

# Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

## A Night at the Opera, Part One

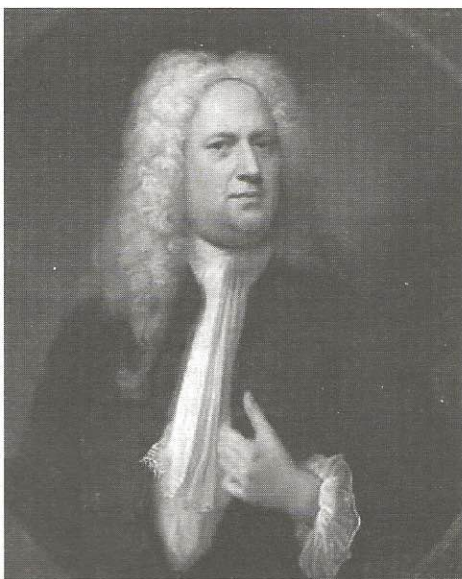
*“Well, art is art, isn’t it? Still, on the other hand, water is water! And east is east and west is west and if you take cranberries and stew them like applesauce they taste much more like prunes than rhubarb does. Now, uh... Now you tell me what you know.”*

— Groucho Marx 1890-1977

Classical music composers have long found inspiration in traditional and popular music in both general and specific ways. Consider the jazz-influenced *American in Paris* (1928) or *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) of George Gershwin (1898-1937), the many English folk music-influenced compositions of Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), the Gypsy-influenced Hungarian Rhapsodies of Franz Liszt (1811-1886), and the Norwegian folk tunes and dances of Edvard Grieg (1843-1907). Apart from a general influence on or flavoring of classical music, traditional melodies themselves have been showcased in classical music. Ludwig Van Beethoven took many genuine British folk songs and arranged them for voice and keyboard, and Tchaikovsky wrote 59 Russian Folk Songs for solo piano. Brahms composed 19 Hungarian Dances, Borodin his Polovtsian Dances, Dvořák wrote 16 Slavonic Dances and Granados 12 Spanish Dances, all using genuine folk melodies. Aaron Copeland’s use of “Bonaparte’s Retreat” for a main theme of his orchestral suite *Hoe-down* is derived from the playing of rural fiddler William H. Stepp (of Leakeville, Magoffin County, Kentucky), via the transcription of the melody by Ruth Crawford Seeger that appeared in John and Alan Lomax’s volume *Our Singing Country* (1941). Australian-born composer Percy Grainger (1882-1961) devised an extended orchestral arrangement of the morris dance melody “Shepherd’s Hey” and converted the English anthem “Country Gardens” into a piano solo. These are but a few prominent examples of the myriad ways that folk music has influenced classical music for centuries.

In the course of working with copies of fiddlers’ manuscript from the 18th and 19th centuries (one of my favorite pastimes!) I sometimes come across tunes that are examples of a reverse of this direction. In other words, classical music — art music — that has influenced traditional music in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. For example, recent manuscripts I have been working with contain names such as “March from Saul,” “Air from Tekely,” “Dance in Paul and Virginia” and so on, titles which obviously derive from composed works for the concert hall or the art stage.

Derivatives from art music in traditional repertoire need to be placed in context, however. Regarding the broad scope of music since the Renaissance, the boundaries between classical, popular, and traditional music were much more permeable prior to the 20th century,



Georg Friedrich Händel by Balthasar Denner  
(public domain portrait from Wikimedia Commons)

