, you could maybe put in some variations within the tune. You want to stay close to the melody, maybe it's just a note or two that are changed. That might be your opportunity to change something. But really beyond that I don't think there is much of an opportunity. You have to stay fairly close to the style.³⁴

In fact, the literature on Canadian old-time fiddling states that there is minimal or no use of melodic variation,³⁵ and certainly this is true in comparison to the highly developed melodic variations typical of American contest or Texas-style fiddling. American fiddle scholar, Chris Goertzen, writes that melodic variation on early American fiddle recordings was minor, but pervasive, because the music was used primarily for dancing: too much variation was a distraction for the dancers.³⁶ As the American contest/Texas style developed, and became a style that was

listened to, rather than danced to, variation took on an increasingly important role. Since Canadian old-time fiddling, even in the competitive context, has not lost its connection with dancing, the role of variation remains minimal.

Indeed, there are only two instances of variations used in these performances. The first occurs in the last bar of each 8-bar section. Scott plays the typical broken chord pattern, while Shane begins the bar with the leap from the 7th degree of the scale to the tonic, and then fills in the chord. Shane further varies the fourth bar of the A section, playing the usual broken chord pattern on the second and fourth times through, following the triplets, but varying the pattern on the first and third times through, contrasting the descending thirds in the first beat of the bar with ascending thirds in the second beat of the bar. These are minor variations, to be sure; most listeners would not even hear the difference, since the notes outline the same chord.

Slight melodic and rhythmic variations are not just a recent phenomenon of contest fiddling; in fact, they are quite prevalent in my sample throughout the 1950s. For example, George Mitchell uses extensive variation in his 1955 'Westphalia Waltz' (Appendix 4), actually changing the melody in the last eight bars of the B section; usually the last eight bars of the B section just repeat the first eight bars. When I asked George about this variation, he said that everyone he knew played the tune that way at that time.³⁷ This is an example, then, of how some variations reify and actually become the melody, at least in some circles. Don Reed explains how a variation can catch on:

Some of the little things you might do, years later it's like a common thing that everybody's doing. [Don plays a variation on 'Big John MacNeil'.] I think Raymond was, I don't know if he's the first guy that did that, but I think I remember him doing stuff like that [...] And then somebody'll change something else.³⁸

According to my sample, there is then a period of time during which there is less melodic variation: the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. It becomes more common again in the late 1980s. Pierre Schryer's 'Tripping up the Stairs' is a good example. In his 1988 version (Appendix 5), he plays the opening motif (bar 1) six different ways, primarily playing with the rhythm (six eighth notes or various substitutions of quarter-eighth combinations), and also varying the pitch slightly on the last repeat (bar 45). A more substantial variation occurs on the last two bars of the B section, a descending scale and then ascending arpeggio passage leading back into the return of the A section. Pierre uses similar relatively substantial variations in his 1987 version of the same tune (compare bars 27 and 28 in Figures 18 and 19 and bar 43 in Figures 20 and 21), that are now relatively common amongst fiddlers on the contest circuit.



Figure 18 Pierre Schryer, 'Tripping up the Stairs' (1988), bars 25–28



Figure 19 Pierre Schryer, 'Tripping up the Stairs' (1987), bars 25–28



Figure 20 Pierre Schryer, 'Tripping up the Stairs' (1988), bars 41–44



Figure 21 Pierre Schryer, 'Tripping up the Stairs' (1987), bars 41–44

Melodic variation is an opportunity for fiddlers to express themselves: 'I think a lot of the young kids, they seem to be trying different things in the tunes, and it's kind of fun. Because that can give you a little bit of individuality.'³⁹ As I describe at the beginning of the discussion of melodic variation, however, too much variation is not acceptable on stage in Ontario contests. And for some fiddlers, variation is disrespectful to the composer of the tune, and simply unacceptable:

But for someone like myself, [Graham Townsend] went out of favour with me because when I heard him playing certain tunes it wasn't the same, and there were a lot of things in there that didn't make it the same. Whereas hearing somebody like Ti-jean [Carignan], who never played anything in his life to change it, he always had that respect for the composer.⁴⁰

So, while melodic variation is one way that contest fiddlers can display their creativity and make the tune their own, it may or may not be acceptable in a contest.

Conclusion

While individual creativity is most apparent in more informal playing contexts, like jam sessions, I have examined how fiddlers can also express their individuality more subtly on the contest stage through tags, intros, ornamentation, bowing, and melodic variations. As I demonstrate, however, these instances of individuality operate within some rather strong boundaries of acceptable old-time repertoire and style: one can write unusual and ear-catching tags, but within certain harmonic and rhythmic limits; one can play certain ethnically-associated ornaments, but not too many, and only for certain judges; one can play some variation on the melody, but not too much. Ontario contest fiddlers walk a careful line between playing the tunes the way they have been played in the past, which is comfortable and familiar to their audience, and infusing them with their own personalities. Too far to one side, they

risk being penalized by the judges and dismissed by the audience; too far to the other, they do not make an impression on either.

Notes

¹ Dawson Girdwood, Perth, Ontario, Canada, personal interview, 25 July 2003.

² Shane Cook, London, Ontario, Canada, personal interview, 31 January 2003.

³ *Fiddles of Shelburne* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1973).

⁴ This attitude is in direct contrast to that of many fiddlers in Norway: 'Although some of the very best fiddlers make a point of continuing to put their own creativity on the line when they perform, more and more fiddlers believe their function is to preserve faithfully their share of a precious heritage.' See Chris Goertzen, *Fiddling for Norway: Revival and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 185.

⁵ Cook interview (2003).

⁶ Chad Wolfe, North Bay, Ontario, Canada, personal interview, 16 February 2003.

