TOURING AS SOCIAL PRACTICE:
TRANSNATIONAL FESTIVALS, PERSONALIZED NETWORKS, AND NEW FOLK MUSIC
SENSIBILITIES

by

Andrew Neil Hillhouse

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Music
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Andrew Neil Hillhouse (2013)
ABSTRACT

Touring as Social Practice: Transnational Festivals, Personalized Networks, and New Folk Music Sensibilities

Andrew Neil Hillhouse

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of Music

University of Toronto

2013

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to an understanding of the changing relationship between collectivist ideals and individualism within dispersed, transnational, and heterogeneous cultural spaces. I focus on musicians working in professional folk music, a field that has strong, historic associations with collectivism. This field consists of folk festivals, music camps, and other venues at which musicians from a range of countries, affiliated with broad labels such as ‘Celtic,’ ‘Nordic,’ ‘bluegrass,’ or ‘fiddle music,’ interact. Various collaborative connections emerge from such encounters, creating socio-musical networks that cross boundaries of genre, region, and nation.

These interactions create a social space that has received little attention in ethnomusicology. While there is an emerging body of literature devoted to specific folk festivals in the context of globalization, few studies have examined the relationship between the transnational character of this circuit and the changing sensibilities, music, and social networks of particular musicians who make a living on it.

To this end, I examine the career trajectories of three interrelated musicians who have worked in folk music: the late Canadian fiddler Oliver Schroer (1956-2008), the
Irish flute player Nuala Kennedy, and the Italian *organetto* player Filippo Gambetta. These musicians are all notable for their taste for transnational collaboration and their reputations as mavericks and boundary-pushers. Through case studies of their projects, relationships, and collaborative networks, I explore transformations in the collectivist folk ideal by focussing on how these musicians are implicated in three phenomena: transnational festivals, new folk music sensibilities, and touring as social practice.

This research is based on multi-dimensional, multi-sited fieldwork undertaken in Toronto, Genoa, Edinburgh, and at various festivals in Europe and North America between 2007-2013. I conclude that Schroer, Kennedy, and Gambetta experience transnational folk music space as a field of intersecting transnationalisms that are imaginaries and collectivities of varying size and scope. While festivals in this space increasingly celebrate a transcultural ideal and foster the formation of transnational networks, stable, heterogeneous transnational relationships are proving more difficult to attain. I argue that touring on this circuit generates a desire for community continuity that becomes part of the poetics of new instrumental folk music.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, this dissertation would not have been possible without my family’s encouragement. My mother and father, Elma and Neil Hillhouse, gave me emotional and material support at times when I had doubts and concerns about the enormous and risky undertaking of writing a dissertation. To them I am forever grateful, not just for this project, but for their support throughout my life in music. My beloved partner, Nathalie Thibault, was always understanding, even when I was in a panic about how I was going to manage to answer student emails, prepare a lecture, and finish a dissertation draft before my deadlines. More important, she let me fly off around the world, despite the expense and strain of being apart. I am especially indebted to her for her patience and understanding in August 2010, when I was in Italy at the time she began to experience labour with our son Adam (I made it back in time for the birth). Merci mon amour, je t’aime fort.

I am thankful and honoured for the opportunity to have worked closely with Dr. James Kippen, my advisor. As an ethnomusicologist, Professor Kippen’s breadth and depth of knowledge and experience goes without saying to those who have read his work or looked at his CV. For those who have not had the opportunity of working with him, they may not be aware that he is also a very encouraging mentor with a special ability to make the most daunting task seem manageable and achievable. He set a standard of composure and professionalism that I hope to aspire to in my academic career.

I was also extremely lucky to work with the two other gifted ethnomusicologists on my committee, Jeff Packman and Joshua Pilzer. Drs. Packman and Pilzer were very generous with sharing their insights into my projects, and I am highly indebted to them.
for their willingness to answer my questions about thorny theoretical issues, whether over email or over pints at the Duke. Two other University of Toronto professors whom I would also like to acknowledge are Dr. Ken McLeod, my internal examiner, and Dr. Robin Elliott, who stepped in at the last minute when needed as a member of my defense committee. Further, Dr. McLeod offered some helpful feedback on various pieces of my work pertaining to my dissertation research, and Dr. Elliott’s PhD seminar in my first year at U of T was highly valuable in setting me off on the right course. My appreciation also goes to Jeremy Strachan, who came to the rescue with his Sibelius skills. I would also like to heartily thank my U of T ethno colleagues, with a particular ‘shout out’ to the ‘60’s club.’ You are all great folks and the collegiality at U of T has made the whole experience that much more worthwhile.

I greatly value my external examiner Dr. Timothy Taylor’s critical and insightful response that gives me much to consider as I continue developing this research. In addition, along the way I have received some indispensable advice and input from other scholars beyond the Faculty of Music. Some of these are Dr. Kim Chow-Morris of Ryerson University, Dr. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin of Concordia University, Dr. David Wilson of the University of Toronto’s Department of Celtic Studies, Dr. Caroline Bithell of the University of Manchester, and Dr. Ulf Hannerz of Stockholm University. Thank you to Linda Bull as well for her assistance in translation.

Finally, I owe my deepest gratitude to Nuala Kennedy, Filippo Gambetta, and the late Oliver Schroer. A special aspect of this project was that Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo all were very willing to discuss their own well thought out, sophisticated, and nuanced takes on their experiences of this musical field. Filippo and Nuala, thank you for letting me
crash on your couches, and for showing me around your cities, and for generally making the space for me in your extremely busy lives. Filippo, I greatly appreciate you taking me up to Bobbio, that was an amazing experience. Nuala, I am incredibly honoured to have had the chance to play together, and look forward to more.

If Oliver were here I would thank him for his enthusiastic discussions while he was in a physical state that would have led most people to prefer privacy. I will close by taking the opportunity to say what I never said when he was alive, and what I know so many people would concur with: thank you Oliver for the deep well of melodic gems you left us, your humour, your daring, and your creative energy that did not cease, even when forces in your body conspired against it. We are definitely the richer for your time with us.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

LIST OF TABLES xii

LIST OF FIGURES xiii

CHAPTER 1 – PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES 1

Festival Snapshot: The Lorient Festival Interceltique, August 2010 1

Festivals, Sensibilities, and Touring as Social Practice 5

Oliver Schroer (1956–2008), St. Margaret’s Hospital, Toronto, September 2007 11

Pushing the Boundaries 13

Tradition/Innovation, Transcendence/Immanence 13

Folk music/Art music 16

Touring and Networks 20

Oliver: A Brief Biographical Introduction 23

Nuala Kennedy and Filippo Gambetta 26

Introducing Filippo Gambetta: A Genoese Organetto Player 29

Introducing Nuala Kennedy: An Irish Flute Player in Edinburgh 34

‘Folk’, ‘Celtic’, ‘Traditional’ 39

A Note on ‘Vernacular Music’ 44

Scenes, Sensibilities, Lifestyles 46

New Folk Music Sensibilities 51

Place and New Instrumental Folk Musics 53

‘World Music’ Intersections 59

CHAPTER 2 – COSMOPOLITAN FOLK IN A TRANSNATIONAL FIELD 70

Globalization 71

Non-diasporic Transnationalisms 74

Folk Music and Transnationality 76
CHAPTER 4 – FESTIVALS AND TRANSCULTURALITY

Historical Emergence of the Transnational Festival Field

International Folklore/Folklife Festivals
The 1960s: Beyond Folklore Festivals
Influence of Rock Festivals and Counterculture
European Festivals
Western Canadian Folk Festivals
Music Camps

Baumann’s Mental Constructs

Welsch’s Transculturality

Three Recurrent Themes in Transnational Festival Promotion

The Ever-expanding Festival
From Diversity to Interaction
New Folk Music and Innovation

Celtic Connections, The Vancouver Folk Festival, and Lorient Festival

Interceltique

Lorient Festival Interceltique
Celtic Connections
The Vancouver Folk Festival

Themes of Transculturality at Lorient, Celtic Connections, and Vancouver

Expansion
Diversity, Boundary Blurring, and Innovations

Broad Categories

CHAPTER 5 – COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS AND TURNING HOME

A Glocal Sense of Place
“The Network Society”
Producing Home by Leaving and Returning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Filippo’s Transnational Links</strong></td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Finland</em></td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Belgium</em></td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Brittany</em></td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Nuala’s Transnational Links</strong></td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Cape Breton</em></td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Voyage de Nuit</em></td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Other Projects</em></td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Turn Homeward: Filippo</strong></td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Ambiguity of ‘Home’</em></td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ligurian</em></td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Pan-Italian Projects</em></td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Turn Homeward: Nuala</strong></td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 6 – OLIVER, NUALA, AND FILIPPO</strong></td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Social Network</em></td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>“Network Sociality” and Community</em></td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Internet and Touring</strong></td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Networked Individualism</em></td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Social Capital, Transnational Networks, and Strength of Ties</strong></td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Network Variety and the Transnational Dimension</em></td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Cultural Capital and Essentializing Place</em></td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Interpersonal Commitment, Risks, and Challenges</strong></td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 7 – OLIVER</strong></td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Relationality, Individuality</strong></td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Tensions and Longings</em></td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Value of Relational, Individual, or Collective Selfhood</em></td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fiddle as Individual, Collective, and Relational</em></td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Dilemma of Choice: Fiddle “Dialects”</strong></td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The Trajectory of Oliver’s Creative Projects</strong></td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Early Career</em></td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>List of Transnational Festivals</td>
<td>170-71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Willson’s Comparison of ‘Network’ and ‘Community’</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Groove Pattern from “Kevat” by Filippo Gambetta</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Main Melody of “Kevat”</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>“Footsteps” by Nuala Kennedy</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>“Flowers” by Oliver Schroer, as performed by Nuala Kennedy on <em>Enthralled</em></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>“Frank’s Throat Song” by Jeremiah McDade</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Melody from “The One I Remember” by Oliver Schroer</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>“Millie’s Waltz” by Oliver Schroer</td>
<td>313-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Underlying Groove for “Horseshoes and Rainbows” by Oliver Schroer</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>B Section of “Horseshoes and Rainbows” by Oliver Schroer</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>“Into the Sun” Eighth Note Melody, A Section</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>“Into the Sun” Dotted Quarter-Note Melody, A Section</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>“Shorelines” by Oliver Schroer</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Festival Snapshot: The Lorient Festival Interceltique, August 2010

In August 2010, after performing and teaching at the Goderich Celtic Festival in Southwestern Ontario, the Irish flute player Nuala Kennedy and I made a 24 hour trip from Toronto to the seaside town of Lorient, Brittany, on the western coast of France. Nuala’s seven-piece band, in which she had hired me to play guitar, was booked to play the following day at the world’s largest Celtic music festival, the Festival Interceltique de Lorient.

After an exhausting journey by plane, train, and car, we arrived at our hotel around midnight and made our way on foot to the festival site, which covered a good portion of the downtown waterfront. As we approached the site, bars spilling out with people emitted a mélange of amplified sounds; popular Irish pub songs mingled with bagpipes, fiddle, drums, bass, and the occasional high pitched and strident sound of the iconic Breton double reed instrument, the bombarde. The noise of people shouting to be heard over the din of the music at times threatened to overpower even this forceful sound.

These crowded pubs lay on the periphery of the official festival site, which was demarcated by a wire fence from an array of stands selling crepes, flags, crafts, and cheap tourist items. Despite the fence, admission to the site was free. Inside the gates was the ‘official’ festival space: several large white tents that were labeled according to Celtic
‘nations,’ including Wales, Galicia, Asturias, Cornwall, Brittany, Ireland and Scotland. The tents contained posters advertising the regions, since part of the funding for the festival came from regional and national tourism foundations. The Scottish tent, for instance, displayed pictures of kilted young men holding bagpipes, jumping in the air.

There were bands playing in most of these temporary structures. We approached the largest tent, the ‘Quai de Bretagne,’ in which hundreds of people were dancing the Breton pinky-linking circle dance an dro\(^1\) to a young band that had the classic Breton combination of bombarde and biniou (a small high-pitched bagpipe), as well as clarinet, electric bass, and Irish bouzouki.\(^2\) We then made our way to the Asturian tent\(^3\) where we soon we ran into some Scottish musicians we knew who were enjoying the Asturian cider. Through connections between a Scottish musician in Nuala’s band and the Asturian musicians working the bar, we soon found ourselves enjoying free cider and snacks. Nearby, another tourist poster for Asturias showed a large crowd of people in the characteristic Asturian cider-pouring method,\(^4\) a technique we rehearsed throughout the evening as we enjoyed what was for most of us a new way to drink.

---


\(^2\) See Fintan Vallely, “Bouzouki,” in *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, ed. Fintan Vallely (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999). The introduction of the Greek bouzouki into Irish music is usually credited to Johnny Moynihan of the groups Sweeney’s Men and Planxty, and also associated with major figures of the 1970s commercial revival of Irish music such as Andy Irvine, Donal Lunny, and Alec Finn. The spread of the bouzouki into other Northern European musics following its adoption into Irish music is a compelling example of the impact that the Irish traditional music revival had in the late 20\(^{th}\) century, a phenomenon that emerges throughout this study.

\(^3\) Asturias is a coastal region in northwestern Spain in which Celtic self-identification has been resurgent in recent decades. The Asturian gaita or bagpipes are the most prominent folk instrument and thus are often invoked as a means of mapping Asturias as Celtic through linking to Scotland, Ireland, and Brittany. The current director of the Lorient Festival, Lisardo Lombardia, is Asturian.

\(^4\) This stance involves raising the right arm in the air to create a distance between the bottle and the glass, in order to aerate the drink.
Our first performance was on the following night in the Quai de la Bretagne tent. Despite its name, the venue presented both Breton and non-Breton acts. Complementing Nuala’s flute playing and singing, her band consisted of upright bass, drum kit, diatonic button accordion, mandolin, and guitar. We played tunes from Nuala’s solo CDs, many of which were her own compositions, alongside some new material: arrangements of traditional Irish songs that included some polyrhythmic grooves. Our stylistically diverse set also included a tune by Nuala’s former musical collaborator, the late Canadian fiddler Oliver Schroer, and some alternative country-folk songs written and sung by Nuala and her boyfriend, the Appalachian singer-songwriter AJ Roach, who was along for the tour. We closed the set with a popular Asturian alborada, or dance-tune, that Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov used as the basis of the final movement of his Capriccio Espagnol Op.34 (1887).

Whereas the Breton music we had heard the night before had inspired dancing, people in the audience received our set as a listening concert. Practically no one was dancing, particularly to Nuala’s and Oliver’s mixed meter instrumental tunes. Nonetheless, as a performer I felt like they were listening intently, and after the show the musicians generally agreed it had gone well. Nuala sold out of the 100 CDs she had brought within half an hour.

---

5 Referring to the notion of ‘traditional music,’ Benjamin Brinner writes “although many scholars now appear to be leery of using the word with anything other than ironic distance, tradition is still useful to designate cultural knowledge that has been developed and shared by a group for a considerable time. Whether we are talking about specific songs or ways of performing and listening, it is an appropriate term without a ready substitute. We just need to be skeptical of claims for great antiquity or fixity and to question the goals that tradition is being mobilized to serve.” Benjamin Brinner, Playing Across a Divide: Israeli-Palestinian Musical Encounters” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30. I apply this rationale to support my own usage of ‘traditional.’ While I use the term in a similar way to Brinner, it is important to mention that it has a broad popular usage. As well as being used for long-existing practices and styles, it is also frequently used among folk musicians and audiences in reference to newly composed music that has stylistic similarity to older styles.
Following our set, I bought a beer for Filippo Gambetta, the 30-year-old accordion player in Nuala’s band, and one of the three central collaborators in my research. I tried not to lose him in the dense crowd as he ran into people he knew. As he pointed out musicians to me, the sense of the festival as a space of social interaction among musicians from various countries became apparent. He had a connection to the Breton folk scene through his collaborations with the Breton flute player Jean Michel Veillon, and knew the accordion player in Startijenn, the young Breton band that followed us on stage, from a music workshop in Belgium at which they had both taught.

While we were watching them, Filippo introduced me to a member of the Asturian group Felpeyu. The young Asturian, in his early 30s, told us excitedly of an album project his band was doing in collaboration with the Finnish group Frigg that performs contemporary tunes based on the Finnish Pelimanni tradition, and that also happened to be at Lorient that year. This collaboration piqued my interest; to my knowledge it was a meeting of musical styles that was very uncommon, if not unprecedented. Frigg was at Lorient

---

6 I use ‘collaborator’ to refer to three participants in my research: Oliver Schroer, Nuala Kennedy, and Filippo Gambetta. Other participants I identify as ‘interlocutors.’ This distinction is meant to indicate the relative levels of each musician’s involvement in this study. Through this process, there was a sense of collaboration in this research from Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo that had a lot to do with our shared experiences and networks, a point I discuss and problematize further in Chapter 3. The term ‘collaborators’ indicates their level of closeness to me as co-participants in the same circuit of work, and our shared interest in the topics I examine. Due to this closeness, I will refer to these three collaborators by their first names. I also use first names in reference to some other musicians, to indicate a level of familiarity and informality between us. In contrast, I refer to the musicians with whom I have only met a few times by their last name.

7 Filippo had earlier cited Felpeyu to me as a model for his own group Liguriani, in that they used a ‘Celtic group’ framework (as developed in Ireland and Scotland in the 1970s with such groups as the Bothy Band, Planxty and Silly Wizard) to modernize and create arrangements of their own regional music. Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, March 2010.

8 Pelimanni music refers to the Finnish branch of a transnational body of Nordic dance music that has origins in mid 17th century Central Europe. Tune types include polskas, polkas, schottisches, mazurkas, and minuets, quadrilles, and waltzes. The Kaustinen folk festival is one of the foremost festivals for the performance of contemporary Pelimanni music. The members of Frigg are mostly from the area of Kaustinen, which is situated in the region of Ostrobothnia, an area renowned for its traditional music. See Tina Ramnarine, *Ilmatar’s Inspirations: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Changing Soundscapes of Finnish Folk Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 47–52.
performing a collaborative piece with a Breton musician, a new composition commissioned by the festival.

Later that evening, the organizers at the Asturian tent requested that the Nuala Kennedy band perform an impromptu set on their stage. Nuala accepted the invitation, simply for the fun of playing and the free alcohol, as we were not contracted to perform there. We took to the stage at midnight, performing two sets for a multilingual, spirited, dancing, and quite drunken crowd of around 200 people. At one point, we launched into the Asturian tune that was a regular part of our set. I was a little apprehensive about playing it for an Asturian crowd that likely knew the tune well. However, it proved to be a highlight of the evening. The floor filled with many young, smiling and dancing Asturian visitors to the festival.

Festivals, Sensibilities, and Touring as Social Practice

There are three interrelated phenomena apparent in the above account that I will be investigating in this dissertation: my interest in these emerges from observations I had made before returning to graduate school, first as a folk festival-goer, beginning in the early 1980s, and later as a touring musician in folk festival circuits, beginning in the 1990s. I use ‘circuit’ here specifically, as I do throughout this dissertation, to refer to venues, events, and sites of work for musicians.¹

¹ I will discuss how a circuit differs from a ‘field,’ another term that I use regularly, in Chapter 2. For now it is sufficient to point out that field, based on Bourdieu’s concept of the field of cultural production, is a more expansive term than circuit that takes into account the dynamics and patterns of social relations on the circuit. See Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
The first of these phenomena is a paradigm shift in the discourses and practices connected with folk festivals since the late 1980s. While self-identified folk festivals in North America and Europe had emerged within the context of regional and national folk music revivals and in relation to a predominantly Euro-American notion of folk music, around 1990 they underwent a transformation that was closely related to the emerging presence of ‘world music’ in the music industry. Folk festivals became increasingly transcultural;\(^\text{10}\) that is, to a far greater extent than ever before, they began to celebrate linkages and overlaps between what were previously represented as distinct cultural and subcultural categories. The emphasis shifted from mere diversity to interaction and exchange. At many festivals, both modes – multicultural and transcultural – now exist side by side. For example, in the above account, despite the emphasis on regional and national boundaries apparent in the tents and touristic posters, the Lorient festival sponsors a Finnish/Breton collaboration; it is the site of encounters between musicians from various nations who form their own collaborative relationships; and it presents bands, such as the Nuala Kennedy band, that are difficult to slot into a national category.

Nuala Kennedy also exhibits the second phenomenon I have observed: a particular sensibility among some musicians who make their living on these circuits. This sensibility in many ways parallels the festival ethos described above, in that it has

\(^{10}\) My use of “transculture” owes much to the concepts of “musical transculturation” and “transculturality” as developed by Margaret Kartomi and Wolfgang Welsch respectively. Kartomi’s focus is on processes of musical mixing, while mine is on transculturality as an ideal and an aesthetic that is discursively constructed through aspects such as festival promotion. For Kartomi, “Transculturation occurs only when a group of people select for adoption whole new organizing and conceptual or ideological principles – musical and extramusical – as opposed to small, discrete, alien traits.” Margaret Kartomi, “The Processes and Results of Musical Culture Contact: A Discussion of Terminology and Concepts,” *Ethnomusicology* 25.2 (1981): 244. See also Wolfgang Welsch, “Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today,” in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage 1999), 194–213. I examine this concept in Chapter 4, in specific reference to transculturality in transnational folk festivals.
become increasingly common since the early 1990s. Those who share it think of themselves as ‘folk’ and ‘roots’ musicians, most closely connected to Euro-American traditions, and yet they favour the idea of drawing from a range of musics with the aim of creating their own unique musical voices. This valuing of choice and emancipation from boundaries discursively places emphasis on the agency of the individual. Further, it privileges expanded musical horizons over the preservation of heritage.

