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**Mediating Between the Past and Present: Changing Faces of the
West Coast Fiddle Tradition in Scotland**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the development of the fiddle tradition in the West Coast of Scotland, which, in comparison with better-known fiddle traditions such as the North East, has been overlooked in the historical narrative. The paper investigates the changes that have occurred in the last thirty years as a result of globalisation and draws from interviews and sound recordings with a selection of fiddle players from the 1950's up to the present day.

The paper examines the performance styles of an older generation of fiddle players in the West Coast and identifies commonalities in their playing such as the influence of bagpipe ornamentation and repertoire as well as influences from the Gaelic song tradition. The paper also draws heavily from correspondence with Angus Grant, one of the foremost exponents of the West Coast Highland style of fiddle playing, in which he discusses the practices of the fiddle tradition in his youth as well as the changes he has witnessed over the years with a move towards a more high technology environment. Following on from this, the paper addresses the current day fiddle tradition and discusses interviews with a number of fiddle players from or now residing in areas in the West Coast, and shows how less travel restrictions as well as technology have led to an expansion of fiddle styles, and movements such as the Fèisean have encouraged a resurgence in Scottish traditional music.

The paper concludes that although there are still definite stylistic aspects of the West Coast style evident in the performances of current day players, regional styles of fiddle playing are dying out as younger players take influence from other styles and genres outwith their own. This leads to a discussion on the notion of mediating between the old and new and concludes that although this music comes out of an old tradition, it is constantly developing and changing, and it is up to those actively practising this musical tradition to decide and shape what comes next.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature:

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Introduction

There are certain differences very perceptible to the musical ear, in the style and character of the music of certain districts. James Logan, 1831¹

In an age of globalisation and the dilution of locality boundaries the artist is able to draw from more sources than ever before and, in the context of music, styles often merge into one another. Scottish fiddle music has often been categorised by regional styles that originated in days gone by when travel was limited and different areas developed unique playing styles influenced by leading local players, repertoire, local dance traditions, and language dialects with limited contact from other regions. There are clear stylistic differences that can distinguish music from the West Coast to that of music from the North East or Shetland. Piping has had a huge influence on the fiddle style of the West Coast, and players from this area, generally speaking, tend to use more ornamentation than say a player from the Shetland or North East fiddle traditions. The North East style is based on a more classical style with the use of longer bow strokes as well as the use of vibrato. Ringing open strings, fast tempo tunes, and syncopation are characteristics generally associated with the Shetland style of fiddle playing. However, this is not to say that players will not take influence from aspects of all these different styles.

Arguably, the most vigorously researched and influential of the fiddle traditions has been that of the North East; Peter Cook has also studied the Shetland style in depth in his book *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles*.² The West Coast and Highland style has been, in comparison, overlooked in the historical narrative; this is most likely due to its development as an oral and non-literate tradition. Compared with the North East and Shetland fiddle traditions, which have developed continuously, the fiddle tradition of the West Coast has had a turbulent and broken past having suffered a decline from around

1. James Logan, *The Scottish Gaël; or, Celtic manners, as preserved among the Highlanders: being an historical and descriptive account of the inhabitants, antiquities, and national peculiarities of Scotland; more particularly of the Northern, or Gaëlic parts of the country, where the singular habits of the Aboriginal Celts are most tenaciously retained*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder, & Co, 1831), 258.

2. Peter Cooke, *The Fiddle Tradition of the Shetland Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

1900 until the 1980's.³ Although there is no concrete evidence or sources to draw from, the fiddle was thought to have been prohibited by the Presbyterian church in the nineteenth century, and the story goes that many fiddles were burned because they were known as the "devil's instrument". It is this broken past that motivates my study; because so much is unknown about the fiddle tradition of the West Coast and with very few sources to tell us more, it seems timely to present a study on its current development. In this thesis I will trace the evolution of the fiddle tradition in the West Coast of Scotland and investigate the effects that globalisation and technology have had on performance styles and how this has ultimately resulted in the decline of regional styles amongst the new generation of players. The fiddle scene is now dominated by a hybrid of styles that can be attributed to mixtures of people coming together with diverse repertoires as well as a surge in new composition.

This conjures up the question of authenticity, and it would appear that the ones who decide the authenticity of a tradition are ultimately the ones who practise traditional music in the present day as well as the audiences who listen to it. However, it would be inadequate to overlook the origins of the style of this music, and therefore I will stress the argument that although globalisation has led to a very vibrant present day scene, fiddle players, and artists in general, should strive to mediate between the past and present; as Angus Grant puts it: "I hope they will remember the old tunes before going further afield".⁴ This thesis should not only be of interest to scholars but also to performers of traditional Scottish music who may wish to reflect on their performance practice and consider the extent to which we should look to the past for inspiration as well as developing what is ultimately a living tradition.

There is no set structure of language or signs to describe the music, which makes the study of traditional music somewhat difficult. Recent years has seen an increase in research into fiddle music; most notably led by Ian Russell at the Elphinstone Institute in the *Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North*

3. Mary Anne Alburger, in *Scottish Fiddlers and their Music*, discusses the effect of two world wars on the decline of fiddle music in the twentieth century, "which severed the musical continuity of centuries". See Mary Anne Alburger, *Scottish Fiddlers and Their Music* (Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd, 1983), 194

4. Angus Grant, letter to author, August 13, 2014.

Atlantic. And whilst these studies have been extremely helpful in generating a broader picture of the current day fiddle tradition, it is apparent that there is still a need to address the changes that have occurred in the West Coast fiddle tradition. Documenting the tradition as it is happening in the present day may help to guide the music in the future. In terms of regional fiddle styles, there are commonalities which players from a certain region may possess. However, fiddle style is ultimately personalised and at the discretion of the individual; this is an idea which I will explore in depth later in the thesis and will draw from interviews and recordings of various fiddle players in order to present an informative and inspired picture of the present day fiddle tradition of the West Coast. Liz Doherty states, in the context of the Irish fiddle tradition, that:

The notion of regional style is defined by a shared space of musical experience with the result being a mosaic of individual re-interpretations of those commonalities rather than a unified and homogenous sound; a celebration of the personal diversities rather than the creation of another defined strand of Irish tradition.⁵

In chapter one I will discuss literature that is relevant to the subject matter of this thesis and place it within the context of previous research to demonstrate the need for study. The following chapter will be a discussion on the methodology of research and an explanation to the manner in which research was collated, why certain approaches were adopted, and how the methodology was used to meet the aims of this thesis. In chapter three I will present a historic account of the fiddle tradition of the West Coast and show how it intricately ties in with the oral tradition. With regards to the oral tradition, I will draw from a discussion with Norman MacLean, a Gaelic singer, piper, and comedian who now resides in North Uist. I will discuss the fiddle styles of an older generation of fiddle players who help to build a picture of the dissemination and ideologies of fiddle music of the West Coast in past generations; in order to do so, I will utilise fiddle recordings and interviews available on *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*.⁶ I will also draw heavily from correspondence with one of the best-known fiddle players of the West Highland

5. Liz Doherty, "Inishowen uncovered: further strands of the Donegal fiddle tradition," in *Driving the Bow: fiddle and dance studies from around the North Atlantic 2*, ed. Ian Russell and Anna Kearney Guigné (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, 2010), 197.

6. *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/>.

style: Angus Grant. By placing the fiddle tradition of the West Coast into a historical context, I aim to show the developments and changes that have occurred along the way and provide a multifaceted picture of the fiddle tradition up to the present day.

Following on from this, in chapter four I will draw from interviews with six fiddle players all involved in traditional music as well as my own personal experiences and observations as a fiddle player. By surveying their individual experiences, motivations, influences, and output in traditional music I will be able to build a picture of the present day fiddler. I will investigate the changes that have occurred in the last thirty years in the fiddle tradition in the West Coast and how the dissemination of tunes have changed as well as teaching methods particularly with a move towards a more literate tradition. Radio, television, and the internet have had a huge impact on fiddle styles as players can access all sorts of music and draw influence from genres such as jazz, bluegrass, and Cajun to name but a few; it should come as no surprise that the breadth of styles in Scottish fiddle music have expanded at an enormous rate.

This leads me onto my final chapter where I will assess the effects that changes in the fiddle tradition have had on older regional styles of fiddle playing and pose the question: to what extent do our musical roots matter and how can or should we go about salvaging these styles, or should we be content with what is happening in the here and now? While there are so many crossovers in fiddle styles within Scotland, far more so today than ever before, it should not be overlooked that there are vast differences that still exist in the musical styles of different regions today: styles that ultimately inform fiddle players of the present day. Music from the West Coast of Scotland is of an oral tradition, and much of it has been lost through the years so it is difficult to date back to anything before audio recording came in; much of this material is found in sound archives in the School of Scottish Studies and will be referred to in this thesis.

This thesis seeks to explore the development of the West Coast fiddle tradition, the regional styles that have developed within this tradition, and the changes that have occurred due to globalisation and the wide availability of sources of inspiration for the musician. I will discuss the impact this may have on

the future of Scottish fiddle music and, indeed, investigate the concepts of authenticity and roots that are so often attached with the term tradition.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

In order to present a full picture of the West Coast fiddle tradition into the present day, it is important to track its relationship to the Gaelic oral tradition. The oral tradition has drawn scholarly interest for many generations; one of the most prominent of these scholars was Father Allan MacDonald (1859-1905) who collated vast amounts of songs, poetry, and folklore. Much of his work is discussed in *Father Allan: The Life and Legacy of a Hebridean Priest* written by Roger Hutchinson; this book has proven valuable in tracing the background of the oral tradition as well as the unique customs that originated in communities—mainly those in the Western Isles.⁷ John Lorne Campbell is another scholar whose contribution to research and collation of folksongs from the Hebrides has provided a benchmark for further study on the oral tradition. Indeed, if it were not for Campbell's vigorous efforts in collating material from the oral tradition in the Highlands and Islands then much of it would have been lost through time. Campbell's collaboration with musicologist Francis Collinson in the *Hebridean Folksong* series has proven to be a valuable asset for any scholar researching the musical traditions of this part of the country. Francis Collinson's analysis of the music to which Gaelic lyrics were set draws attention to the variations that occur in songs, which he attributes as a direct result of the oral tradition and the "artistic and creative instincts of the singer".⁸ Collinson has carried out extensive musical analysis on the scales used in these folksongs.⁹ These historic accounts provide a basis with which to compare the current performance practices in the West Coast fiddle tradition as well as the changes that have taken place in the dissemination of traditional music today.

The West Coast style of fiddling has often been linked to the pipes. Indeed, much of the repertoire of the West Coast is within the nine-note pipe scale; the bagpipe scale uses three interlaced pentatonic scales, and this tonal palette is

7. Roger Hutchinson, *Father Allan: The Life and Legacy of a Hebridean Priest* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2010).

8. John Lorne Campbell and Francis M. Collinson, *Hebridean Folksongs*, vol. 2, *Waulking songs from Barra, South Uist, Eriskay and Benbecula* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 256.

