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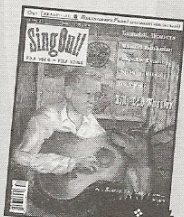
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Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

A Few Moor

One of my favorite tunes was played in our local Irish pub session last month, “Over the Moor to Maggie,” a three-strain reel that has been at times considered among the best in the whole Irish repertoire, and certainly a periodic favorite among our local crew. Not so coincidentally, perhaps, “Waynesboro” was played at the old time jam I frequent (typically for much longer than the typical three repetitions that “Maggie” received with the Irish musicians). If a coincidence it was indeed small, since a few of the same musicians are at both events and the connection between the two melodies has long been established and widely commented on. However, it remains a fact that “Maggie” is one of the relative handful of tunes in which the close relationship between the American tune and the Irish antecedent is indisputably clear, although how the Irish melody came to the Upland South remains a mystery. Whatever the path, it was probably of no great antiquity for neither tune appears to have been from the nether reaches of their respective repertoires, time-wise. There are some interesting features about the development of both tunes in America and in Ireland, however, that I find appealing and a fun puzzle because of some confusing twists.

First, “Over the Moor to Maggie” as a title is not unique, nor particularly Irish (the word “moor” itself comes from the Old English *mor*, also meaning a heath or wasteland). Wherever there were moors and women, I suppose one might find the combination obvious as a tune title. For example, “Over the Moor to Betty” is the title of a country dance melody from Northumbrian musician William Vickers’ 1770 manuscript, while “O’er the Muir to Kitty” (a variant spelling of Katie or Kitty, for Katherine) is a Scots measure from “King” McGlashan’s c. 1780s collection. Similarly, “Over the Moor to Peggy” is the title of a reel recorded in New York in 1925 by the famous County Leitrim-born flute player John McKenna (accompanied by banjoist Michael Gaffney). There are even other melodies with the “Over the Moor to Maggie” title itself. A country dance by that name appears in the *Perth Manuscript*, compiled in Scotland in 1768 by David Gillespie, a version that also appears in Glasgow publisher James Aird’s *Selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign Airs* (vol. 2, 1785), and an “Over the Moor to Maggie” (an unrelated hornpipe) was collected by Frank Roche and published early in the 20th century.

Confusion comes in the Irish repertoire with the closeness of the “Over the Moor” titles, for the first names “Peggy” and “Maggie” sound almost the same, and, although the tunes are different the titles lend themselves to mis-hearing. Indeed, not infrequently does one stumble across a confusion of the two in the literature. “Over the Moor to Peggy” is related in the first part to a family of reels that includes “Mayo Lasses,” “The Hag’s Reel,” “The Old Maids of Galway,” “Johnny, When You Die,” “The Turf House,” “Paddy’s Gone to France,” and “The Ballina Lass(es).” The “Mayo Lasses” group, however, are two-part tunes (also in G) that appear earlier in print, and earlier in sound recordings—beginning in 1916 with accordion player John J. “Dutch” Kimmel, a musician of German extraction who played much Irish music. “The Old Maids of Galway” was included in *Ryan’s Mammoth Collection*, printed in Boston by Elias Howe in 1883, and was reprinted with the same title in O’Neill’s *Music of Ireland* (1903). “The Mayo Lasses” was published in Giblin’s *Collection of Traditional Irish Dance Music* in 1928, with a version appearing in Brendan Breathnach’s *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, vol. 1 (1963), collected from famed Dublin accordion player Sonny Brogan. “The Ballina Lass(es)” was the title employed by Sligo fiddler Paddy Killoran and His Pride of Erin Orchestra when he recorded the melody in New York in the 78 RPM era. Another title may stem from songs or ditties sung to the tune: “Johnny When You Die” (remembered by at least one older musician as “Johnny, when I die, bury me in Kerry”), or a ditty usually sung to “The Keel Row” (“Johnny, when you die, will you leave me your fiddle-o”). Accordion player Johnny

O'Leary usually paired this tune with "Anything for John Joe" and referred to them jointly as "The Sliabh Luachra Reels" (after the hilly area straddling Counties Kerry and Cork). It was also recorded by Kerry fiddlers Denis Murphy and Julia Clifford as "Johnny, When You Die." "Paddy's Gone to France" (sometimes "Paddy's [or, "Johnny's"] gone to France, and he's never coming back again") appears to be a more recent name, as is Patrick Street's title, "The Turf House" (set in the key of D).