Finally, in my life as a working musician in this milieu since the 1990s, I have observed a third phenomenon. When musicians, myself included, go on tour it transforms how we position ourselves in relation to others, how we represent ourselves, along with our places of origin, on the world stage, and how we experience community and belonging. As a touring musician, this sense of transformation was the stuff of daily life for me, and lay not just in the realm of theory. When I came back from a tour I related to home in a different way, the landscape of my social world had shifted, and I thought of myself differently than I had before I left. This assertion could be made for people who engage in many types of travel, but these transformations take on a particular meaning when the musical practices of touring musicians are rhetorically associated with notions of ‘roots’ or ‘folk’ that imply a bounded sense of place and home. I am therefore interested in touring as a type of social practice that transforms both individuals and the social and institutional formations with which they engage. Specifically, touring within a circuit that is increasingly transcultural in character propels different transformational processes than those that would have occurred in earlier paradigms of the public presentation of folk music.
My understandings of these three phenomena – a changing festival paradigm, an emerging sensibility, and the social practice dimension of touring – of course need to be examined critically and reflexively, which I intend to do throughout this dissertation. For now, however, I will take the interrelationships between them as a starting point for the discussion. They lead to a question that frames my research, and which itself leads to numerous other questions. Before positing this question, there is one more historically based assumption regarding folk festivals that underlies my examination. Since their inception, folk music festivals, and the folk revivals that spawned them, have represented music’s power to mobilize collectivities through musical practice, often through music’s ability to represent the specific links between place and community.¹¹ The types of collective belonging represented by festivals have varied greatly, ranging from regional and national belonging to identification with political movements; nonetheless, in general, they have historically held to what Simon Frith calls “the folk ideal,” which is “the experience of collective, participatory music making.”¹²

Writing a little over a decade ago about transnational folk, roots, and world music festivals, Max Peter Baumann argued that this collectivist folk ideal is waning. He stated “a changing paradigm has been emerging for quite a while: the replacement of the ‘romantic-collective’ concept of regional or national musics with the individualization of experiences in the multicultural context.”¹³ Baumann identified a “transnational” mental construct among musicians that indicates a pick and choose, mix and match approach to

---


music, in which individual agency trumps nationalistic, regionalistic, and other collectivist narratives surrounding traditional music: “It is the musicians who today individually select, newly configure, historicize, sample, innovate, and synthesize from the diverse possibilities and work out their own musical narrative constructs.”

I see Baumann’s statement as both insightful and problematic. ‘Individualization,’ a term associated with sociologists of globalization Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, and Zygmunt Bauman, refers to the increased role choice plays in the contemporary age. In their work, increased individualization in modernity is seen as fostered by institutions. In a sense, established folk festivals and similar events may be seen as quasi-institutions that play a role in shaping sensibilities in which freedom of choice in affiliation is highly valued, and even promoted as an ideology. It is certainly true that, within the category of folk and traditional musics, “musical identities and styles are more visibly transient, more audibly in states of constant fission and fusion than ever before.” Yet are “romantic-collective” associations with regions and nations really being “replaced” by these types of individualized, flexible approaches? And if not, how are the tensions between collectivist and individualist tendencies manifest in the lives of the musicians who work on this circuit?

My question then concerns a) the seemingly individualistic sensibility that I argue is shared among my interlocutors, and b) the emphasis on the dissolution of boundaries in contemporary festivals, despite the fact that they often reinforce national, regional, and ethnic categories (as represented by the demarcated tents in my opening account). What can examining the musical and social life of these musicians – in particular as connected

---

14 For a concise yet comprehensive analysis of this tradition of thought, see Brian Heaphy, Late Modernity and Social Change: Reconstructing Social and Personal Life (New York: Routledge, 2007).
to spaces of sociomusical interaction such as festivals and music camps – tell us about the current state of the collectivist folk ideal?

While fascination with the three phenomena outlined above has occupied my mind for many years, I have decided to step back and analyze them through considering how they are manifest in the life of other musicians with whom I have crossed paths. The musician whom I am positioning as a central hub in the construction of my research field was a celebrated musical character in Canadian folk/roots music, and a performer and composer whom it was difficult to categorize: the late Ontario fiddler Oliver Schroer (1956–2008). Indirectly, I got to that festival in Brittany I described in my opening through my connection to Oliver, who had introduced me to Nuala at the Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow in 2007. In fact, many of the relationships I formed in the process of this research came through my connection to him, in one way or another. To an unusual extent, he was a hub with a high number of connections to diverse musical scenes.

There are many such hubs touring on this circuit. I chose Oliver as a central focus of my research as he represents someone who embraced the particular sensibility and way of being a musician that I will identify and articulate, and who committed himself to it to a greater extent than most. In short, he was clearly an example of someone who considered the broad and ambiguous category of ‘instrumental folk music’ as something akin to an artistic palette from which to create his own body of work and a personal style. In fact, Oliver became a model for some musicians of how to pursue a living on folk music circuits, of negotiating varied expectations, constraints, and economic limits, while striving for personal style.
In this chapter, I introduce Oliver, Nuala, and another interlocutor, Filippo Gambetta. In addition, I articulate the rationales behind this project and outline the basic ideas and concepts. In Chapter 2 I further develop my theoretical and conceptual framework, followed by a discussion of my methodology and research techniques in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I examine themes of transculturality in transnational festival promotion, while Chapters 5 and 6 take a more ethnographic turn as I examine the range of projects with which Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo have been involved, both local and transnational, and the dynamics of the relationships among the members of my central triad of collaborators. Finally, Chapter 7 is concerned with Oliver himself. I look at tensions between relationality and individuality as they are evident in his career and projects, with a final focus on his 2002 trek to the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain, and the subsequent recording project, the album *Camino*. With this framework, I intend for the chapters to be read as case studies of various levels of interaction and exchange on this transnational circuit. Yet they can also be understood as a means of contextualizing Oliver’s art and experience, which I examine at the end of this work, and which I will now turn to as a launching point for my investigation.

**Oliver Schroer (1956-2008), St. Margaret’s Hospital, Toronto,**

**September 2007**

When I applied to the PhD program in Ethnomusicology at the University of Toronto in 2007, I proposed to conduct a study of fiddle camps in British Columbia. I was interested in examining how local communities were being transformed – and how new translocal
communities were emerging – through the annual hiring and re-hiring of fiddle teachers from diverse locations in Canada, the U.S. and Europe. This topic relates closely to the three phenomena listed above. However, the focus of my research began to change when, shortly before arriving in Toronto to start my PhD studies, I received the information that one of the teachers at these camps, the Toronto fiddler Oliver Schroer, had leukemia and was unlikely to survive. Within days of commencing the program, I started to interview Oliver in his hospital room. These interviews transformed my topic from a focus on locally based communities to individual musicians and their social networks linked to various sites on both sides of the Atlantic.

I knew Oliver as an acquaintance from my participation in professional folk music. Over the years, I had taught with him at music camps, jammed with him onstage and backstage at folk festivals, and attended music parties with him, yet I had only ever shared one or two real conversations with him. After an email exchange, I visited the St. Margaret’s hospital on University Avenue in Toronto where he was undergoing treatment in the cancer ward. I had heard his prognosis was poor, and I approached my interviews with nervousness. As with most people going to see a terminally ill friend in hospital for the first time, I was apprehensive and fearful of my reaction to the situation as much as I was concerned for his suffering.

When I entered Oliver’s room, my nervousness actually began to ease. Although Oliver knew at that point that he was terminally ill, he was fully engaged with life, even while lying in his hospital bed. He had his headphones plugged into his laptop, listening to recently recorded tracks from one of three CD projects he was working on. When we

---

16 One of the CDs, Hymns and Hers (Big Dog, BD0701, CD, 2008) was released while Oliver was still in hospital; Freedom Row (Borealis, BCD201, CD, 2010), made with his band the Stewed Tomatoes, and
started to talk, he was positive and displayed a disarming amount of energy for someone who had recently undergone chemotherapy. Oliver was open and receptive to my questions, and seemed enthusiastic about being part of a dissertation project. I began to ask him open-ended questions concerning his life story, although I had no clear idea of how these discussions would fit into my thesis. Quickly, however, two interrelated themes – boundary pushing and personalized networks that cut across various categories – came to the forefront as topics with relevance not only to Oliver but also to the three phenomena identified above relating to festivals, sensibilities, and touring as a social practice.

**Pushing the Boundaries**

*Tradition/Innovation*

As I spoke to Oliver over the course of several visits, one theme kept re-emerging: the idea that he had “pushed the boundaries” with his music. Oliver used this phrase in relation to his development of a personal style and different aspects of his recording and compositional processes, such as his use of ‘found sounds’ (sounds he had collected from various non-musical instrument sources and later used in his recordings) or his striving for unusual sounds from his fiddle. The phrase ‘pushing the boundaries’ has deeper rhetorical resonance however: it implies the desire to transform the structures, whether musical or social, within which one finds oneself. Further, it hints at the stake Oliver placed in his self-conception as a unique auteur.

---

*Enthralled* (Borealis, BCD206, CD, 2011), a collaboration with Irish flute player Nuala Kennedy, were released posthumously.
I will discuss this idea of pushing the boundaries below, however first it is necessary to compare it to an oft-evoked concept with which it is closely linked: the concept of innovation. This is a concept that has spurred a great deal of research into folk music and revival, including my own Master’s thesis.\textsuperscript{17} Innovation, however, has different implications than pushing the boundaries.\textsuperscript{18} While pushing the boundaries is a spatial metaphor, innovation is predominantly a linear, temporal one. In the discussion of music, innovation is presented as being constantly in tension with tradition, and those who celebrate it often represent it as part of a teleological, forward march of history: it inevitably brings tradition into the future. Even those who draw firm limits on what they consider as acceptable innovation (those people often pejoratively called traditionalists or purists) still formulate their critique so that tradition versus innovation is equivalent to looking backward (to an idealized past) versus looking forward.

Pushing the boundaries does not emphasize the sense of forward and backward temporality implied in innovation/tradition (although it may not necessarily discount the idea of progress). It implies being within, transforming the structure in which one is bound. Pushing the boundaries, therefore, can suggest at least two things that are not implicit in the notion of innovation. It can imply the will to \textit{expand} and enlarge a space in which a practice or a person exists. A member of the stylistically eclectic Canadian Bill Hilly Band, a very popular group on the Canadian and British festival circuits since the

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{17} Andy Hillhouse, “Tradition and Innovation in Irish Instrumental Folk Music” (Master’s thesis, University of British Columbia, 2005).
\textsuperscript{18} The Canadian Folk Music Awards has recently adopted two separate categories that distinguish between these two concepts: the Innovator Award and the Pushing the Boundaries award. The Innovator Award was created in order to recognize “a new and innovative approach that has had an impact on Canadian Folk Music.” For this award “nominees can come from any aspect of the Canadian Folk Music community.” While this award may be given to musicians, it also may be given to other workers in the industry. The Pushing the Boundaries award, by contrast, is created “to recognize a solo artist, duo or group taking creative risks to create folk-based music that is innovative, original and imaginative.”
\end{flushright}
late 1990s, describe themselves as boundary-pushers this way: “There's five guys and five influences coming out into one project. The only limit that we have is that we maintain acoustic instruments. It's quite fun to work within that structure. It's amazing how you can push those boundaries.”\(^1\) This sense of pushing the boundaries implies the ability to “work within a structure,” as the Bill Hilly Band puts it: a structure that can encompass a range of loosely related Euro-American musics (in their case, bluegrass, Irish, old time, Balkan, and more) but a structure nonetheless. Pushing the boundaries also often emphasizes the possibility of emancipation, of breaking through to a place where stylistic elements can be used at will. A promotional blurb for a band I toured with from 2005 to 2007, The McDades, has this emancipatory spirit: “Punching through the walls of tradition, The McDades’ Celtic-rooted music fuses the spontaneity of jazz improvisation and infectious global rhythms.”\(^2\)

The discourse of pushing the boundaries is as much apparent in the rhetoric around festivals as it is around individuals and their musical styles. As I was preparing the final pages of my dissertation, the following update appeared on my Facebook feed from the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, Scotland, quoting an article from that city’s *Sunday Herald*: “Always pushing the boundaries of what can appear under the banner of a so-called ‘folk’ festival, in the space of a few weeks Celtic Connections will feature some of the coolest gigs Glasgow will see all year.” It then lists some of the festival headliners, demonstrating that pushing the boundaries in this instance means the expansion of Celtic and the broader term folk to include world music and pop music: performers listed include Malian singer Salif Keita, Irish pop band Hothouse Flowers,


and Mongolian group Anda Union. If Oliver Schroer represents a type of musician that has embraced the fluid and expansive potential categories through a discourse of pushing the boundaries, Celtic Connections is a festival that in many respects does the same. It is perhaps no surprise that Oliver performed at that festival in 2007 with the Irish flute player Nuala Kennedy as part of a commission for the New Voices program. I will return to this collaboration later.

**Folk music/ Art music**

Folk musicians identified as boundary-pushers or innovators are often praised for their originality in a way that is reminiscent of the Western art music discourse that surrounds the European ‘masters’. In contrast to the participatory and democratic folk ideal, this discourse has an element of connoisseurship, of elitism, and hierarchy. As many scholars have identified, the masters of Western art music have been represented in conservatories as autonomous geniuses, particularly since the late 18th century. Indeed, in the Canadian folk scene, Oliver’s reputation as an artist was to some extent reminiscent of that of composers of high status in Western art music.

---

21 See Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”: Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) for an exploration of the construction of “folk music” and “art music” as opposing categories.


23 Helen Kruse has pointed out that the discourse of transcendence evident in Western art music is part of rock music discourse as well, particularly in populist criticism. Kruse relates this to a transcendental rock music aesthetic in which rock greats like Elvis are presented in rock criticism as “not bound by the limits of time and history.” Holly Kruse, “Abandoning the Absolute: Transcendence and Gender in Popular Music Discourse,” in *Pop Music and the Press*, ed. Steve Jones (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 136.
Yet, Oliver’s association with folk music and ‘roots music’ always formed the backdrop to such perceptions; he was not represented as a classical or jazz musician, despite the fact the sounds he made, and the musical processes he employed, had confluence with those categories. Demonstrating this perception, shortly after Oliver’s passing his brother Andre was quoted as stating “[Oliver] was a very complex individual who in one way skewed authority […] but still had one foot in traditions.” While Oliver was clearly identified as a singular and innovative artist, he was also invested in being a folk musician, a term that evokes community and tradition. He told me he played “extended folk music,” for example. His association with folk music is evident in the fact his catalogue of commercial releases was adopted by the Borealis folk music label after his passing.

Another sign that Oliver foregrounded the folk musician in his self-conception and public image is that he self-identified as a fiddler instead of a violinist. The term ‘fiddler’ emphasizes vernacular approaches to technique and style over the formal, so-called classical approaches of violin. In practice Oliver remained connected to regional fiddle musics as a point of reference; they were a musical and social home base to which he returned regularly, even if his own music sometimes seemed at times to have as much in common with Steve Reich, progressive rock, or New Age music as it did with the iconic Canadian fiddler Don Messer, Métis reels, or Swedish polkas. The association of the fiddle with sociality and collectivity is perhaps one of the reasons that, according to the Toronto multi-instrumentalist and luthier Grit Laskin, a longtime leading figure on

26 Borealis is a label run by several prominent musicians in the Ontario folk music scene: Grit Laskin, Bill Garrett, Ken Whiteley, and Paul Mills.
the Canadian folk scene, Oliver’s distinctiveness did not exclude his potential for connection with audiences. Speaking to the relational potential in his music, Laskin stated “[Oliver’s] playing pushed boundaries, in a way that was accessible.”

On the Canadian folk scene, where he had carved out a reputation for having a singular, novel compositional and performance style, Oliver was known as a boundary-pusher. To his audience, and many that knew him, although he had interacted with styles thought of as ‘traditional’ he ultimately moved beyond them to produce something entirely new and distinct. He had an air of freedom about him: the freedom of having evaded conventional categorizations in the creation of his own style. Grit Laskin again said of Oliver, “His playing style of music was unique […] physically what he did with his bow technique and the kind of rhythms and structure in the music he wrote – there was nobody else like him.”

According to Simon Frith, folk, ‘art’, and ‘pop’ refer not to “the creation and maintenance of three, distinct, autonomous music worlds but, rather, the play of three historically evolving discourses across a single field […].” Frith explores the interplay of these categories in the context of the post folk-revival period in North America in the 1960s, when rock critics and other “ideologists” drew on what he calls “folk values” and “art values” as a means of distinguishing rock from pop music, the value of which they represented as being based mostly in commercial exchange. A focus on “pushing the boundaries” within the field of folk music demonstrates how these three discourses intersect in complex ways within the contemporary realm of folk music. In my life as a

28 Ibid.
29 Frith, Performing Rites, 42.
musician, as well as in my research, I meet increasing numbers of people that, depending on the situation, use folk music as a pragmatically broad and ambiguous category that already has ‘built-in’ traces as a signifier of collectivity, while it also presents an array of styles and sounds that the performer can draw on for the creation of a unique artistic self, or, as I shall discuss, selves. The supposed inauthenticity of pop music still stands in opposition to both the folk and art discourses.

The above descriptions of Oliver demonstrate how he was seen as both a category-defying artist and a folk fiddler. As I shall describe throughout this dissertation, these individualist and relational aspects come into greater or lesser focus in self-representation depending on the situation. Pushing the boundaries not only suggests changes in musical form and style but also implies the diverse possibilities on these circuits for collective belonging, a remapping of the transnational landscape of folk music into a multitude of shifting possibilities for identification.

Another important point is that allusions to pushing the boundaries in the discourse surrounding musicians can in fact signify relationality and immanence; they can refer to forms of belonging that expand beyond, for example, the nation. A recent review of the latest album by a transatlantic group led by a former band mate of mine, the flautist and singer Norah Rendell, alludes to the creation of such new collectivities. It also remarks on how the current institutionalization of folk music in festivals and universities – spaces of interaction that have emerged in recent decades – makes such connections possible:

In a world of international music festivals, arts centres and traditional music academies, it shouldn’t be surprising that a new generation of roots musicians have arisen to push the boundaries and explore common ground between old musical traditions. The Outside Track is just such a group. Formed by five
virtuosic artists from Ireland, Scotland, Cape Breton, and Canada, they came together to find the common roots of Celtic music. On their new album, Flash Company, they bring tunes and songs drawn from their respective backgrounds collectively infusing the music with the powerful energy of a group that has cut its teeth playing festivals throughout Europe and North America.30

In contrast to how Oliver used the term, pushing the boundaries here does not refer to the development of a personal style but more to a fusion of styles based on lost commonalities that are being rediscovered; the possibility for a new community beyond national boundaries. Pushing boundaries can therefore refer to collaboration across regional styles and the formation of networks that can be grouped under broad categories such as Celtic, or beyond to folk. This rhetoric of cross-cutting connections is increasing on folk circuits, with musicians such as Oliver in the vanguard. It is not surprising therefore that, along with the idea of pushing the boundaries, the concept of personal, cross-cutting transnational networks emerged at the forefront during my conversations with Oliver.

Touring and Networks

Oliver’s career was characterized by collaboration with musicians from various countries and stylistic genres. As a result, over the course of his musical development he had garnered a large network of musical friends, some of whom, when he became ill, traveled to visit him from around Canada and as far as away as Europe.

Oliver’s hospital room was a busy place, and during most visits I was not alone. Many days I encountered musicians from one of several musical networks within Toronto, the place in which he had established his musical career. These included musicians involved with Canadian fiddle music, South Indian music, free improvisational music and Scandinavian folk music. I was becoming introduced to the cross-cutting, personalized musical networks of Oliver, who in network analysis terms was a hub, an individual actor with relational ties or linkages to an unusually high number of other “actors,” or “network members that are distinct individuals […] or collective units.”

Several spheres of musical activity were therefore linked through him.

Of course, Oliver’s ventures into these socio-musical networks were a means for him to grow creatively, and were a sign of his musical interests. Yet, they also reflected practices that allowed him to sustain himself as a working musician. In an economy I know well from my own 20-year career as a touring musician in folk music, maintaining a living as a musician locally can require flexibility, which in turn requires constantly forging and maintaining connections. In Oliver’s case, by forging links with a variety of communities within culturally diverse Toronto, he created local work opportunities for himself.

While one group of people visiting Oliver represented a strong local network and sense of community, another group of visitors pointed to long-distance connections that he had developed and maintained over years of touring. On one of my visits he played me a track from the album *Enthralled* he was recording with Irish flute player Nuala

---


Kennedy, who lives in Edinburgh. The recording of the CD included another musician with whom he expressed an intuitive and deep musical affinity, the Italian organetto (diatonic button accordion) player Filippo Gambetta. Both of these musicians – whom Oliver had met, respectively, at a music festival and a music conference – made the trip to Toronto to visit him in the hospital and to record with him. In my discussions with Oliver I discovered he had several such connections – in other parts of Canada, in the United States, and in Finland – with musicians who had appeared on his CDs, whose CDs he had performed on, or those he had simply established as friends and with whom he maintained contact over the years.

As I shall demonstrate throughout this dissertation, these two trends that are so closely associated with Oliver – the idea of pushing the boundaries and the fostering of personalized social networks that reach into varied places and spheres of musical activity – are serving to remap notions of collectivity in folk music. Oliver connected with musicians who shared a particular sensibility with him, although they were raised in different local musical environments and rooted in different musical traditions. This shared sensibility in many ways paralleled the ideals and values that, as I mentioned in my opening section, have characterized a circuit of transnational folk music festivals. Despite this parallelism, the sensibility is in tension with the varied expectations in these circuits. As I argue, these tensions are not merely abstract concepts but rather permeate the experience and music of these musicians. Before discussing these ideas further, I will introduce in greater depth Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, and I will explain my rationale for choosing to focus on them out of a sea of touring contemporary folk musicians.
Oliver: A Brief Biographical Introduction

I first met Oliver in 1995 at the Vancouver Folk Festival. His group, the Stewed Tomatoes, shared a workshop stage with my own Celtic rock band, Mad Pudding. I remember then having difficulty placing his music into any of the preconceived categories with which I was familiar. Like my own band, there were aspects of Celtic music, such as Irish-style reels with rock, funk, jazz and various so-called world music influences. However, while these styles were evident in the music, any secure sense of genre provided by such musical reference points was fleeting, even within a single tune. For example, in one tune, “The Humours of Plato,” phrases that started off sounding like Canadian fiddle music were interspersed with blues riffs, and they further confounded predictability through their unconventional length and periodicity. This genre switching made him difficult to place. Whereas other Canadian performers on the circuit at the time, such as Great Big Sea, Ashley MacIsaac, or La Bottine Souriante, strongly represented regions of Canada such as Newfoundland, Cape Breton, and Québec, I had trouble figuring out if his music represented anybody else other than himself; a fact that became apparent in the designation of his repertoire among many Canadian fiddlers as ‘Olitunes.’