9. *Ibid.*, 255-268.

often used in the melodies for Gaelic songs.¹⁰ The close relationship between instrumental music, in this case bagpiping, and the Gaelic language is also discussed in Joshua Dickson's *When Piping was Strong: Tradition, Change and the Bagpipe in South Uist*.¹¹ In a similar vein to this thesis, his work is based on documented history as well as interviews with local performers engaging in the tradition. He examines the role of piping within the wider context of everyday life in the Hebrides and shows the changes that have occurred along the way. The piping tradition in South Uist was of an oral tradition whereby pipers would learn their tunes by hearing them sung or "diddled" in what is known as *canntaireachd*.¹² Piping, it would appear, has been the most dominant musical tradition in the West Coast, and studies have often addressed the close relationship with the Gaelic song tradition such as Allan MacDonald's thesis "The Relationship between Pibroch and Gaelic Song: its Implications on the Performance Style of the Pibroch Urlar".¹³ The relationship between bagpiping and fiddle music of the West Coast has also been noted in the work of scholars such as Francis Collinson in his book *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*. As Collinson commented:

From personal observation the writer would aver that the West of Scotland fiddlers differ in playing style from those of the Strathspey country, being somewhat less aggressive in accentuation, and with musical ornamentation more closely modelled on that of the pipes.¹⁴

The relationship between the fiddle and the bagpipes is further discussed in David Johnson's *Scottish Fiddle Music in the 18th Century*, a collection of one hundred years of previously unknown Scottish fiddle music.¹⁵ Johnson's discussion

10. For an in depth study on the bagpipe scale see Roderick D. Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2002).

11. Joshua Dickson, *When Piping was Strong: Tradition, Change and the Bagpipe in South Uist* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 2006).

12. For a definition see Edward Dwelly, "canntaireachd," in *The Illustrated Gaelic- English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Glasgow: Gairm Publications, 1994), 159-161.

13. Allan MacDonald, "The Relationship between Pibroch and Gaelic Song: its Implications on the Performance Style of the Pibroch Urlar" (MLitt thesis., University of Edinburgh, 1995). <http://allanmacdonald.com/thesis.php>.

14. Francis Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1966), 213.

15. David Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music in the 18th Century: A music collection and historical study* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1997).

on bagpipe pieces in chapter five is particularly relevant to my own research whereby much of the West Coast fiddle tradition seems to be heavily influenced by the pipes. Johnson also discusses the reinvention of fiddling since the Second World War and draws particular attention to the fact that traditional music now has a formal place in the education system. This has, perhaps, been one of the biggest changes in traditional music in general, and the fact that many fiddle players are able to make a full-time living from a musical career demonstrates the vast changes that have occurred. I will extend on this point later in the thesis.

It is apparent that traditional music retains certain elements of the oral tradition although in more of an aural sense where players learn by ear with notation at hand, if need be, as opposed to being taught orally through the singing of another individual. The oral tradition is discussed in depth in Anne Dhu McLucas's *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA*.¹⁶ Although based in the USA, much of this book is applicable to my own work as the author discusses the way in which Irish-American fiddlers formed styles in their own creative way but also very much tied to a tradition of fiddle playing whereby the "foundation for Irish-American fiddling is a deeply traditional one, going back many generations, but incorporating change and allowing for new composition within time-honored formulas as tunes are handed down".¹⁷

Mary Anne Alburger has carried out significant research in Scottish fiddle music including her PhD thesis "Making the Fiddle Sing: Captain Simon Fraser of Knockie and his Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles".¹⁸ Part one provides useful background reading on traditional Gaelic music and the oral transmission: this ties in with my own research as much of the traditional music of the West Coast, including the fiddle tradition, has been transmitted orally. Alburger discusses the close relationship between the lyrics

16. Anne Dhu McLucas, *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010).

17. *Ibid.*, 26.

18. Mary Anne Alburger, "Making the Fiddle Sing: Captain Simon Fraser of Knockie and his Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2001).

and music that make up Gaelic song and states that before steps were taken to notate the songs, "they could only be transmitted by a singer. However, a musician could receive the music, and a non-singer the words, which could then be used for separate purposes".¹⁹ Much of what lies at the heart of traditional music in the West Coast, it would appear, derives from a close relationship between music and the language.

The development of the Scottish fiddle tradition is further discussed, in detail, in Alburger's book *Scottish Fiddlers and their Music*.²⁰ Extensive coverage is given to famous composers such as William Marshall, Niel Gow, Nathaniel Gow, Simon Fraser, and James Scott Skinner. Alburger also addresses the fiddle tradition of the present day and the changes that have taken place, predominantly advances in technology. I will extend on this idea later in this thesis particularly in discussions with present day fiddle players. Alburger discusses three fiddle players who represent three distinctive fiddling styles: Hector MacAndrew of the North East, Tom Anderson of Shetland, and Angus Grant of the West Coast/Highland style. Although she notes differences in regional styles such as those afore mentioned, particular emphasis is placed on the individual who although "has in his background a family tradition of music which he is continuing, the real storehouse of style remains in each individual".²¹

Alburger's book, although extremely detailed and diverse in context, focuses more so on the literate fiddle tradition of the North East; understandably because the most outstanding composers, such as James Scott Skinner, are exponents from this tradition. However, it would appear that there is scope to broaden the field of research into fiddle traditions such as that of the West Coast which has been overlooked in the historical narrative; this thesis will attempt address this gap by tracing the development of the fiddle tradition in the West Coast.

19. Ibid., 1.

20. Alburger, *Scottish Fiddlers and Their Music*.

21. Ibid., 208.

Glenn Graham in his book *The Cape Breton Fiddle* discusses the evolution of the fiddle tradition up to the present day and addresses the "relationship between the maintenance of the Gaelic sound in the playing style and the accelerated decline of the Gaelic language".²² Graham states that his research is "above all a musician's outlook"²³; this is a useful approach that ties in with my earlier discussion of authenticity. Those who determine authenticity are those who are actively engaging in the tradition. Graham's study of the impact of global influences on the fiddle tradition in Cape Breton demonstrates the multi-faceted status of it in the current day whilst at the same time places a strong emphasis on past generations of players who were eminent in passing on the tunes to younger players.

The concept of style is continuously referred to in the context of fiddling and in traditional music in general. Indeed, some of the aims of this thesis are to explore the West Coast style, the dilution of regional styles, and global influences informing the performance styles of current day players. Far from trying to define style or ring-fence the West Coast fiddle tradition under one heading, it is more appropriate to demonstrate the diversities amongst fiddle players. However, in order to do that, it would be helpful to have a form of describing the performance style of a player with reference to the technical features that form their distinctive sound and distinguishes them from another player. Niall Keegan's article "The Parameters of Style in Irish Traditional Music" addresses this issue and provides a useful breakdown of components which construct style; examples include ornamentation, phrasing, articulation, and repertoire.²⁴ Although this gives the musicologist a means of breaking down the components to discover the make-up of a sound, it should not be considered definitive by any means. Keegan himself states:

In the analysis we can lose the thing we love and interact with, this music is obviously more than a sum of its parts and this sort of process can lose its

22. Glenn Graham, *The Cape Breton Fiddle: Making and Maintaining Tradition* (Sydney: Cape Breton University Press, 2007).

23. *Ibid.*, 15.

24. Niall Keegan, "The Parameters of Style in Irish Traditional Music," *Inbhear- Journal of Irish Music and Dance* 1, no. 1 (2010): 63-96, accessed August 7, 2014, <http://www.irishworldacademy.ie/inbhear/volume-1/n-keegan/v1-i1-n-keegan-menu.html>.

true musical, social and cultural impact. However, as a tool to develop our individual performance practice it can be invaluable. It is also invaluable for musicologists attempting to engage with native structures for assessing and accounting for performance. Many contemporary performers need to become musicologists in order to develop their performance practice and examine how these technical parameters of style are manifest in their own music and make decisions about the effect of such technique on their style and how their use can add, or subtract, from what they want to achieve in performance.²⁵

The notion of style brings me to the subject of regional fiddle traditions. In an age of globalisation less attention is paid to regional fiddle styles, and it would appear that regional fiddle styles are in decline. There seems to be much more discussion on regional fiddle styles in Irish traditional music compared to that in Scotland. Keegan's article "Let Go of the Language of the Past" in *The Journal of Music* questions the notion of regional style as being something of a myth:

We are judging the value of new music according to imagined past practices, performances rooted in earlier performances, of iconic, performers who themselves have had their music rooted - by others - in certain regions.²⁶

Daithí Kearney also discusses the notion of regional styles in "Towards a Regional Understanding of Irish Traditional Music" and identifies individuals as "important forces in the development and changes in regional styles."²⁷ Much of the literature is focused on the fiddle tradition of Ireland; however, there are many similarities between Irish and Scottish traditional music so it would seem appropriate to discuss them in conjunction with each other.

In recent years The Elphinstone Institute has published four volumes of *Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic*; each volume is an important contribution to the study of fiddle music across the world in the 21st Century. Volume two, *Driving the Bow*, consists of essays covering a range of topics from authenticity in Cape Breton fiddle music and dance to the role of rhythm in

25. Ibid., 94.

26. Niall Keegan, "Let Go of the Language of the Past," *The Journal of Music*, December 1, 2009, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://journalofmusic.com/focus/let-go-language-past>.

27. Daithí Kearney, "Towards a Regional Understanding of Irish Traditional Music," (paper presented at the Society for Musicology in Ireland's 2nd Annual Postgraduate Students' Conference, Maynooth, Ireland, January 24, 2009), 2.

traditional Irish fiddling. Gregory J. Dorchak's chapter in this volume, "The formation of authenticity within folk tradition: a case study of Cape Breton fiddling", examines the boundaries which determine authenticity and how boundaries are "actively determined by community participation".²⁸ This ties in with the question of authenticity within my own study in the context of the West Coast fiddle tradition and the idea that regional styles represent what may be considered an authentic form of the tradition, but in reality there are many more variants and strands of styles which make up what is ultimately a living tradition.

The notion of regional style in the Donegal fiddle tradition is also discussed in Liz Doherty's chapter "Inishowen uncovered: further strands of the Donegal fiddle tradition" in *Crossing Over: fiddle and dance studies from around the North Atlantic 3*. Doherty dismisses the idea of regional style as a homogenous sound whereby fiddle players can be categorized under the heading of their certain region.²⁹ Regional style is a complex matter and can often denote negativity in the sense that regional style can suggest confinement and a need to define something. I think it is important to note that scholars, more so today, are interested in a multi-faceted picture of fiddle traditions and do not strive to define style as one homogenous entity. It may be more useful not to question whether regional styles actually do exist but rather how they developed into the present day and how, or if, they are still present in a living tradition in which the boundaries are blurring due to globalisation.