Cape Breton fiddlers also play a close variant of the "Mayo Lassies" melody, which has long had currency on the island and has been recorded numerous times by generations of fiddlers. There it is called the "West Mabou Reel" and is considered part of the core repertoire. In fact, it has been popularly attributed to Donald John (the Tailor) Beaton (1854-1919), a Mabou fiddler renowned to this day on the island and scion of a musical family. "West Mabou" (named for a village situated on the western part of the island) has its two strains reversed from the Irish versions of the melody, but otherwise is quite close.

However, the particular "Over the Moor to Maggie" melody we're primarily interested in—the popular session tune—appears first by that name in Captain Francis O'Neill's *Dance Music of Ireland* (1907), his second large collection. It is a three-strain tune usually in the key of G major (infrequently in A), and is substantially the melody played in modern sessions. It was not the only Irish title for the reel, though, for it appears in P.W. Joyce's *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs* (published in 1909, two years after O'Neill) as "Peggy's Wedding," again in three parts in the key of G. The first two parts of Joyce's tune closely resemble O'Neill's "Over the Moor to Maggie," but the third part of "Peggy's Wedding" differs noticeably, although the general musical contour and phrase end-

ings remain very similar. A third early 20th century version of the melody is to be found in *Allan's Irish Fiddler*, probably published sometime in the second decade by Glasgow publisher Mozart Allan, but arranged by Hugh McDermott (about whom, unfortunately little is known). The tune in *Allan's* goes by the name of "The Green Meadow" and is in two strains, corresponding to the first two strains printed by O'Neill and Joyce. Finally, a version of our melody is included in the *Robbins Collection*, printed in New York in 1933, where it appears as simply "Old Reel."

Where did the tune originate? We don't know, although there is some information that an early version of our "Maggie" reel was included in the c. 1865 music manuscripts of County Fermanagh's Gunn family, under the title "Rakes of Abeyfale" (Abbeyfeale is a town in the extreme west of County Limerick). Joyce is the only early printing to list a specific source for the reel, his having collected it from one Michael Walsh, "a good professional fiddler," who was from Strokestown, County Roscommon. O'Neill visited Ireland in 1906, and it may be that he picked up the tune at that time (since the reel "Over the Moor to Maggie" does not appear in his previous compendium, the 1903 *Music of Ireland*). From the information gathered we might speculate that the reel was in fairly wide circulation in Ireland at least since the latter 19th century, under a variety of titles.

Recordings of the tune with the "Over the Moor to Maggie" title are relatively recent, stemming principally from the 1967 Topic recording by County Clare uilleann piper Willie Clancy (1918-1973) called *The Minstrel from Clare*. The influential piper can be credited with popularizing both tune and title amongst Irish musicians, and it is rare for it to be identified by other names in modern times. The reel remains associated with Clancy to this

Over the Moor to Maggie

day—so much so that the third part is sometimes attributed to him (although it clearly predates him in published works cited above)—his having “composed” it “in a fit of devilment.” However, in Pat Mitchell’s transcription of Clancy’s version of “Over the Moor to Maggie” the third part is missing altogether, which may have been typical of the way it was played by the piper.

A twist occurred when Cape Breton fiddler Howie MacDonald first recorded the tune in 1985. Having finished the recording (set in the key of A major), MacDonald found he had no name for the melody and so employed the words on a gas station sign near the studio, dubbing it “The Willow Tree.” Subsequent Cape Breton fiddlers have recorded the reel as “The Willow Tree,” taking their cue from MacDonald, and it appears that the “Willow Tree” title may be gaining traction on the island. The key has reverted to G, however, even in MacDonald’s subsequent recordings.