Oliver’s career-long evasion of categories – which as I shall argue was partially an intentional move that yielded economic, social, and creative benefits alongside risks – followed an early developmental musical path that was also eclectic. Born in Toronto in 1956 and raised in the rural southern Ontario town of Flesherton, Oliver studied classical

33 Oliver Schroer, Whirled (Big Dog, BD9302, CD, 1994).
violin and recorder as a child.\textsuperscript{34} His entry into public performance came later however, in his teens. He primarily played guitar into his 20s, however he said that the violin began to get him more attention from his peers. He recalled bringing it to parties and playing Orange Blossom Special, which he had learned off of a recording of guitarist Mason Williams (known for his hit “Classical Gas”). After high school, Oliver played for several years with a local country swing group, the Traverston Band, which often performed for dances in his home region. He claimed that he began to learn ‘fiddle music’ after the leader of the band, Jim Ryan, loaned him a tape of the Canadian fiddler Don Messer so that he could play tunes for a square dance.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Oliver attended York University in Toronto. Encounters with other musicians in the city led to more discoveries of traditional music. On one occasion in the early 1980s, the Toronto accordion player and singer Ian Bell gave Oliver recordings of the Québécois fiddler Jean Carignan, English fiddler Dave Swarbrick, and the Irish band De Danaan, a moment that both Oliver and Ian referred to as pivotal in developing his interest in fiddle music.\textsuperscript{35} Oliver attended traditional music sessions in Toronto featuring Bell and other traditional musicians, many of whom had diverse fiddle music interests. This included the fiddler and ethnomusicologist Anne Lederman, who introduced Oliver to Balkan music, the mixed metres of which intrigued him. A further connection with fiddle music came through an enthusiast of Ontario fiddle

\textsuperscript{34} Oliver’s biographical information that follows came from a number of sources. I gained as much as possible from him during our 5 interviews in the Fall of 2007 and Spring of 2008, however as my research developed I realized there were several gaps in the information in terms of dates, places and people. Luckily, Oliver’s biography is well documented in several sources. One important source was an interview on Oliver’s website that Oliver did with himself regarding his life story. Oliver Schroer, “An Interview with Oliver Schroer,” http://www.oliverschroer.com/about/self_interview.html (accessed November 25, 2012). Unless otherwise stated, the information here either comes from this website, or from my interviews with Oliver. Oliver’s friend and musical collaborator David Woodhead fact checked details for me.

\textsuperscript{35} Ian Bell, personal communication, August 2012.
tunes, Norm Gibson, who hired Oliver to transcribe tunes for his personal and extensive collection. It was this body of tunes – Irish, Canadian, Scottish, French-Canadian and Balkan – that formed his repertoire as a busker in the Toronto subways in the 1980s.

Oliver performed full-time in the Toronto subway for five years in the mid 1980s, playing at first with a University friend accompanying him on guitar and later primarily playing alone. He said it was during this period that his repertoire of traditional music expanded to over 600 tunes.

Oliver also started to compose tunes in this period. He presented his early ventures into composition in his first independently produced recording, the cassette *Underground Freedom* (1987). Following the release of this cassette, which to his disappointment attracted little attention outside of his immediate circle, Oliver searched for musicians to play his tunes with him. This ultimately led to two projects: The Harbord Trio, with guitarist Don Ross; and Eye Music, with his longtime collaborator David Woodhead, Don Ross, and percussionist Mark Duggan. The Harbord Trio was clearly in the genre of acoustic folk, while Eye Music was improvisational and more closely aligned with jazz. In 1988 Eye Music traveled to perform at the Montreux jazz festival, at the members’ own expense, a moment that Oliver recounted as a pivotal for him in his early career.

From this brief account, it is apparent that Oliver’s early experiences in music were not dominated by one genre of music, nor by a single style of fiddling. It is also evident that Oliver’s diverse socio-musical connections were already apparent at this early stage in his career.
Oliver’s entry into a life of national and international touring followed the 1994 release of two CDs of his music, *Jigzup* and *Whirled*. His group the Stewed Tomatoes formed after these two recordings in order to perform the music of these CDs (which had been recorded with a variety of musicians). It was shortly after this, in 1995, that I met Oliver at the Vancouver Folk Festival.

In Chapter 7 I will take a closer look at the trajectory of Oliver’s career, paying special attention to how he negotiated tensions between individuality and relationality at different points in his sociomusical life.

**Nuala Kennedy and Filippo Gambetta**

I had met Oliver through touring. As a way of mapping out the larger cultural space that is this touring circuit, this dissertation centres on encounters like these – made on the road at festivals, music camps, workshops, conferences, and other interactive events – encounters that can lead to deeper collaborative relationships. Nuala Kennedy and Filippo Gambetta are two musicians whom Oliver met through touring with whom he had a particular affinity, and on whom I focus.

Oliver’s wider network offered many possibilities of collaborators. Therefore, an important question that I need to address from the outset is why I chose these two musicians. In short, along with the fact that Oliver valued highly his relationships with Filippo and Nuala, they are compelling examples of people whose careers are characterized by a similar sensibility for ‘pushing the boundaries.’ Consequently, their careers took shape through negotiating the tensions between the individualism inherent in this sensibility and the collectivist values associated with the folk ideal.
Since I am interested in the relationship between individuality and collectivity, I chose to focus on these single musicians and examine their affiliations, rather than choose a collective framework (nation, political affiliation etc.) as my starting point and picking representatives of these collectives. The broader network of musicians that I have brought into this study are drawn from a mapping of the personal networks of these three musicians, or else they are musicians I met while following Nuala and Filippo on tour or visiting them in their home towns. For this research strategy, it was beneficial to choose as my main collaborators musicians that, like Oliver, were hubs in their own right. Maintaining a high number of connections in itself is not unusual for touring musicians within the highly interactive environment of professional folk music. My collaborators’ sociomusical networks however are characterized not only by their high number of connections but also by their heterogeneity, or what sociologist Bonnie Erickson terms as ‘network variety.’ These personal networks cut across various spatial, stylistic, and genre boundaries. Thus focusing on these musicians allows for an examination of a broad web of connections. Further, in order to examine the transnational scope of musicians’ networks, I chose musicians who were in different countries. Limiting my focus to just a few hubs was important: it was impossible for me to follow all of Oliver’s musical collaborators. I was able to focus on Nuala and Filippo’s musical projects in depth, yet also to map out their own networks of collaborators. Through this mapping, I aimed to construct my field through a logic of collaborative interpersonal networks in order to examine dynamics, tensions, and politics in this transnational cultural space.

Another reason for focusing on Filippo and Nuala is more pragmatic. Limiting my focus to two musicians was manageable in terms of the time and funding available to me. In order to maximize observation of my research collaborators ‘at home’ I took successive trips to their hometowns and spent time participating with them at informal music sessions, interviewing them, and observing, when possible, projects they were involved in. In the course of this method of “following the people,” I gained a sense of their own local networks and their place in the musical culture of their towns and regions. I discuss my rationale for my methods further in the following chapter.

Nuala and Filippo offer another particular perspective that has shaped my research: the perspective of the current experience of these circuits, and in particular, what it has been like to try to forge a career over the last fifteen years (roughly the late 1990s-2013). This is due to their age and the point at which they find themselves in their careers. In contrast to Oliver, who was 53 years old at the time of his passing, both Nuala and Filippo are relatively young musicians; Filippo was born in 1981 and Nuala in 1977. Their youth created both benefits and challenges in terms of research. As they have had short careers thus far, it is difficult to map changes over time in the manner that, for

37 The session is a musical gathering of two or more musicians to play informally together. The term is widely associated with Irish traditional music; however, it is now commonly used in a variety of traditional EuroAmerican musics. Social expectations regarding etiquette and interactional style vary greatly from session to session and style to style, but most commonly musicians face each other in a circle formation and play instrumental dance tunes. Usually, one person or a small number of people acts as a session leader, starting tunes or assigning others to start. Adam Kaul describes a session in Doolin, County Clare, Ireland, that would match the description of many around the world: “The session is different from a concert ‘performance’ in the sense that it is unstaged. The musicians simply sit around a table in the pub, facing towards each other in a circle, not on a stage elevated above an audience facing linearly outward. Also distinct from staged performances, sessions ideally create a carefully balanced but permeable social boundary between the musicians and the audience. Interaction occurs across this boundary in the form of conversation, jokes, and rounds of drink.” Adam Kraul, “The Limits of Commodification in Traditional Irish Music Sessions,” Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 13 (2007): 703–719.

example, Benjamin Brinner recently did so effectively with the career of middle-aged Israeli musician Yair Dalal in his study of networks and collaboration in Israeli and Palestinian music.\(^{39}\) However, as they are young, they are in still in the process of developing contacts, and thus I am able to observe careers unfolding, along with the anxieties and successes they experience.

A brief introduction to how Nuala and Filippo represent themselves, to the style of music they play, and to their early development begins to reveal what they share, and what brought them together: both an aesthetic sensibility and a way of being musicians on the transnational touring circuit.

**Introducing Filippo Gambetta: A Genoese Organetto Player**

Like Oliver, Filippo Gambetta is difficult to categorize, both in terms of musical style and his self-identification. As with Oliver, he performs a range of musics, from Irish traditional music to Brazilian *choro*. He self-identifies variously as world citizen, European, Italian, Northern Italian, Ligurian, and Genoese. His biography on his website (in English) exemplifies his ambiguous self-categorization:

Filippo Gambetta (born in 1981) is an Italian melodeon player and composer; the music that he presents is innovative contemporary folk music with lots of different influences. Hailing from Genoa, in northern Italy, Filippo began playing the accordion at the age of fourteen; his music is steeped in northern Italian folk idioms, but also taps Nordic, Celtic, Balkan and other global inspirations.\(^{40}\)


My first meeting with Filippo, as with Oliver, was at a folk festival in British Columbia, and was very brief. My second encounter with him was during my first field trip in 2009 to a small Danish folk festival. I had gone specifically for the purpose of meeting him. On this occasion, the impression he made on me was similar to the musical vagabond image apparent in his biography. He told me he spent a large amount of time outside of Italy collaborating with musicians in other European countries. His diverse musical interests and his penchant for ‘pushing the boundaries’ were evident in the melodically complex instrumental compositions of his band, the Filippo Gambetta Trio. His tunes sounded variously and vaguely like Irish, Balkan, or Finnish dance musics, arranged in filmic settings coloured by diminished chords and tone clusters. Despite its rhetorical connection with Italian folk music this music was difficult to place in a specific locale. He seemed a musical navigator, cut loose from his origins, creating what he himself sometimes referred to as ‘folk music from nowhere.’

As I got to know Filippo over a series of visits during the following year, however, my impression of him as a footloose traveler altered. A regular theme in our conversations was that the role of international touring musician was actually causing him anxiety. He longed for a closer connection to home, and was even considering quitting touring altogether. He was trying now to base his living more locally and to engage more with Ligurian musical styles. While he continued ongoing collaborative ventures with Finnish, Belgian, Breton, and Irish musicians, his vision for his own future was shifting from an international to a local purview. This was in no small part due to the

---

41 I had actually performed at two of the same festivals as Filippo previous to this meeting (Vancouver Folk Festival and Mission Folk Festival, 2002) and had seen him perform, but had not spoken with him. 42 Filippo and Oliver used the term “folk music from nowhere” in the promotion of their 2001 tour in Canada. The music on this tour was primarily improvisational. They made a cassette recording of some of these improvisations, Filiology, that was never released commercially.
economics of international touring life, particularly in the context of the time period (2008-present), which has seen the worldwide recession that repeatedly came up in conversation with musicians during my fieldwork.

Filippo was raised in an environment of touring musicians. His father, Beppe Gambetta, is a touring guitarist who is well known on folk and roots music circuits. Beppe introduced Filippo to Riccardo Tesi, a Tuscan organetto player who, according to Filippo, was among the first professional organetto players to play a range of musics from various regions of Italy. Tesi was Filippo’s first mentor on the instrument. Filippo’s decision to play it therefore did not grow out of a local practice. While the organetto is common to many regions in Italy, it is actually not strongly associated with Liguria, the province whose capital is the city of Genoa.

As with Oliver, Filippo’s musical development has been focussed on achieving an original compositional voice out of a wide range of influences. For much of his career thus far, he has concentrated on original composition rather than a deep exploration of traditional material. Since the late 1990s, the bulk of his resources and energy have been devoted to trying to establish the Filippo Gambetta trio, which he formed to perform his own compositions. This has recently changed, with an increased focus since 2009 on the band Liguriani, which perform arrangements of regional Ligurian music. In Chapter 5 I discuss the implications of these and other projects in relation to their role in fostering a sense of place and home.

[43] The website of Filippo’s other important mentor Riccardo Tesi, while noting Tesi’s explorations beyond Italian folk music, establishes his folkloric credentials as a “researcher” and a “true pioneer of ethnic music in Italy.” He is also represented as a modernizer who allows the accordion to speak “both an archaic and modern language, widening the vocabulary and the technique of an instrument for a long time preserved as part of a traditional heritage.” Riccardo Tesi, “Riccardo Tesi: Biography,” http://www.riccardotesi.com/index.php?es=biografia_eng (accessed November 27, 2012).
In terms of compositional style, it is very difficult to point to any tune or group of tunes as being typical of his original music. This is true of Oliver and Nuala as well, and is part of the difficulty in classifying these musicians. However “Kevat” (“Spring” in Finnish), the first tune from his third CD *Andirivieni*, contains some features of Filippo’s compositional and arrangement style that are recurrent in his work and have commonality with Oliver and Nuala’s approaches. “Kevat,” like many of Filippo’s tunes, is not written in the particular style of any regional dance music. Its arrangement on the CD is based around an alternation between a three-measure groove (played in a number of variations and instrumental combinations) and a melody, as follows:

![Fig. 1.1: Groove Pattern from “Kevat” by Filippo Gambetta](image)

45 In his dissertation on groove in Cape Breton fiddle music, Jeffrey Hennessy develops a definition of groove that is a good starting point for my application of the term. According to Hennessy, groove is “the acoustical repeating of a rhythmic idea that forms the metrical underpinning for a piece of groove music, and the effect this has upon individual people who respond collectively as a group to the sound of the groove. This second meaning of groove can be expanded to represent metaphorically the musical community or subculture that forms around the music. The community consists of individuals who maintain their own identities and relationships to the music but who also unite as a unit, with the music as the tie that binds them – a social groove.” This semiotic association of groove with sociality is an important part of my analysis. The assumption that it “forms the metrical underpinning for a piece of groove music” is challenged by the music I am examining. As I discuss, in “Kevat” Filippo intersperses a groove-oriented figure with an assymetrical melody. Groove here is part of a larger structural framework characterized by the juxtaposition of repetition and variation. Jeffrey James Hennessy, “Fiddle Grooves: Identity, Representation, and the Sound of Cape Breton Fiddle Music in Popular Culture,” PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto (2008): 5.
A notable feature of “Kevat” is the asymmetrical grouping of strong and weak beats, which I have represented in this transcription as a mixture of 5/8, 6/8, and 7/8 measures, according to what I hear as downbeats in the accompaniment on guitar and bass.\footnote{For the most part in this dissertation I have transcribed examples from recordings. In mixed metre tunes, I have given my own interpretation of the barlines. Part of the reason for this is that these melodies are generally transmitted by ear, so there are no existing scores. In learning these tunes, the listener must use their judgement to determine strong and weak beats, as I have done, since they are not constructed according to established metrical dance music patterns.} This tendency towards asymmetrical metric organization is a characteristic that Filippo shares with Oliver and Nuala’s compositional style. As I shall discuss in relation to Oliver’s composition, this is a polyvalent tendency that could signify a contemporary sensibility and an intellectualism (analogous to the use of mixed metres in progressive rock). However it has precedent in several EuroAmerican and Eastern European dance music traditions such as Québécois reels, Appalachian fiddle and banjo music, Bulgarian horos, or Finnish polskas. A further aspect is the seeming juxtaposition of this asymmetry with a repetitive groove that in this case alternates with the melody rather than underlies it. As I will discuss in Chapter 7, such juxtapositions and elisions between idiosyncratic and relational elements have a close connection with the dynamics and tensions of touring in transnational space.
Introducing Nuala Kennedy: An Irish Flute Player in Edinburgh

Nuala Kennedy is a flute player who is also difficult to categorize. Like Oliver and Filippo, she composes tunes, has a project that was created to perform them (The Nuala Kennedy Band) and maintains a project-based career that involves a high degree of collaboration with performers from different places and musical traditions. A quote from the Irish Times on her website echoes this sentiment: “Kennedy doesn't so much imbibe or inhale as swallow, whole and unadulterated, melodic and rhythmic influences from beyond her kith and kin. A delicious mix of influences abound, without ever sacrificing musical identity.”

I first met Nuala (again, very briefly, as are many festival encounters) through Oliver, backstage at the two-week long Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow in 2006. She was there to perform a project commissioned by the festival entitled “Astar” (‘journey’ in Irish Gaelic). The show was a multimedia presentation that included Oliver alongside Canadian fiddler Daniel Lapp, Americana singer songwriter Will Oldham (‘Bonnie Prince Billy’), and other Scottish musicians.

The next time I encountered Nuala was in 2009, on the same trip during which I met Filippo. I had traveled to Edinburgh to meet with her while she was commencing a tour for another transnationally constituted project, with an equally travel-oriented title, Voyage de Nuit. The band for this project performed her original compositions alongside

---

those of French flamenco guitarist Philippe Guidat; the group included a Bolivian percussionist, an English accordion player, and a Brazilian bass player.

With their evocations of travel, Astar and Voyage de Nuit speak to a theme of mobility that threads through Nuala’s musical projects and mirrors her own history of movement. Her life of travel began in her 20s with a move away from her home city of Dundalk in Northeastern Ireland to Edinburgh. She is now a tireless touring musician. As someone who organized my own tours throughout the 1990s, I am consistently impressed by Nuala’s ability to organize work for herself in the United Kingdom, Northern and Southern Europe, and North America. In March 2011 Nuala played in Nashville, Denmark, and Asturias, Spain, within the space of a week, prompting a Facebook update that read, “Yes, taking it all in...the new tunes will be a Danish pastry filled with southern fried catfish and Fabada Asturiana...”.

The Nuala Kennedy Band, which performs her original songs alongside traditional material, are signed to the Nashville-based Compass label, and their latest CD, Noble Stranger, was released in the summer of 2012. The band varies in size and draws from a consistent pool of musicians, mostly based in Edinburgh. However, like Filippo and Oliver, she has largely maintained a project-based career, and has collaborated and toured with musicians from Cape Breton, France, Norway, and the United States.

While Nuala shares aspects of her career approach and aesthetic with Oliver and Filippo, in one major respect she offers a counter example to them: unlike Oliver and Filippo, Nuala grew up strongly rooted in the traditional music of her homeland, playing in a local céili dance band in her hometown in her childhood. However, in her 20s she moved to Edinburgh, Scotland, largely because she felt what is locally known as the ‘folk
scene’ there was more vibrant than the ITM\textsuperscript{48} scene in Ireland from which she had come, which was, in her words, “restrictive.” She was inspired by the number of youth in Edinburgh who were engaged with traditional music. The band Shooglenifty, a group that plays reels and jigs with drum kit and bass grooves that reference electronica, reggae, and a range of dance club beats, was an inspiration for her in this early period.

Nuala’s move to Scotland is an important moment in her biography that exhibits an attitude she shares with Oliver and Filippo. In their life stories, all three musicians identified moments of connection with – or groundedness in – specific traditions, yet they also spoke of the need to break free of them; there is a sense that commitment to a single tradition is, to use Nuala’s term, “restrictive.” This sense of transcending boundaries is one of the major commonalities that informs their aesthetic approaches and shapes their career trajectories.

With her background in Irish traditional music and her deep connection to the Edinburgh traditional music scene, it is understandable that Nuala’s compositional style is more closely aligned with a globalized, modern Celtic style than Filippo’s style is. Below is the tune “Footsteps” from Nuala’s second solo CD, \textit{Tune In.}\textsuperscript{49} Notable melodic and rhythmic features include an asymmetrical phrase structure, metres that change regularly (almost every measure in the A section), repetition of motives (eg. mm 3 and 4) or motives that are repeated in a varied form (eg. mm 7 and 8), and a repeated, syncopated figure that evokes a temporary sense of groove (mm 16-22). The frequency of motivic repetition\textsuperscript{50} and minor melodic variation helps to reinforce certain motives as

\textsuperscript{48} I will be using ITM as an abbreviation for “Irish Traditional Music” throughout this dissertation.
\textsuperscript{49} Nuala Kennedy, \textit{Tune In}, Compass COM4534, 2010.
\textsuperscript{50} I use ‘motif’ to indicate a small melodic fragment that is shorter than what I term as a ‘phrase.’ Phrases are not always easy to delineate in asymmetrical metric structures. I recognize them according to their
‘hooks,’ to use a phrase common in popular music discourse. Thus, while the tune requires facility with asymmetrical phrase structures and mixed metres, it contains memorable moments that the listener and learner can latch onto:

![Sheet music for "Footsteps" by Nuala Kennedy](image)

**Fig. 1.3: “Footsteps” by Nuala Kennedy**

As James Cowdery has recognized, the structure of Irish dance tunes is formed around common motives and other subdivisions of melody that are circulated in oral transmission, subject to various processes of recombination as they become new tunes.\(^{51}\) Cowdery’s demonstration of processes of transmission offers insight into another interpretation of the asymmetrical nature of these tunes. As asymmetry is not a common

---

aspect of Irish dance music, the use of it in composition can be seen as a sign of boundary pushing. On the other hand, thinking of motifs and phrases part of the heritage of a wider community of Irish musicians allows for an interpretation of these new tunes as grounded in Irish traditions. I discuss several of these aspects, specifically in relation to new compositions in Irish music, in my Masters thesis.

To summarize, there are several noticeable aspects common to these three musicians:

1) they make their livings predominantly as musicians
2) they consider themselves to be primarily instrumentalists
3) they are primarily melody instrument players, rather than accompanists
4) they have extensive association with a dance music tradition within their home nation
5) they all play Irish traditional dance music in addition to their home-associated music
6) they write their own tunes and also play traditional, common practice compositions and contemporary compositions of others. Further, they highly value their own bands that play their own compositions (the Filippo Gambetta Trio, the Nuala Kennedy Band, The Stewed Tomatoes)
7) they write in forms and engage in other experiments that push the generally accepted idea of traditional form within traditions (i.e., Irish reels with mixed metres, changes to form of their instruments)

Assymetrical metre in popular ITM does have precendents. Use of assymetrical metre in ITM, particularly in songs, became associated in the 1970s with Andy Irvine, a well-known bouzouki player. Irvine also included Bulgarian dances in medleys or ‘sets’ with Irish dance tunes.