The third volume in this series *Routes and Roots* consists of insightful essays all from a very modern perspective to demonstrate a current understanding of the fiddle and dance traditions and the transformation of them through processes of globalisation and historical influences. Emma Nixon, in her chapter "The Transmission of Style in Scottish Fiddling", explores the revival of Scottish traditional music and the methods of teaching which favour aural transmission over notation. Nixon suggests that by favouring aural methods, "there is more

28. Gregory J. Dorchak, "The formation of authenticity within folk tradition: a case study of Cape Breton fiddling," in *Driving the Bow: fiddle and dance studies from around the North Atlantic 2*, ed. Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, 2008), 153.

29. Doherty, "Inishowen uncovered: further strands of the Donegal fiddle tradition," 184-199.

potential for evolution and change in style".³⁰ This is an interesting strand which is further examined by Chris Stone in his chapter "Tradition and Creativity: the Roots and Routes of fiddler Aidan O' Rourke" where he discusses the performance style of O'Rourke and shows, for example, how he uses "identifiable Scottish fiddle techniques and changes their musical function to enable him to add depth, texture, and drive to the music".³¹ Innovation is a concept that is very much apparent in this discussion, and it is a term which I will refer to later in this thesis with regards to the performance practice of some of the fiddle players interviewed during my research.

The purpose of this chapter was to address the material that has already been written on the fiddle traditions in Scotland. Within this, I have acknowledged material written on the oral and bagpipe traditions as intrinsic to an understanding of the West Coast fiddle tradition, and I have also addressed the relationship between bagpiping and fiddle music. Within the historical narrative of Scottish fiddle music, I have noted the North East in particular as the dominant fiddle tradition and have identified a gap in the study of the West Coast fiddle tradition. I aim to fill a proportion of this gap by presenting a thesis that explores the development of this tradition as well as the changes that have shaped its existence today.

30. Emma Nixon, "The transmission of style in Scottish fiddling," in *Routes & Roots: fiddle and dance studies from around the North Atlantic 4*, ed. Ian Russell and Chris Goertzen (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, 2012), 118.

31. Chris Stone, "Tradition and creativity: the roots and routes of fiddler Aidan O' Rourke," in *Routes & Roots: fiddle and dance studies from around the North Atlantic 4*, ed. Ian Russell and Chris Goertzen (Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, 2012), 194.

Chapter 2. Methodology

This chapter describes and explains the methodology deployed in the research process to trace the development of the West Coast fiddle tradition and investigate the effects of globalisation and technology on this tradition. The bulk of data collated for this thesis consists of ethnographic research. The methodology was guided by a need to explore the historical background of the fiddle tradition in the West Coast as well as the use of empirical data and interviews to evaluate the performance style and motivations of current day fiddle players.

The motivation behind this study arises from my own background in the West Coast fiddle tradition, and as a traditional musician I am constantly evaluating, whether consciously or subconsciously, my performance practice and tend to mediate between conforming to a rule-based set of practices within traditional music and conflicting with what could be considered newer global influences. I have already discussed the position of the West Coast fiddle tradition within the historical narrative and how it appears to have been overshadowed by literate fiddle traditions in Scotland with a wider output of published fiddle collections. However, it should be stressed that my view is not wholly objective; my epistemological stance is such that it determines certain choices in the methodological approach such as the participants chosen for an interview as well as the construction of particular research questions. Above all, this thesis strives to be a musician's outlook. I have the beneficial position of an insider, as it were, within this fiddle tradition, and I am able to relate to the experiences of the interviewees.

Because of the literature limitations, I consulted other sources such as the online sound archive called *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches* which contains a variety of material including music, poetry, story-telling, and interviews on various topics.³² There is a wealth of fiddle recordings collected from all over Scotland from the 1950's onwards. I chose to focus solely on the recordings of fiddle players from the West Coast as well as recordings of discussions of the

32. *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/>.

Highland fiddle style with fiddlers such as Farquhar MacRae; a reason being that Farquhar's fiddle style was, and still is, synonymous with the old West Coast style of fiddle music. These recordings enabled me to hear the playing styles amongst these various fiddle players and evaluate trends and similarities as well as differences in their playing. This thesis is not scientific in its analysis, and I do not assert that it is a fully comprehensive study of the fiddle tradition; indeed, it is not within the scope of this paper. However, it is intended that the paper will give an accurate representation from the point of view of the musicians interviewed.

I have adapted a similar approach to that used by Glenn Graham in his MA thesis, "Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Making and Maintenance of a Tradition", which traces the evolution of the Cape Breton Fiddle tradition in the face of many changes and draws from interviews with fiddle players as well as a survey.³³ Another method of data collection took the form of letter correspondence with the West Coast Highland fiddle player, Angus Grant. Angus Grant answered field questions on various topics such as his musical background, influences from piping and the Gaelic language, his personal style, and his thoughts on regional style.

The main source of data collection for this thesis took the form of semi-structured interviews with individual fiddle players who are practising performers within the traditional music scene in Scotland today. I chose players involved in Scottish traditional music who had a background in the West Coast fiddle tradition and credited some influence to this style in their playing; although, two of the interviewees did not grow up in the West Coast of Scotland but at the time of the interview had been residing in the Western Isles for some years and were both intrinsically involved in the music scene in this area. The interviews had structure in the sense that I had set questions that were posed to each interviewee, but there was scope to steer away from the main questions and quite often interviews took the form of an informal discussion. I interviewed six fiddle players in total. The players interviewed came from Nairn, South Uist,

33. Glenn Graham, "Cape Breton Fiddle Music: The Making and Maintenance of a Tradition" (MA Thesis., Saint Mary's University, 2004), http://library2.smu.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/01/22168/graham_glenn_masters_2004.PDF?sequence=1.

North Uist, and Cardross as well as two players from Manchester and Edinburgh respectively but both now residing in North Uist. All of the interviewees demonstrated in their playing some stylistic traits associated with the West Coast fiddle style; for example, intricate ornamentation, smooth bow strokes, and strong articulation in rhythms closely related to the pipes. The data collected in these interviews was compared to interviews with the older generation of fiddle players, and the differences were used as evidence to justify my research aims and attempt to answer the research questions.

I recorded the interviews on a portable audio recorder and transcribed the recordings afterwards. In order to carry out ethnographic field study it was imperative to get permission from the ethics committee at the University of Glasgow. It was apparent that most of the interviewees had considered their performance practices before and therefore gave very perceptive answers. However, occasionally it transpired that an interviewee might never have thought about a certain aspect in the aesthetics of their playing, and I had to question the validity of their response. Indeed, this seems to be common amongst musicians when asked to describe their music. I think this stems back to the fact that all traditional music is of an oral tradition, and there is no set terminology or language to describe this music. Some traditional musicians may argue that the spontaneous nature of this music is such that there is no need to describe or analyse it.

Chapter 3. The West Coast Fiddle Tradition

In this chapter I will discuss the development of the West Coast fiddle tradition and reference particular respondents from an older generation of players placing the tradition in a historical context. The earliest available fiddle recordings on *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, recorded in 1952 by Francis Collinson, are of Donald and James MacDonald from Keppoch and Roy Bridge respectively. Recorded the following year was Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee from Benbecula who is recorded playing a march, strathspey, and reel on the fiddle as well as another set sung in canntaireachd, which is a means of passing on pipe tunes through singing. I will also discuss two renowned fiddle players from the West Coast: the late Farquhar MacRae and Angus Grant; both of whom are regarded as key exponents of the West Coast and Highland style. The performance styles of these players will be discussed in anticipation that commonalities may be identified in their playing that suggest a regional style of playing although avoiding generalisations and addressing the fact that style is ultimately generated by the individual. The purpose of this chapter is to present a historic account of the fiddle tradition in the West Coast and discuss the dissemination of tunes, the oral tradition, and the setting for musical performance. This will enable me to then discuss in the following chapter the developments and changes that have led to a more diverse fiddle tradition in the present day.

The West Coast of Scotland- the Highlands and Islands in particular- has a long tradition of song, poetry, music, and storytelling which over generations of change and development has led to the living tradition as we know it today. James Logan, in his book *The Scottish Gael*, refers to the Highlanders as people who "tenaciously preserved primitive institutions, their costume, language, poetry, music... and remained for many ages little known to the rest of the kingdom".³⁴ One of the major changes has been the near eradication of the Gaelic language in an area where Gaelic was, at one time, the dominant

34. James Logan, *The Scottish Gaël; or, Celtic manners, as preserved among the Highlanders: being an historical and descriptive account of the inhabitants, antiquities, and national peculiarities of Scotland; more particularly of the Northern, or Gaëlic parts of the country, where the singular habits of the Aboriginal Celts are most tenaciously retained*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder, & Co, 1831), xi.

language. Naturally it would seem that the language has shaped the music. The term "blas", which translates into English as taste, is commonly used to refer to someone who speaks the language very well and is most likely a native speaker or someone who has been immersed in it and learnt all the natural nuances.³⁵ It is also used in music; Angus Grant describes his style of playing as having a "Gaelic blas".³⁶ The Gaelic language is still spoken today, but the practices of the oral tradition have all but died out with a move towards a more literate environment. The Gaelic oral tradition was the practice of transmitting stories, songs, and music through speech and song from one person to the next and passed down through generations. The oral tradition, whereby a person learnt a song or tune directly from another person singing or "diddling" it, differs from aural methods in which a player may learn a tune from listening to a CD or from hearing another person play the tune on an instrument but not verbally. Norman MacLean, with regards to the decline of oral methods, states that:

The practice of conveying information orally is now an alien one. We have it is claimed, almost universal literacy in Britain. In addition to traditional methods of communications, pen, paper, print and books, telephone, fax, we now have Skype, smart phones, twitter, and Facebook if we wish to transmit our thoughts, or be borne by the wind to others.³⁷

Norman Maclean further discusses the move towards a more literate tradition and states that "in one way, the oral tradition, whether it is canntaireachd for piping or fiddle music, or whether it be for vocal music, is better than what we have today".³⁸ Although Norman MacLean does emphasize the value of music literacy, he comments further that he "wouldn't rely totally on it".³⁹ Elements of the Gaelic oral tradition are retained in the manner in which old songs and tunes are still sung in the present day without the aid of sheet music, and there is much scholarly interest in material that was collected by Father Allan MacDonald and John Lorne Campbell; "to varying degrees, many subcultures,

35. For a definition see Edward Dwelly, "blas," in *The Illustrated Gaelic- English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Glasgow: Gairm Publications, 1994), 100.

