Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

Tune History in Context

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."
— William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

In this issue I would like to articulate my approach to tune history, developed over my time spent indexing and annotating (The Fiddler's Companion, www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers, and The Traditional Tune Archive, www.tunearch.org), and writing for various periodicals.

When we are presented with something new, as humans we attempt to process information presented to us; to order and arrange the information in ways that make sense to us, and in ways that allow us to integrate it into our own experience. One word that describes this process is contextualization, which simply means to place in context, which gives rise to the philosophy of Contextualism which argues that actions or expressions can only be understood in context.

We are always naturally contextualizing things—sometimes automatically and with ease, where new information is readily understood and absorbed. Other times it is extremely difficult, and despite our deliberate efforts to understand, information may be unable to be integrated; or, more likely, becomes distorted or dismantled so that only part of it is understood. Knowledge and structure help us to contextualize, and provide shortcuts so that the process is easier over time. On the extreme end, these cognitive structures would be called stereotypes or biased thinking, where information is filtered through fixed beliefs—cognitive structures—that allow only information that is congruent to be absorbed, while incongruent information is discarded, thus preserving the stereotype.

It is natural to contextualize our experience, even when we play music. Every fiddler contextualizes to one degree or another. Most fiddlers are interested in where the tunes came from, how they were played, who composed them, etc., and thus deliberately or by osmosis (i.e. consciously or unconsciously) absorb a tradition, which is a process of contextualization. Some deliberately contextualize tunes more than others—not that it's necessary to do so, for music can be enjoyed on many different levels, including just the pleasure of playing and listening. However, traditional fiddlers generally seem interested in some conscious historical contextualizing as a part of honoring and maintaining the tradition.

Consider the concept of the "session," for example. I play fairly regularly at three: an old time jam, an Irish session, and a Québécois session. Already context is provided by the names with which I've identified the groups, and a musician new to each of the sessions can quite reasonably expect that a style and repertoire will be played at each one that is distinct from the other sessions. The terms "old time," "Irish," and "Québécois" are descriptive, but broad, and further context may be provided for each. For example, the old time session may lean toward Appalachian tunes or Midwest tunes, Kentucky modal tunes, or Mississippi blues breakdowns. The Irish session may be oriented to Munster polkas and slides, or Donegal Highlands, or pan-Irish reels and jigs. The Québécois session may play core Québec tunes, or be inclusive of Acadian and Métis tunes as well.

There is a social context to the session as well. There are alpha musicians—the acknowledged or unacknowledged musical leaders—whose playing heavily influences the music and social life of the session, or the session may be more "democratic," with no acknowledged leader, but with a consensus guiding the play. Sessions may be relatively open or closed, with varying degrees of comfort for newcomers. Sometimes the best players are grouped together in a tight core, with concentric rings of less skilled players around them; sometimes there is a circle that expands no matter how many attend. There may be subgroups in the session as well: spouses and family members, band-mates, old friends. Entering the realm of psycho-social phenomena, the session may be an arena for acting out rivalries, courtship, relationships to leaders, individual personality characteristics, and so on.

Musical elements have a contextual place in the session as well. Some sessions are relatively proscribed with regard to what instrumentation will be accepted, while others may welcome an unusual instrument. Sometimes the tunes played at sessions are consistently "straight," while other sessions welcome "crooked" or asymmetrical tunes. Songs may or may not be welcome, and there may be an unwritten but nonetheless shared understanding of the frequency of songs vs. tunes. There may be a pause for re-tuning so that players can move in and out of scordatura, or re-tuning may be seen as an unnecessary burden on the flow of a session. There may be unwritten prohibitions against too many tunes of one meter or tempo in a row, or expectations for how sets of tunes are arranged. There may be norms for tempo and how much improvisation is tolerated.

The point is, that contextualizing experience is a layered process—or rather, it can be. To continue with the example of the sessions, one can have a perfectly enjoyable experience in sessions by just playing along when one can, and considering the music for the pleasure it gives. If one listens simply for musical pleasure—a valid way of engaging the session—then contextualizing may be minimal as listening pathways operate on a different plane. Processing of information is ultimately a personal experience, and, although much of this processing is unconscious, there is still a good deal of conscious choice that one can exercise with regard to contextualizing information.