Andy Hillhouse, “Tradition and Innovation in Irish Instrumental Folk Music.”
8) they position themselves as solo performers who do not play predominantly with one group but rather in several, in project-based careers

9) they have recorded and toured with several musicians from other countries than their own, including transatlantic collaborations

The characteristics shared by Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo that I have identified here are typical of musicians that share a particular sensibility that falls within a general category of new folk music sensibilities, that I will describe further below. On another level, there are more particular points of connection that are specific to this triad of people. As I explore transnational networks formed on touring circuits, it is important to note that musicians are connected by various levels of affiliation, from the specific and idiosyncratic to a shared identification with broader categories. In my analysis I seek to bring out these different levels, from connections at the macro level to the very specific types of dynamics that shape particular relationships. I will now parse out some common terms that are used to define categories in these networks, and articulate my employment of them.

‘Folk’, ‘Celtic’, ‘Traditional’

My use of the term ‘folk music’ in this dissertation is based on the following two factors:

1) My research collaborators Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo used ‘folk’ in reference to themselves;\(^{54}\) and 2) the international touring circuits of festivals, music camps, and other events in which they predominantly work, while overlapping and merging with world and

---

roots festivals, have emerged historically from what many authors and participants have referred to as folk music revivals.\textsuperscript{55} Subsequently, the term folk music is still in common discourse and is used in categorization, particularly of festivals.\textsuperscript{56}

Ethnomusicological literature on folk music has been relatively sparse in recent decades, in comparison to literature pertaining to the industry categorization World Music. In part, this is due to the exhaustive terminological debates that have accompanied folk music in the past. With folk music used to refer an ever-shifting array of practices, attempts to define it have proved unresolvable. This is one of the reasons for a disciplinary avoidance of the term folk in ethnomusicology, exemplified by a prominent example: the 1981 renaming of the International Folk Music Council as the International Council for Traditional Music.\textsuperscript{57} However, as Philip Bohlman has pointed out, ‘traditional’ is no less problematic and ambiguous a term.\textsuperscript{58}

While folk music is a confounding category for both performers and academics alike, and is seen as a social construction that resists any clear definition, it is a notion that will not disappear. As Matthew Gelbart has recently written, “abandoning the idea of folk music may be as artificial now as accepting it was originally. Perception has formed its own reality.”\textsuperscript{59} My concern with folk music is therefore with how it is constructed discursively, and the meaning it continues to have for people, rather than identifying

\textsuperscript{55} See Bohlman, \textit{The Study of Folk Music}, 66; Thomas R. Gruning, \textit{Millenium Folk: American Folk Music Since the Sixties} (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press 2006) 109–132; Hans-Hinrich Thedens, “’How Funny—I’m at a Folk Music Event and I Don’t Know a Soul Here!: Musicians and Audiences at the International Folk Music Festivals in Norway,” World of Music 43.2,3 (2001) 171;\textsuperscript{56} The Edmonton Folk Festival, The Falun Folk Festival (Sweden), and The Rudolstadt Tanz und Folk Festival (Germany) are a few examples.

\textsuperscript{57} Bohlman, \textit{The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World}, xiii. In Canada, this change was echoed in an equivalent name change for the Canadian Folk Music Society, which in 1989 became the Canadian Society for Traditional Music.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59} Gelbart, \textit{The Invention of ‘Folk Music’} and ‘Art Music’, 274.
musical traits that define a style as folk. More specifically, I am interested in the usefulness that affiliating with broad categories such as folk, ‘roots,’ and ‘traditional’ has for musicians and, in particular, the value and challenges presented by the ambiguity of these labels.

Stokes has suggested the benefit of ambiguous categorization with respect to another vague and ambiguous category that comes up repeatedly in this dissertation: Celtic music. Stokes writes of the category of Celtic: “whilst it is a strictly defined category (as a romantic ‘other’ in binary oppositions such as European periphery vs. centre, Celt vs. Anglo Saxon or French) its content is capable of a great deal of variety and left relatively undefined.” This ambiguity allows for access to the category denied “by the complexities of, for example, a Celtic language.” Timothy Taylor discusses the popularity of Celtic music in the 1990s as partially due to the fact that the term Celtic is “a word sufficiently vague that almost any white American could claim to have some Celtic ancestry.” Taylor also posits that the Celtic music trend is related to a tendency for middle class Euro-North Americans to think of themselves as having no ethnic identity. According to Taylor, they contrast their middle class individualism with what they see as the solidarity and sense of collective belonging of the so-called lower classes they associate with traditional music. An imagined Celtic ancestry speaks to the envy they have for such a sense of belonging.

While this certainly helps to explain the rise in the popularity of Celtic music in the 1990s (and which I see in my own search for my so-called “roots” during my

---

62 Ibid.
I believe that the quest for ethnic identity is only part of the reason for the connections musicians have with the Celtic category. The reasons for musician’s associations with such categories are multiple. Musicians are often highly aware of the constructed nature of the Celtic category, and associate with it in pragmatic ways as they negotiate their careers. Folk is even more ambiguous than Celtic (although in some areas of Europe the two terms are almost synonymous) therefore it can incorporate an even greater range of variety of content while providing the benefits of association with a category, such as a touring circuit and social networks.

While folk music is an encompassing term that reappears often in performer biographies, it is regularly used in combination with other signifiers rather than on its own. Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo do not exclusively refer to themselves as folk musicians. Rather, folk is often combined with some other adjective in self-description. For instance, Oliver Schroer referred to himself as an “extended folk musician” and Filippo Gambetta’s biography claims he is an “innovative folk musician” who plays “folk music from nowhere” (implying a transcendence of place-bound traditions). These usages of “folk music” are ambiguous in that they do not evoke a bounded sense of place. In Oliver’s and Filippo’s cases, the reader of the biography is invited to imagine what “folk music from nowhere” or “extended folk” sounds like.

---

63 See chapter 3 for a more comprehensive account of my relationship to folk and traditional musics.
64 Chapman writes that “the Celts, in the British context, form the largest phantom army of ‘folk’ who are the notional makers of folk music. The ‘folk,’ as a musical ethnicity, englobe the ‘Celts’; there is, however, a strong tendency for the tail to wag the dog, and for the ‘folk’ category in the British sense to be usurped by Celtic material, or to assume a Celtic accent of some kind.” Malcolm Chapman, “Thoughts on Celtic Music,” in Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1994) 42.
At first glance, the ambiguity of folk music contrasts with the seeming stability invoked by the term traditional, which implies an attachment to a local place, to its community, and to a connection with its past. Exceptionally among my three research collaborators, Nuala Kennedy predominantly uses the term traditional, describing herself as a “traditional Irish musician” in her biography. Compared to the above descriptions, “traditional Irish music” is far less ambiguous; it evokes commonly associated images (fiddles, step dancing, the Irish landscape etc). However, usage of the term traditional is problematic for a musician such as Nuala: if she strictly identified herself as traditional it would inadequately represent the breadth of her musical activities. When I asked her how she classified the music she is most associated with, she responded “Irish traditional and Scottish/Celtic.” In this description she is identifying herself clearly with a notion of tradition yet also invokes the ambiguous category of Celtic.

It is important to note that there may be a straightforward reason why some of these musicians use folk; perhaps folk is what the music they play is called where they come from. For example, the term folk music is identified with the Sibelius Academy Folk Music Department. As Tina Ramnarine has pointed out, it is very much a current term in Finland; in fact there is a commonly understood distinction there between ‘old’ and ‘new’ folk music. Therefore, the usage of folk among musicians such as Oliver’s Finnish collaborator Maria Kaliniemi (accordion) and Filippo’s Finnish collaborator Emilia Lajunen (nyckelharpa) has emerged from their local milieu rather than from their

connection to a transnational folk community. There may be a similar local reason for why Nuala uses traditional music, a term that is common in Ireland.

_A Note on ‘Vernacular Music’_

While I employ folk in relation to both the international touring circuit and the self-categorization of my research collaborators, I will use the term ‘vernacular’ to indicate musics and performance contexts that involve music making as part of everyday experience. Despite ambiguities in the term and in the concept of ‘everyday’ that I will point out, vernacular is useful to describe particular contexts.

The term vernacular has been used in several ways: as a catch-all for American popular musics, as a substitute for non-elite musics, and as analogous to the various usages of the term folk music. In an article discussing ‘vernacular music,’ Archie Green, while arguing for the term’s utility, points out that it has often implied a binary between high and low culture.70 Another binary, between vernacular music as simple and art music as is complex, is implied in Philip Bohlman’s entry “Vernacular Music” in The New Grove Encyclopedia. The entry states that “unlike musics known and practiced by a sociocultural and professional elite, vernacular music is accessible to the majority of people because of their familiarity with its forms and functions and because they are able to acquire knowledge of it through everyday practice, that is, without any specialized skills.”71 This definition equates non-elite musical forms and practices with formal and

technical simplicity. This seems to contradict his observation elsewhere that special skills “do not in themselves negate the possibility of widespread collective performance.”

Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo demonstrate that the term vernacular is best tied to performance contexts rather than to musicians, as they complicate such dualities. They are highly skilled and even virtuosic performers, however referring to them as non-vernacular musicians would be misleading, as they have been deeply involved in everyday, accessible, and amateur practices, in particular traditional music sessions. Sessions in many ways concur with Michael Pickering and Tony Green’s definition of the “vernacular milieu,” which they equate with local, everyday experience. This usage is analogous to the notion of vernacular language, with its implications of locality that contrast with the implications of lingua franca. In this sense, Pickering and Green employ “vernacular milieu” to refer to “the local environment and specific immediate context within which, as an integral part of their everyday life, people participate in non-mediated forms and processes of cultural life. By definition that cultural life is non-official, and while it is at times assimilated into the national culture, it is experientially felt and understood by the participants as quite distinct.” Sessions generally comply with this definition to the extent that they regularly (often weekly) occur at pubs and invite participation from amateurs. Sessions in transnational and transcultural spaces such as festivals however raise questions regarding the changing notions and experiences of the everyday. Are musicians’ experiences of ‘the road’ daily life? Or are interactions that

---


74 It is important to note that Pickering and Green’s book was written in 1987; with the introduction since then of the Internet and the ability to interact simultaneously via internet across the globe, the notions of “local” and “immediate” are complicated.
come about in the festival milieu, among professional musicians, elite occurrences? With this complexity concerning the everyday in mind, I retain vernacular to emphasize the quotidian quality of certain practices. The term in this regard is usefully distinct from ‘traditional’ and ‘folk’, which has other resonances.

**Scenes, Sensibilities, Lifestyles**

In common parlance, the social milieux and patterns of interaction and exchange that form around what people think of as specific musical genres are often referred to as ‘scenes.’ The term has been most commonly used in local contexts (‘the London free jazz scene’), but as Will Straw and others have pointed out it is also commonly extended to translocal and transnational contexts in which strong local scenes are connected to each other (‘the global extreme metal scene’). With this everyday usage in mind, it is therefore an intuitive response to label the broader circuit of festivals I am discussing as the ‘transnational folk scene,’ or some similar description. However, while it has much applicability to my topic, I have opted not to employ scene regularly.

In popular music studies, the term scene has moved beyond common parlance and has come to indicate a particular type of social bonding that is distinguished from other sociological categories of ‘community,’ ‘subculture,’ ‘art world,’ and ‘simplex’ that Will Straw argues “circumscribe activities and identities more tightly than does the notion of ‘scene’.” Straw has described a scene as “that cultural space in which a range

---

of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization.” Appropriate to the festival circuits, this definition allows for a broad interpretation of the location of ‘cultural space,’ and indeed, with the increased importance of the Internet in the production and consumption of music, a tripartite concept of ‘local,’ ‘trans-local,’ and ‘virtual’ scenes has recently been developed in popular music studies.  

As Andy Bennett points out, one of the most important functions of scene is that it suggests a relative instability and heterogeneity. The concept of scene implies a dynamic social formation: rather than suggesting an overly structuralist analysis that posits agents as negotiating rigid and unified structures, scene “compels us to examine the role of affinities and interconnections which, as they unfold through time, mark and regularize the spatial itineraries of people, things and ideas.” Finally, pointing to how scene invites a deeper level of analysis than circuits, Straw states “the usefulness of scenes is that it allows for a discussion of workplaces [and by extension work circuits] as social and cultural environments.” Scenes are spaces in which the “permeable boundaries” between “work and sociality” that are apparent in many sectors of the culture industry can be observed.

Scene, in the sense Straw uses it, is appropriate to describe the “fluid mobility” and the “variety of activities which transpire” within the cultural space I am examining.

---

82 Ibid., 225.
84 Ibid., 250.
However the social networks of touring musicians on these circuits are so variegated, diffuse, and complex that it leads me to question whether the use of scene in this context takes the term beyond the point of usefulness. It could be better to think of transnational folk festivals as the intersection of various transnational scenes: the bluegrass scene, the Irish music scene, and so on. In my formulation, I contend that a useful way of dealing with this dilemma is to constantly engage the question: in what ways are processes of exchange and interaction at festivals potentially fostering a transnational scene, a kind of macro-scene, as it were? As I stated in my opening section, and argue further in Chapter 4, festivals underwent a transformation to sites of increasing interaction and exchange in the 1990s; is this transformation leading to an increased sense of unity around a transnational notion of folk music promulgated at festivals?

With these questions of scene always in my mind, I nonetheless prefer to use the term transnational folk festival field rather than scene in reference to these circuits. This is in order to foreground the professional pressures and expectations faced by my collaborators within a field of cultural production, and to employ notions of social capital and other social networking theory to examining the dynamics of these circuits. I discuss my use of field within a larger discussion of transnational space in Chapter 2.

A scene is useful in describing the festivals themselves, and the more specific linkages that create a transnational network of scenes; however, within this complex I am also examining a more specific set of tastes and attitudes that my collaborators and interlocutors share: a sensibility that crosses national, genre, and even stylistic boundaries. ‘Sensibility’ is useful in describing what binds them, as it does not indicate necessarily a shared style nor a clearly defined music industry category but rather a broad
aesthetic approach. Sociologist David Chaney refers to sensibility as “an attitude or perspective which enables disparate activities or choices to be seen as consonant or consistent. A sensibility is therefore a constellation of tastes that ‘hang together’: they form a pattern that is recognizable to those who share it and probably to outsiders.”85 One can see resonances here with Straw’s notion of the scene. Of the ambiguous quality of sensibilities, Chaney writes “Of course sensibilities are vague, amorphous orientations that do not lend themselves to precise definition but crucially they do enable actors to know how to keep going.”86

Folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett employs sensibility in a similar way in her discussion of the ‘ruptures’ and ‘faultlines’ in klezmer music that preceded the 1970s klezmer revival in America. She tracks shifts in sensibility as an indicator of changing “structure of feeling”, a concept developed by Raymond Williams. In Williams’ hypothesis, “feeling” indicates “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt,” and are distinguished from “ideologies” which he states are “formally held and systematic beliefs.” Kirshenblatt-Gimblett thus uses sensibilities as a way of describing shifting tastes in a loosely configured musical scene, and how these indicate wider “meanings and values” in a milieu that has not yet made the shift to a more solidified ideology.87

As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett indicates, as does the notion of scene, surrounding any movement is a variety of affiliations and a range of sensibilities. There is therefore an element of selection and choice. This leads to a consideration of professional musicians

---

86 Ibid., 86
beyond their role as producers of music and begs to think of them as participants and as consumers of styles and cultural forms. This shift to a consumptive focus resonates with Chaney’s concept of lifestyle. Chaney writes that lifestyles are “patterns of interaction that differentiate people,” and distinguishes the concept from “culture” by qualifying that “while lifestyles are dependent on cultural forms, each is a style, a manner, a way of using certain goods, places and times that is characteristic of a group but is not the totality of their social experience.” He contends that “Lifestyles are sets of practices and attitudes that make sense in particular contexts.”

While I do not employ the lifestyle concept in a wholesale fashion, there are nonetheless some reasons why it helps to describe these musicians. First, it resonates with these musicians’ participation in what Mark Slobin calls “affinity interculture” that crosses over both professional and amateur musicians as well as people of different regional and national identifications. It is evident that shared affinities based on taste, and not simply explained by economic imperatives or cultural identities, play a large role in forming these connections. Second, I suggest that with increased involvement in online social media and other aspects of online music “technocultures,” as well as the use of sampled sound in recordings, the line between musicians as producers and as consumers is increasingly blurred, not only in the folk festival circuit but also in other realms of popular music. Further, in contemporary folk music the processes of tune exchange –

---

89 Ibid., 5.
92 For example, Carey Sargent has observed how the independent rock musicians she studied “became consumers of a range of on-line companies that offer services such as promotion, booking and distribution.
already an aspect of folk revival communities – is increasingly embedded in commodified exchange patterns, thus further blurring the lines between producer and consumer.

The lifestyles concept points to an aspect of cultural interaction on this circuit that is not easily captured by the frameworks of identity, diaspora, and others that are commonplace in the analysis of social formations in music. Chaney suggests that, for the analyst, delineating lifestyle formations is difficult due to their ephemeral quality: “The central roles of sensibility and reflexivity in lifestyle formation mean that as social groups lifestyles are loose agglomerations. Any attempt to map them is chasing after a vague and constantly changing constellation of attitudes.” By focusing on a shared sensibility, such a mapping project is what I have set out to do. Towards this end, I will now discuss this new folk music sensibility.

New Folk Music Sensibilities

What I term as new folk music sensibilities are broad and difficult to define in terms of musical style, due to the varied musical activities of many musicians who share them. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s insight that varied sensibilities within klezmer in the 1950s and 1960s preceded a more systematic klezmer revival ideology in the 1970s raises the question as to whether the current variety of sensibilities in transnational festival circuits will eventually be systematized as a kind of transnational folk or roots music, with certain

---


93 Chaney, “From Ways of Life to Lifestyle,” 86.
Stylistic traits emerging as dominant signifiers within an ideological “system.” At the moment, I do not see it crystallizing to this extent, although, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, discursive constructs of transculturality in transnational festival promotion may indicate a nascent ideology. At the level of the musicians, what I can point to are shared aesthetics and ways of negotiating careers.

Stylistically transforming over the course a career, reaching out to embrace new sounds, and identifying with multiple musics are some of the processes with which musicians that share a new folk music sensibility engage. These musicians often exist in uncomfortable and unstable border zones between genres and affinity groups as they perform various styles, but there is a meeting point of folk or traditional music forms and contexts that serve as a common reference. In academic literature, promotional material, and among musicians, descriptors such as “new folk music,” “progressive folk music,” “post-traditional folk music” and a host of other compounds demonstrate attempts to synthesize what is by nature loosely connected and flexible.

Composing new tunes is highly valued among these musicians; they consistently draw on various Euro-American folk dance musics as reference points in creating new music that often transcends forms and styles commonly thought of as ‘traditional’ by practitioners. Further, musicians who share this sensibility often reach out in transcultural collaboration. As a result, many have formed ongoing collaborative relationships with players from other countries and regions following initial encounters on tour at festivals, music camps, or workshops. Musicians like Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo have developed transnational networks connecting to diverse music scenes and genres. As a touring
musician on folk festival circuits since the mid 1990s, I have seen numerous musicians adopt this sensibility and career approach in recent years.

It is important to note that all of these aspects – new tunes, collaboration, and musical flexibility – clearly are connected with career strategy and economic benefits. Throughout this dissertation my discussion of social and cultural implications therefore needs constantly to consider the ways that these aspects are implicated in making a living. The interrelation between sociality, culture, and economics is complex. To reiterate an earlier point, I foreground the economic imperative by theorizing this as a field of cultural production, with the implications of economic competition and commerce implied by the Bourdieusian term ‘field,’ that consists of various scenes and sensibilities.94

**Place and New Instrumental Folk Musics**

In this study of a loosely formulated sensibility, I have no pre-existing generic term that is regularly used by musicians to describe the music itself. Instead, there are several labels utilized by those sharing this sensibility. One place to look for how musicians attempt to describe this new music is through the titles my collaborators give to their collaborations and projects. One example comes from the title Oliver and Filippo gave to a program that they took on tour in 2001 in British Columbia. In this series of concerts, they performed a repertoire of new compositions that were arranged in such a way as to allow for improvisation. Their promotion for the tour labeled this music as “folk music from nowhere.”

---

94 I discuss the idea of a transnational field in Chapter 2.
Folk music from nowhere suggests an antithesis to long-held conceptions of folk, roots, and traditional music, in which melodic forms and structures are iconic of particular places. Folk music from nowhere is a phrase that can be interpreted several ways. Filippo used it to suggest that his and Oliver’s music spoke to the loss of a specific sense of place in the contemporary world, an idea that for him was inspired after reading anthropologist Marc Auge’s work on “non-places.” In this sense, calling their music ‘from nowhere’ was meant as an ironic commentary: places are increasingly losing their specificities, therefore it is less and less possible to create folk music that can claim exclusive connection to ‘somewhere.’ Offering a differing yet related interpretation of ‘nowhere,’ Kirschenblatt-Gimblett writes of a sensibility within klezmer music driven less by identity, revival, or heritage than by “technical aspects, fun, and the market.” This attitude, she claims, was fostered by the “disjuncture” that occurred as musicians encountered the music primarily through recordings; she quotes contemporary klezmer musician Frank London as saying his relationship to klezmer began “in the middle of nowhere” – on recordings – rather than in face-to-face encounters in places. This notion of nowhere is related to Schaeffer’s notion of “schizophonia,” or the separation of sound from its original source. Such disjuncture makes the music accessible to musicians who can employ it in the creation of their own style: according to London, now “one can study and assimilate the elements of any musical form, style, or tradition by ear.”

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett affirms this point: “‘Nowhere’ is a space of abstraction where

97 Ibid.
sounds unmoored from other times and places can be engaged as sounds for its own sake. In that place called nowhere, musicians can play anything.\(^{100}\)

Are these new instrumental tunes “from nowhere” in any way vehicles for meaning, particularly in terms of place and community? Historically, the meanings attached to dance tunes in the 20\(^{th}\) century developed in conjunction with early commercial recordings and their consumption by members of diasporic cultures. Dance tunes, and the way they were performed, became signifiers of heritage, whether in klezmer, Irish music, Finnish music, or other European diasporic musics. Early recording industries for traditional music, mostly in America, traded on this sense of longing for a lost homeland.\(^{101}\) Dance tunes became markers of cultural identity, even without words to portray such belonging through explicit textual references.