36. Angus Grant, letter to author.

37. Norman MacLean, interview with author, July 23, 2014.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

even in a high-technology ambience, preserve much of the mind-set of primarily orality".⁴⁰

The fiddle tradition in the West Coast, as previously discussed, was not a literate one; although there were players who could read music, the vast majority would learn by ear. Canntaireachd is used to transmit pipe music orally and was very common practice particularly in the West Coast where the highland bagpipes dominated. Canntaireachd, in its simplest form, is a means of "diddling" the tune with ornaments indicated by consonant sounds so that the recipient can learn how to play it on an instrument. Recordings of Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee singing a march, strathspey, and reel in canntaireachd on *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches* would suggest that the practice was still going strong in the Western Isles in the 1950's and beyond.⁴¹ Donald "Sunndachan" was not a piper so it is interesting that he used canntaireachd for fiddle music; this would imply a close relationship between the pipes and the fiddle in this part of the country. Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee's style of fiddle playing in the march, strathspey, and reel set is most definitely influenced by the pipes in terms of the tunes he plays as they are all within the pipe scale: the major scale of A with a flattened 7th. Interestingly, during my research I spoke to fiddlers who cited the pipes as a prominent influence in their playing but stated a preference for playing G# as opposed to G natural whilst playing a pipe tune in A; this would appear to be a more modern day adjustment particularly when you compare it to the playing of Donald "Sunndachan". This is something that I will expand upon later in the thesis. Donald "Sunndachan" also uses grace notes similar to the embellishments used to divide notes on the pipes, and his smooth bow strokes, particularly in the strathspey, contrast a great deal with the North East style which would tend to be more aggressive in the use of bow particularly when doing a 'scotch snap'.⁴² What is most interesting is the transition between the strathspey and reel in his playing; when he changes to the reel he retains the

40. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 11. Ong defines "primary orality" as the "orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print". (P.11)

41. Donald MacPhee, "Unknown/The Bob of Fettercairn/Unknown," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1953, accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75262/2>.

42. Donald MacPhee, "Millbank Cottage/Louden's Bonnie Woods and Braes/Rory Chisholm's Reel," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1953, accessed August 25, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/12971/1>.

use of dotted rhythms, albeit at a faster tempo. Collinson defines a reel as "a rapid but smooth-flowing quaver movement in *alla breve* time, minim = 120".⁴³ The strathspey, on the other hand, "is written in common time, crotchet = 160 to 168, or slower. Musically, the strathspey is characterised by its dotted quaver-semiquaver rhythm and the inversion of this, the 'Scotch snap'".⁴⁴ Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee's performance of the reel conforms to a trait that Will Lamb, in his paper "Reeling in the Strathspey: The Origins of Scotland's National Music", has previously identified in other recordings of Gaelic music:

There are copious examples in the sound archives of Scotland and Nova Scotia of Gaelic speakers singing and playing one or more strathspeys followed by one or more reels. What is curious is that when one listens closely to the way in which many of these sets are performed, the pointed rhythm that we associate with the strathspey is often maintained as a sort of rhythmic palimpsest after the tempo change (i.e. during the 'reel').⁴⁵

It is not within the scale of this thesis to delve any further into the relationship between traditional music and the Gaelic language. It is, however, worth noting that Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee's fiddle playing demonstrates a stylistic distinction, as discussed above, found in the playing of other musicians from Gaelic speaking regions.

The fiddle tradition in the West Coast, it would appear, was community based whereby fiddlers performed at dances, and the performance of a solo recital was extremely rare especially when compared to the North East tradition. Ronnie Gibson, in his blog *Scottish Fiddle Music*, highlights these differences in the following:

The patronage of fiddle music in the Highlands was (is) vastly different from patronage in the North-East: the influence of Scott Skinner's classical approach, with technically challenging tunes and solo concert

43. Francis Collinson, "Reel," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed September 7, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23050>.

44. Francis Collinson. "Strathspey." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed September 7, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26909>.

45. William Lamb, "Reeling in the Strathspey: The Origins of Scotland's National Music," *Scottish Studies* 36 (2013): 76.

performances, contrasts with the community-based structures that supported music in the Highlands, where the influence of classical music was limited and performances took place in the context of dances first and foremost.⁴⁶

The patronage of fiddle music in the West Coast of Scotland is such that many fine fiddle players go unheard and undocumented as a result of the oral tradition. However, from the 1930's onwards efforts were made to collect material such as songs, folklore, and music from all over Scotland by the School of Scottish Studies. During my research I came across one of the earliest fiddle recordings on *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*: that of Donald and James MacDonald. Donald is also recorded playing a set on the highland bagpipes; it appears to be a common occurrence that many fiddle players from the West Coast can also play the pipes.⁴⁷ Donald's fiddle style retains traits of the bagpipes such as his use of double stopping that replicates the drones of the pipes, and the snaps in the strathspey, similar to Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee, are played smoothly as opposed to the use of abrupt bow movements.⁴⁸ James is recorded playing a 2/4 March called "Highland Wedding" which demonstrates stylistic nuances associated with the West Coast style as described in the playing of Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee and Donald MacDonald.⁴⁹ Many of these players would remain unheard outwith their local area. It was not common practice to travel as much then, and it is unlikely that the fiddle players discussed would perform outwith their local area. Angus Grant alludes to this when he describes how his uncle Archie, who was a fine fiddle player, "was unknown outside a thirty mile radius".⁵⁰

46. Ronnie Gibson, "Gow the Gael: An Alternative History of Scottish Fiddle Music," *Scottish Fiddle Music* (blog), August 20, 2013, accessed August 25, 2014, <http://scottishfiddlemusic.com/2013/08/20/gow-the-gael-an-alternative-history-of-scottish-fiddle-music/>.

47. Donald MacDonald, "Corriechoille's Farewell to the Northern Meeting/The Duke of Roxburgh's Farewell to the Blackmount Forest," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1952, accessed August 25, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/71219/1>.

48. Donald MacDonald, "The Lochaber Gathering," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1952, accessed August 25, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/76763/1>.

49. James MacDonald, "The Highland Wedding," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1952, accessed August 25, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/38368/1>.

50. Angus Grant, letter to author.

The late Farquhar MacRae was a renowned fiddle and box player whose name was synonymous with the West Coast Highland style, yet there is scarcely any biographical information online or commercial recordings of this fine fiddle player. Farquhar, born and raised in Roshven in 1925, taught himself to play by ear from a young age. In an interview in *Fiddler Magazine*, Farquhar's sister Peggy recalls their childhood and describes how "living off the land gave people the deepest appreciation of their environment, its changing weather and seasons. Socially, there was a tremendous sense of community".⁵¹ It would appear that the dissemination of traditional music in the West Coast, whether it was for fiddling, piping, or Gaelic singing, was, first and foremost, community based. This sense of community was enhanced by ceilidh dances held at local halls with music provided by Farquhar MacRae and his siblings.

There is a wide selection of recordings of Farquhar playing on *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches* recorded by ethnographers from the School of Scottish Studies from the 1950's onwards. One of the most interesting recordings is an interview with Farquhar MacRae on the Highland style of fiddle playing and the influence of the pipe and Gaelic song traditions:

Interviewer 1: What I found very prominent when I came here was the adoption of pipe setting for marches and also in reels sometimes, and I think to the locals it's more attractive.

Interviewer 2: Do you think this has always been the case?

Farquhar MacRae: Oh I think so yes. The fiddle in this area follows on from the pipe tunes.⁵²

Farquhar goes on to describe how he "generated his own style from listening to different fiddlers and pipers":⁵³

51. Shona MacMillan, "A Highland Gentleman: Farquhar MacRae, the Roshven Fiddler," *Fiddler Magazine*, March 1, 2008, accessed August 26, 2014, <http://www.fiddle.com/Articles.page?ArticleID=17983&Index=12>.

52. Farquhar MacRae, "A discussion on the Highland style of fiddle playing," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1971, accessed August 26, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/83468/12>.

53. Ibid.

Farquhar MacRae: I listened to records like Scott Skinner and Hector McAndrew and various fiddlers and worked away from there.

Interviewer 1: And did you listen often to the pipes?

FMR: Oh yes, very interested in the pipes.⁵⁴

It is worth noting that fiddle players outwith the West Coast fiddle and piping traditions influenced Farquhar; he was open to other styles and repertoire such as that of Scott Skinner's although he generated his own style of playing them which was very much influenced by piping and Gaelic song. Farquhar may have been influenced by Scott Skinner in the manner in which he utilised classical technique more often associated with the North East style such as vibrato and third position; this is particularly evident in his rendition of the Gaelic song "An Ataireachd Àrd" (The Surge of the Sea) written by Donald MacIver.⁵⁵ Farquhar displays considerable technical ability in playing in high positions and retains a full tone throughout aided by the use of vibrato. Fiddlers of the West Coast did not commonly use vibrato; indeed, Angus Grant recalls only one player who used it in his youth.⁵⁶ Although Farquhar was self-taught, in an interview on *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches* he recalls receiving a lesson from an American soldier during the Second World War:

This chap, he was a very good player... a violinist. He came to the house and he didn't have a fiddle with him. He was very interested in the Scottish music, and he went to Fort William and he bought Scottish music books. He taught me to read the notes, well, roughly.⁵⁷

Farquhar refers to the soldier as a violinist; this suggests that he was a classical trained player. It is possible that Farquhar was influenced by him to some extent

54. Ibid.

55. Farquhar MacRae, "An Ataireachd Àrd," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1986, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/87987/1>.

56. Angus Grant, letter to author.

57. Farquhar MacRae, "A discussion on what has influenced Farquhar MacRae's style," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1971, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/83474/1>.

and may have learned some classical technique from him, as evident in "An Ataireachd Àrd". In a style closely fashioned to Gaelic singing, Farquhar applies lots of rubato almost as though he is mimicking the breaths of a singer.

Farquhar's performance style is similar to the fiddlers already discussed in terms of repertoire, ornamentation, and bowing. In one recording Farquhar plays a 2/4 pipe march with the flattened 7th and grace notes as well as the use of a smooth bow; although, Farquhar occasionally uses vibrato in the march and strathspey in a style that is less similar to the fiddlers afore mentioned. He demonstrates considerable technical ability in his rendition of the reel "Mrs MacPherson of Inveran", which was originally written on the pipes and requires tricky finger patterns when played on the fiddle: for example, G to C# on the E and A string (low second finger on the E string to high second finger on the A string).⁵⁸ Further discussion in this interview explores the idea that style is inherited:

Interviewer: I have a hunch that style is not so much adapted or adopted, but that you're born in one. You find a father and son with the same style; whether he's adopted it from the father is another matter.

Farquhar MacRae: It's sort of inherited.⁵⁹

The idea that musical style is inherited is constrictive in the sense that it strives to reify the notion of style. However, I would allude to the notion that musicality does, on some level, run in families and as Graham states "genetic predisposition should not be dismissed".⁶⁰ Farquhar himself states that his father did not play but was musical in the way in which he could "diddle" a number of tunes; some of which Farquhar picked up directly from him so it is likely that his style was, on some level, influenced by his father. Often a musical tradition does

58. Farquhar MacRae, "Stirlingshire Militia/Sandy Cameron/Mrs Macpherson of Inveran," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1971, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/83470/1>.

59. Farquhar MacRae, "A discussion on the Highland style of fiddle playing," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*.

