Traditional Music of Scotland

A Journey to the Musical World of Today
Abstract

Immigrants from Scotland have been arriving in the States since the early 1600s, bringing with them various aspects of their culture, including music. As different cultures from around Europe and the world mixed with the settled Scots, the music that they played evolved. For my research project, I will investigate the progression of “traditional” Scottish music in the United States, and how it deviates from the progression of the same style of music in Scotland itself, specifically stylistic changes, notational changes, and changes in popular repertoire. I will focus on the relationship of this progression to the interactions of the two countries throughout history. To conduct my research, I will use non-fiction sources on the history of Scottish music, Scottish culture and music in the United States, and Scottish immigration to and interaction with the United States. Beyond material sources, I will contact my former Scottish fiddle teacher, Elke Baker, who conducts extensive study of ethnomusicology relating to Scottish music. In addition, I will gather audio recordings of both Scots and Americans playing “traditional” Scottish music throughout recent history to compare and contrast according to their dates. My background in Scottish music, as well as in other American traditional music styles, will be an aid as well. I will be able to supplement my research with my own collection of music by close examination. To culminate my project, I plan to compose my own piece of Scottish music that incorporates and illustrates the progression of the music from its first landing to the present. Overall, I hope to gain a greater knowledge of the interaction between Scotland and the United States through music, and how the cultures have merged and deviated throughout history.
Preliminary Research

Music in Scotland in the 18\textsuperscript{th}, 19\textsuperscript{th}, and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries

- **Musical Features**: Scottish “snap,” drones (pedal tones), melodic ornaments; songs known for distinctive and direct emphasis on melody; bagpipes and fiddles most prominent instruments; pentatonicism; use of modes

- **Scottish Nationalism**: A changing image if “Scottishness” pervaded the music of Scotland in the 18\textsuperscript{th}-20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Scottish composers were “keenly aware of musical developments in continental Europe (Everett, 160).” The traditional music written early in this time period, especially that in the Lowlands of Scotland, reflects the influences of continental music, both classical and traditional. During the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, “Britishness took over many aspects of society (165),” which was echoed in the music as well, in the form of both composition styles and methods of performance. The Highlands were less affected by outside influences due to their geographic remoteness, so the style of the Highlands evolved more uniquely than that of the Lowlands. A “Scottish Revival” took place later during this time period during which Scottish Nationalism encompassed the music of Scotland. Kilts and bagpipes became not only legal again, but also very popular, for they symbolized quintessential “Scottishness.” Old tunes were brought out in full force and new tunes were composed to sound like old ones. Even the aristocracy of Scotland began to drop the classical and play and listen to traditional music.
Preliminary Research

Immigration from Scotland to the US

- First Wave: early-mid 1600s (Cromwellian Civil War); only a few hundred
- Second Wave: 1715-1745 (Jacobite Rebellion; Scotch-Irish); 10,000/year by 1770
- Third Wave: late 1800s

- Approximately 150,000 Scots immigrated to the US prior to 1785.

Where did they go?

- 1st and 2nd wave: East Coast, Appalachia (PA, DE, MD, VA, NC, SC)
- 2nd wave: further south and inland (GA, AL, TN, AK)
- 3rd wave: larger industrial cities in North Eastern US
The Musicians
Elke Baker

• **Home Country:** USA
• **Instrument(s):** Fiddle
• **Styles Played:** Started with Classical; Scottish and Cape Breton

• **Introduction to the music:** Liked the style as a kid; Scottish dance class in college, Scottish fiddle club in Boston, listened to and learned from touring musicians

• **Musical Influences:** Ed Pearlman (American); Alasdair Fraser (Scottish); Buddy MacMaster (Cape Breton)
Billy Jackson

- **Home Country:** Scotland, family from Ireland
- **Instrument(s):** Classical piano, mandolin, uilleann pipes, fiddle, double bass, bass guitar, harp
- **Styles Played:** Scottish, Irish
- **Introduction to the music:** Irish from family, then Scottish music from surroundings. Formed band, Aussian. Started composing traditional music, crossing it with classical (inspired by Scotland’s history).
- **Musical Influences:** Irish musicians, self-taught, listened to music
Brian McNeill

• **Home Country:** Scotland; mother was Austrian

• **Instrument(s):** fiddle, guitar and electric bass, fiddle, bozouki, concertina