In recent decades, certain Euro-American dance tune forms have become globally circulated and adopted into the repertoires of musicians from many countries, complicating their significance as markers of national and regional identity. Partly due to the place Ireland has played in the romantic imagination of the West, Irish dance music is arguably the most pervasive instrumental European folk music repertoire on a global scale; Irish instrumental music has emerged as a kind of lingua franca among Euro-American folk musicians, and at many festivals it is common to find an Irish session somewhere on the sidelines, involving musicians from different countries. Recently we have begun to see the broad circulation of other forms, such as Appalachian ‘old time’ tunes or Finnish polskas, through well known bands and the growth of transnational

---

\(^{100}\) Ibid., 59.

affinity groups, or “cultural cohorts,” those “social groupings that form along the lines of specific constellations of shared habit based in similarities in parts of the self.”102 As these forms circulate globally and are taken up by musicians in various countries, the diasporic longing for the homeland they represented to earlier generations is less important. Therefore when an Italian musician such as Filippo plays Irish music in a concert setting, for example, the question needs to be raised: what else, if anything, is being represented alongside or in place of Irishness?

Creating a further disjuncture between tunes and places, many new instrumental compositions are being written with only a vague reference to formal dance music structures. This instrumental music, free of the clear associations with single places and the lexical meaning of words, can be more semiotically ambiguous than songs. It can be more easily represented as ‘universal’ music: in other words, as emancipated from specific semiotic associations that link it to places and cultural norms of communities. Yet simultaneously it represents a universalized notion of “folk dance music”; paradoxically, it signifies particularity of place and community now lost in modernity.

Timothy Taylor discusses a related yet very different phenomenon of “music from nowhere” in the context of world music in advertising. Referring to the combination of women’s vocalizations, drums, flutes, and children’s choirs that often accompanies airline ads, Taylor states that such music has a “generic world music” sound that works as a kind of “neo-classical/new age” signifier of culturedness.103 I would guess that this comparison would likely offend some of my collaborators, and I do not mean to suggest

that their music is “generic.” However, Taylor’s case study points to some of the criticisms that could be levelled against the music I am discussing, and must be taken into account. To what extent should this folk music from nowhere be seen as representative of a process through which transnational social relations are reified? That is, is the desire for transnational belonging commodified in the object of the new tune, and then marketed on the world stage? Or conversely, is there any way that folk music from nowhere is critical of such reification? Since this sensibility hinges on the ability of the individual to pick and choose sounds in the creation of new music “from nowhere,” it is essential to consider critically the implications of this individualism. In the following chapter, I turn to theories of globalization, transcendence, cosmopolitanism, and individuation in order to frame such an examination.

While there is an aspect of these new tunes that is difficult to identify with place, in performance these musicians often employ stylistic elements that identify them with their locality or nation. When I asked one of Filippo’s fellow Genoan musicians, a member of his band Liguriani, what was ‘Italian’ or ‘Genoese’ about his compositions, he told me “not much really, if you ask me. What's Genoese and inherently Italian in his playing? Well, a lot. I find there is a ‘popular Italian’ flair in his phrasing and sometimes in his way of harmonizing music. The more simple the music Filippo plays the more evident this comes out of him.” One stylistic element I have noticed in this regard is the regular use of the bass buttons to provide rhythmic accents and harmonies, a practice that separates Italian button accordion playing from Irish accordion playing, for instance.

This observation points to new tunes as globalized forms that are given local

---

104 Michel Balatti, email communication, April 2013.
flavour through elements of ornamentation and phrasing. This becomes very evident in collaborations, in which the contrast of individual styles is evident. Nuala’s performance with Oliver on his tune “Flowers” from *Enthralled* is a case in point. The melody itself has few strong signifiers of either traditional Irish or ‘Canadian old-time’ dance musics. In particular, it contains mixed metres and thus goes beyond the metric regularity that is common in those traditions. Yet Nuala’s performance is marked by clearly Irish ornamentations:

\[ \text{= a ‘cut’ consists of a short articulation that immediately precedes a primary melody note, from above or below} \]

\[ \text{= a “roll” is an ornament consisting of 5 events in sequence within the length of a quarter note or dotted quarter note: 1) the primary melody note 2) a cut from above 3) the primary melody note 4) a cut from below 5) the primary melody note} \]

\[ \text{= a trill, or a quick, repeating alternation between two notes} \]

\[ \text{= a quickly repeated articulation of a note, often called a triplet or ‘treble’} \]
Fig. 1.4: “Flowers” by Oliver Schroer, as performed by Nuala Kennedy on *Enthralled*

‘*World Music’ Intersections*

Halkaer, Denmark, June 2009. At this small rural folk festival, there was one band on the roster that would fit easily into the music industry category of “World Music”. They were a Senegalese band, fronted by husband and wife kora players; the husband is a hereditary griot and his wife is Swedish. The band members, who except for the Swedish woman are all from Senegal and Mali, live in either Sweden or Norway. At one point in the festival, a Danish musician laughingly told me he had seen their van arrive, with the band stumbling out of it obviously high on marijuana.

After the festival was over, I hitched a ride back to Copenhagen with this band. The Danish musician commented as I was getting ready to go that I was about to have a
fun ride, a reference to the pot. However, there was little conversation once I was in the car. Instead, we listened in silence to the Côte d'Ivoire Reggae star Tiken Jah Fakoly and Malian singer Salif Keita. At one point one of the band members broke the lull in conversation, complaining about some overtly racist comments made by two drunk audience members at the festival. The rest of the group pursued a discussion of the incident in French. I asked the group what they thought of the festival. The Swedish woman responded that the Danish audience was stiff; not unusual for Denmark, she said. These musicians did not seem to have a great opinion of the festival, which I had thought was such a pleasant event. I was expecting someone to light up a joint, after the impression I got from the Danish musician. There was no sign of any pot at any point in the ride. We arrived in Copenhagen. I gave them money for my portion of the gas; they gave me their card and their independently produced CD, expressing their interest in playing in Canada and asking if I had any links to festivals there. I have since emailed them a thank you message, with no response.

From my perspective as a participant, the boundary of folk music – the point where it ends and ‘insiders’ are separated from ‘outsiders’ – is blurry, as transnational folk festivals are places in which categorical worlds meld together: world music, pop music, art music.\(^{105}\) Indeed, these are all categories that I have often traversed myself, and as I cross musical borders, I sometimes wonder in which world I am left standing. As I am concerned in my research with how networks of collaboration simultaneously cut across and reinforce categories, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between categories. As I am looking at musicians who engage with notions of traditional music, it

is of value to consider the relationship between folk music and world music, both of which are underscored by notions of roots, traditional authenticity, and primordial connections between a people and a land.\textsuperscript{106} I understand categories such as these to be dynamic, as they are constantly being defined through the discourse of producers and consumers. Yet, despite the ever-shifting definitions, I will consider whether folk and world are constructs that still retain meaning in the music industry as aligned with ‘the West’ and ‘the rest’ respectively.

The notions of roots and tradition that are pervasive in folk festivals, and the stance of solidarity with oppressed, subaltern peoples that has defined the North American folk revival, have led to the inclusion of much non-Western music at folk festivals. Folk festivals such as the Halkaer festival hire world music acts – non-Western traditional music – however at these events such musics tend to constitute a minority of the content. It follows that there may be benefits for world music bands because of this – if they are to carve out a distinct place for themselves within folk festivals – as they have less competition than they would in the world music industry. However it is necessary to consider whether they occupy a marginal space on folk music circuits. While the discourse of folk music expounds egalitarian values, it may also continue to emphasize the ‘Otherness’ of non-Western musics, and the category of folk remains as a means of separating the West from the rest.

I had the opportunity to ask Filippo about this subject and he made a distinction between North American festivals and European festivals. He sees North American festivals as differing from European festivals with respect to the representation of world

music. While he likes certain aspects of North American festivals, he points to what he calls the “politically correct” aspect that propels them to include a minority world music element, arguing that in such festivals there is a superficial encounter with such musics (I pointed out that the Halkaer festival in Denmark, at which Filippo performed, also had a minority world music element; interestingly he thought that festival was closer to a North American style folk festival in that regard). He claims that European festivals, by contrast, were more focused on special themes that gave room for the in-depth encounter with particular musics. While this generalization needs to be substantiated by more empirical research, Filippo’s discussion raises some of the controversies around world music and folk music as categories.

One example from my experience as a working musician serves to illustrate the sometimes-uncomfortable relationship between folk and world music as categories. From 2005 to 2007, I made my living touring as a guitar player with The McDades. In November 2006, The McDades album *Bloom* won Best World Album at the Canadian folk music awards, an annual event organized by some long-standing and prominent members of Canada’s folk music industry who grew up during the ‘folk boom.’ At a party in Vancouver, some of my friends in what I would call the Vancouver World Music scene, whose bands had been nominated in the same category, graciously congratulated me, yet subsequently expressed dissatisfaction at the inclusion of a Celtic band in the World Music category. One musician, a Taiwanese-Canadian *erhu* player, noted that there was more than one category for music of anglo-celtic origin, while

---

107 The Vancouver World Music Scene is represented by a body called the “Vancouver World Music Collective”, a group of musicians who formed a collective in the mid-1990s to organize concerts and raise the profile of musicians on the world music scene in the city. Their 2003 performance of a collaborative composition at the Vancouver Folk Festival was recorded in the film *Music for a New World* (2004).
projects that were predominantly non-European and often vastly different from each other were conflated in one category. Her understandable conclusion was that the category of World Music was there to give a token sense of diversity to what was predominantly a Euro-centred organization, and that awarding it to a Celtic group served to alienate the non-Western musicians even further.

While the marginalization of non-Western musics at The Canadian Folk Awards is problematic, the very presence of a World Music category in the awards nonetheless indicates a recent change in the concept of folk in Canada. This change is reflected in the trend towards the internationalization of folk festivals in the country that had begun in the late 1970s, a trend that has parallels in the United States and Western Europe. The change that occurred at folk festivals between 1980 and today demonstrates the influence of the world music phenomenon on the folk festival circuit. Some folk festivals, previously aligned with the 1950s and 1960s North American folk boom or with regional and national music revivals, began to resemble Peter Gabriel’s flagship festivals of the world music industry, the multicultural WOMAD festivals. While the ideal of cultural pluralism has long been a part of folk festivals, and was represented in the 1960s folk boom most famously by folk singer Pete Seeger in his multicultural song repertoire, until recently performer rosters at folk festivals consisted predominantly of musicians

108 Baumann, “Festivals, Musical Actors and Mental Constructs.”
109 As I discuss in Chapter 4, even nominally “Celtic” festivals such as Glasgow’s Celtic Connections Festival and Lorient Festival Interceltique have included African performers.
from either Anglo-Celtic “named-system” revivals of regional musics\textsuperscript{112} or “new aesthetic” singer songwriters,\textsuperscript{113} with non-Western musicians being in the minority.

This change in the makeup of festivals, while it has intensified certain tensions, has also led to new possibilities for expanding musical horizons and interaction across boundaries. Another example from my experience of folk festivals will serve to illustrate this. While The McDades was marketed as a Celtic band, most of our repertoire was newly composed, and we regularly utilized instruments such as the \textit{cajon}, various North African hand drums, the \textit{bansuri} flute, and the saxophone. Although the structure of our tunes and stylistic elements such as melodic ornamentation were often referential of Irish dance music, our sets included long improvisational sections (not common practice in Irish music), tunes in mixed metres, and grooves that were inspired by band members’ experiences (to varying degrees) with musics ranging from Hindustani classical music to flamenco. At the folk festivals that were the highlight of our touring year, such as the Edmonton Folk Festival and the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, we liked to think of ourselves as a band that would jam with anyone who was interested. Over the years, The McDades played in festival workshops with Moroccan Gnawa musicians, Galician folk musicians, Rom musicians, and recorded with a Persian \textit{santour} player and a North Indian \textit{tabla} player.

Oliver Schroer’s musical career coincided in many ways with the rise in the industry category of World Music and the increasing links between Western folk music practices and non-Western musics in the 1990s. One particular set of his CDs vividly

\textsuperscript{112} Rosenberg, \textit{Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined}, 177.
demonstrates an attempt to market to both genres at that time. His 1994 CD *Whirled*\textsuperscript{114} is the only one of his albums that has notable use of non-Western instruments. It is telling that he released the CD immediately following the Celtic oriented *Jigzup*,\textsuperscript{115} that both CDs were recorded in the same series of sessions, and that they were later divided into two separate albums. While they both consist of Oliver’s characteristic compositional traits such as mixed metres and formal references to various Celtic dance musics, *Whirled* contains non-Western instruments, such as South Indian *kanjira* and *mridangam*, played by Trichy Sankaran, with whom Oliver was studying at York University.\textsuperscript{116} With the release of these two albums simultaneously, there is an attempt to distinguish two strands in his music: one more ‘exotic’ and seemingly complex to his Canadian fiddle audience, and the other relatively more familiar to those within the world of traditional Western musics. This division certainly reflects the scope of Oliver’s creativity and musical interests at the time, however it also demonstrates a consciousness of two distinct yet interrelated categories with which he was engaged. Stylistically, neither CD fits comfortably into the genres of World or Celtic with which its tune titles playfully associate. This could indicate a type of strategy through which Oliver embraces enough aspects of a category to be identified with it in the industry while maintaining an ambiguity in terms of actual musical style.

Filippo was highly critical of World Music as a category in his discussions with me, just as he was of all large, catch-all categories (jazz, folk etc.). He believes that fine differences in style are elided by these broad concepts. Unlike Oliver, he has never made

\textsuperscript{116} Oliver Schroer, personal communication, October 2007.
any attempt to align himself with world music as a category. Although Filippo has not
pursued any cross-cultural collaborations with such musics, he believes there is a
sociopolitical need for cross-cultural collaboration within the context of Italy today. In a
discussion with him, he told me:

Let’s say that in Italy we need…to rebuild everyday, daily, our feeling, with
immigrants…this is something that is totally necessary at this point in our
country, because politics are very sometimes fascist, so I think connecting
cultures this moment is very…the most important thing in my country…I don’t
know about other countries, but I am now in my country, and I…well, myself I
should do more in that direction…musically…so it would be interesting for me to
do something with musicians from other communities in Genova.\footnote{Filippo Gambeta, personal communication, March 2010.}

Filippo here indicates that his support for the idea of collaboration is based on a
particular vision of the Italy he wants to live in. His conception of pluralism is placed
specifically within an Italian and Genoese – rather than a transnational – context. This
example points to how cosmopolitan sensibilities can be deepened (if not formed) in
reaction to local or national circumstances in one’s home.

So far, Filippo has not pursued such a project. When I asked him why, he replied:

“I believe that to know how a maqam or a taqsim or something works, it is much more
necessary for me than suddenly starting to play with a name player.”\footnote{Ibid.} Filippo is
indicating here a reflexive awareness of a distinction similar to that which Ulf Hannerz
makes between dilettante and connoisseur in his discussion of cosmopolitan subjectivity:

“Cosmopolitans can be dilettantes as well as connoisseurs, and are often both, at different
times. But the willingness to become involved with the Other, and the concern in
achieving competence in [alien] cultures relate to considerations of self as well.”

I will return to the topic of cosmopolitanism and subjectivity formation in greater depth in the following chapter.

Filippo’s allusion to a “name player” points to the career benefits that can be gained from collaboration across cultures. However it indicates an inversion of a major criticism that has been levelled at World Music as a genre, and at intercultural collaboration in the World Music industry. Steven Feld120 and Louise Meintjes121 have demonstrated how non-Western artists have gained increased acceptance and visibility in the West through their collaborations with well known Western pop stars such as Paul Simon and David Byrne, and have examined the power imbalance in such collaborations. However, in his comment, Filippo is suggesting that he could benefit from collaboration with a “name player” from a non-Western tradition. His comment raises questions about what sort of social capital could be gained for a Western folk musician through collaboration with a non-Western musician.

Filippo’s ambivalence towards such collaboration indicates that, for some musicians, there is a critical awareness that they can fall short of reaching a musically satisfactory depth of engagement in collaborations with musicians who are trained in a style that they would consider to be very different from their own. However, the fact that he is willing to collaborate with other European musicians such as the Finnish nyckelharpa player Emilia Lajunen, despite the major stylistic differences between Italian


and Scandinavian music, indicates a sense that he has drawn a line between European musics and non-Western musics in terms of his collaborations. When I asked him what allowed him to collaborate with Emilia he told me that she shared an “openness” with him, that she was “an artist making her own music with different tools” and that “the way she develops her language is working with [his].” These qualifications were related to a shared sensibility rather than confluences in musical style. He acknowledged that he does not play Finnish folk music; however after my interview with him in March 2009, he was going to Finland not only to play with Emilia, but also to learn more about Finnish folk music.

Whereas Filippo is ambivalent towards collaboration with non-Western musicians, the musical scene in which his Finnish collaborator came of age has institutionalized the idea of ‘global folk music.’ Emilia Lajunen was trained at the Sibelius Academy, which as Juniper Hill discusses in her dissertation on folk music at that institution encourages collaboration between Finnish folk music and non-Western musics. The notion of global folk music is not always so expansive however; when I was in Denmark I picked up a pamphlet that advertised a camp by that title, and noticed that the styles on offer were strictly Western European and Euro-American folk dance musics. This usage suggests a restriction of folk music to European origins.

In sum, while the categories of Folk Music and World Music often share unclear boundaries in terms of industry genre, there is much evidence of boundary-making in the practices of musicians and the folk music industry. The politics of exclusion and marginalization are perhaps more obvious in the type of racism experienced by the

122 Filippo Gambetta, personal conversation, March 2009.
Senegalese musicians at Halkaer (which certainly in my experience is rare at festivals) and the marginalization of non-Western musicians through the conflation of styles at the Canadian folk music awards. However, performers who have a new folk sensibility, akin to what Filippo describes as “openness,” may nonetheless be reinforcing a sense of boundaries between Western and non-Western folk musics, despite their intentions. In so doing, while they push the boundaries that distinguish various genres of European folk music, it is important to consider whether or not they are playing a part in reinscribing a broader category of European or EuroAmerican folk music.

Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo were a triad of collaborators whose collective and individual experiences of touring provide a window into the phenomena that I identified at the opening of this chapter: transnational festivals, new folk music sensibilities, and touring as a form of social practice. My focus on a very specific group of people within a broad, even vast transnational context is a distinguishing aspect of this dissertation that requires a particular analytic framework, one that brings together theories of globalization and subjectivity with discussions of the dynamic concept of folk music in the contemporary world. I now turn to the development of this framework.
CHAPTER 2

COSMOPOLITAN FOLK IN A TRANSNATIONAL FIELD

Transnational sensibilities, transnational networks, transnational festivals: the idea of transnationalism is central to my analysis. This concept has come to prominence in relation to the larger theoretical area of Globalization, a term that is predominantly tied to a massive body of humanities and social science literature in the 1990s that deals with the following phenomena:

[...] those spatio-temporal processes, operating on a global scale, that rapidly cut across national boundaries, drawing more and more of the world into webs of interconnection, integrating and stretching cultures and communities across space and time, and compressing our spatial and temporal horizons. It points to a world in motion, to an interconnected world, to a shrinking world.124

The three phenomena – transculturality in festivals, new folk music sensibilities, and touring as social practice – which I raised at the very beginning of the preceding chapter, are linked to transformations in “spatio-temporal processes” within the field of professional folk and traditional music. My inquiry examines how individuals experience these processes, through a networked biographical focus on Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo. Therefore, in this chapter I explore and develop three concepts that bring together three

theoretical areas: theories of transnationalism, theories of folk music in contemporaneity, and theories of changing notions of subjectivity in globalization. Following an introduction of my use of ‘globalization’ and ‘transnationalism’ in the first section, drawing on Philip Bohlman I will explore discursive binaries, in particular transcendence/immanence and individuality/relationality, as a means of approaching a study of folk music as a dynamic concept. I then proceed with a discussion of transnational space, first as a general concept with globalization studies, then as it more specifically applies to what I term as the transnational folk festival field. The final section is devoted to considering theoretical approaches to selfhood in the context of globalization, drawing on the concepts of cosmopolitanism, reflexivity, and individualization. This chapter therefore constitutes an in-depth examination of key terms and a theoretical framework for my analysis that follows.

**Globalization**

I use ‘globalization theory’ to refer to a general assortment of theories and discourses concerned with the above-mentioned “spatio-temporal processes”. Since Globalization studies emerged in the early 1990s, it has gone through significant transformations and refinements of its basic precepts. Prominent among early critiques of globalization theory was that analysts tended to assume, a priori, that the world was increasingly culturally homogenous. As Inda and Rosaldo point out, initial interest in globalization emerged from the cultural imperialism thesis, which postulated an increasing dominance of
Western cultural forms throughout the world, an idea reminiscent of Alan Lomax’s notion of ‘cultural greyout’. Much globalization research in the following decade or so pointed out the oversimplification of this idea, through case studies that emphasized particular localizations of global cultural forms, the emergence of cultural hybrids, and cultural flow as occurring between so-called cultural peripheries, or from peripheries to centres (the ‘centre’ being most often conceived of as ‘Western’).

As more recent studies grapple with the complexities of global interconnection, globalization theory now mobilizes a range of interrelated concepts such as transnationalism, translocalism, glocalization, cosmopolitanism, and individualization, all of which I will employ at various points in this dissertation. These terms tend to be used more than globalization over the past decade, as the study of global processes has evolved from initial grand theorizations into more focused and nuanced areas of inquiry that try to capture the diverse ways people experience “global complexity.”