60. Graham, "Cape Breton Fiddle Music," 152.

run in families, and it would appear that in the West Coast the musical tradition was kept alive by those who had a love of the music and handed it down to their children who naturally developed a style similar to what they heard from older generations. It is also worth noting that instruments were not easily obtained particularly in more isolated areas such as the Western Isles, so if a family were fortunate to own a fiddle it would likely be passed down to the next generation. This may help to explain why there is less of a fiddle tradition in this region compared with that of the piping tradition which continues to dominate because back then fiddles were difficult to come by. This appears to be the case in other areas of the West Coast where piping predominated. This in turn may offer an explanation as to why the fiddle style in the West Coast is so heavily influenced by piping; in areas such as the North East and Shetland, for example, the fiddle was (is) extremely popular so naturally fiddle players took influence from other fiddlers and, in turn, developed a style which was unique to the function of the instrument. In the West Coast there were fewer fiddle players to influence one another so it is likely that fiddlers took influence from the instrument they heard most: the pipes; this may be why they used less in the way of tunes in the flat keys, double stopping, and fingerboard positions.

In the manner in which accents vary from district to district, so does music in different regions. It is possible to change an accent, as it is possible to change style and be influenced by others. In his youth, Farquhar had limited access to other genres of music compared with nowadays, and his style, shaped by his geographical surroundings, local musical companions, and playing for ceilidh dances, features common stylistic traits synonymous with the West Coast fiddle tradition and can be considered an old style in the manner in which it was unaltered by outside genres.

The West Coast fiddle tradition, in comparison with other fiddle traditions, has not produced the same calibre of players to the extent of the North East famed for players such as William Marshall and James Scott Skinner. This may be attributed to the fact that the fiddle tradition in the West Coast was, at best, an amateur practice for fiddle players; this is not to say they were less able or

talented but, more so, that they treated it as a social pastime as opposed to a profession. Angus Grant was the first fiddle player from the West Coast to achieve recognition and competition success outwith the National Mòd having won a competition at the Blairgowrie Folk Festival and released his first album in 1977.⁶¹ His success shone the spotlight back on the West Coast Highland fiddle tradition, which had, up until then, been tentatively kept alive in communities. Angus Grant was brought up in Fort Augustus and came from a family of pipers, fiddlers, and Gaelic singers. Angus Grant himself is a Gaelic speaker and recalls that there were still lots of native Gaelic speakers in the village in the thirties and forties.⁶² He also describes how speaking the language has inevitably influenced his interpretation of slow airs that derive from Gaelic songs:

When playing our Gaelic songs it is of great help when you know the words and what the song is about. There has to be freedom about these airs. Most of the bards who composed them had not a clue about 3/4 [time signatures] or know an F# if they met it on the road."⁶³

This statement alludes to the non-literate nature of this tradition. There is most definitely something lost in the nature of notating these old tunes and songs, and it would suggest that oral or aural transmission is the most effective method of learning them and picking up all the nuances. Angus Grant was given his first fiddle from his uncle Archie (b.1872) and recalls how he learnt over the years:

Like all traditional players, over the years I have perhaps developed my own style of playing tunes. I would like to think that I have retained some of what I picked up from the fine old fiddlers of my youth; these players had a pure style of Highland fiddling untouched by what we hear today. In my uncle's case, he had learned from his father (b. 1834) who had likely heard fiddlers from the 1790's.⁶⁴

61. The National Mòd was founded in 1871 and is held annually to this day. It is a celebration of Gaelic culture and holds numerous competitions in a range of disciplines such as Gaelic song, dance, poetry, music, and much more.

62. Angus Grant, letter to author.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

It would appear that what Angus Grant is suggesting here is that the range of influences engrained in the fiddle styles of present day players starkly contrast with the "pure" and "untouched" style of Highland fiddle playing that he remembers: a style which was unaffected by external influences. Angus Grant is a player very much rooted in his own musical heritage, and his main source of influence comes from the musical tradition that he grew up with:

My own style is a smooth bow, lots of grace notes, a touch of the pipes and a Gaelic blas to it all. I am sure the pipes and the Gaelic has a lot to do with the Highland style.⁶⁵

Angus Grant's description features attributes found in the fiddle styles of the players previously discussed. His style, it would seem, retains aspects of an older style of West Coast fiddle playing which he picked up from an older generation of players such as his uncle Archie, and he from generations before that. The stylistic nuances that Angus describes above are most certainly evident in his playing; an example of this can be heard in his performance of "The Hills of Glengarry".⁶⁶ He continuously uses grace notes to embellish the tune in a manner similar to the pipes and makes use of a smooth bow as described above. In another recording available on *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, Angus plays a slow air that is outwith the pipe scale and uses all four strings on the fiddle.⁶⁷ Occasionally, Angus uses third position and vibrato, which indicates a more classical approach. It is worth noting, however, that Angus, like Farquhar MacRae, never received formal lessons, and it is likely that he applied these techniques without knowing very much about them and used them almost subconsciously as a means of expressing the emotion of the tune to a greater

65. Ibid.

66. "Scottish Tradition: Angus Grant- Fiddler," YouTube video, 1:33, posted by "uistman59," December 26, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADyHCb8q7eM>.

67. Angus Grant, "Unknown/Crossing the Minch/Unknown," *Tobair an Dulchais/Kist o Riches*, 1970, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/fullrecord/89327/1>.

degree. Many of the old fiddlers in the West Coast never used position work, vibrato, or played in flat keys; much less importance was placed on technique.

It would appear that the West Coast fiddle tradition has more in common with fiddle traditions in Ireland than say that of the North East. Much of what has influenced Irish fiddle ornamentation, in all its strands, is a result of imitating the pipes; ornaments in Irish fiddle music, such as the cran, replicate the Uilleann pipes in a similar manner to the way in which the birl replicates the highland bagpipes in Scottish fiddle music.⁶⁸ Margaret Bennett states that:

though the traditions of the Scottish Gael have been rooted for several centuries in the Highlands and Islands, their language, *sgeulachdan* (stories), songs, music and art have more in common with Ireland than the rest of Scotland lying to the south and north-east of the demographic divide known as the 'Highland line'.⁶⁹

The community-based structures described by Ronnie Gibson were at the heart of the West Coast fiddle tradition, whereby the fiddler's performance outlet consisted of dances and informal house ceilidhs. A major change that has occurred in the West Coast fiddle tradition has been the decline of dances; the session scene has taken over. Angus Grant alludes to this idea in the following:

The Young fiddlers of today play, to my mind, far too fast. Then again they are mostly doing concerts, pub gigs and have to put on a showy performance; most of them have never or seldom played for dances. When I was young our main outlet for performing was playing for dances.⁷⁰

68. A cran on the fiddle is an open string roll (See note 100). A birl is a bowed triplet whereby a note (normally a crotchet) is broken into two semi-quavers and a quaver played in three short and separate bow strokes. The rhythm may differ from player to player and three different notes can also be used as opposed to using one.

69. Margaret Bennett, "Scotland," in *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*. 2nd ed., edited by Fintan Vallely (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), 594.

70. Angus Grant, letter to author.

Playing for dancing requires that the musician abide by a strict tempo. The tempo of tunes played in session nowadays would often be far too fast to dance to. This would suggest that the setting for performers- whether it is a hall for a ceilidh dance, a session, or a solo concert- has shaped the development of the fiddle tradition in the West Coast. The session scene is extremely popular today and allows for fiddle players to play with musicians from all over the country. Sessions are most popular in cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh where something of an urban fiddle style has emerged which can be attributed to mixtures of people coming together; as Angus Grant states, it is "a very hybrid mixture".⁷¹

The purpose of this chapter was to place the fiddle tradition of the West Coast in a historical context to which I can then discuss the performance practice of current day players in the present day tradition. In order to do so, I have discussed the playing styles of an older generation of players and identified commonalities that seem to indicate a regional style of fiddle playing. The influence of bagpiping is apparent in the manner in which these players embellished tunes with ornaments very similar to those used on the bagpipes. Other similarities in their playing styles include repertoire; the popularity of the march, strathspey, and reel set; the use of the pipe scale; and a smooth bow stroke. I have discussed a preference for oral or aural methods over literacy for the transmission of tunes and songs. One of the most significant aspects explored in this chapter has been the community based structure of the West Coast fiddle tradition whereby the main outlet of performing was the dance hall as opposed to players from the North East who regularly performed solo recitals. In the next chapter I will investigate the changes that have taken place in the fiddle tradition over the last thirty years particularly with the growing popularity of Scottish traditional music, and I will assess the impact of globalisation on the performance style of present day fiddle players.

71. Ibid.

Chapter 4. Present Day Fiddlers

When I was young a few families kept it [traditional music] alive just for the love of it and the instruments, fiddle and pipes. What changed things was the Fèisean movement.⁷²

The first ever Fèis was established in 1981 on the Isle of Barra with the vision to promote the practice of Gaelic language and culture, music, song, and dance that were feared to be diminishing traditions. The Fèis sparked a movement that now consists of over forty Fèisean across Scotland and can be credited as helping to generate a revival in traditional Scottish music.⁷³ Different Fèisean take place throughout the year for children of primary school age as well as Fèisean for adults. The Fèisean provide instruments, and traditional music is accessible for everyone who wants to learn it. This contrasts with past generations whereby instruments were hard to come by, and traditional music was kept alive in families. Of the six fiddle players interviewed for this chapter, four had taught at numerous Fèisean in various areas in Scotland. The Fèisean movement has resulted in a greater number of children learning traditional Scottish music; with the inception of The National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music at Plockton High School, children can now specialise on their instruments with regular tuition from professional players and even go onto study traditional music in a higher education institution such as the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS). In the last thirty years growing numbers of traditional Scottish musicians have built careers from music; this was near impossible in Angus Grant and Farquhar MacRae's youth. The Fèisean have encouraged a resurgence of fiddle players who have, in turn, become instrument instructors themselves. Angus Grant recalls that in his youth "very few taught, apart from some pipers who had been in the war".⁷⁴

All the fiddle players interviewed were brought up in areas in the West Coast of Scotland apart from Anna-Wendy Stevenson, originally from Edinburgh, and

72. Ibid

73. "Dè a tha ann am Feis?" *fèisean nan gàidheal*, accessed September 4, 2014, <http://www.feisean.org/ga/fiosrachadh/de-tha-feis.php>.

74. Angus Grant, letter to author.

Simon Bradley from Manchester; both of them now reside full time in North Uist in the Western Isles. In this chapter I will present some information garnered from these interviews and address the changes that have occurred in the fiddle tradition in the last thirty years. Is learning by ear still important to the present day fiddler? How have teaching methods changed and impacted playing styles? What influences and inspires players today? And what are the effects of technology and globalisation on performance styles and older regional styles of fiddle playing?