What does this have to do with tune history?

Traditional music—and I'm speaking broadly of what most of us would consider "fiddle tunes"—can be understood to have a musical, a social, and a psychological context. This understanding is borrowed from the field of clinical psychology, where the "bio-psycho-social" model is not only a way of understanding an individual, but also a method of investigation; it is also a model I am very familiar with. In the biopsychosocial paradigm an individual is considered in terms of his/her personal biology (physical health, genetics, etc.), social functioning (family, friends, work, recreation), and psychological functioning (temperament, intelligence, emotional regulation, etc.). In conducting investigations with the biopsychosocial model, one gathers data on the individual in all these realms to form the most complete picture possible.

Similarly does a tune historian gather data, for tunes have analogies in this model. We can replace the "bio" part of the paradigm with the musical elements of the tune, the "socio" with the social context in which the tune is embedded, and the "psycho" with the psychological context of the tune. Here I would add "tune and title," for a tune's name forms part of its character and is a prime avenue of investigation. Therefore, a place to start a tune history investigation is with a "musical-psycho-social" investigation.

What kinds of questions do we ask in investigating with this model? Here are a few of the questions I routinely address myself to in tune history:

- Musical—What prominent musical characteristics does the tune possess? Is it pleasing or dull, does it possess style and character, and are there musically similar tunes that it might be grouped with? Is the phrasing musically complete or fragmentary, and are there musically unique elements? Is it "purpose-built" (for dancing or for listening) or multi-functional (as when a tune is used for a polka, barn-dance, song, and march).

- Social—What is the social purpose of the tune—is it for dancing, for marching, for listening, for singing? What social arena would the tune most likely be played in—a dance, a martial setting, an opera house, a parlor? Is it meant to be played with others or in a solitary performance? Who is the audience and who are the players, and where are they from? Does the music involve rituals and gatherings (religious, festive, sporting, political...)?

- Psychological—What are the responses to hearing the tune—is it meant to incite or calm, motivate or relax, elevate or aggravate? Is it pleasurable to the ear, containing the right mix of musical tension-and-relaxation, or is it dull and pedestrian? Does the role of music aid in forming personal and group identities? Does the tune possess emotional meaning, as, say, a national anthem or "Dixie" or "Lillibulero"? What might be the psychological motives of the composer, or the player, or the audience?

However, we still need to take into account the historical context, or, as I see it, how the tune is embedded in space and time. The results of the "musical-psycho-social" investigation are variable according to where the tune was played and, historically, when it was played. There will be different conclusions as a result of the musical-psycho-social investigation depending on where the tune was played and when in time it was played. It's a bit like the concept of "alternate universes" in which a variety of Earths coexist in space and time—each with similarities and divergences from our own (as in the Superman comics, remember? D.C. comics actually coined the term "Multiverse" for the phenomenon. For those who would prefer not to use comics as the source of their metaphysical knowledge, the concept is called the "many-worlds interpretation" of quantum mechanics and can be found in the literature of that discipline). So too is a tune embedded in layers of time and space.

An example is the best way to understand what I'm driving at.

[Context #1] "Scotland" is a melody that was first printed in Henry Playford's *Dancing Master,* 10th edition of 1698. Musically, it was originally set in 9/4 time in the key of G. Some 9/4 pieces in Playford are triple-hornpipes, which were set in 9/4 time at the beginning of the 17th century, but more likely to be set in 3/2 time by the end of the century. Triple hornpipes usually featured syncopation, which "Scotland" does not have, being rather straight groups of quarter notes in triple time. It is more likely characterized as a type of jig. The melody is pleasant, if pedestrian, with no musical surprises, and moves quickly through the four repeated bars of each of the two strains. Harmonically, it is driven by a familiar tonic-subdominant-dominant chord structure. Socially, it was the vehicle for a country dance, "Longways, for as many as will," as is often directed by Playford, which describes figures performed by lines of dancers facing each other. The "country dance" at this time was a generic name for group dancing, and had nothing to do with a rural setting; the tunes and dances were composed for a leisure class, and meant to be danced in assemblies, or social gatherings where the focus was on dance. Psychologically, the assembly was a place to see and to be seen, where one could exercise what grace and charm one possessed to widen contacts and further one's goals. Dances went in and out of vogue, albeit at a slower pace than we are used to in modern times, but the urge to remain current and popular existed then, as today, and thousands of tunes and dances were produced in the era to feed the demand for the latest and best.