Anthropology and sociology, two of the fields with the strongest influence upon ethnomusicological trends, developed divergent approaches to the study of globalization in the 1990s. Arjun Appadurai, Ulf Hannerz, Akhil Gupta, and James Ferguson most famously initiated theoretical lines of inquiry into globalization within anthropology. An

125 Ibid., 25.
127 Many of the articles in *The Anthropology of Globalization*, for instance, are concerned with how “peoples of the periphery […] customize […] imported forms, interpreting them according to local conditions of reception” 25.
128 Examples of the various strands of inquiry are evident in the articles contained in *The Anthropology of Globalization*.
expansive body of ethnographic case studies followed, focusing on diasporic and migratory cultures, aiming to understand reconfigured identities amid what was widely perceived in the early 1990s as the decline of the nation state and the emerging dominance of global capitalism in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc. Around the same period, Anthony Giddens initiated a theoretical conversation within cultural sociology, in which Ulrich Beck and Zygmunt Bauman are among the most prominent participants. This literature examines social change in the same period – termed by Giddens as “late modernity” – and is primarily concerned with re-examining sociological concerns with structure and agency in light of the changing relationship between individuals and increasingly globalized institutions.

I propose that sociological and anthropological literature on globalization offer complementary perspectives that are useful in illuminating my main concern with how individual folk musicians experience globalization. Yet, the two paradigms are rarely brought into conversation with one another. In particular, cultural sociology utilizes notions of the individualized and variegated social network that are not often explored by anthropologists within the context of globalization, a point recently made by anthropologist Vered Amit. Such an approach, employed within an ethnographic methodology, can be useful as a means of approaching the study of globalization in a way that does not problematically presuppose group identities, thus allowing for a focus on

---

131 Beck and Bauman have developed their theories through a number of works. Beck lays out his main ideas, such as reflexivity, individualization, and the risk society, in Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999). Bauman articulates his concept of liquid modernity, a variation on late modernity that stresses the uncertainty of contemporary experience, in Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

emergent collectivities, rather than relying on already defined categories. As one sociologist has put it, network research can be seen “as a way of revealing de facto active networks rather than a priori assumptions of community solidarity.” The network approach allows for an analytical focus on multiple affiliations and attachments, of which attachment to the nation, for example, need not be presumed to be paramount.

Of course, the complexities that challenge unified notions of national culture are a primary concern in contemporary anthropology, and ethnographic thick description is an effective method for increasing our understanding of these nuances. As it is often employed in sociology, social network analysis, with its focus on structural connections, does not foreground the poetics and affective qualities of the experience of globalization to the extent that anthropological studies do. Further, the insights of cultural sociologists call out for examination through ethnographic case studies. With the development of multi-sited approaches to ethnography in the 1990s, anthropology has a methodological paradigm for the study of transnational spaces that takes into account the anxieties and tensions that characterize them. I address the critiques of, and rationales for, this methodology in the following chapter.

**Non-diasporic Transnationalisms**

Many of the ties I examine may be considered as transnational, as they demonstrate “sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social

---


formations spanning nation-states.” Increased intensification in communications and mobility has now made transnationality part of everyday life. In the introduction to the critical volume *Transnational Spaces*, the authors argue that “more and more people throughout the world are experiencing different forms of transnationality and…as a social force and ideological formation, transnationalism now readily applies beyond the social worlds of those who define themselves as transmigrants or who are the members of ethnically identified migrant communities, all of whom can trace their origins to some more-or-less distant place of origin.” As the authors indicate, people

...may occupy [the spaces of transnationality] momentarily (during the consumption of a meal, for example) or for a lifetime (as members of ethnically defined transnational communities). They may have residual affinities to the transnational identities of earlier migrant generations or emergent identities as a result of their own current transnational experiences.

The authors further suggest, “Focusing on the *spaces of transnationality*, rather than just identifiable transnational communities distinguished from other (and often still normative) national communities, opens up ways of exploring this *multiplicity of transnational experiences and relations*” (my italics).

From the preceding quotes, three points can be identified that are particularly relevant to my study: 1) individuals’ subjectivities are shaped by their transnational experiences; 2) there exist “spaces of transnationality,” and I suggest that folk festivals and the non-contiguous social space of cyber-space, in which, for example, touring musicians interact, are such spaces; 3) individuals engage with multiple types of transnational experiences and relations, even within a single transnational space – in the

---

137 Ibid., 3
138 Ibid.
world of folk and traditional music, for instance, musicians interact with various transnational social networks based around various sensibilities and affinities, only some of which are related to diasporic identifications. I term these experiences and relations ‘transnationalisms,’ and those that are not based on diasporic identifications I term ‘non-diasporic transnationalisms.’ Highlighting the multiplicity of this experience, and its implications for notions of collective experience and belonging, is part of the goal of my analysis.

**Folk Music and Transnationality**

Recently, cognizant of the kind of transnational phenomena that sparked my own research, folk music revival researchers have turned their focus towards globalization and transnationalism. One example is folklorist Katherine Lavengood’s dissertation, in which she argues (drawing on a concept developed by anthropologist Etienne Wenger) that there exists a transnational Celtic music “community of practice.” According to Lavengood, this community is constituted through the interactions of traveling musicians, local musicians, and music camp students as they negotiate competing interpretations of Celtic music within a shared cultural space of festivals, informal music sessions and music camps.\(^{139}\) Lavengood’s work is groundbreaking in that she highlights the transnational connections that are fostered through festivals. However, I question the degree to which there is a singular, transnational community based around such practices. By focusing on the category of Celtic as a unifying element, she does not address the

---

kind of fluidity and multiplicity of identification that exists, and that I seek to bring out here. For my collaborators, Celtic is one of several identifications that, from the perspective of the participant, come into greater or lesser focus depending on the situation; this looseness suggests less of a transnational Celtic community and more like a Celtic category – reified through processes of commodification – that individuals engage with intermittently. I am interested in how engagement with such categories constrains or enables artistic, social, and economic possibilities for musicians.

Other studies of transnationalism and folk music focus on the nation as a normative point of reference. Tina Ramnarine’s work on new folk music in Finland points to an aesthetic of experimentation and fusion with other world musics that has become important to the construction of national Finnish identity, particularly through the folk music program at the Sibelius Academy.140 As I discuss in Chapter 5, this glocal aesthetic is evident in other countries in which local folk music institutions and grassroots organizations promote interconnection and fusion. While nationally based studies of such phenomena are crucially important, it is also essential to acknowledge an emerging aesthetic, if not quite an ideology, that connects institutions and people across national borders, within the kind of transnational space Crang et al refer to above. I will expand on Lavengood’s, Ramnarine’s and others’ contributions to the study of folk music and globalization141 by focusing on musicians who appeal to highly ambiguous and universalist notions of folk in their attempts to transcend industry categories and pursue individual creative freedom.

140 Ramnarine, Ilmatar’s Inspirations, 22–23.
Therefore, I do not foreground any pre-suppositions of collective identity – political, local, national, transnational, or other – that have dominated discussions of folk music, even within recent studies that have focused on fusion and hybridization. I argue that people take on various identifications at various times as a means of negotiating varied and sometimes conflicting expectations; tensions that are intensified in the processes of interaction and exchange that are increasing in a “world in motion…an interconnected world…a shrinking world.”

Tensions in ‘Folk Music’

Transcendence and Immanence

I approach the topic of the individual experience of the transnational folk festival field within the context of processes of globalization through the conceptual pairing of transcendence and immanence. These two concepts represent a dialectical pairing that speaks to Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo’s music, sociality, and subjectivity formation as they pursue their careers within the transnational field of folk music.

The concept of transcendence has a long history within hermeneutics and theology. I will not be debating the various philosophical approaches to transcendence and immanence that have characterized this scholarly tradition. Rather, I argue that transcendence has an ideological dimension that shapes the expectations musicians face.

---

in the contemporary folk music field. This is at tension with folk music as iconic of collective belonging.

My use of transcendence has some confluence with a recent exposition on the topic. In his book *Transcendence: On Self-Determination and Cosmopolitanism* philosopher Mitchell Aboulafia explores the intersections between transcendence, cosmopolitanism, and self-determination. Aboulafia states that transcendence “denotes a supersession of the given, the accepted, the familiar, or the weight of circumstance”. He takes a moral stance in relation to transcendence, arguing for transcendence as an ideal and asserting “transcendence and self-formation are possible in spite of the weight of circumstance.” His goal is to embrace “a cosmopolitanism that makes room for both tradition and transcendence and that is…primarily moral, psychological, and sociological.”

I do not take a stance of arguing for transcendence as an ideal. However, I do examine ways the discourses and practices of these musicians are tied to the supersession of the “the accepted, the familiar.” Do these discourses and practices reinforce various boundaries, or serve to redefine or reconfigure them? In this respect, to what extent do my research collaborators’ perspectives coincide with what Aboulafia identifies as “the challenge in our times,” which is “to pursue a cosmopolitanism that is neither exclusionary (in respecting identity) nor crudely universal”? Aboulafia asserts that “If this challenge is met, although it may seem paradoxical, cosmopolitans will respect local cultures, the transcultural, and the ‘universal’; that is, they will recognize the importance

---

144 Ibid.
of place and of transcendence.”\footnote{Ibid., 5.} While I do not adopt Aboulafia’s pragmatic stance with respect to the possibilities of transcendence, I do argue that this challenge is understood by many musicians and is an important dynamic cultural tension in the transnational folk festival field.

\textit{Dialectics, Tensions}

My use of a dialectical pair as a means of examining transformations in the transnational cultural space of folk music has precedence in scholarship on folk music and folk revival. In his 1988 work \textit{The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World} Philip Bohlman uses dynamic binaries rather than static categories as a means of conceptualizing folk music.\footnote{Bohlman, \textit{The Study of Folk Music}, xviii.} This book is worth discussing at some length, as it remains one of the few monograph-length studies of the folk music concept that takes into account contemporary processes of cultural exchange. First of all, Bohlman’s dialectical approach is a useful conceptualization in that, as my ethnography shows, such binaries refer to very tangible tensions that musicians such as my collaborators must negotiate. Part of the aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate how musicians experience such tensions. Second, Bohlman’s work is one of the few attempts in recent decades to theorize the idea of folk music on a transcultural level, and to argue that folk music is worth retaining as an analytical concept, due to the fact that it still has deep cultural resonance.

Many of the arguments in the book have by now been repeated and rehearsed to the point of being commonplace. Bohlman presents a challenge to what he considers as
static conceptions of folk music. He calls for a change in folk music research away from what he terms a “conservative” approach focused on preservation and revitalization. In contrast, he emphasizes “dynamism and change” and discusses folk music as process rather than product, exploring questions of revitalization, commodification and revival. He offers his work as “a call for the study of folk music…in the incredibly diverse contexts that [it] now freely admits.”

An aspect of his argument that is still applicable is his approach to the basic conception of folk music. Bohlman does not enter into the exhaustively debated question of how to define this term. Rather, in order to avoid the quandaries of categorization within the shifting and complex field of musical practice, he characterizes the boundaries of folk music as discursively constructed and in a constant state of tension and change. The binaries that give the discursive boundaries of folk music a “dynamic quality” include universality/relativism; communiality/individuality; realism/modernism; aesthetics/function; core/boundary; creativity/representation; and text/context. Although he offers a few examples of these dynamics at work, his purpose is largely intended to propose a theoretical frame through which to study folk music, as opposed to a collection of case studies.

As much as these binaries are productive constructs for the cultural analyst, I consider them to be not simply theoretical but actual, experienced tensions, which the practices of touring musicians both reinforce and challenge in various ways. Negotiating these tensions in turn affects their motivations and decisions as they pursue making a

147 Ibid. xix.
148 Ibid. xviii
149 Ibid.
living on touring circuits. For example, Oliver told me there was a “constant tension” in his musical life between pursuing individualistic, soloistic, idiosyncratic compositions and being able to participate as part of a musical community with a body of “traditional” shared dance tunes.\(^{150}\) This one comment intersects with a number of the binaries listed above. As well as the obvious tension between individuality/communality, his statement implies another between involvements in what Thomas Turino has termed as “presentational fields” and “participatory fields” of music making that can both be present within single genres.\(^{151}\) According to Turino, the “primary goal” of participatory music making is “to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role,”\(^{152}\) and that it is “more about the social relations being realized through the performance than about producing art that can somehow be abstracted from those social relations.”\(^{153}\) Oliver’s music is largely listening-oriented and concert-oriented music, while the traditional music that formed much of the musical “DNA” of his compositions, as he called it, is tied to practices such as social dancing and playing in sessions that would fit this definition of participatory. His performances often challenged the performance/participation binary by inviting participatory elements such as audience singing in the performances of idiosyncratic tunes. Another binary implied in Oliver’s statement is between universality and relativism. He is speaking of a tension between the idea of tunes as associated with particular cultural practices and places and the new compositions as having a more universal appeal that supposedly transcends such particularities.

\(^{150}\) Oliver Schroer, personal communication, October 2007.
\(^{152}\) Ibid., 26.
\(^{153}\) Ibid., 35.
Place, Community, and the ‘Folk Musician’

I concentrate on the tensions generated as individuals move between notions of the universal and notions of the particular represented by the interrelated concepts of community and place. As Bohlman discusses, these latter two concepts are central to the discursive construction of folk music. Bohlman writes that "the various rubrics applied to folk music have derived from two fundamental rubrics of social organization…the primacy of the group or community itself" and "the role of place, whether geographically, politically, or culturally situated." Music identified as folk therefore is commonly associated with “a sense of community” and “a sense of place” and has “a common tendency to identify groups of individuals: the folk, the people, the nation.”

Before leaving Bohlman, it is necessary to explain both his and my use of ‘folk musician.’ This term in Bohlman’s work, as with his use of folk in general, is deliberately vague. He avoids definition, leaving it up to the reader to forment his or her own interpretation. In my writing, I use folk musician because ‘folk’ is a common self-designation among my musicians. However, they rarely use it on its own; it is often used with some other qualifying adjective or paired with another descriptor. Oliver called himself an “extended folk musician,” for example, while Nuala says she plays “traditional/folk” and “new folk” music. Filippo’s website states that he plays “folk music from nowhere.” As will become increasingly evident, folk in this context is a deliberately ambiguous self-designation that allows stylistic flexibility yet associates one with the transnational folk music circuit.

154 Bohlman, The Study of Folk Music, 53.
Bohlman argues that studies can shed light on tensions and processes within folk music by looking at individual folk musicians. Significant for my study of musicians who position themselves as boundary-pushers, Bohlman “persistently call[s] attention to the importance of the individual folk musician as an agent of change and creativity.” This is to counter notions of the folk musician as “the homogenized version of the everyman.”\textsuperscript{155} According to Bohlman, “The folk musician, at least in many societies and genres, challenges the implicit order that motivates many theories of folk music by composing new songs that enter oral tradition, serving as a conduit to traditions outside the community, making choices about a repertory to be performed in certain settings, and specializing in certain genres or as an instrumentalist.”\textsuperscript{156} This combination of processes evokes what I call the ‘new folk music sensibility,’ but, as Bohlman is suggesting, this is not to say that these processes are solely ‘modern.’

Before theorizing further on the relationship of individuals to this transnational circuit, I will now develop my conceptualization of it as a transnational field.

**The Transnational Folk Festival Field**

As I briefly discussed in the first chapter, Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo are internationally touring musicians who have each formed a number of collaborative relationships across national borders. These connections came about while touring on a circuit of festivals, music camps, music conferences, and other venues in which cross-border interaction and collaboration are increasingly common. The term ‘circuit’ as I have been using it refers to

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, xix.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 70.
the types of venues to which these musicians tour, but does not imply the kind of social
and cultural dynamics that characterize it, particularly in light of its transnational
makeup. To this end, I draw on Levitt and Schuller’s discussion of transnational social
field\textsuperscript{157} in order to understand how work on this circuit fosters a dynamic cultural space
that I call the ‘transnational folk festival field.’

The transnational concept presents a range of conceptual and terminological
problems regarding spatial metaphors. In this section, I will begin with a discussion of
several approaches from anthropology and sociology that conceptualize transnationality.
Various metaphors and concepts have been criticized for being reductive, overly
simplistic, and dualistic in pitting the local against the global. The network concept has
come to prominence in social sciences as a metaphor that challenges dualistic
conceptions of the global and local. I agree with Steven Vertovec that a “network
approach, which itself cuts across a number of research fields, seems to be the best way
to structure research and analysis of transnational social formations.”\textsuperscript{158}

I will then move on to theorizations that are more specific to festivals, with an
emphasis on the idea of ‘festivalization’, a term that is often interpreted as the use of
festivals in the selling of places on the world stage, whether for tourism or other
purposes. Festivalization is important to my discussion as points to some of the tensions
that musicians must negotiate as they tour, particularly with respect to the essentialization
of place. I then broaden the discussion to examine the range of celebratory and critical

\textsuperscript{157} Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field
\textsuperscript{158} Steven Vertovec, “Transnational Social Formations: Towards Conceptual Cross-Fertilization,” (paper
presented at workshop on “Transnational Migration: Comparative Perspectives, Princeton University, June
30–July 1, 2001), 29. To clarify (in light of my analytic use of the field concept), Vertovec is referring here
to research fields (for example, sociology, anthropology, etc.) to social or cultural fields.
tropes related to festivals in academic discourse. I conclude by suggesting that a major factor that characterizes the transnational folk festival field is the degree to which it displays tensions related to these contradictory tropes.

**Spaces and Fields**

Literature on transnationalism increasingly employs the metaphorical term ‘transnational space.’ It has come to be used in two very divergent ways and thus can be confusing unless it is well defined. The ambiguity in its usage stems from the fact that it may refer to: a) transnational networks (of people, places or things) that are spread out over great distances, with nodes in several countries; or to b) specific places that are characterized by a high degree of networked connections (among people or things within that place) to many countries.

The first usage of transnational space is a metaphor for cultural and social formations that are not dependent on face-to-face contact or contiguity. The commonplace concept of cyberspace is a related idea. Transnational space in this sense refers to processes of deterritorialization, which Nestor Garcia Canclini has referred to as “the loss of the ‘natural’ relation of culture to geographical and social territories.”\(^{159}\) The second concept of transnational space may refer to temporary or perennial events such as festivals, or more permanent places, as in the case of cities and towns. Thus, Peterson explores how a world music concert series works to create an image of Los Angeles as a

---

transnational space;\textsuperscript{160} Mazdon discusses the Cannes Film Festival as a transnational space;\textsuperscript{161} and Stoller discusses the problems of undertaking ethnographic research in a transnational space such as New York City.\textsuperscript{162} The distinction then is between transnational space as a type of place that is a locus for the convergence of multiple networks with transnational ties,\textsuperscript{163} and as a notion of a collectivity that is based on shared social relations across national boundaries. Both concepts are relevant to my analysis of Oliver’s, Nuala’s, and Filippo’s work and relationships: they perform in specific transnational spaces such as festivals, and they tour in the broader transnational space of the festival circuit. However, partially to avoid this confusion, and partially for reasons I will now discuss, I refer to the cultural space of interrelated festivals I am describing as a transnational ‘field.’

Anthropologists Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller developed the concept of transnational social field, seeking to problematize the concept of ‘society’ as contiguous with ‘nation.’ They draw on Bourdieu’s theory of the field of cultural production\textsuperscript{164} to define the notion of social field as “a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged,

\textsuperscript{163} In that this latter notion of transnational space implies networks that are not defined by contiguity, it is similar to the notion of transnational sphere as identified by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson. Gupta and Ferguson write that “Something like a transnational public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community obsolete…At the same, it has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount.” Gupta and Fergus, "Beyond ‘Culture’,” 68.
\textsuperscript{164} See Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production.
organized, and transformed.”165 According to the authors, a social field is “multi-dimensional, encompassing structured interactions of differing forms, depth, and breadth that are differentiated in social theory by the terms organization, institution, and social movement.”166 Many social fields are transnational since “National boundaries are not necessarily contiguous with the boundaries of social fields. National social fields are those that stay within national boundaries while transnational social fields connect actors, through direct and indirect relations across borders.”167

Levitt and Schuller’s focus, therefore, is not on places that have a transnational character but rather on “networks of social relationships” that transcend national boundaries. The use of the Bourdieuian notion of field points to the theory’s focus on “organizations, institutions, and social movements” in which people compete for limited positions or resources. In this sense, field applies to festivals, camps and showcases, as artists compete to be hired and are booked according to various types of capital they have accrued; particularly cultural and social capital.168 As one researcher has stated about the Australian “folk festival scene”, it is “a distinct field of cultural production and an arbiter of taste, although often with vague but nonetheless staunchly held and defended notions of what constitutes a good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate ‘folk performance’ at a ‘folk festival’.”169

An important reason for distinguishing between a national field and a transnational

---

166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production.* I discuss social and cultural capital in greater depth in relation to Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo in Chapter 6.
field is that the transnational nature of relationships affects the dynamics of competition and cooperation within them. In particular, notions of what constitutes the authentic carry a great deal of importance within professional folk music, and the value of various notions of authenticity is very much connected to where one comes from. This is a subject that I will take up in depth in my discussion of sociomusical networks in Chapter 6. The use of the term field in this sense implies an emphasis on the dynamics of the social relationships and networks (of both individuals and institutions) that constitute it. When these take place over national boundaries, the idea of transnational field is relevant.

Steven Vertovec has been critical of spatial terms such as field and space in relation to transnationalism. He argues that, while useful in many respects, the concept of transnational field “if not clearly elaborated…might paint a picture that suggests a rather singular or homogenous set of relationships,” and that transnational space “could potentially suggest a reductive or simplistic model.” He suggests the need for micro-level analysis to understand the heterogeneous and complex character of these large social formations, a diversity that, in the case of festivals, can be found in both the events and the musicians that flow between them: “each point within the transnational social space (or better, sub-space or field) will present an array of conditioning factors affecting social, economic, cultural and political dynamics. It is the confluence of these that colour the nature and development of any social space and, thereby, the community that inhabits it.”¹⁷⁰ This heterogeneity of “points” in space particularly applies to transnational folk festival circuits in which individual festivals have their own ‘cultures’ and musicians come from various places. This micro-level analysis is what I aim for in my in-depth

¹⁷⁰ Vertovec, “Transnational Social Spaces,” 25.
focus on Oliver, Nuala, Filippo, and their networks. I will go into greater depth on how I pursued this focus in the following chapter on methodology.

Despite the concerns that Vertovec expresses regarding the transnational field concept, it usefully implies that spaces such as festival circuits are dynamic and constantly created through the relationships between actors: “the boundaries of a field are fluid and the field itself is created by the participants who are joined in struggle for social position.” This metaphor of fluidity is recurrent in literature on transnationalism. In the transnational folk festival field, for instance, the borders are clearly in flux, particularly when considering the kind of flexibility musicians such as my collaborators demonstrate, which leads them to inhabit the fuzzy boundaries between folk music and other categories, or between various more specific categories that fall under the umbrella of folk music. I will now turn to a discussion of cultural flows, and the oft-accompanying geographical metaphor of ‘scapes.’