at which time widening gaps between the genres became chasms. Earlier there was much less distinction between what was considered art music and what was popular or even traditional, especially during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Consider German-born composer Georg Friedrich Händel (1685-1759), a contemporary of Bach who excelled in producing concerti grossi, oratorios, and operas. At the beginning of the 18th century Händel (whose reputation was already firmly established) was Kapellmeister (music director) for Elector George of Hanover, a German state. Händel visited London in 1710, found employment with Queen Anne and discovered an English public with a taste for Italian-style opera, one of his fortes. He permanently settled there in 1712. Presently Queen Anne died, and Elector George was invited to the throne, becoming King George I. After an awkward reconciliation with his former employer (whom he had so cavalierly turned his back on), Händel continued to compose for the Hanoverian court of Great Britain, but also became interested in music he heard in the British street. Melodic and thematic material indigenous to the island began to color his works, and, as Britain took to the adopted composer, his music in turn influenced popular culture. One of Händel’s coronation anthems, *Zadok the Priest*, written for the crowning of George II, has been played at every British coronation since. In 1726 his opera *Scipio* was performed for the first time, a march from which struck a chord and was adopted as a military march by the British army. In fact, it remains the regimental slow march of the British Grenadier Guards to this day. It is probably as a stage composer, however, that he had the broadest influence on English traditional music. Händel was a partner in the management of the King’s Theatre from 1729-1734, and had a long association with the Opera House at Covent Garden. Unfortunately, the composer was eventually bankrupted in his theatre ventures, curiously by competition from John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera*, a pastiche of hastily improvised works, a wisp of a story, old ballad tunes and dance music recast as airs, and even some of Händel’s own melodies. The British “ballad opera,” as it was called, took London by storm and *Beggar’s Opera* and its numerous imitators eclipsed the taste for Italian opera, and Händel ended up owing more than £75,000 — an astonishing sum for the times.

Händel was so singularly popular during the early Hanoverian period that it is no wonder that his music reached a broad audience. It certainly was well-published, and thus widely disseminated, and influenced amateur as well as professional musicians. One of the most popular of Händel’s compositions to appear in traditional musicians’ manuscripts was the famous “Dead March” from his oratorio *Saul* (1738). There were numerous “dead marches,” of course, with every tragic opera and musical stage production having solemn music to accompany a post-expiration scene — there were dead marches in *Coriolanus* and in *Merope*, for just two contemporary examples — but Händel’s dirge proved enduringly popular, despite being written in a major key. It became one of the most famous of funeral airs, used on many occasions in the



18th and 19th centuries. It was, for example, played during the progress of the hero Lord Horatio Nelson's casket from Westminster to St. Paul's. It was played before military executions in the British army, and was the most frequently used funeral march by American Civil War bands. The tune was also played for other kinds of executions in the 19th century. Captain Boteler of H.M.S. Gloucester witnessed the hanging of twenty Spanish pirates at Port Royal, Jamaica, in 1823:

*Early in the morning the Gloucester's boats, manned and armed with a guard of marine drums and fifes, went up to Kingston, returning in a procession towing the launch with the captain and nine pirates, the drums and fifes giving out the "Dead march in Saul," "Adeste Fideles," etc. The following morning the other ten were also executed — a fearful sight. No men could go to their death with less apparent concern. Before the captain first went up the ladder he called upon his men to remember they were before foreigners and to die like Spaniards.* [Michael Pawson & David Buisseret, Port Royal, Jamaica; Oxford, 1975]

"Dead March in Saul" appears in the 1786 commonplace book of American flute player Henry Beck, in William Morris's commonplace book of 1776-1777 (he was with the First Regiment at Hunterdon County, New Jersey), and in John Beach's (Gloucester, MA) musical copybook of 1801-1825. Keyboard player Ann Winnington, of New York, copied a "Dead March from Saul" into her c. 1810 music book, as did Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, musician William Patten, around 1800, although Winnington's was a different tune. In England the march appears in the 1820 music manuscript book of the Rev. Robert Harrison (Brampton, Cumbria).