• **Styles Played:** Scottish, Irish

• **Introduction to the music:** dancing lessons w/ Scottish country dance trio; “bad fiddle teacher,” rock bands, back to Scotland, picked up fiddle again in pub, learned Irish first

• **Musical Influences:** Dave Swarbrick: Rags, Reels, and Airs album, learned every tune; learned mostly in Glasgow
Jeremy Kittel

- **Home Country:** USA
- **Instrument(s):** fiddle/violin
- **Styles Played:** Scottish, Jazz, Classical, many others
- **Introduction to the music:** Scottish roots, Highland games in Michigan, pipe bands, fiddle competition (had been playing classical violin, started learning tunes by ear); went to Nationals and met many musicians
- **Musical Influences:** Scottish fiddlers in the Detroit/Ann Arbor area, took lessons; Alasdair Fraser, Barbara McOwen; Anne Leslie; Ed Miller; Ian MacFarthan; Bonnie Rideout
The Interviews
Elke’s Interview

Elke’s Career

• Introduced to Scottish music while in college in Boston, where there is also a huge Cape Breton music scene.
• Has played Scottish music in 40-45 states, Ireland, England, Scotland, Canada, Japan, and West Africa. There were people in all of these places who knew the style!

Cape Breton Music

• Cape Bretoners came to Boston because of job opportunities and its close proximity.
• CB immigration: started in the 1700s, bigger waves in the 1800s. Most came from the western isles and highlands.
• Cape Breton music is played by everyone in Cape Breton (Scottish, Irish, Acadian, Native population, etc.) and called Scottish music.
Elke’s Interview

The Style

- Stylistic features: Percussive, not about speed
- Ornamentation in Scottish music comes from bagpipes, vocals, and harps.
- Different instruments had different roles. Harpists were “historians” who played and sang about their clans. The fiddle was a dance instrument.
- American players of Scottish music can be more traditional because they are not actually Scottish; they can want to be serious traditional Scottish players, and so stick to only completely Scottish style. People who play varying styles are more eclectic.
- Scottish players (from Scotland) do things like add jazz chords to traditional tunes.

The Repertoire

- Modern publications of music have changed the Scottish traditional music repertoire; before these (20-30 years ago) there were only collections from the 18th and 19th centuries still in print.
- Collection: Neil Gow, Simon Fraser, Sky Collection, Atholl Collection (1870s). These tunes are still in repertoire. However, many have evolved in North America with modern variations, added parts, etc. (in last 100 years).
- Scottish music is a literate tradition: collections were published very early (compared to say Irish music, with its first published collection in the 1900s). People still do, however, learn by ear, just with a written parallel.
Elke’s Interview

Nationalism: The Revival

• Scottish Revivalist Movement: US, 1970s: Paul Brachman in VA created a Scottish Fiddle Contest based off of Old Time Fiddle contests. Scottish Fiddling Revival (Scottish FIRE) got started on the East Coast. On the West Coast, Barbara McOwen started playing Scottish country dance music on the fiddle (this music was previously monopolized by accordion-based bands, as it still was in Scotland).

• The revival put a lot of emphasis on strathspeys. One can understand a lot about the whole context of Scottish music by understanding how strathspeys came about. Historically derived from reels, strathspeys are the major dance form of tune in Scotland. The rhythms are evident in Scots-Gaelic (and Scots-English) speech patterns.

Relationship with England

• People fight over whether tunes are Scottish or Irish, Scottish or English (historically), though they often have been cross-overs for centuries.

• Folk traditions of Scotland and England are very closely intertwined because of the ease of access and frequent travel across the border.
Elke’s Interview

Around the World/In the US

• There are many places around the world where no one has heard Scottish music.

• Scottish fiddle music is at the roots of American Old-Time fiddle music, but has become so far transformed that most tunes are hardly recognizable. The rhythms of Scots measures and reels (Scottish immigrants came over before strathspeys spread from the highlands) are however very present.


• Bruce Mulsky’s unique Old-Time bowing is the same as an African style bowing on their fiddle equivalent, the Susa (right).
Elke’s Interview

The Dialect

- Names of tunes have changed over time because few people spoke the original Gaelic, and there was discrimination against those who did (to break the power of the highland chiefs).
- Playing old tunes is like speaking in an old dialect, but with a modern interpretation.

Am baile 'm beil mo leannan fein.

"The hamlet where my lover dwells."
Final Thoughts

• “Folk music is about expanding expression; understanding the parameters of a tradition and ranging as wide as you can within that scope. People are always pushing the edge of what is within a tradition.”