Angus Grant and those before him rarely, if ever, had any music lessons, whereas in the present day music lessons have taken more of a formal structure and it is very rare to find a self-taught fiddle player. Music was tentatively kept alive in some families but formal music lessons were a rarity. Norman MacLean recalls how he learnt songs orally from his grandfather with no sheet music or written source involved:

As the words poured out in languid gouts from his mouth I did not take my eyes off his mobile lip movements and, after trying to emulate them silently at first, eventually 'lifted the melody' along with the old man I absolutely adored.⁷⁵

From the interviews conducted for this thesis, it is apparent that aural methods are still favoured in the transmission of fiddle music and are considered a more effective way of grasping the nuances within the tune. Anna-Wendy Stevenson, a classically trained violinist, alludes to this idea in the following:

I didn't do any by ear learning until I was well into being an adult, and once it clicked that in order to get the nuances of the traditional styles that the only way I could really do that was by learning by ear. The style wasn't really written down.⁷⁶

McLucas, in her book *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA*, discusses similar methods of learning in her description of the Irish-American fiddler Kevin Burke:

75. Norman MacLean, interview with author.

76. Anna-Wendy Stevenson, interview with author, July 10, 2014.

From the oral tradition he learned to treat the printed page simply as a guide to which he could add grace notes and triplets at will, along with other ornaments- shakes, rolls, crans, for example- that he heard on the recordings.⁷⁷

Learning by ear enables the player to mimic stylistic nuances in the playing of other fiddlers, whether it is in person or from a recording. Kevin Burke, in a similar vein to the fiddlers interviewed for this thesis, was able to access recordings of older fiddle players from Ireland and replicate, to a certain extent, their style of playing, the ornamentation applied, and the overall sound of the track. Although most traditional tunes are notated, the nuances are not written down, and it is up to the fiddle player to discover them by taking influence from other players as well as using their own creative touch. Players such as Farquhar MacRae and Angus Grant generated their own individual way of playing that was very much rooted in the West Coast fiddle style. They were both influenced by the sound of the pipes and Gaelic song but heard less in the way of other genres. Present day fiddle players have no such limitations in what they listen to as a result of technology, namely the World Wide Web.

The majority of fiddle players interviewed began by learning by ear. Rua MacMillan recalls learning by ear and using tablature to help him remember the tune after a lesson.⁷⁸ Learning by ear, as with sight-reading, requires practise, and it would appear that acquiring a balance between both methods could prove difficult for the musician; Rua MacMillan alludes to this idea in his description of both learning by ear and notation:

I remember when we started using written music; I could not get my head around it at all. It took so long but then the converse of that was that I spent the next three years learning solely by music so when I went back to learn by ear it was almost impossible. It was like I had lost the momentum with it, and it took a long time to do both.⁷⁹

77. McLucas, *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA*, 27.

78. Rua MacMillan, interview with author, June 13, 2014.

Fiddle tablature indicates which string and finger placement the player should use. For example A1= first finger on the A string assuming the use of first position.

79. Ibid.

Interestingly, Angus Grant states that "after learning [to read] music, one loses some of your natural gift" for learning by ear.⁸⁰ Learning by ear is the main method of teaching tunes at Fèisean and fiddle camps although Angus explains how this is rather strange to him as in his youth "people would say he is only an ear player, as if you were rubbish".⁸¹ With the inception of the Scottish music degree at the RCS as well as Fèisean and festivals such as Celtic Connections, there is now greater respect for Scottish traditional music as an art form. With the establishment of traditional music degrees, more emphasis is placed on technique and theory, and it would appear to be the case that sight-reading is often essential for fiddlers who wish to study traditional music in higher education institutions. Ryan Young recollects learning mainly by ear and then more so by notation when he studied BA (Hons) Scottish Music at the RCS.⁸² Nowadays it is very rare that a young player will learn solely by ear, and the majority of players will have a good grasp of sight-reading. Recently there has been a surge in new compositions in Scottish traditional music particularly implemented through the New Voices Commission at Celtic Connections: these compositions are often notated in orchestral form, and many include large instrument sectionals, so it is a required skill that traditional musicians can read music. Overall, however, it would appear that the emphasis is still placed on aural methods of learning, and often notation is used as a means of "reinforcing the tune" afterwards.⁸³

Teaching methods in traditional music have also changed significantly over the years, and this in turn has had an impact on playing styles. Angus Grant describes how he has witnessed a change in the present day and states that "there is much more violin technique being taught today".⁸⁴ All of the fiddle players interviewed for this thesis received formal lessons from a young age as opposed to being self-taught. Anna-Wendy Stevenson was classically trained from the age of ten, and her first experience of traditional music was at the age

80. Angus Grant, letter to author.

81. Ibid.

82. Ryan Young, interview with author, June 18, 2014.

83. Eilidh MacLeod, interview with author, August 18, 2014.

84. Angus Grant, letter to author.

of fifteen when she joined the Lothian School Strathspey and Reel Society; although, she recalls "that it was quite formal", and it was later that she immersed herself more in traditional music.⁸⁵ Simon Bradley, similarly, received violin lessons from the age of eight and was introduced to traditional music later on through the Irish traditional music scene in Manchester. Eilidh MacLeod from North Uist and Kirsty MacMillan from South Uist, on the other hand, received formal fiddle lessons, but they both recall that violin technique was never an intrinsic part of the lesson and the emphasis was placed on obtaining the style and nuances of the tune more so than technique. Rua MacMillan, as well as going to fiddle lessons, received classical lessons in school, but the emphasis was on style in fiddling as opposed to technique. Ryan Young from Cardross was first introduced to the instrument at school:

It was the only thing that was offered to me, but I didn't really know what the difference between fiddle and violin playing was until I heard Eilidh Steel from Helensburgh who has a very West Coast style, so then that was when I really wanted to be a fiddler. I learned in a group with other children where Eilidh would teach us tunes. There wasn't an emphasis on technique.⁸⁶

Unlike the fiddle players discussed in chapter three, none of the interviewees were completely self-taught. Two of the fiddle players studied BA Scottish Music at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and another two studied BA Applied Music at the University of Strathclyde. Ryan Young describes how studying music and receiving formal fiddle lessons, with more emphasis on technique, had an impact on his playing:

My playing changed a lot because my technique changed. I was very much self-taught in terms of technique. It has helped me feel more comfortable holding the instrument, and I think it has helped improve my tone. It had absolutely no effect on style or approach to phrasing and bowing.⁸⁷

Kirsty MacMillan relates a similar experience:

85. Anna-Wendy Stevenson, interview with author.

86. Ryan Young, interview with author.

87. Ibid.

I probably learnt a bit more of other musical styles and techniques such as my bowing and use of dynamics. Through being told to do certain things [technical aspects of playing] I have changed a wee bit.⁸⁸

All the interviewees who received some form of classical training agreed that it benefitted their playing in terms of tone and bow control. Ryan Young does, however, state that classical training never affected his overall style as he was very much aware that the nuances were achieved through certain stylistic aspects such as bowing, phrasing, and ornamentation as opposed to having classical technique. It is worth noting, however, that none of the players interviewed utilise a wholly classical approach to technique in terms of bow and violin hold. It is apparent that traditional fiddle music requires a different approach to playing particularly with the use of the bow. Some players held the bow further away from the frog as is the norm in a classical bow hold; this is, perhaps, because they use far less of the bow than a classical player would particularly when playing fast jigs and reels; this was the case for Kirsty MacMillan who held the bow two or three inches from the frog. It was also apparent that players had a relatively relaxed wrist more so than a classical player; this is beneficial to the playing of birls. Overall, however, the fiddle players interviewed, in comparison with an older generation of players, have better technique aided by formal lessons that players such as Donald and James MacDonald and Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee never had. However, it is apparent that style is far more crucial than technique in grasping the nuances of traditional fiddle music. Whilst sound technique is good in the sense that it allows for more diversity, Angus is dubious about having too much and states that "some classical trained violinists have got into the fiddling, but most of them still sound like Mozart. It is good to have some technique but something is lost".⁸⁹

It would appear that style remains the most important aspect to the art of fiddling. Rua MacMillan alludes to this idea in the following:

88. Kirsty MacMillan, interview with author, June 17, 2014.

89. Angus Grant, letter to author.

If you take out style you are left with notes, and as nice as notes can be it is, for me, not necessarily traditional music: it's all the nuances, the phrasing, and the breaths in the tunes. I think a lot of it is phrasing: if you look back to the basics of folk/traditional music in general it wasn't music for historically educated people. People weren't necessarily getting all the technique lessons... how to hold and use the bow. You know, in my own teaching I spend a lot of time on bowing, but you are maybe looking at people using a tiny amount of bow and trying to get all of the sound in and trying to capture the phrasing that perhaps a singer would use singing the song.⁹⁰

Rua's comments here suggest that the aesthetics of fiddling stems from the self-taught nature of it all whereby players were not aware of technique and utilised the instrument in a way that produced the sound which sounded right to them. Rua alludes to Angus Grant's comments on classical technique and emphasises differences in the sound produced:

I think in general with orchestral music and the classical violin styles that emphasis [on phrasing as described in previous comments] isn't there; it's just a different approach to playing. The bow is used in, well to my ear, a slightly more staccato way in playing tunes. It's a bit more stop and start, and the tone throughout one bow stroke is exactly even whereas with us it's not; there's a dip maybe by speeding the bow up in the middle of a note, which gives it a different sound all together.⁹¹

It would appear that much of what constitutes style comes from the manner in which fiddle players phrase the tune and how they use the bow.

I have briefly discussed the notion that fiddle style is unique to the individual, and no group of fiddle players sounds exactly the same even if they do demonstrate aspects that constitute a regional style of playing. Fintan Vallely alludes to this idea in that "the personality of the musician, the very soul of the performer, contributes much to the creative process, and so may also be

90. Rua MacMillan, interview with author.

91. Ibid.

regarded as having a major influence on the style of playing".⁹² From the six interviews carried out for this thesis it was evident that all the fiddle players had their own individual style that was shaped by their musical upbringing as well as influences from other styles and genres of music.

Rua MacMillan was immersed in traditional music in the West Coast from a young age and states that his style "is definitely rooted in the Highland and West Coast style but probably with some more contemporary influences as well".⁹³ There are strong elements of piping that penetrate through Rua's style- certainly in his use of ornamentation which he discusses in the following:

I suppose there is something about the pipe sound and the ornaments that I have tried to incorporate into my playing... the third finger groove or birl. Pipers cannot bow notes, so if you have two f# [notes] it is the equivalent of a fiddler doing it on just one bow stroke that doesn't change direction so you have to separate those notes out with an ornament. This is something I am quite aware of.⁹⁴

Rua's performance style consists of a smooth, accented bow as well as the use of lots of birls. He also uses lots of ornamentation such as grace notes whereby two notes of the same pitch are broken up by a single grace note in one bow stroke as described above. Ornamentation plays a prominent role in the playing styles of all the fiddle players interviewed, and it would appear that the pipes have been a significant influence:

Question: Has bagpiping influenced any aspects of your playing?

Anna-Wendy Stevenson: It has... ornamentation in particular. You could say it has influenced composition with the use of the bagpipe scale. I think

92. Fintan Vallely, ed., *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, 2nd ed. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), 259.