Händel's early tenure in England coincides with the publication of the later volumes of *The English Dancing Master*, famously published in London in 1651 by John Playford, then issued in

increasingly expanded and revised editions through his lifetime. His son Henry then took over the long-running series. Finally, *Dancing Master* volumes were published by John Young until the 18th edition, in 1728. Collectively known as the "Playford" volumes, they are the most famous collection of tunes gathered for social dancing of the era. The second volume (first published in 1713, then revised in a subsequent four editions) of the *Dancing Master* contained some 360 dances. The Playfords were not the only ones to publish dance collections, of course, for several London publishers competed in the lucrative market: Rutherford, Walsh, Oswald, Johnson, Bremner, and Thompson are the most prominent of the 18th century publishers to issue collection after collection of country dances with music and steps to feed the popularity of the "dance assemblies." Often there would be a yearly offering by these various publishers, with titles such as "24 Country Dances for the Year 1746." With all of this activity, the locally available traditional tune repertoire suitable for dancing was quickly exhausted. City publishers generally had limited access to rural music, nor were they, after all, in the business of collecting — they were publishers. Some were also musicians and fiddler-composers — Bremner and Oswald, to name outstanding examples — but even their output could not keep pace with demand and they had to round out their collections with music obtained from other sources.

An example of this reaching out to other sources to round out publications may be seen in the tune "Correlli Reviv'd," a jig printed in John and Andrew Gow's *A Collection of Slow Airs, Strathspeys and Reels* (London, c. 1795). Andrew (1760-1803) and younger brother John (1764-1826) established a publishing business in London in 1788 and were the English distributors for the Scottish Gow family's musical publications. The title is a reference to the Italian Baroque composer and violinist Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713). Immensely popular and successful in his day as a concert violinist, Corelli also popularized and perfected the concerto grosso form in his composing. He was also renowned as a teacher, and among his pupils were Vivaldi and Geminiani.

## Dead March in Saul



The Gows' tune incorporates some aspects of baroque style, and presumably is based on a Corelli air. Another Corelli piece, a gavotte from his Trio Sonata op. 2, No. 1 (1685) was printed with country dance directions in Wright's *Compleat Collection* (vol. 1, London, c. 1740). "Corelli's Gavotte" also appears in the music manuscript book of Captain George Bush (1753?-1797), a fiddler and officer in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. Bush had evidently copied it from a tutor for the fife printed in Philadelphia in 1776, thought to be reprinted by George Willig around 1805. The melody appears much earlier in the 1718 music manuscript of Englishman Thomas Bennet, as simply "Gavot." Modern fretted-instrument player Doc Rossi has made a connection between Corelli's piece and a variant called "Mr. Cosgill's Delight." The latter tune was published in the third volume of the *Dancing Master* (1728) and in Walsh and Hare's *New Country Dancing Master* (3rd Book, 1728), picked up and recorded by Ashley Hutchings and John Kirkpatrick in the early 1970s.

As George Dorris (in his article "Music for the Ballets of John Weaver," *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 3, No. 1, 1979) points out, "In order to find enough tunes, the compilers presumably searched widely for suitable music to fill out these books, and theatre music would have offered a convenient source." The *Dancing Master* volumes contain numerous references to "art" theatre in the names of tunes and dances representative of stage productions then current. Sometimes these would be the names of the plays, characters from them, or even people performing in them (keeping in mind that many plays of the time could be considered what we call musical theater today, with dancing and singing included). Plays such as *The Way of the World*, *The Beaux Stratagem*, *Recruiting Officer*, *Fair Quaker of Deal*, and *She would if she cou'd*, are graced by tunes and dances of the same name in *Dancing Master: Vol. the Second* (1713). "Two tunes bear the name of popular characters," finds Dorris, "'Miss Hoyden' from Sir John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* and 'Sir Foplin's Airs' from Sir George Etherege's *The Man of Mode*: or *Sir Fopling Flutter*, in which the dance mimics foppish behavior; these tunes may well be associated with the characters in the plays as performed in the theatres." The third volume of the *Dancing Master* (published between 1726 and 1728) has even more references, showing the taste for Italian opera that Händel rode upon: Giovanni Bononcini's *Griselda* and *Farnace* ("Pharnaces" in the *Dancing Master*), and Händel's own *Radamisto* ("Radamistus"), *Flavio* ("Flavius"), and *Pastor Fido*. Dorris remarks the plays of John Dryden are also represented by *The Indian Emperor*, *Aurangzebe* ("Orangzebe"), and *Amphitrion*. The tunes "Monsieur Dupre," "Booth's Hornpipe," and "Mrs. Booth's Minuet" all refer to period performers — Mrs. Booth