• “Musical ability is learned. Anyone who immerses themselves in it by listening and looking into the history and cultural context can learn to speak it like a native.”
**Thoughts**

My preliminary research on Scottish music in the United States focused mainly on the history and specific style of the music. In Scotland itself, I researched the divide between the highlands and the lowlands and the country’s relationship with England, Ireland, and the continent, and how the music was affected by these geographic influences. I then began to connect what I discovered of the music in Scotland to the waves of immigration to the United States. At this point I conducted my interview with Elke Baker. We discussed stylistic features of music, as well as the difference between music in Scotland and Scottish music in the U.S. While talking about immigration, another seed was planted in my head that I had not considered before: the music of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, which came directly from Scotland in the 1700s and has evolved in its own way, and also traveled into the U.S. We then began to discuss her personal background with the music: how she began with classical and then discovered traditional music, both Scottish and Cape Breton at essentially the same time, while living in Boston. This laid out even more paths for me to explore for my project. Still, as I prepared for my big interviews at the Swannanoa Gathering (a celtic music camp and festival in Ashville, NC), I tried to keep my thoughts and questions on my original path, because I was afraid of how many doors I could open!
Billy’s Interview

The Scottish Harp

- Scottish harp was used in Scotland until the 18th century, but then died out. Wealthy clan chiefs had a harper who would compose songs and poems about the family’s history for entertainment.
- Much harp music is lost, though some went into bagpipe and lute manuscript; Robert Burns used a couple tunes to set his poems to. More music was written down in Ireland.

The Revival

- A revival of traditional music on the harp took place in the 1890s. Lord Archibald Campbell commissioned copies of old Scottish harps to be built. However, people played classically (pedal harps), and so had trouble playing old-style harps. As a compromise, pedal-harp string spacing was set into a smaller harp, which was dubbed the “neo-celtic harp.”
- The Harp Society in Scotland started promoting the harp. At the Edinburgh Harp Festival, hundreds of kids can now be found playing harp.
Billy’s Interview

Scottish Harp in the United States

- Harp competitions at highland games in US. Oberlin College harp program.
- Competitions in the US are very different from Irish/Scottish harp competitions. They use a different repertoire.
- In US, players are not always coming from a traditional music background, and so they may not play exactly in the traditional style. They may come from a classical background, etc, and therefore have no ornamentation (in Scotland, harpists use pipe ornamentation, etc.)
- At the New Jersey Harp Festival, there are workshops in Celtic music, Latin American music, improvisation, arrangement, accompaniment, meditation, new age, etc. Festivals like this exist all over the country!

The Music Played

- 16th and 17th century harp pieces are still played, but they are hard to find.
- Pieces are not baroque style; they are through-composed, with some rhythmic repetition.
Billy’s Interview

The Music
• Classical music had a strong influence on traditional Scottish music, esp. fiddling. Different cultural influence (mainland) than Irish music.
• Cellos were used in dance bands in 18th century.
• Musicians would be traditional and classical musicians. Music not as “rough,” especially in slow airs. Vibrato, etc.
• Music follows voice patterns.

Changes and Worldly Exposure
• More recently, non-traditional instruments began to be used in traditional music, i.e. bozouki, tenor banjo, and accordion.
• Accompaniment is a new thing. The Dubliners were one of the first bands to experiment with accompaniment. The chords used are reminiscent of the pipes.
• Cape Breton music was unknown in Scotland until recently.
• Old Joe Clark, a popular Old-Time tune, is a Scottish pipe setting (mixolydian).
• American pipers go over and beat everyone in Scotland!
Thoughts

The harp had, and has, essentially its own genre. It experienced its own revival, and had spread around the world of its own accord, separate from other instruments such as the fiddle. The Irish and Scottish harp came to the United States much later than other instruments, after the revival, and so was already strikingly different from the old tradition in terms of both style and the music played. The tradition was heavily influenced by classical music, almost completely rebuilt by it, because the old tradition was almost all lost.

Billy talked about the spread of music, and how traditional styles have traveled all over the world. The fact that American pipers win Scottish Pipe competitions in Scotland itself demonstrates just how intensely the traditional has entered other cultures.
Jeremy’s Interview

Background
• Majored in jazz, took classical lessons, and still kept up with traditional music.
• Most of his interaction with Scottish musicians has been in the US and Canada.