**Flows and Scapes**

In Arjun Appadurai’s well-known conception of ‘scapes,’ people, capital, and goods in global circulation constitute “five dimensions of global cultural flows,” which are ethnoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. The concept of scapes seeks to elucidate processes of deterritorialization as communities become dissociated from nation states, in what Appadurai calls the “complex, overlapping,

---

171 Levitt and Schiller, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity,”
disjunctive order” that is the “new global cultural economy.” This idea has been
discussed at length in numerous works, including ethnomusicological ones, so I will not
examine its basic thesis in depth. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile considering Appadurai’s
theory in light of the particular mobility of touring musicians. While the idea of various
dimensions of flow is useful for thinking of touring musicians on the folk music circuit,
these are not the deterritorialized subjects of whom Appadurai writes. The nature of
touring involves a leaving and returning pattern of mobility, which involves engaging
regularly both with local (at home) and transnational networks. It seems inaccurate to call
such a collection of people deterritorialized.

Related to this observation, the theory of scapes has been criticized for the way in
which it pits flows in opposition to “static units.” In response to Appadurai’s theory,
Josiah Heyman and Howard Campbell accept Appadurai’s notion of the “multiplicity of
flows” and scapes. In contrast, they advocate for a “processual geography” that
challenges Appadurai’s focus on deterritorialization and that “understands how flows can
create, reproduce, and transform geographic spaces.” Thus, they see flows as
processes, and that flows “of various sorts are simultaneously reinforcing and challenging
organization by geopolitical borders in the contemporary world.” Further, they state
“Flows do not necessarily obliterate the territories that they cross, and indeed may help
constitute and reproduce them. Flows of various sorts both build up and tear down
territorial units. They contribute to the persistence and even strengthening of borders in

173 Ibid.
of Appadurai’s ‘Distuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy’,” Anthropological Theory 9.2
175 Ibid., 139.
many cases.”\textsuperscript{176} It is this dual process of transcending and reaffirming borders that interests me, as I explore how folk musicians are engaging in the process of re-interpreting or reaffirming boundaries at a cultural, rather than geopolitical level.

Heyman and Campbell also usefully identify an ambiguity with the concept of the ‘global’ within Appadurai’s work, and within globalization literature in general. They state “On the one hand, global might mean definite connections between definite sites over long (world-scale) distances,” while “at other times…the global exists as a space that is neither here nor there, has no distributed patterns, and has no internal relations producing convergence or differentiation. It is simply a space that is everywhere at once.”\textsuperscript{177} While the authors are pointing to what they see as a problematic conceptual ambiguity in Appadurai’s analysis, they could just as well be discussing what I interpret as two very real experiences of transnationality among folk musicians. They correspond to the difference between the idea of folk music from nowhere and the type of transnational linkages in which individual musicians maintain or emphasize strong identifications with distinct places.

The cultural sociologist John Urry also uses the metaphors of scapes and flows. In Urry’s conception, flows have a more independent relationship to scapes, which he describes as the established structures forming what we refer to as networks. According to Urry, flows of peoples, information, or goods – ‘fluids’ – are relayed along such scapes, as individuals and organizations seek incorporation into networks. Applying this conception, musicians would constitute a particular fluid in the transnational festival scape. According to Urry, the key aspect of fluids is that they need not follow particular

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 140
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
scapes; they can break away and re-merge with them.\textsuperscript{178}

Following on this notion of networks and fluids, Urry theorizes a distinction between what he calls GIN’s, or globally integrated networks, which are “complex, enduring, and predictable networked connections between peoples, objects and technologies stretching across multiple distances and time,”\textsuperscript{179} and global fluids, of which he writes “First, while fluids undoubtedly involve networks, such a notion does not do justice to the uneven, emergent, and unpredictable shapes that such fluids may take…fluids move according to certain novel shapes and temporalities as they break free from the linear, clock time of existing scapes – but they cannot escape, they cannot go back because of the irreversibility of time.”\textsuperscript{180} Urry describes travelling peoples as one type of global fluid, along with examples such as oceans, the Internet and social movements.

In contrast to Appadurai’s theory of scapes, which has been employed in the conceptualization of diasporic communities, Urry delineates a useful starting point for theorizing the movement of traveling peoples who cannot be clearly mapped according a clear connection to a single homeland, and whose patterns of mobility are more unpredictable. The notion of travelling musicians as a type of global fluid is useful in that there is a shifting quality to their interactions, movements, and connections. Urry

\textsuperscript{178} In a more recent work, John Urry expands on this notion of fluids by drawing on Mol and Law’s use of the metaphors of regions, networks, and fluids in their ethnographic exploration of the treatment of anemia in different countries.\textsuperscript{178} Urry employs these metaphors in describing cultural and social spaces. Regions are the bounded, clustered units familiar to what he describes as “traditional” ethnography, in which “objects are clustered together and boundaries are drawn around each particular cluster.” Networks and fluids both transcend and connect such regional boundaries. However, networks are relatively static structures, while in fluid space “places are neither delineated by boundaries, nor linked through stable relations: instead, entities may be similar and dissimilar at different locations within fluid space.” A. Mol and J. Law, “Regions, Networks, and Fluids: Anaemia and Social Topology,” \textit{Social Studies of Science} 24 (1994): 641–671 quoted in John Urry, \textit{Global Complexity}, Malden, MA (Blackwell, 2003): 43.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 57
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 60.
recognizes these types of flexible formations: “These different peoples…overlap, with one category dissolving into one another, giving rise not just to the traveling peoples, but also diverse, complex, and hard-to-categorize ‘travelling cultures’.”

Therefore, in a conceptual sense, Urry’s notion of fluids usefully highlights the complexity and flexibility of transnational social fields. However, as Anthony D’Andrea claims in the introduction to his ethnography of transnational techno and new age travellers, it and other grand conceptualizations related to globalization fall short of elucidating the production of meaning within transnational social fields. A central question that remains in ethnography of transnational fields is whether or not the social forms emerging from them provide the meaning for people that local place does.

**Transcendent Institutions? Transnational Festivals**

*Tropes of Transnational Festivals*

While theories pertaining to large-scale movements of peoples provide a general framework for studies of touring musicians, they are abstract and grand by definition. I will now turn to a discussion of the transnational folk festival field, to frame more specifically how cultural meaning is produced in the circuits in which these musicians make their living. Drawing on literature on festivals and festivalization, I argue that new folk music sensibilities are best understood in relation to a complex and contradictory transnational festival dynamic that is evident in many types of transnational festivals. In

---


this dynamic, notions of transcendence of the local are at tension with the reinforcement of essentialist conceptions of cultures and places. I contend that the movement of musicians on festival circuits, and the resultant interaction and exchange among them, dissolves some boundaries and reinforces others. In short, they often promote the idea of cultural transcendence while they trade on bounded notions of culture.

The study of festivals is often concerned with festivalization, which is both the process through which festivals transform localities and local cultural practices, and “a term used in references to the strategic employment of festivals in place marketing and tourism promotion, as in the ‘festivalization’ of many historic cities.”

A survey of recent studies of festivalization demonstrates the tension between celebratory and critical narratives pertaining to pluralistic, transnational festivals of various kinds. For example, one major celebratory trope is that such festivals are events in which human diversity is valued; pluralistic festivals can be models for a peaceful future for humankind as they provide individuals and groups with a means to imagine new horizons and to interact across historically contested boundaries. Another is that festivals serve the interests of the local people in the area in which a festival occurs, as they aid in local community and economic development.

In contrast, critical studies of festivals have demonstrated that it is impossible for festivals to transcend the agendas of governments and corporations, particularly the promotion of tourism through which places, peoples and practices are reified and

---

184 Baumann, “Festivals, Musical Actors and Mental Constructs”.
marketed, a process that often reinforces established power structures more than it challenges them. In this interpretation, while diversity among places and cultures is valued, these notions of diversity are based upon essentialized notions of people and places. In her study of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which she refers to as a “postmodern” festival, Nicola MacLeod captures the tension between these two interpretations in her conclusion that while “the touristic commodification and production of the ‘local’ contributes to the contemporary processes of alienation and feelings of ‘placelessness’,” nevertheless there is “the potential for the ‘postmodern festival’ to provide a new context for cultural sharing and transcendence in which tourists may play a role as catalysts for the innovation of new hybrid cultural forms and the revival of a sense of ‘local’ pride in host communities.”

*Ties: individual and institutional*

One aspect that inhibits the transcendent potential of festivals is that they are tied to the agendas of various bodies within the nation states and regions in which they occur, in particular the agenda of marketing place on the global stage. The transnational festival space is by no means a space that transcends state-to-state links. Rather, there are multiple levels of cross-border interaction within circuits of transnational festivals: links

---


between governments, private companies, political movements\footnote{188} and individuals. The evolution of Steven Vertovec’s definition of transnationalism – “sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states”\footnote{189} – demonstrates the need to distinguish analytically between two types of links: those between states and those between independent actors. Vertovec’s definition was arrived at ten years after his earlier reference to transnationalism as “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (my emphasis).\footnote{190} This dropping of institutions in the definition demonstrates his adoption of Alejandro Portes’ 2001 differentiation between transnational and ‘international,’ in which the latter is defined by connections between institutional (including state) actors. According to Portes, in contrast to international activities, transnational activities “take place outside the pale of State regulation and control,” and are initiated by “members of civil society.”\footnote{191}

This distinction between transnational and international raises a question with regards to festivals: are the personal, socio-musical connections that are fostered through festivals “outside the pale of State regulation or control”? This is a complex question as festivals foster an agenda of interaction that often comes from governments. In fact, festivals are regularly dependent on subsidies from various levels of government,

\footnote{188} A case in point is that of Nueva Canción performers from Central America in the 1980s and early 1990s, who raised significant funds for their causes at home in festivals in Canada. Gary Cristall, Personal Communication, February 2008.
\footnote{189} Vertovec, \textit{Transnationalism}, 2.
including federal, local and regional.\textsuperscript{192} This is due to the fact that, as festivalization literature illustrates, festivals are closely linked with tourism and are emblematic of a city or region’s image. The Vancouver Folk Festival, Lorient Festival Interceltique, and Celtic Connections, which I examine in Chapter 4, all receive funding from government sources. Further, governments often fund artists to attend festivals; for example, in 2007, which was the “Year of Scotland” at the Lorient Festival Interceltique, the Scottish Executive provided £286,000 in support for a Scottish delegation.\textsuperscript{193} Also, some touring initiatives to festivals involve government sponsored exchanges and tours.\textsuperscript{194} While Vertovec’s concept of transnationalism is appropriate to describe the links among my collaborators – in that it emphasizes exchange, affiliations and social formations across borders – considering Portes’ distinctions,\textsuperscript{195} the transnational connections made through festivals are not strictly “undertaken on their own behalf, rather than on behalf of the state or other corporate bodies.”\textsuperscript{196}

Returning to Urry’s conception of scapes and flows, thinking of transnational circuits as a festival scape on which individual musicians are part of a flow of people is useful as a concept to discern the layers of connections that occur in festivals, and whether these are “initiated and maintained by non-institutional actors.” Transnational musicians’ networks – or fluids, to adopt Urry’s term – thus can be analyzed in terms of

\textsuperscript{192} Symon, “From Blas to Bothy Culture,” 201.
\textsuperscript{194} For example, during the 1990s, my band received two grants from Heritage Canada to fund festival tours in Europe. In both cases, the rationale we gave in our successful applications was that the tours would promote Canadian culture abroad. Another example, now discontinued, was the British Council initiative that sent several English and Scottish folk musicians to India and several African countries in the 1990s.
\textsuperscript{195} This distinction between “international” and “transnational” is also made by Ulf Hannerz. Ulf Hannerz. Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places (London: Routledge, 1996), 6.
\textsuperscript{196} Portes, "Introduction," 186.
how they contribute to, challenge, or are themselves a result of the “official” links and notions of international exchange promoted by festivals. To adopt Vertovec’s terminology, the transnational folk festival field is both international and transnational, and the transnational activities of actors must be considered within the context of the international, inter-institutional network in which they take part.

Festivals, Tourism, and the Marketing of Place

Festivals have become important means for cities and rural regions to promote themselves in the contemporary global economy. As Silke Roth and Suzanne Frank suggest, “the transition from industrial to service economies, the internationalization of capital, the opening of the world market and national boundaries have contributed to an intensified competition among cities.”197 In other words, cities such as Glasgow and Vancouver, and regions such as Brittany – with major festivals at which Oliver, Nuala and Filippo have performed – compete globally for attention, prestige, and the economic capital that these accrue. Other studies have examined this phenomenon.198 Festivals, whether encountered by the tourist through targeted package vacation deals or as part of the overall cultural experience of a destination, are increasingly popular sites to visit.199

In no small part due to the connection between festivals and tourism, the number of music festivals, at least in Europe, has accelerated in recent decades.\textsuperscript{200}

An important factor that contributes to the success of some festivals on the world stage is the association of the festival theme and/or programming with the place in which the festival occurs. Transnational music festivals often trade on the idea of specific places as epitomes of some cultural phenomena that transcend national borders, from as broad a notion as “sacred music” and “folk music” to specific instrumental practices such as accordion playing.\textsuperscript{201}

Such essentialization of place based on grand – and sometimes putatively universal – concepts can lead to conflict between the interests of local non-elites and elites. In recent years, one transnational music festival that has gained prominence on the world stage is the Fez Festival of Sacred Music in Fez, Morocco. In his analysis of that festival, Taieb Belghazi demonstrates that an outcome of the Festival is the representation of Fez internationally as a city of peace and tolerance, by showcasing musics from various religions of the world on stage together. Through the diversity of musics presented, Fez is represented as a city historically accepting of all faiths, and is marketed as a sacred yet progressive ‘world’ city. Belghazi believes that this “strategy,” to use Getz’s term, serves the interests of local elites more than those of the majority of people in Fez itself; the festival fee is beyond the reach of most local people’s affordability and the target audience consists of elite consumers from distant locales with whom only the local urban upper middle class interact. Further, the festival displays little of what

\textsuperscript{201} For example, Le Festival Mondiale de l’accordéon in Montmagny, Québec. This festival takes place in a region strongly associated with accordion playing.
Belghazi sees as the positive outcomes of festivals, in that it is “Neither a gathering together of the community and a mechanism in the construction of social solidarity, nor an occasion that generates excitement as a result of prohibitions,” the latter point referring to Bhaktin’s theory of the carnivalesque. Rather, the festival maintains the status quo of the local elites, in that “those who control the social order also dominate the festival.”

Multivalent concepts such as ‘the sacred’ in festival promotion thus sell places as sites of interaction and exchange. The transnational concept of Celtic culture has led to some of the world’s most prominent transnational festivals, held in places that are seen as centres of such culture. Many of these festivals have shown sustained success at the time of writing. Prominent examples of this include the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, The Hebridean Celtic Festival, the Celtic Colours festival in Cape Breton and the Lorient Festival Interceltique in Brittany, France. Currently, there is little research on how such festivals affect local populations, and the relationship between tourism and these festivals. However, academic critiques tend to point to the positive aspects of such festivals on local populations. In her study of Cape Breton fiddle music, Katherine Anne Lavengood interprets the relationship between three forces – the tourism industry, the cultural tourists that visit Cape Breton to experience the music, and locals – in such a positive light. She claims the interaction between these forces is dialogic, dynamic, and a force in the ongoing transformation of Cape Breton identity. According to Lavengood, while industry-promoted touristic images represent a one-dimensional image

---

204 Symon, “From Blas to Bothy Culture,” 195.
205 Lavengood, “Transnational Communities.”
of Cape Breton as a static, traditional society represented by the fiddle, the actual interactions that occur between tourists and musicians at Celtic Colours reveal a Cape Breton that is more complex than the tourist posters suggest. She writes that “the commercialization of Cape Breton fiddling as a cultural commodity sets the stage for amplified vocalizations of the dynamic tension between tourist essentialism and the multiple and diverse Cape Breton identities that co-exist within the geographic context of Cape Breton Island.”206 In a similarly positive light, Peter Symon found that locals of various economic levels were engaged with, rather than alienated by, the Hebridean Celtic festival on the Isle of Skye in Northwestern Scotland.207 These observations point to the kind of distinctions between what Urry would call fluids – the movements of peoples – and the scapes of festivals. While festivals depend upon such essentialization, ethnography often reveals a more nuanced picture of people resisting or complying with such essentialization in different contexts.

Social Stratification at Festivals

Discussions of festivalization, then, depict festivals as events that, while sites of cultural transformation, also produce and maintain regimes of power and patterns of social stratification. Belghazi’s criticism is directly related to such stratification: cosmopolitan interactions are reinforced among elites rather than among those who cannot afford to be access the festival. However, festivals can also reinforce social stratification in other ways, including among musicians and between musicians and audiences. Owe Ronström

206 Ibid., 26.
207 Symon, "From Blas to Bothy Culture," 195.
refers to “changes in musical practices” related to the “increasing number and importance of music festivals.” He claims that festivals have had an effect on folk music performance, due to the concentration of time and space that occurs within them. In Ronström’s interpretation, the dynamic of competition characterizes contemporary festivals. He posits that the limited frame has resulted in music performance that is aimed at seizing audience attention; the result is the separation between audience and performers, which could be considered another stratifying aspect of festivalization.

As with other writers on festivalization, Ronström nonetheless recognizes that festivals are potential sites of transcendence. He writes that transnational music festivals have a dual nature as “instruments for both control and change.” According to Ronström, festivals are places in which the limitations of day-to-day, regular experience are transcended, which points to their potential as “important potential spaces of intercultural interaction, where one can come to understand what one does not understand.” Yet, the connection between festivals and tourism raises the issue of power within their production and promotion, and the extent to which interactions between musicians reinforce power regimes, as multiculturalism and pluralism become marketable concepts that, as Belghazi has demonstrated, can benefit elites.

As Ronström suggests (and I also observe in my life as a musician), within festivals musicians are subject to social stratification. These facts problematize notions of festivals as sites of egalitarian cultural exchange. In fact, as Fjell has argued, festivals are complex social environments in which the goals and purposes of organizers, musicians, staff,

---

210 Ibid., 63.
volunteers and audiences often conflict; this prompts him to refer to festivals as “spaces of dispute”\textsuperscript{211}. My work primarily concentrates on musicians, but considers the varied and conflicting expectations they face trying to make a living on festival circuits that are accurately described as contested cultural spaces.

**Transcendent Individuals? Cosmopolitan Folk Musicians**

In this section I turn to theorizations related to subjectivity in the transnational folk festival field. Specifically, I turn to cosmopolitanism and reflexivity. I argue that these are highly useful in an examination of touring subjects such as folk musicians. However, drawing on some recent critiques of these terms, I contend that in employing them it is necessary to consider their problematic implications of universality and autonomy of the subject.

**Mobile Cosmopolitans, Flexible Careers**

On Oliver Schroer’s website, still maintained years after his passing, his biography includes the statement “flexibility was Oliver’s hallmark.”\textsuperscript{212} This is followed by a list of performers, associated with various music industry categories and nations, with whom Oliver had worked. This tendency for variegated sociomusical engagements developed in conjunction with his experience as a traveling musician. In a paragraph that aptly describes many touring new folk musicians, Hannerz writes:

\textsuperscript{211} Fjell, “Contemporary Festival,” 130.
Cosmopolitans are usually somewhat footloose, on the move in the world. Among the several cultures with which they are engaged, at least one is presumably of the territorial kind, a culture encompassing the round of everyday life in a community. The perspective of the cosmopolitan may indeed be composed only from experiences of different cultures of this kind, as his biography includes periods of stay in different places. But he may also be involved with one culture, and possibly not usually more, of that other kind that is carried by a transnational network rather than a territory. It is really the growth and proliferation of such cultures and social networks in the present period that generates more cosmopolitans now than there have been at any other time.  

Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo demonstrate a particular “search for contrasts” in their musical practices, evident in their engagement with a variety of musical endeavours that involve them in what Hannerz distinguishes as local and transnational “cultures”. As I discuss in Chapter 4, transnational festivals such as the Vancouver Folk Festival, Lorient Festival Interceltique and Celtic Connections constitute localized sites of a distinct type of transnational festival culture – the transnational folk festival field – in which not only diversity but, increasingly, exchange and interaction are highly valued and featured in promotion and mission statements.

Along with the transnational festival circuit, these musicians are engaged with at least three other musical cultures. First, Oliver, Nuala and Filippo maintain strong ties to local “territorial” communities in other places. For instance, Nuala has toured Cape Breton so often that she has developed a strong connection with the local community of musicians there, returning on a nearly annual basis since 2002. She remarked several times to me that she has a strong sense of home there. Similarly, Filippo has an affiliation with new Finnish folk music, and works to maintain his relationships with musicians in Finland. Along with festivals, music camps also play a role in such connections with local places; Oliver developed a particularly strong relationship with the community of

---

213 Hannerz, “Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture,” 104.
Smithers in Northern British Columbia (while not a transnational connection, nonetheless a relatively distant place from his home) through his work with the fiddle camp there,\textsuperscript{214} and Nuala, Filippo and Oliver have all established long-lasting collaborative relationships through such camps. Second, they are all involved in what Hannerz calls “that other kind” of culture “that is carried by a transnational network rather than a territory”; in their case the network of musicians, fans, music industry professionals, and cultural workers with whom they interact, socially and/or through collaboration. Finally, they work in their home localities, pursuing projects that reference the idea of local cultural distinctiveness in their music and promotion. These projects tend to interpret the ‘local’ by interaction and exchange with other places, and the culturally particular as being the result of cultural interaction, rather than based upon a culturally homogenous ideal.

Therefore, as Hannerz suggests, belonging to a “transnational network rather than a territory” does not necessarily erase sentiments related to a particular self-identified notion of home. Helena Wulff has provided an example of this in her ethnographies of traveling ballet dancers\textsuperscript{215} and dance in Ireland,\textsuperscript{216} in which she argues that the mobility of Irish dancers creates conditions in which they develop a “rooted cosmopolitan” sensibility, using Kwame Anthony Appiah’s term.\textsuperscript{217} For Appiah, a “rooted cosmopolitan” or “cosmopolitan patriot” is someone who “can entertain the possibility of

\textsuperscript{214} I describe this relationship in Andy Hillhouse, “Random Acts of Violins: Oliver Schroer and Two British Columbia Fiddle Communities,” in Crossing Over: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3, ed. Ian Russell and Anna Kearney Guigné (Aberdeen: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, in association with the Department of Folklore, MMaP and the School of Music, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2010), 105–113.
\textsuperscript{216} Helena Wulff, Dancing at the Crossroads: Memory and Mobility in Ireland (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 126.
a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities…taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people.”