Other psychological elements are suggested by the title. In 1698 England was but eight years past the Battle of the Boyne (July 1690), in which the forces of William of Orange soundly defeated those of King James II, sending the Catholic king into exile and dashing the hopes of the Scottish Jacobites who had supported James. The next few years saw a consolidation of William and Mary's power, although Queen Mary died in 1694, leaving William to rule alone. England remained wary of Scottish power, however, and vigilant of the country to the north.

[Context #2] Some two generations later, the "Scotland" context, dance and title, had dissipated, to be replaced by a continuation of the melody under another guise, a slip jig and song air called variously "Andrew Kerr," "Andrew Carr," or "Andrew Carey/Cary." The earliest tune by this name I have found is in London publisher John Walsh's *Third Book of the Compleat Country Dancing-Master* (1735). It was picked up quickly by other London music publishers and, by the end of the century there was hardly a large collection that did not include it under one of the variant titles. Its popularity is attested to in fiddlers' manuscript copybooks (why take the time to transcribe a tune you don't like?), where "Andrew Carey" was included by 18th century musicians in Ireland, Britain, and North America. It is safe to say that, by the latter 18th century, "Andrew Carey" was as familiar a melody as could be found throughout the English-speaking world.

Musically, "Andrew Cary" resembles "Scotland" and follows similar melodic and harmonic contours, without being a copy of the Playford melody. Often the parts in publications and manuscripts are reversed from Playford, and sometimes one strain or another varies from the usual, depending on the text. The meter has been changed to a more modern setting, 9/8 time, a more efficient way of transcribing 9/4 and a meter that was more suggestive of the tempo of the tune. In part, more "modern" printing techniques eased the change, as eighth and sixteenth note groups became easier to print. Melodically, the tune has become more complex, and, while the harmonic underpinnings are largely the same as the earlier Playford tune, it is starting to "open up" in terms of melodic and harmonic possibilities. These are explored in 18th and 19th century variants to the tune, numerous examples of which survive.

Socially, there has been great change, for many tunes and dances have transcended the rarified dance assembly for adoption by a larger and more varied consumer base. The country dance has ceased to be the pastime of the leisure class, and has become a much more broad social event. In part, this has been aided by technology, as cheaper and more available dance and tune collections have appeared in print. Collections have become more portable and have been distributed to a wider audience. "Andrew Carey/Andrew Carr/Andrew Kerr" versions start to appear in Irish and Scottish collections as well as in English ones. The tune also starts to appear in musicians' copy- and commonplace books, a sure sign of popular acceptance, for musical literacy has increased to the point that many amateur musicians can read and write music. One can conclude that the frequency of "Andrew Carey" in musician copybooks means that the tune was well-known to late 18th century amateur musicians and dancers, from all parts of the English-speaking world (and elsewhere as well—"Andres Ker" was printed in Spain in Testore's *Reglas Utilas Para los Aficionados a Danzar,* 1745). Both British and American amateur musicians played the tune during and following the American War for Independence.

Psychologically, the tune seems to have struck a responsive chord. What is surprising is its longevity in the "Andrew Carey" iteration —more than a century. Its popularity seems to have peaked around the end of the 18th century, but it continued to be published in collections throughout the next century, despite the disappearance of a great many other 9/8 time tunes. It is not known how the name change from "Scotland" to "Andrew Carey" took place. Perhaps, as we have speculated, the wary watchfulness by the English of Scotland at the end of the 17th century was assuaged, and the title "Scotland" no longer bore the same associations, and thus weakened in meaning. It could be there was an early 18th century song "Andrew Carey" set to the tune—although none has been found until one was printed in Bruce and Stokoe's *Northumbrian Minstrelsy* (1883), which seems to have been written in the 19th century. While the original song disappeared, the name remained—not an unusual occurrence. Or, it could be that "Andrew Carey" represented the "everyman" of the British world, and thus was sustained by populist emotions.