93. Rua MacMillan, interview with author.

94. Ibid.

naturally we would find that we would write a tune that uses the bagpipe scale; it falls onto your fingers easily.⁹⁵

Simon Bradley: Definitely yes, I think, certainly in terms of repertoire and ornaments as well, the way pipers ornament things and even just the metre, the rhythm, and the phrasing that they use has had a big influence on me.⁹⁶

Ryan Young, similarly, has taken influence from pipe ornamentation:

Almost every grace note, apart from slides, I do is what I want to sound like the pipes. I was always taught that it's supposed to sound like the pipes when I do it. I am more drawn to playing 2/4's [marches] with G # for some reason.⁹⁷

It is apparent that the West Coast fiddle style remains deeply rooted in piping, but present day players are able to draw from other influences and sounds they find pleasing with ease of access. Slides, more common in Irish fiddle music, is an ornament that Ryan has incorporated into his playing alongside more traditional pipe ornaments, which results in a sound that remains rooted in the West Coast style with strong Irish influence.⁹⁸ Interestingly the use of G#, a note outwith the bagpipe scale, reflects a more contemporary variation, which, perhaps, is a result of new compositions comprising of more complex tonal palettes as well as the influence of other fiddle styles outwith the West Coast. More contemporary elements such as the use of slides, tunes in the flat keys, and tunes outwith the pipe repertoire suggest that regional styles of fiddle playing may be dying out as players broaden their repertoire to include musical styles and genres outwith their own. Rua discusses how he tends to mediate between traditional and contemporary styles:

95. Anna-Wendy Stevenson, interview with author.

96. Simon Bradley, interview with author, July 10, 2014.

97. Ryan Young, interview with author.

98. Slides are a means of approaching a note from a semi-tone or so below and sliding up to the correct pitch.

Depending on what setting I am playing in, the music I play might change; if I am playing with my trio [fiddle, guitar and bodhran] then it might be slightly more contemporary; for example, I might use some rolls rather than birls, whereas if I was doing a solo recital I would try to concentrate on playing a bit more traditional at points.⁹⁹

Nowadays it is more common for a fiddle player to perform in the more formal setting of a concert as opposed to the dance hall, which was the main performance setting for Angus Grant and Farquhar MacRae.

Simon Bradley discusses the influence that other musical traditions have had on his playing style:

I would say it's a mixed style because I do not have one. I have several dominant influences: I started off on Irish and then was heavily influenced by Scottish music, and then on top of that I have a long-standing collaboration with Asturias in the north of Spain. Through that repertoire my style has changed to accommodate and reflect that.¹⁰⁰

There are more travel opportunities in the present day, and more people are exposed to different cultures and musical traditions. This appears to have impacted Simon's style whose playing in turn will influence younger generations of players, and the breadth of fiddle styles will increase to reflect that. Anna-Wendy Stevenson relates a similar approach to style as Simon:

I am the same in that it is a combination of styles. I am quite flexible so I can hook onto a bit of a style; for example, if I am playing a pipe repertoire, I know the nuances and stylistic aspects of it so I can click into that way, but it does not mean I do not have my own personal way of playing.¹⁰¹

99. Rua MacMillan, interview with author. A roll is when a note is broken into five notes played in one bow movement for the length of a dotted crotchet. The original note is the first and main note of the roll followed by the note above, back to the main note, the note below and then the main note again. For example, to play a roll on E, the notes would be E F# E D E and the fiddle fingering would be 1 2 1 0 1 on the D string.

100. Simon Bradley, interview with author.

101. Anna-Wendy Stevenson, interview with author.

It would appear that these fiddle players are much more diverse in terms of the playing styles, repertoire, and musical influences they employ in comparison with older generations of players. It is also worth noting that although Anna-Wendy and Simon do not come from the West Coast, they both now reside in North Uist in the Western Isles, and they are both influenced by the West Coast style of fiddle playing. For example Anna-Wendy uses lots of birls, grace notes, and a smooth bow with slurs across the beat for a swingy effect, which may be influenced by the Irish fiddling tradition where the tunes are often played slightly slower than in Scottish fiddling. Interestingly, Anna-Wendy's pitch sounds ever so slightly sharp at times; this may have something to do with the highland bagpipes because the pitch of the chanter is tuned to Bb (concert pitch) but tends to be closer to B. I have also noticed this quality in the playing of other fiddlers from the West Coast; namely Gabe McVarish who frequently plays with a piper in the band Dàimh.¹⁰² Simon Bradley, similarly, uses smooth bow strokes and bowed ornaments such as the birl as well as grace notes and rolls but, overall, uses less in the way of left-hand (fingered) ornamentation and focuses more so on the bowing. Simon states that the "syncopation and driving rhythms" of pipe tunes have inspired his own playing.¹⁰³

It is quite often the case that leading musical figures have significant influence on the styles and repertoire that develop within an area, and "different generations and influx of people can impart their influence on that scene".¹⁰⁴ Kearney, in the context of traditional Irish music, relates to this in that "individual musicians have been innovators of musical style and are often associated with particular regions".¹⁰⁵ It is likely that Farquhar MacRae and Angus Grant have helped to shape a style- based on the performance practices of older

102. "Daimh- Ida's Jigs," YouTube video, 4:02, posted by "jonsabine29," June 7, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pdKOTd0KyE>.

103. Simon Bradley, interview with author.

104. Ibid.

105. Kearney, "Towards a Regional Understanding of Irish Traditional Music," 2.

generations and the Gaelic songs and tunes that were handed down to them as well as their own creative individuality- that is considered synonymous with the West Coast style of fiddling. Angus Grant recalls fiddle players within his local area that influenced him. Perhaps the main difference now is that there is a tendency for people to move away from home and travel, so within an area there will likely be a variety of people from different places. Indeed none of the interviewees resided in the place they were brought up. In the case of the fiddle players discussed in the previous chapter, musical style was far more contained within an area compared to the present day.

Eilidh MacLeod was brought up in North Uist, and was immersed in traditional music from a young age in an area where there was a rich culture of traditional music but not necessarily a fiddle tradition- "the pipes and Gaelic singing played a much stronger role".¹⁰⁶ Eilidh, like many other young fiddlers, first learnt how to play at her local Fèis. Although Eilidh describes her style as West Coast, she states that "influences from Cape Breton fiddle music" and listening to lots of Irish music have most likely had an impact on her playing.¹⁰⁷ Eilidh's uses lots of birls as well as using the bow to accent particular notes. In her performance of a reel the accent falls on every second crotchet or so, and the effect is such that the rhythm of the reel is ever so slightly dotted and sounds quite similar to the way Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee played his reels with pointed rhythms as found in the strathspey. Eilidh comes from a Gaelic-speaking background, so it is quite possible that the rhythms and sounds of the language penetrate into her playing particularly in how she accents tunes. Leaving home has also been influential, and Eilidh states that:

moving away from the island to go to the mainland has influenced my playing as it gave me more opportunities to listen to other musicians in concert, and festivals such as Celtic Connections were more easily accessible.¹⁰⁸

106. Eilidh MacLeod, interview with author.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid.

Although Eilidh's playing style is rooted in the West Coast style with the use of pipe ornamentation and repertoire as well as a smooth bow, her style has expanded to include a wide variety of playing styles as a result of moving away from home and hearing other fiddle players perform live. Rua MacMillan relates a similar experience:

Up in Inverness there is scarcely any Irish music so it was a whole new thing to me when I came to Glasgow. One of my favourite fiddlers is Liz Carroll, an Irish-American fiddler, so listening to players like her and bands like Altan and hearing the styles there and then coming into somewhere in Scotland where that style of playing is a thriving community was really interesting, and I think that has had quite an influence. I would not really have thought of using rolls at all in my playing; it was always birds.¹⁰⁹

In the case of Rua, he was exposed to new ornaments that he had never really heard before and incorporated them in to his playing. It would appear that regional styles develop through shared musical experiences and influences that shape the styles of fiddle players within an area. However, now it would appear that styles are less distinct in regions as a result of crossover between styles as well as artists taking influence from everything they hear and like. Ryan Young alludes to this notion in that style is very much driven by "what you like rather than a conscious effort".¹¹⁰ However, in the performance style of all the interviewees it is apparent that influences from their musical background remain- particularly ornamentation, bowing, and repertoire. It is likely that fiddle players are more attracted to the musical tradition from which they come and expand on it with influences from other styles alongside their own creativity:

I find I am drawn to tunes from the West Coast (where I am from) rather than tunes from other parts of Scotland. I do use lots of "pipey" West Coast style of ornaments, but I would not disregard an ornament because it wasn't part of my style or not play a tune because it isn't from where I am

109. Rua MacMillan, interview with author.

110. Ryan Young, interview with author.

from. I basically just play anything I like, how I like, but more often than not the tunes I really like are from the West Coast.¹¹¹

It would appear that the West Coast fiddle tradition shares similarities with the Irish fiddling tradition, more so than say the Shetland or North East style. For example, left-hand ornamentation is used far more in West Coast fiddle music compared with both the Shetland and North East styles. Ornamentation is integral to Irish fiddle music, and many of the ornaments are adopted from the uilleann pipes, as is the case with the West Coast fiddle style and highland bagpipes in Scotland. The North East style is more classical influenced in its repertoire, and players tend to use higher positions and longer bow strokes.¹¹² The strathspey is very popular in the North East and tends to be played with much staccato. The Shetland style has been influenced by Norwegian folk music and makes use of ringing open strings, double stopping, and varying key signatures.¹¹³ Many of the slow airs played in the West Coast derive from Gaelic songs, and this also appears to be the case in Ireland. Both of these traditions share language and cultural links; Irish Gaelic is still spoken in Ireland today, and although Gaelic was spoken all over Scotland at one time, it has only really survived in the present day in areas in the West Coast. All interviewees agreed that their style had elements of an Irish influence mainly that of ornamentation.

It is apparent that many changes have occurred in the West Coast fiddle tradition since the days of players such as Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee and Donald and James MacDonald. The Fèisean has undoubtedly encouraged a new wave of young fiddle players, and the traditional music scene appears to be thriving. Technology has had a major impact on fiddling habits in the manner in which people can access any style and genre of music via the Internet, and this

111. Ibid.

112. Paul Anderson is a renowned exponent of the North East Style. For an example of his playing see "Paul Anderson- Slow Strathspey: "James O' Forbes of Corse", " YouTube video, 2:51, posted by "tarlandfiddler," February 19, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bn_qdo9ch2M.