⁷ Dan Schryer, Bobcaygeon, Ontario, Canada, personal interview by Marcia Ostaszewski, 27 July 2002.

⁸ Don Reed, Naughton, Ontario, Canada, personal interview, 9 November 2003.

⁹ Cook interview (2003).

¹⁰ Mathew Johnson, Stratford, Ontario, Canada, personal interview, 10 May 2003.

¹¹ Johnson interview (2003).

¹² Johnson interview (2003).

¹³ Linda Maldonado, Brampton, Ontario, Canada, 14 April 2003.

¹⁴ Cook interview (2003).

¹⁵ Cook interview (2003).

¹⁶ Cook interview (2003).

¹⁷ Fiddlers, even in contests, do not cue their accompanists as classical musicians do. They may look over to make sure the accompanist is ready, comfortably seated, with headphones on, but then they just start and expect the accompanist to be with them. Most of the more accomplished fiddlers will have practised ahead of time with their chosen accompanist; even after he practises with his accompanist. Open class fiddler, Mathew Johnson, plays the first couple bars of each of his three tunes quietly for his accompanist, just before he steps up to the microphone, to remind her what pickups he is using and the approximate tempo.

¹⁸ Ed Gyurki, Woodstock, Ontario, personal interview, Canada, 13 January 2006.

¹⁹ Al Cherny is credited with introducing a 'new' arrangement of 'Shannon Waltz', transposing it from F to G for the contest circuit (Ron Reed, personal communication, 14 February 2004); perhaps this intro was part of the new arrangement.

²⁰ Mathew Johnson, personal communication, 24 February 2004.

²¹ Anne Lederman, Special Issue on Fiddling in Canada, *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin/Bulletin de Musique Folklorique Canadienne* 19/3, pp. 18–19; Earl V. Spielman, 'Traditional North American Fiddling: A Methodology for Historical and Comparative Analytic Style Study of Instrumental Musical Traditions' (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975), pp. 441–42; Johanne Trew, 'Music, Place, and Community: Culture and Irish Heritage in the Ottawa Valley' (University of Limerick, PhD dissertation, 2000), pp. 188–89, 198.

²² Graf writes that lack of ornamentation is a characteristic of old-time style in general (presumably meaning American old-time). See Sharon Poulson Graf, 'Traditionalization at the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest: Politics, Power, and Authenticity' (Michigan State University, PhD dissertation, 1999), p. 170.

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²³ This terminology marginalizes some regional styles in Canada, such as Cape Breton and some French-Canadian styles that are heavily ornamented.

²⁴ Graham is referring to the Canadian *old-time* style; to Graham it was just 'the Canadian style', another example of how regional styles can be marginalized in the discourse of Canadian fiddling.

²⁵ Graham Townsend, interview with Martin Chapman, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Radio One, Grassroots, June 1982.

²⁶ Reed interview (2003).

²⁷ Schryer interview (2002).

²⁸ The Ottawa Valley is the area bordering the Ottawa River, which separates the provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

²⁹ Jean Carignan was principally influenced by the recordings of Sligo-style fiddler, Michael Coleman. See Richard Green and Christian Rioux, Jean Carignan, *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/jean-carignan/> (accessed 11 February 2006).

³⁰ Dawson Girdwood, Perth, Ontario, Canada, personal interview, 4 May 2001.

³¹ Tammy Yakabuskie, London, Ontario, Canada, personal interview, 31 January 2003.

³² Mark Sullivan, personal communication, 4 February 2006.

³³ Mathew Johnson, personal communication, 21 February 2004.

³⁴ Cook interview (2003).

³⁵ Lederman (1985), p. 19; George A. Proctor, 'Old-time Fiddling in Ontario', *National Museum of Canada Bulletin*, 190 (1963), 188; Spielman (1975), p. 442.

³⁶ Chris Goertzen, 'The Transformation of American Contest Fiddling', *The Journal of Musicology*, 6, no. 1 (1988), 111.

³⁷ George Mitchell, personal communication, 28 October 2004.

³⁸ Reed interview (2003).

³⁹ Reed interview (2003).

⁴⁰ Girdwood interview (2003).

Appendix 1 'Red Lion Hornpipe'

Arr. Shane Cook

♩ = 116

The musical score for 'Red Lion Hornpipe' is presented in 12 staves of music. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 116. The score includes various musical ornaments and techniques, such as triplets (indicated by a '3' below the notes) and grace notes (indicated by a 'V' above the notes). The music is written in a single melodic line, typical of a fiddle or hornpipe. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and rests. The piece concludes with a final chord and a fermata over the last note.

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Appendix 2 'Red Lion Hornpipe'

Arr. Scott Woods

♩ = 116

The musical score consists of ten staves of music. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 116 beats per minute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 2/4. The music is written in a single melodic line. The first nine staves contain the main body of the piece, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. There are several slurs and accents throughout. The final staff concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Appendix 3 Graham Townsend – ‘Rocking Chair Jig’ (1964)

Graham Townsend

♩. = 120

The musical score for 'Rocking Chair Jig' is written in 6/8 time with a tempo of 120. It consists of seven staves of music. The first staff begins with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplets. Chord symbols (C, F, G7, D7) are placed above the notes. There are two first and second endings marked with '1' and '2'. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

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Appendix 4 George Mitchell – ‘Westphalia Waltz’ (1955)

♩ = 152

C

C Dm G7

Dm G7

G7 C 1 2 C

C

C Dm G7

Dm G7

G7 C

C

C F

F G

G7 C

Appendix 5 Pierre Schryer – ‘Tripping up the Stairs’ (1988)

♩. = 116

D G D A7 D A7 D G D A7 D Bm A Bm A7 D Bm A Bm A7 D D G D A7 D A7 D D G D A7 D