The Scottish Community
• Groove and swing to Scottish music, syncopation.
• Scottish music is communal, about the group (compared to jazz, which is more about the individual).
• Jeremy always has a desire to make music about celebration and community; this sentiment comes from Scottish music.

Traditional Music Today
• There are infinite different pockets of styles in the world that are all constantly changing.
• Gathering places, such as festivals, are where the tradition stays alive. No town or family really exists anymore that all plays traditional music.
• So many 21st century musicians are a mix of things.
• When playing with traditional players, you try to play in a more traditional way.
• There are many different styles of just Scottish fiddle: “violinistic” Scottish fiddle, dance fiddle, etc.
• Scottish fiddlers listen to Irish music and popular music!
• Some people really plant themselves in the tradition instead of expanding their musical knowledge.
Jeremy’s Interview

Similarities Between Cultural Music Styles

• Strathspeys, the quintessential Scottish tune type, are played in County Donegal in Ireland.

• Ornamentation can be universal: Cape Breton burls are found in Indian music (though this is probably a coincidence).

• Pop music/fusion groups incorporate traditional tunes and styles.

• The accompaniment style of the Orkney Islands (islands just to the north of Scotland) is very much like 1930s swing guitar.

• The Cape Breton piano style is similar to American 20th century piano styles.

• Pipe band drumming incorporates syncopation that is also used in modern music.

• Even more similarities in African, European, Ragtime, etc.
Thoughts

Jeremy exemplifies the multicultural musician. He has experienced so many different styles, and delved very deep into many of them, and he has done this from the United States. While he has traveled, all of the music styles he has explored and played have been available to him in the US. Other players of these styles and modern technology have enabled him to learn and master several musical styles, both traditional and classical in origin. By way of his diverse exposure, Jeremy discerned several similarities between various traditional styles of music. These similarities, as well as his ability to explore the different styles, illustrates just how far our world has come in terms of cultural diversity and acceptance, especially in recent years with the many traditional revivals.
Brian’s Interview

The Battlefield Band

- Nobody in Scotland particularly cared about traditional music when he started with the Battlefield Band.
- They made their reputation in Brittany, Germany, and Denmark
- They were half-way to a rock band
- 1980- First trip to the States. At their first gig, 4 people were there. Throughout the States, their audiences were very enthusiastic (mostly interested in the foreign accents), and they became popular.

“Inspired by their rich heritage of Celtic music and fired by the strength and vibrancy of today’s Scottish cultural scene, which indeed they have done much to create and fuel, they have led and been at the forefront of a great revival in Scottish music. Refusing to be limited musically by suffocating antiquarianism, or musical fashions, they have mixed the old songs and music with a new self-penned repertoire, all played on a fusion of ancient and modern instruments – bagpipes, fiddle, synthesiser, guitar, flutes, bodhran and accordion.”

http://www.battlefieldband.co.uk/about.htm
The Revival of Traditional Music

- Scotland had an explosion. A community of less than 50 people saved the national tradition.
- When he first started playing, there were no traditional music teachers.
- The traditional Scottish music scene in Scotland is so different now: The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, the Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh. At the Festival in 1995, there were 200 people in the audience. In 2005, there were 3000 people in audience, most of them under 16.
- New bands broke tradition. They used synthesizers! Bagpipes and fiddle on same stage! Electric guitar! These changes appealed to young people.
- Battlefield Band, Tannahill Weavers, Aussean, Silly Wizard, Boys of the Loch: these bands rehabilitated Scottish traditional music, made it accessible to people, attracted big audiences, and started writing their own (non–traditional) songs.
- The music has exploded in the US and around the world too!
The Evolution of Traditional Music

- Traditional music was many traditions.
- Scottish people moved to Ireland and became what is known as the Scotch-Irish. The Highland Clearances cause large immigration waves to Cape Breton and Appalachia. These people mixed with other immigrant groups and their music (African music (banjar), religious music)
- Style changes to Scottish music: double stopping (louder for dancing, emulate bagpipes), different tunings (whichever way they though sounded good!), tune names changed.
- Accompaniment is a 20th century phenomenon
- The music in the US was played in solitary cabins, etc; and so not played with others. Therefore, stylistic quirks came about without being corrected.
- Bluegrass developed in the US. Bill Monroe composed a tune called “Scotland”. African music, Scottish and Irish music, and Jazz combined to create this genre.
- Technology makes it easy to hear different styles of music from all around the world.
- The “Highland Line” separated two different traditions. In song tunes, their different ways of speaking created different rhythms.
- Publications came out of all different types of tunes of all traditions (Kerr’s Merry Melodies).
Thoughts