113. For an example of the Shetland style of fiddling see "Scottish Tradition: Shetland Reels: Willie Hunter Aly Bain," YouTube video, 1:53, posted by "uistman59," August 17, 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_5hSUs11Jo.

has ultimately led to an expansion of fiddle styles. This leads me on to the final section of this thesis where I will assess the impact of change on the future of this musical tradition.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to expand the narrative on the West Coast fiddle tradition, which in comparison with fiddle traditions such as that of the North East and Shetland has been tentatively studied and researched. My aim was to assess the changes that have occurred in the last thirty years, how these changes have impacted the playing styles of present day players, and what implications these changes may have on the future of the fiddle tradition in the West Coast and traditional music in Scotland in general. In chapter three I presented a historical account of an older generation of players and identified commonalities in their playing which appear to be unique to the West Coast fiddle tradition: mainly the influence of piping and Gaelic song. It became apparent that the fiddle tradition in the West Coast was kept alive in families and communities, and the dance hall provided the main performance setting as well as the informal house ceildh with family, friends, and neighbours. In the following chapter I addressed the significance of the Fèisean movement as promoting and encouraging traditional music amongst the youth. One of the key findings has been the impact of technology on present day fiddle styles, which in comparison with older players have expanded at an enormous rate and consist of a hybrid of styles. With a move toward a more literate and high technology environment the musician is exposed to more of a variety of styles and genres; this was demonstrated through interviews with the fiddlers discussed in chapter four. Within this, I stressed the importance of style as personalised at the discretion of the individual as opposed to one homogenous sound; it is "impossible to copy another person's playing slavishly".¹¹⁴ Style is shaped by experience, observation, and personal taste as well as the creativity of the individual. It would appear that fiddle players who share experiences within the locality of an area tend to develop commonalities in their playing as demonstrated in the playing styles of an older generation of players discussed in chapter three.

My research shows that present day fiddlers favour learning by ear above the use of notation. It is apparent that the method of learning by ear is essential in

114. Alburger, *Scottish Fiddlers and their Music*, 209.

obtaining the nuances of style in fiddle music. Fiddle players could even consider adopting methods from the oral tradition, particularly in teaching fiddle, such as "diddling" a tune to their students and asking them to join in until they have it memorised in their head and can hum the tune along with them. Often, when a tune is in your head it falls easily onto your fingers when transferring it on to the instrument. This method of teaching is engaging and encourages the pupil to actively absorb the tune in their memory rather than just hearing it and trying to figure out the notes on the instrument. Although sheet music is extremely beneficial, it is important that fiddle players treat it like a guide. No matter if a notated tune has all the bowing, dynamics, and ornamentation indicated, the style and nuances cannot be written down; that is something that the individual generates personally.

It is apparent that, in the present day, regional styles appear to be less distinct, and there is far more variation and crossover in styles as fiddlers are exposed to a wider range of influences. Angus Grant alludes to this in the following:

Sadly regional styles are on the way out. The world is a small place nowadays; the young fiddlers are hearing music from all over: Bluegrass, French Canadian, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Cajun, etc.¹¹⁵

Rua MacMillan, in accord with Angus's statement, states that:

in Scotland there is a tendency to not pay as much attention to regional styles of playing these days, and certainly with Internet and radio people have access to all sorts of different styles of music, and that influences their own playing.¹¹⁶

115. Angus Grant, letter to author.

116. Rua MacMillan, interview with author.

It appears to be the case that the term regional style may be misused in the sense that it strives to ring-fence fiddle styles geographically against a set criteria, which in reality fails to acknowledge numerous strands of creativity influencing the present day fiddler. However, it would appear to be the case that roots are important to people and their music; Eilidh MacLeod alludes to this when she states that "it is important to stay in touch with your roots".¹¹⁷ Similarly, Rua MacMillan emphasises the importance of "taking the music forward but still being respectful of where it came from" by maintaining techniques that have developed in the West Coast style such as the pipe influence and use of ornamentation.¹¹⁸ Regardless of outside influences, it is an intrinsic part of human nature to be influenced by your roots and hold a personal connection with stylistic traditions unique to your area. In this sense regional styles may continue, not in a slavish way but in a creative way that will take the music into the future. Findings from my research show that the influence of the pipes is still very strong amongst fiddle players brought up in the West Coast as well as players who now reside there. Ornamentation is very prominent in the playing styles of the interviewees, and this appears to be a direct relation to the bagpipes. However, it is apparent that fiddle players are influenced by what they hear and like, and regional styles may be tempering as players delve into other styles. For any future research, it may be useful to interview a wider range of fiddle players from all over Scotland to see how styles are interlinked and the extent to which players from the North East or Shetland are taking influence from traditionally West Coast styles of playing and vice versa. Although only a small number of players were interviewed for this thesis, I would hope that the findings from this research fairly represent a broader picture of the fiddle tradition in the West Coast of Scotland.

Players such as Angus Grant and Farquhar heard less in the way of other musical styles, and it would appear that they were more likely to take influence from their local musical traditions. Angus tells how his uncle Archie was "happy with his native airs" whereas younger generations now "hear so many different

117. Eilidh MacLeod, interview with author.

118. Rua MacMillan, interview with author.

styles of fiddling".¹¹⁹ Angus elaborates on this with regard to two of his children who play the fiddle:

My son Angus Rory, the fiddler with Shooglenifty, only plays the tunes I taught him when he is at home. My youngest daughter Fiona is also a fine fiddler but, like her generation, plays tunes from everywhere.¹²⁰

The breadth of fiddle styles that have developed and the creativity within that should not be regarded negatively by any means; many players are producing innovative music that reflects a broad range of influences. This does, however, beg the question of what do our traditions matter to us? Younger players could listen more to recordings of older fiddle players and learn the old tunes- the "native airs"- that have been played for generations as a means of retaining aspects of regional styles as well as to compose new tunes to bring the music forward.

The outlook appears to be extremely positive for Scottish traditional music in general, and this will continue for a long time yet. Competitions, such as the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year, provide a route for young traditional musicians to build a reputation and career in the traditional music scene. Many musicians are making a living from performing and teaching traditional music; this is extremely beneficial to the morale of musicians, as well as the future of traditional music, as it gives hope that traditional music is capable of making money and encourages more people to follow a musical career. Graham, in the context of the Cape Breton fiddle tradition, states:

It is good to see from the views of fiddlers in the new century that a positive attitude remains with regard to keeping the tradition vigorous: the island's fiddlers remain willing to adapt and take advantage of business

119. Angus Grant, letter to author.

120. Ibid.

prospects that arise, yet reveal that a strong sense of balance must remain between commercialism and art form continuance.¹²¹

There is to an extent, although rare, a level of commercialisation ("sell out") amongst bands with some adopting gimmicks and trends to amuse the audience as well as using Scottish stereotypes in the hope of appealing to international audiences. For example, The Red Hot Chilli Piper's win on BBC talent show *When Will I Be Famous* is a world away from the more natural setting of the dance hall or the house ceilidh. Whilst their success is to be applauded, it would appear to be the case that retaining a balance between commercial successes and to what Graham refers to as the "cultural integrity" of the music is most important to musicians.¹²²

Ryan Young discusses a preference amongst young fiddle players for playing more contemporary tunes:

I think lots of younger players are more drawn to contemporary folk music and modern tunes, which have taken influence from other genres such as jazz, rather than traditional tunes. I think this might result in traditional ways and styles of playing becoming rare and, because many of the older tunes don't seem to be getting played as much, Scottish folk music might not be instantly recognisable as Scottish in the future.¹²³

This may well be the case if younger generations of fiddle players turn their attention to global influences and overlook the importance of listening and learning from older players and their styles of playing. However, for the most part, this is unlikely as long as players maintain aspects of the tradition that have been handed down. Overall, the interviewees aired a positive outlook on the future of the fiddle traditions in Scotland and agreed that traditional music in general has to evolve; it is a living tradition after all and, as Chris Stone states,

121. Graham, "Cape Breton Fiddle Music," 227.

122. *Ibid.*, 226

123. Ryan Young, interview with author.

"no aural musical tradition can remain completely sterile or unchanging".¹²⁴ The preference for aural methods of dissemination of this tradition lends itself to change; each generation and individual shapes the music in some way, and with this the music evolves. It is, however, possible that this generation has been subject to more change than ever before as a result of technology. Whilst Angus Grant agrees that the very nature of this tradition requires change, he emphasises "the danger in too much".¹²⁵ This poses the question of how much is *too* much? The notion of tradition is troublesome in the sense that to decide how much is too much would require defining what constitutes traditional music and thus, in a way, constricting it. I am confident that the tradition will evolve naturally, but I do think that the extent of sources for the musician can be overwhelming at times. The danger, as Angus states, may well be the overwhelming array of musical genres at the disposal of the fiddle player, and it is up to the individual to carefully consider their performance practices as evolving from a timeline of tradition; this way the music, whether it be Scottish, Irish, or any other fiddle tradition, may be guided and modeled by older performance practices and be carried forward alongside change and individual creativity:

The thing about this music... it's not slavishly about the past necessarily. It's certainly music that comes out of an old tradition, but it's continually growing and developing all the time, and people are adding new melodies and coming up with new ideas... reinterpreting everything over and over. We're just part of that.¹²⁶

Interestingly, while in the process of writing this conclusion, Simon McKerrell released some results for his recent sample survey on Scottish traditional music; the survey consisted of a number of questions including "Scottish traditional music should be...?". Participants ranked a selection of multiple choices answers

124. Chris Stone, "Tradition and creativity: the roots and routes of fiddler Aidan O' Rourke," 198.

125. Angus Grant, interview with author.

126. Martin Hayes, "Martin Hayes & Dennis Cahill: NPR Music Tiny Desk Concert," YouTube video, 13:12, posted by "NPR Music," March 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5hg3iuoJoM>.

on a scale of "very relevant" to "completely irrelevant". From a participation of 280 people, the majority ranked "orally transmitted" and "composed in a traditional style" as relevant or very relevant to the question above. It is apparent that oral transmission is a key component, and that perception and understanding of traditional music is shaped and defined by the form and sonic facets. Quite remarkably, 175 participants answered that "Scottish traditional music should be old" with "completely irrelevant" and no one answered with "very relevant".¹²⁷ This reveals that playing old tunes is of less importance to the present day player. This is rather surprising in consideration that the term traditional suggests something that is long established and has strong links to the past, and it is rather strange, in a way, that newly composed music is allocated the term traditional at all. However, to return to my earlier discussion on the fiddle traditions in Scotland as evolving from a timeline of tradition, it would appear to be the case that what is most important to fiddle players, and traditional musicians in general, is that the music is moulded by what has evolved from the past and that does not necessarily entail playing 200 year old tunes; it is music that is not slavishly replicated but, more so, in accord with the musical characteristics that have developed in this tradition as well as guided by musical empathy and underlying criteria in the mindset of musicians and audiences alike of what makes this music what it is, how it should be performed, and how much change is too much, or too little. I wonder what Donald "Sunndachan" MacPhee or Farquhar MacRae, were they alive today, would think of the West Coast fiddle tradition as it exists in the present day; perhaps they might think that it has changed too much, but, more so, perhaps they would be delighted to see how many young people are taking part and bringing the tradition forward to the future.

127. Simon McKerrell, "Scottish traditional music should be...," *Understanding Scotland Musically* (blog), September 23, 2014, accessed September 24, 2014, <http://www.musicalmeaning.com/home/blog>.

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