We are at a loss to know how the “Over the Moor to Maggie” melody (by whatever title) came into American old time tradition, but the first two strains were adopted nearly intact and given the title “Waynesboro” (sometimes Waynesburgh), likely after towns of that name in either Kentucky or Ohio (although there are also Waynesburghs in Illinois, Georgia, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Virginia). The title appears as early as 1919 and 1920—academic and researcher Jeff Titon found it was played by no less than five fiddlers in the Berea, Kentucky, fiddle contests in those years, making it one of the more popular selections. However, its popularity among American fiddlers was propelled with the recording by Richmond, Madison County, Kentucky, fiddler Doc Roberts (1897-1978), for the Gennett label in 1927. Roberts was an early country music recording star and his numerous records proved widely popular in the South and were widely disseminated. He learned the tune while still a teenager from his

brother Liebert, who himself had the tune from a local African-American fiddler named Owen Walker, a musical mentor to the Roberts brothers from whom they may have (according to Gus Meade) learned seventy percent of their repertoire. Walker was born in 1857, and by World War I had established a solid reputation as an entertainer, much in demand for social events in the county. No one knows where Walker obtained the tune. “Waynesboro” was also in the repertoire of West Virginia fiddler Edden Hammons (1874-1955), some of whose ancestors came originally from Knox and Whitley counties in eastern Kentucky, not too far from Madison County. Mike Yates (2001), for one, wonders if some of the Hammons family tunes originated in this part of the mountains. He points out that eastern Kentucky connections continue with fiddler Darley Faulks, born in 1895, who called the tune “Andrew Jackson,” presumably in honor of the seventh President of the United States. Faulks maintained the tune had been played by both his grandfather and uncle, and that the tune was well known long before Doc Roberts made his recording. Ivan Tribe thought Roberts’ “Waynesboro” was related to “Georgia Railroad” and “Peter Went a-Fishing,” recorded by such Georgia groups as Gid Tanner and Riley Puckett.

Another “Waynesboro” variant is to be found in the repertoire of Kentucky fiddler Clyde Davenport (b. 1921), from Monticello, Wayne County, who played a version he called “Ladies in the Ballroom.” Jeff Titon (*Old Time Kentucky Fiddle Tunes*, 2001) says Davenport is the only source musician known to have been recorded playing this tune; however, its history can be traced somewhat. Titon cites Bobby Fulcher, who maintained that Shell Coffey, who was born in 1895, learned the tune from an older African-American fiddler, Bled Coffey, who came to the Wayne County, Kentucky, area from Virginia prior to the Civil War. Old time musician Dick Burnett (1883-1977), also from Monticello,

Peggy’s Wedding

said, "Yes sir, there were a lot of black men playing old time music. Bled Coffey was the best fiddler in the country." One wonders if the old time melody so associated with eastern Kentucky and West Virginia fiddlers might not have originated in Virginia, and may have been disseminated by African-American fiddlers who adapted it from Irish sources.

Eventually "Waynesboro" made its way to Oklahoma and Texas, perhaps via Doc Roberts' recording. It was recorded in the mid-20th century by fiddlers such as Herman Johnson (b. 1920), Bartow Riley (b. 1921), and Terry Morris (1956-1988), and is

part of the regional repertory, although considered not to be a flashy contest tune in the same category as "Sally Johnson" or "Grey Eagle." Texas versions are recognizably based on the Doc Roberts' tune, but characteristically contain more swing elements.

[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.]

Waynesboro

The musical score for "Waynesboro" is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). It consists of four staves of music. The first staff contains the first line of the melody. The second staff begins with a first ending bracket labeled '1' and ends with a repeat sign. The third staff begins with a second ending bracket labeled '2' and ends with a repeat sign. The fourth staff contains the final line of the melody, including a triplet of eighth notes.

Ladies in the Ballroom

The musical score for "Ladies in the Ballroom" is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a common time signature (C) and changes to a 2/4 time signature. The second staff continues the melody in 2/4 time. The third and fourth staves complete the piece, ending with repeat signs.