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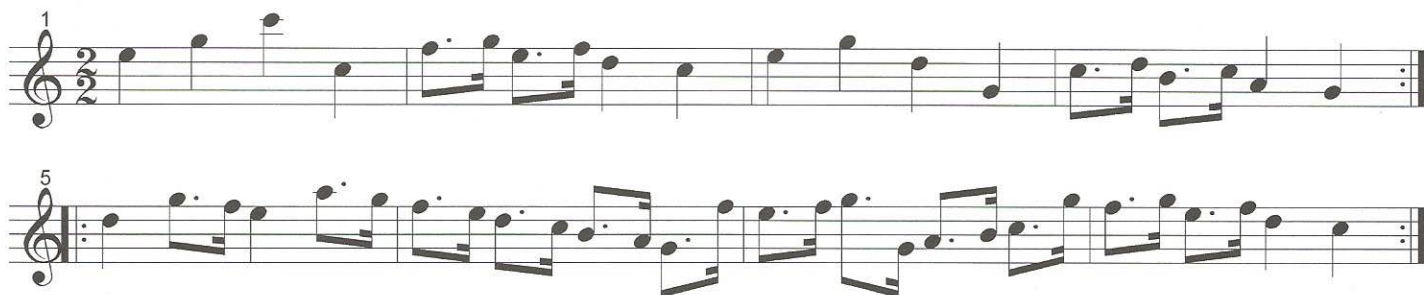
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was Hester Santlow who married actor Barton Booth. Finally, the popular stage pantomimes are represented by "The Hey-Maker's Dance in Faustus; or Wing's Maggot," "Dr. Faustus Tumbler's," and "Harlequin, a Director."

It appears there is ample evidence that "art" music was well represented in volumes such as the *Dancing Master* and other collections meant for social dance consumption by dancing masters and their patrons and audiences. Is there evidence that they made an impact on traditional ("folk") music? If tune titles and melodies in musicians' copybooks, commonplace books, and manuscripts is evidence, then the answer is broadly yes, although these make up a small percentage of tunes in handwritten musicians' manuscript copybooks. For example, Harlequin titles — which can only have derived from the art stage — appear in the Thomas Hammersley copybook (London, c. 1790), Ebenezer Beven's

## Mr. Cosgill's Delight





commonplace book of music for the fife (Middletown, Conn., c. 1825-1830), Jeremiah Brown's commonplace book (Seabrook, New Hampshire, 1782), David Young's manuscript collection of reels (Drummon Castle, Crieff, Perthshire, Scotland, 1734), Nancy Shepley's commonplace book (Pepperell, Massachusetts, c. 1794), and others. Harlequin titles appear no less than seventy-eight times in printed 18th century music and dance collections, scores, and periodicals.

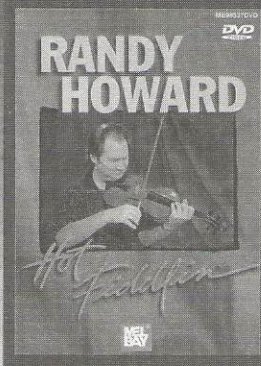
Händel is represented in fiddlers' manuscripts by other musical selections adopted into general use; his march from Solomon (1749), the march from Rinaldo (1710), and the aforementioned march from Scipio (1728). In addition to its military uses, the latter appears in period tutors for the oboe, bassoon, flute, and fife, as well as country dance collections. The march was used as the vehicle for an air in the ballad operas Polly (1729), Quaker's Opera (1728), The Country Wedding (1729), Welsh Opera (1731), Grub Street Opera (1731), and Stage Mutineers (1733).