Historically, the tune became completely detached from its Playford origins, even to the point that its English provenance was doubted. Glasgow publisher James Aird (in *Selections, vol. 5*, 1797) and dancing master Thomas Wilson (*Companion to the Ball Room,* 1816) both identified Ireland as the place of origin of the melody.

[Context #3]. The tune appears in Ireland as early as 1790, when "Andrew Carey" was printed in Dublin by E. Rhames on a single sheet entitled "Three Fashionable Country Dances," probably from English sources. Yet, in Ireland the tune again transcended the country dance identity and became absorbed into Irish tradition not as a country dance, but as a slip jig. It was printed by Frank Roche in his third volume of *Traditional Irish Music* (1927) as "The Hills of Tipperary," and by O'Neill as "Tipperary Hills," a setting and title he probably copied from William Bradbury Ryan's *Ryan's Mammoth Collection* (1883). Other Irish titles include "Over the Hill(s) to Tipperary," "Cnuic Tiobraid-Arainnand," and "Michael Gorman's" (stemming from his 1956 recording *Irish Jigs, Reels & Hornpipes*). The group Altan recorded the slip jig as "Con's Slip Jig" on their album *Another Sky* (2000), set in the key of E major, sourced to Teileann, Donegal, fiddler Con Cassidy (1909-1994). The group notes that the tune was common around the Teileann and Gleann Cholmcille, Donegal, areas.

Musically the slip jig, in 9/8 time, is distanced from the British country dance. Roche's version is in three parts, with the second and third roughly corresponding to some English and Scottish versions (such as the two-part setting in James Stewart-Robertson's *Athole*

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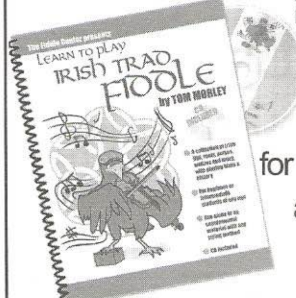

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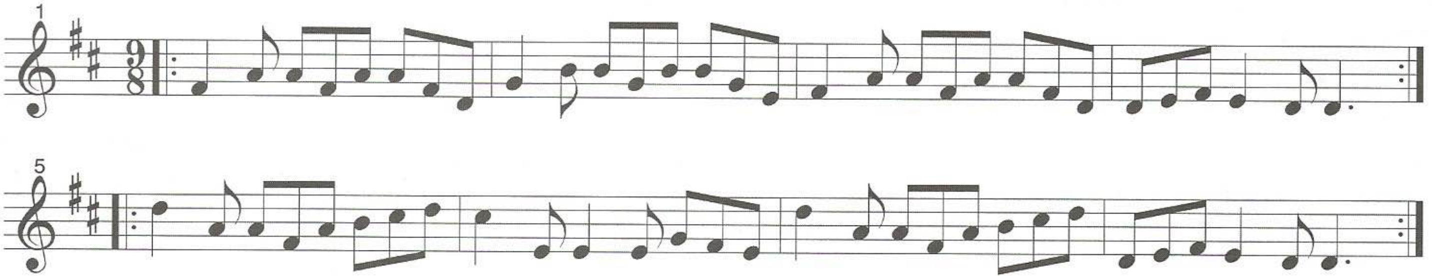
Collection, 1884). A first strain has been added that generally fits the melodic contour of some first strains of "Andrew Carey," but has been significantly changed. Roche's first strain is a melodic, step-wise, and "smoothed out" melody, attached to two other strains that are much more similar to the "Andrew Carey" tune. Other Irish versions are in two parts and correspond more closely to the "Andrew Carey" tune. The Gleann Cholmcille version has a low ending in both parts, while the Teileann version has a second part with a high ending.