Brian played a huge part in the revival of traditional Scottish music, but his way of getting there strays very far from the tradition. He started with classical violin, but hated it, and so joined a rock band playing lead guitar and electric bass. He played with bands of many different styles before chancing upon a traditional Scottish musician back in Scotland and falling in love with the music of his homeland. He learned Irish music first however, and self-taught himself Scottish fiddle from a vinyl. Brian now composes as well as plays, and his compositions reflect his varied musical background and his appreciation for different styles. He plays not only fiddle, but bouzouki and concertina as well. Brian is one of the few musicians responsible for the traditional music revival in Scotland, which then spread around the world to join with the already evolved traditional music scenes of the west, and even the traditional scenes in other parts of the world where his band toured. He still spreads his music and educates new generations to continue to keep the music alive in its various shapes and forms.
Post-Swannanoa Interview

Thoughts

After my interviews at Swannanoa, my thoughts, as I feared they would, veered in different directions from my original research idea. Traditional Scottish music and its immigration to the United States was still an interest, but I realized that there is so much more to consider about what made (and makes) the traditional music scene the way it is today. The three professional musicians I interviewed were all from different backgrounds: one Irish, one Scottish, and one American. And yet they all play traditional Scottish music. In addition, they also all play other styles! Billy Jackson in a renowned Scottish harp player, yet he also plays Irish harp and whistle, and bozouki. Before these, he played fiddle and stand-up bass! Brian McNeill is a founding member of the famous Battlefield Band that helped revive traditional Scottish music, yet he began his musical career in a rock band playing guitar and electric bass. He also currently plays much traditional Irish music. Jeremy Kittel won the US National Scottish Fiddle Competition when he was 16, and now, at 28, has a Masters in jazz, and plays almost everything under the sun. During these interviews I was simply amazed at how diverse everyone’s backgrounds were, how open they were (and are) to other traditions and styles, and especially how easy it is for them to explore these other styles.
Collaboration Performance

During the Swannanoa Gathering, I met with 5 other musicians my age who also demonstrated this ease of access and diversity: Adam Bern, a fiddle player from Maryland who expertly plays the music of Cape Breton; Jack Bogard, a fiddle and banjo player from Ohio who excels in classical as well as Irish and jazz; Matt Floyd, a guitar, banjo, and bodhran (Celtic drum) player from Connecticut who dabbles in all Celtic styles as well as bluegrass and modern alternative rock; Kyle Burghout, a fiddler from Ottawa who plays Irish, Scottish, Cape Breton, and French-Canadian styles, as well as classical; and Nate Godshall, a bodhran player from Pennsylvania. These 5 musicians and I (a fiddler from Maryland who plays mainly Scottish, but also Irish, Cape Breton, bluegrass, and classical) collaborated on a group performance that showcased the wide range of styles that we have been exposed to (already, at the ages of 17-19).
Conclusion (of sorts)

I know that I do not have a complete grasp on traditional music; I have not even scratched the surface. The history of Scottish music is both incredibly broad and deep. It stretches all over the world and all through time, intertwining itself endlessly other traditions, and evolving in different ways. For instance, let's follow one path (of many) that Scottish music took to get to the United States. In the 18th century, a series of waves of emigration from Scotland known as the Highland Clearances spread thousands of Scots around the New World. One of the larger groups in 1792 went to the island of Nova Scotia (latin for "New Scotland"), bringing with them the contemporary traditional music of Scotland, mainly by fiddlers (the fiddle is an easily portable instrument). While the traditional music in Scotland continued to evolve and other cultures and music styles continued to affect it, the music that came over to the isolated island of Nova Scotia, mainly Cape Breton, remained strikingly the same, with only a few stylistic changes. To this day, Cape Breton players still call their music "Scottish music," although it is referred to elsewhere as "Cape Breton music." In more modern times, big waves of movement from Cape Breton to the United States have occurred, almost all to Boston, because of the large city's proximity to the island and the job opportunities there. With these waves, Cape Breton music (also very much the Scottish music of the 18th century) came to the United States. Upon arriving, it met not only American music, but also the more modern Scottish traditional music. So already, although we have followed only one path, three have crossed. The availability of these varying traditional music styles in modern times adds to the intermixing of them, and allows people to be as diverse and open to different cultures as they are today.
Bibliography