It appears also in the music copybooks of musicians John W. Stiles (probably from New England), dated 1807; Silas Dickinson (Amherst, Massachusetts), around 1800; and violinist John F. Curtiss (Cheshire, Connecticut), around 1800. The Rinaldo march was similarly used in ballad operas (including the seminal Beggar's Opera), instrument tutors, martial and dance collections and periodicals. The march from Solomon was printed by expatriate Scot Robert Bremner in London (*A Collection of Airs and Marches*, 1761) and in Preston's *Marches, Airs & Minuets* (London, 1804). It was included in the late 18th century manuscript copybook of Henry Livingston, Jr., a veteran of the Revolutionary War who lived in Dutchess County, New York. Livingston was an important land owner in the Hudson Valley and a member of the powerful extended Livingston family, but he was also a surveyor and real estate speculator, an illustrator and map maker, and a Justice of the Peace. Henry was a musician (probably a flute player) and presumably a dancer of some skill, as he was elected a Manager for the New York Assembly's dancing season of 1774-

## March from Solomon

## Doctor Haydn





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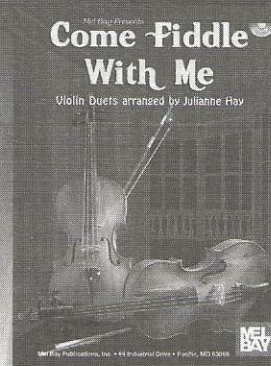
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1775, along with his third cousin, John Jay, later U.S. Chief Justice of Governor of New York. P. Van Schaack (Kinderhook, N.Y.) also had the march from Solomon in his 1820 copybook for the fife and flute.

Händel was not the only German composer to have influenced London social music. Later in the century Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) resided in London for two periods: 1791-1792 and 1794-1795, where he concertized to great acclaim. Contemporary music historian Charles Burney (1726-1814) wrote in his memoirs: "Haydn himself presided at the piano-forte; and the sight of that renowned composer so electrified the audience, as to excite an attention and a pleasure superior to any that had ever been caused by instrumental music in England." Haydn is known to have composed country dances; one, called "The Princess of Wales' Favorite Dance by Dr. Haydn," was printed by Gow & Shepherd (Edinburgh). Haydn's other country dances unfortunately are now lost. Haydn and the Gows were all associated with the extravagant Prince of Wales and the King's Theatre in London during the same period. The "Princess" title of the surviving piece honors Caroline of Brunswick (1768-1821), who married George Augustus Frederick, then Prince of Wales and later king George IV, her first cousin, in 1795. Unfortunately, the Prince and Princess appear to have taken a dislike to each other in record time, never living together again after the first few days of their marriage (although one child, Princess Charlotte Augusta, was conceived in that brief time). They maintained separate households, and indeed, each embarked on numerous affairs with other

lovers. Scottish fiddler-composer Duncan McIntyre (born c. 1765), then working in London, was impressed with Haydn and wrote a strathspey ("Doctor Haydn") for him that appeared in his *Collection of Slow Airs, Reels, and Strathspeys* (1796). [McIntyre reportedly journeyed to India around the year 1806 as master of ceremonies to the governor general's court, but there his trail ends. His cause and date of death is unknown.] Finally, a slow march called "The Picnic" shows an interesting juxtaposition, with parts of the piece arranged by three prominent composers from three different backgrounds. The first and last parts of the four-part tune were arranged by Nathaniel Gow, a prominent fiddler-composer, bandleader, and publisher both in Edinburgh and London. The second part — eight bars — was set by "Mr. Giornovich," while the third part was set by Haydn. Reviewing "The Picnic," Peter Brown (*Musical Times*, vol. 129, No. 1747, Sept. 1988) notes the music's similarity to the slow movements of Haydn's Paris Symphony no. 82 (1786) and the String Quartet op. 64, no. 1.

[The author wishes to gratefully acknowledge communications with Vivian Williams and Doc Rossi for information contained in this article, as well as the websites [www.colonialdancing.org/Easmes/index.html](http://www.colonialdancing.org/Easmes/index.html) and [www.village-music-project.org.uk/](http://www.village-music-project.org.uk/) .]

[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](http://www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers)). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in Irish music sessions.]