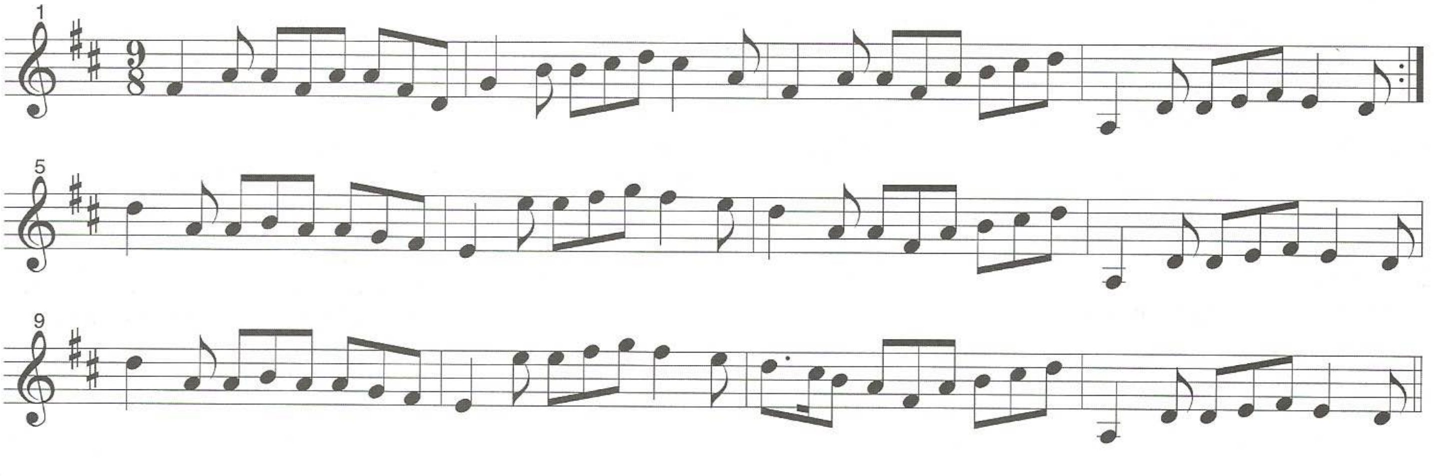
The tune has been transformed into the vehicle for another kind of dance, a slip jig, or (as in Roche) a hop jig. Socially, this is a difference, for as a country dance the tune propelled a kind of social interaction, acted out in the form of a group dance. As a slip jig, it is a step dance, a kind of solo dance often performed in soft shoes. In the 20th century it became known as a women's dance, although it was formerly performed by men, and although both sexes now dance a slip jig, it is almost exclusively danced by women at the competitive level. It is a graceful and stately dance, with sliding movements of the feet, giving the effect of "slipping across the floor." While it is relatively rare to play 9/8 tunes in English and Scottish sessions, slip jigs are often played in Irish sessions, albeit with much less frequency than Irish musical forms.

Psychologically, the slip jig has acquired a thoroughly Irish character, with its English associations distanced and often unrecognized. Although this transformation happened over the last 150 years or so, it is interesting to note that provenance was "loosening" even in some older publications. As noted, both Aird and Wilson thought the tune Irish enough in character to assign provenance to that country in their published volumes.

Scotland



Andrew Carey



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The tune has come a long way from its origins in England in the 17th century. Playford, like other publishers, was an eager consumer of tunes himself. He is not credited with any of the compositions he printed, and he obtained the tunes and dances in his volumes from other sources, not identified. Where did he get "Scotland" from? Was it a new composition, or one already old, and was it really English? Ultimately all attempts at constructing a historical context for music end in unknowns. We should also be mindful that contextualization is a cognitive construct, and not "fact," for we cannot know the past, only perceive what it may have been like from our vantage point in the present.

[Andrew Kuntz is the author of a book of old time songs and tunes called Ragged But Right (1987) as well as the on-line tune encyclopedia "The Fiddlers' Companion" (www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in Irish music sessions.]

The Hills of Tipperary