Critiques of Cosmopolitanism

The “rooted cosmopolitan” concept as Appiah develops it is closely linked to discussions of citizenship, and it is an attempt to address criticisms of cosmopolitans as lacking in loyalty or commitment to their home. In relation to the arts, cosmopolitanism, interpreted as antithetical to ‘roots,’ has been interpreted as producing ineffectual, inferior quality art. Expressing this viewpoint, in 1935 the British folklorist Frank Howes stated “Universal understanding will not come of that cosmopolitanism, all bloom and no roots, which is the highest common measure of all sundry national cultures. We cannot all live abroad all the time and so obtain for ourselves that exotic bloom, for what it’s worth. Taste, certainly, is to be had that way but not creative power; the history of music alone provides ample testimony for the need for roots in art.”

In the sociological and anthropological realms, scholars have critiqued the implications of the idea of the transcendent cosmopolitan individual that can rise above cultural specificities. In many critiques, this cosmopolitanism implies a problematic universalism, in other words the claim that one can transcend cultural attachments, when

---


in fact one cannot. As the sociologist Craig Calhoun has pointed out, those who claim to have transcended such boundaries – those supposedly “cosmopolitan” subjects – “often fail to recognize the social conditions of their own discourse, presenting it as freedom from social belonging rather than a special sort of belonging, a view from nowhere or everywhere rather than from particular social spaces.”

Calhoun further states that “cosmopolitan transcendence of localism and parochialism is not well understood as simple neutrality towards, or tolerance of, all particularisms. It is participation in a particular, if potentially broad, process of cultural production and social interconnection that spans boundaries.”

Thus, Calhoun is pointing out that cosmopolitans participate in particular transnational formations that are associated with sensibilities or ideologies. Other writers are critical of the idea that cosmopolitans transcend localism.

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino, for example, in his study of cosmopolitans in popular music in Zimbabwe, is critical of what he calls “the universalist idea that cosmopolitans individualistically supersede actual local or national identities and affiliations.”

In music scholarship, as in other research areas, a common critique is that universalism is strongly linked to colonialism and East/West power imbalances: this has been especially true in relation to so-called art music, in which universality in fact “reveals the tastes of those in power, masking a normative, Eurocentric attitude.”

However, for some musicians, being able to identify oneself with universalism has also been interpreted as a means of facilitating agency and countering essentialism. For

---


221 Ibid. 544.


example, in his investigation of Latin American composers in the United States, ethnomusicologist Marc Gidal argues that “claiming that aesthetics and techniques of art-music composition are “universal” has...proved a powerful strategy for composers who want to avoid being categorized, based on their national origin, gender, or ethnicity, in order to compete on an even playing field worldwide and/or to distance themselves from nationalist trends.”

Thus, it is important to avoid positing universalism as an entirely negative and homogeneous ideology. Rather, it is useful to ask what is at stake, both on the collective and individual level, in adopting a universalist stance (if my collaborators do indeed take one). Does their music and discourse serve to reinforce a normative, Eurocentric concept of “folk music” by claiming universalism? Or conversely, does it aid in any kind of strategy for transforming folk and traditional music to be more inclusive, in which boundaries truly are broken down under the broad banner of “folk music”?

Calhoun offers some nuance to the conception of cosmopolitanism by identifying different types of cosmopolitanism. On the one hand, he critiques Martha Nussbaum’s ethical cosmopolitanism, which he says is problematically universalist in its disdain for localisms and its call for cosmopolitanism as an overriding value. On the other hand he regards as more positive another type of cosmopolitanism, for which “diversity is the core value”, and which invokes the “infinitude of potential weavings together of more or less local traditions, cultural productivity that seeks to transcend particular traditions, and practices that seek to express traditions but not only to themselves.”

---

224 Ibid.
226 Ibid., 540.
cosmopolitanism does not “incorporate the illusory claims of many advocates of ethnicity (as of nationalism) to discern a pure core to ethnic culture or precise boundaries to the ethnic community.” Rather, it

…understands participation in cosmopolitan relations as participation in specific cultural traditions and cultural relations that partially transcend and partially incorporate others – including others that may be more particular and others that may be comparably general. It refuses the notion that the cosmopolitan is somehow above or outside the particularities of culture – though he or she may participate in cultural production and change, and in multiple cultural contexts and traditions.227

This type of cosmopolitanism goes hand in hand with the maintenance of multiple cultural identifications, such as my research collaborators exhibit. However, I am not suggesting that the musicians I am discussing ideally embody this balanced type of cosmopolitanism. In fact, as I discuss in Chapter 6, while they are involved in projects based on “cultural relations that partially transcend and partially incorporate” specific cultural traditions, at other times they have not abandoned their association with essentialized representations of place and culture, necessary to promote themselves on the world stage. I therefore concur with the view of sociologists Victor Roudometof and Jonathan Ong, who separately have argued that it is useful to conceive of cosmopolitanism as a continuum, with individuals varying in their degree of attachment to place, depending on the context. In both conceptions, people switch between different cosmopolitanisms for strategic reasons. Ong argues that subjects “weave in and out of different expressions of cosmopolitanism according to particular contexts”228 and that

227 Ibid., 541.
228 Jonathan Corpus Ong, “The Cosmopolitan Continuum: Locating Cosmopolitanism in Media and Cultural Studies.” Media, Culture, and Society 31.3 (2009): 452 and Victor Roudometof, “Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism, Glocalization,” Current Sociology 53:1 (2005): 123. Referring to an individual’s commitment to either cosmopolitan or localist ideals, Roudometof argues for “the theoretical and empirical possibility that individuals might not be consistent in their advocacy of such ideals, but that
“cosmopolitanism is an identity that we develop in particular contexts and express in different ways to suit particular purposes.”

His continuum lies between what he calls “closed cosmopolitanism” (a term he admits is paradoxical, but which he associates with “enclave societies”) at one end and “ecstatic cosmopolitanism” at the other. In between these two are instrumental cosmopolitanism, which is the kind of Western-associated elitism Calhoun criticizes, and banal cosmopolitanism, which is the cosmopolitanism of everyday life of non-elites. Roudometof’s continuum lies between various extremes of attachment or detachment to locality, to state or country, to specific cultures, and to degrees of economic, cultural, or institutional protectionism.

Roudometof and Ong both stress that individuals rarely embody one end of the continuum or another.

These degrees of cosmopolitanism have some corollary to the different scenes and networks with which folk musicians engage. Some collectivities, while they may even be transnational, are nonetheless more “closed”, such as what is often referred to as ‘pure drop’ Irish traditional music, which is defined according to the conscious avoidance of fusion among its practitioners. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, when musicians “turn homeward” they often, though not always, make a move towards this end of the continuum as they involve themselves with practices that are regionally focussed.

**Reflexivity and Self-making**

As Ulf Hannerz mentioned in an above-cited quote, cosmopolitanism is closely linked to

---

229 Ibid., 454.

flexible self-identifications, or what has been called ‘flexible acculturation.’ Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo are cosmopolitans who exhibit such flexibility: their chosen way of being musicians demonstrates a type of project-based career path through which they have developed individualized social networks that reach into a range of genres in a variety of locales and nations. I argue that one’s particular constellation of connections can become a personally crafted social group. Just as cosmopolitan attitudes can be placed on a continuum, so can degrees of multiple involvements. At one end are those musicians who tend to be identified with a single musical practice, and by extension a community and place connected with that practice, and at the other are those who become predominantly identified with the unique combination of styles and musicians with which they engage. These latter musicians are difficult to classify.

For those musicians who interact with a range of groups, how does such an approach affect their sense of self in relation to the collective? To engage with this question, I turn to Anthony Giddens’s work on the self in what he called late modernity. Giddens’s perspective is prominent within the social sciences conversation concerning self-making within the context of globalization. While his assertions have undergone much criticism, they are a good starting point as they are initiated by a similar phenomenon to the one I am examining: the role of choice in self-making, within the context of a contemporary world in which possibilities for affiliation are seemingly boundless.

Giddens argues that in the current period, which he terms as late modernity, individual identities are increasingly constructed through self-conscious “reflexive

---

projects of the self.” His theory is based on an assumption that institutionalized forms of solidarity (e.g., the nation state, religion, the family) are weakening, and therefore individuals have greater agency in choosing their affiliations.

For Giddens, a central aspect in this process is reflexivity, or the way in which “social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character.” While Giddens states that reflexivity is not new, he argues “only in the era of modernity is the revision of convention radicalised to apply (in principle) to all aspects of human life.” In his view, as such “revision of convention” is all-pervasive today, there is an increased role for conscious choice over unconscious habit in the development of the self: “Reflexive self-awareness provides the individual with the opportunity to construct self-identity without the shackles of tradition and culture, which previously created relatively rigid boundaries to the options for one’s self-understanding.”

Critics of Giddens’s theory have argued that it understates the cultural factors in self-making, and that it over-accentuates “the ability of reflexivity to transcend its cultural origins” by viewing the subject as overly autonomous. This criticism echoes Calhoun’s observation of the culturally embedded nature of cosmopolitanism above. Giddens’s notion of reflexivity can problematically leave universalistic Western concepts of the autonomous self unexamined, as it implies “an unquestionable faith in the separateness of self and surroundings; a teleology of self-mastery; a grasping of a

---

233 Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity, 38.
234 Ibid., 38–39.
236 Ibid., 226.
meaningful life as a rationally-induced future-oriented project; a disjunctive relationship between language and reality which progressive reason can overcome, or…a view of the individual as a bounded, cognitive isolate.” Postmodern and poststructuralist critiques, drawing on the notion of the decentred self, by contrast tend to “foreground issues of difference and power” that Giddens ignores. These critiques point to “the overemphasizing of agency with respect to self-identity and lifestyle” in Giddens’s idea of reflexivity, as well as “the overly coherent view of the reflexive self; the denial of how significant resources are for determining the different possibilities that exist with respect to self-making; and the overly optimistic view of social change.”

Yet, despite the persuasiveness of such critiques, there is a sense in which Oliver, at least on the surface, seems to embody such freedom of choice in self-making. However, it is important in light of the aforementioned critiques of cosmopolitanism and reflexivity to consider whether such choice is really due to freedom from traditional cultural constraints, or is an aspect of a consumption-oriented culture that reifies the idea of the individual agent. Does Oliver challenge such individualism, or reinforce it?

**Representing the Self/Narrating the Self**

Giddens writes that:

> A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually

---

237 Ibid.

238 Heaphy, *Late Modernity and Social Change*, 119.
integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.\(^\text{239}\)

The narrative construction of self is exemplified in a very concrete way in Oliver Schroer’s “interviews with himself” on his website.\(^\text{240}\) In these interviews, in which questions about Oliver’s life story are both asked and answered by himself, it is clear that Oliver is attempting to develop a “coherent narrative” for his audience and to “keep it going” through its establishment in print. These interviews give a chronological account of his life and are in two parts: “The Early Years” and “The Middle Years.” Of course, this narrative served a promotional purpose for him as a working musician. It was important for him to develop some kind of coherent narrative to represent and market himself; in particular, with his varied musical upbringing, it is easy to see that he felt the need to explain himself in a way that would make sense to his audience, and to give them a frame of reference for such a difficult-to-classify musician. However, I contend that there is a blurry line between the promotional imperative of such a biography and the role it plays in self-making. This became evident when I interviewed Oliver about his life story and found his self-representations to me were virtually identical in many respects to his representation in his self-interviews. The same stories and events that he cites as important on his website biography are emphasized in his life-story accounts, as they are in the 2010 documentary on him, *Silence at the Heart of Things*.\(^\text{241}\) Along with his autobiographical accounts, his musical activities served as a form of self narrative:

aspects such as song introductions, liner notes, and tune titling all offered the opportunity to present an autobiographical narrative.

While the idea of creating such narratives based on the choices available in the wider field with which they were involved certainly suits Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, Giddens’s reflexivity is at odds with critiques of unified notions of self-identity that, stemming from the psychoanalytical theory of Jacques Lacan, the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida, and the feminist criticism of Judith Butler among others, have been prominent in poststructuralist analyses. Such theories have transformed notions of the self within anthropology, leading to assertions such as Dorrine Kondo’s that “It is important to realize that conflicts, ambiguities, and multiplicities in interpretation are not simply associated with different positionings in society – though of course this is a critically important factor – but exist within a “single” self.”

Giddens does not account for the role that such tensions within the self play in shaping one’s actions; the idea of reflexivity relies on a pre-existent and stable core subject that is doing the reflecting. For Giddens, a stable sense of self is brought about through the development of biographical narratives based on conscious, reflective choices. This has been called a “psychosocial” perspective of self-narration. By contrast, I take a “storied resource” perspective that sees self narrative as a form of social practice through which “speakers orient and position themselves and others vis-à-vis shifting interpersonal conditions set within, and framed by, culturally available

narratives.”244 In this perspective “selves, identities, and biographies can be understood as a situated construction, produced for and constituted within each new occasion of talk [or other forms of social practice] but shaped by previously presented versions and also by understandings which prevail in the wider storied environment, such as expectations about the appropriate trajectory of a life.”245 I contend that a basic tension evident in the narratives surrounding contemporary folk music – in particular tensions between what Debbora Battaglia calls “rhetorics of the relational and the individual self”246 – provides much of the impetus for their choices. These tensions emerge from competing expectations related to authenticity on the circuit in which they work. These musicians’ allusions to autonomy are primarily rhetorical. While their musical promotion often stresses their individualism, it is important to recognize that “Individualism is itself, after all, socially and relationally constructed,” and that “all identities must be analyzed in the context of relational and cultural matrixes because they do not ‘exist’ outside of these complexities.”247

While I see Giddens’s overemphasis on the autonomous individual as problematic, a useful outcome of the conversation in which his theory lies is his notion of detraditionalization, a process through which “the social institutions that once gave social actions their meaning are now being reconfigured”, and a term that “implies that social, political, and personal life must, in late modernity, take the form of

244 Ibid., 17.
245 Ibid., 19.
I argue that the meanings folk and traditional music took on in middle class revivals in the twentieth century are being reconfigured through processes of globalization. Individual experiments play a prominent role in this process, particularly through the formation of often temporary and tenuous connections among musicians from varied locales, which may lead to networks of collaboration that challenge pre-existing boundaries, while not fully releasing ties to locally situated traditions.

**Festivals, Individualization, and Pluralism**

While Giddens’s assertion that individuality, in the sense of autonomy and increased agency, is worthy of some scepticism, the idea of individualization is worth considering. I argue that modern folk festivals actually promote the experimentation and individualization that Giddens recalled above. This puts the meaning of contemporary transnational festivals at tension with historic meanings of both folk music and festivals that emphasize stable, collective identities. The idea of shared meaning among participants is central to some definitions of “festivals,” such as the much-cited definition of Alessandro Falassi:

---

248 Heaphy, *Late Modernity and Social Change*, 83.

249 In a study on friendship networks among young New Zealanders living in London, the authors describe “individualization” as follows: “In using the term individualisation, Giddens and Beck-Gernsheim do not mean to suggest a process in which individuals have somehow become decoupled from social institutions. What they wish to highlight is how the central modalities of social power are now organised through the figure of the individual. The State and other institutions increasingly assume an active and self-responsible individual as the central organising unit of society. At the same time, and in a closely related fashion, many of the key building blocks through which people had previously oriented their lives—things such as marriage, work, family and education—have become explicitly matters of choice. They have become de-traditionalised. These activities are no longer bound into the bedrock of tradition, but have instead become part of the increasingly complex, fluid and reflexive project of forging a self. The result, as Beck and Beck- Gernsheim (2002: 3) write, is that “[t]he normal biography thus becomes the ‘elective biography, the ‘reflexive biography’, the ‘do-it-yourself biography’”. David Conradson and Alan Latham, “Friendship, Networks, and Transnationality in a World City: Antipodean Transmigrants in London,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31.2 (2005): 292.
…festival commonly means a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview.250

Putting aside the shifting and complicated concept of “community” for now – a concept that I return to before closing this chapter – it is important to note that festivals such as the Lorient festival, Glasgow Celtic Connections, and the Vancouver Folk Festival, at which Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo have performed, challenge Falassi’s conception due to their pluralist, multicultural and transnational nature. Nonetheless, the idea of shared meanings is prominent in current scholarly understandings of festivals. A recent definition also refers to group unity as a defining feature: festivals are “collective phenomena rooted in group life” which “express group identity through memorialization, the performance of highly valued skills and talents, or the articulation of the group’s heritage,”251 thereby also suggesting the centrality of collective identity to festivals. In such definitions, as Nicola MacLeod has recently criticized, festivals are conceived of as “celebrations of the specificities of social groups and communities.”

However, contemporary transnational festivals are events that are socially constituted by travellers such as tourists and musicians with diverse community, ethnic and linguistic affiliations.253 This has led some theorists to posit that meaning at the more pluralistic events is not shared, rather it “is something that is constructed within the

252 MacLeod, “The Placeless Festival,” 228.
individual celebrant themselves.” This understanding greatly contrasts Falassi’s classic conception, which emphasizes group belonging. Transnational festivals demonstrate how categories of festivals, and their roles in constructing national or ethnic identity, are complicated by pluralism. I recall Baumann’s quote, cited in the introductory chapter, which states that “a changing paradigm has been emerging for quite a while: the replacement of the ‘romantic-collective’ concept of regional or national musics with the individualization of experiences in the multicultural context.”

While transnational festivals celebrate multiple affiliations and heritages, these however do exist under what I call an umbrella ethos that defines the festival. Many contemporary, seemingly pluralistic festivals demonstrate community “boundary work.” In the Michigan Womyn’s festival, for instance, an underlying pluralism is subsumed by an overarching feminist ethos, which is maintained in particular ways. Sometimes, the overall ethos can be more broad than that; Western Canadian folk festivals, which I discuss in Chapter 4, draw together several intersecting social movements (the Labour movement, the Gay Rights movement) under an overall banner of left-of-centre politics, an outcome of the splintering of left wing politics following the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. When I was growing up and going to the festival on a yearly basis in the 1980s, regular performers included Meg Christian, Holly Near, and others who were regulars on the Womyn’s music circuit, alongside Labour movement singer songwriters such as Utah Phillips. Seeing performers such as these side-by-side at festivals, there was little doubt that, despite their coming from different social worlds,
Meg Christian and Utah Phillips shared an ethos, however vague it may have been. The political orientation of the Vancouver Folk Festival in particular, in recent years, has not subsided. Festivals therefore can draw varied traditions under a broad and vague ethos.

**Community: An Open Question**

So far in this work, the notion of community has been lingering unaddressed behind other terms such as collectivity or scene. I will address it further in relation to the term ‘network sociality’ in Chapter 6. For now, I ask: how do we conceive collectivity among these dispersed and mobile musicians I am discussing? Might it resemble what Gerard Delanty terms “communications communities”? This term refers to contemporary communities as “groupings that are increasingly willfully constructed: they are products of ‘practices’ rather than of ‘structures’”: “Communication communities are not shaped only by relations between insiders and outsiders, but by expansion in the community of reference and the construction of discourses of meaning. Thus, rather than being sustained by symbolic boundaries and a stable community of reference, communications communities are open horizons.”258 According to Delanty, “the symbolic level of community – that is, the dimension of shared meanings by which boundaries are constructed, is thus in tension with the pragmatic role of community as an action system.”259 At this point I leave the question open as to whether or not the collectivities I am discussing are communities, a question to be teased out as I continue through my ethnography. Labelling the type of community may be less important than restating the

---

259 Ibid. 190. This hypothesis is similar to that of Kathleen Lavengood, who argued the existence of a transnational Celtic “community of practice.” Kathleen Lavengood, “Transnational Communities”. 121
crucial observation that the transnational folk festival field is constituted through a
tension between the role it plays in producing shared meanings and in fostering a vision
of expanded, cosmopolitan horizons within a cultural space in which individual
musicians can challenge expectations and boundaries. I now turn to the methods and
techniques I took to examine these tensions.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Mapping Networks: Micro, Meso, Macro

The network concept has permeated sociological and anthropological analysis for decades and has been developed through a number of classic studies that examine the relationship between individuals and the social structures in which they interact. In the most prominent ethnomusicological study employing the network concept to date, Benjamin Brinner has succinctly and conventionally defined a network as “a set of nodes and the links (or ties) that connect them.” Brinner also outlines the factors that affect the quality of interaction in networks, stating that “the number and type of nodes, the number and type of links that connect them, and the network’s structure, i.e., the configuration of those nodes and links, enable and constrain interaction among nodes and the action of the network as a whole.” How networks enable or constrain the agents (nodes) that constitute them is one of the major foci of network research. Similarly, in his study of transnational techno music countercultures anthropologist Anthony D’Andrea notes that


261 Brinner, Playing Across a Divide, 165.
“Assuming different topologies (chain, hub, channel) a network is a system of interconnected nodes for maximizing information and energy output. Its potency is defined by the number of nodes, their interconnections and density, as well as by its relation to other environs.”

My use of a network approach grew out of my interest in Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo as subjects who are involved in a high degree of collaboration and interaction with musicians from nations, regions, and musical genres other than those with which they are primarily connected. The network concept can be applied to three different areas of my research: 1) the structure of professional and social connections that contextualize these musicians’ musical lives; 2) the research design framework, or the way I constructed my field; and 3) the analytic technique – network analysis. In terms of the latter, I do not purport to employ a social network analytic method, as would be applied in sociology. However, I do engage with some of the theoretical approaches drawn from social network analysis, in particular in Chapter 6, in which I discuss social capital.

Oliver, Nuala and Filippo have developed extensive networks of transnational connections to diverse music scenes and genres. In terms of network theory they are hubs, or individual nodes that are linked to an unusually high number of other nodes. In *Playing Across a Divide*, ethnomusicologist Benjamin Brinner argues for the usefulness of researching such hubs. He suggests that the mapping of relationships formed through musical collaboration “offers a framework for talking about individual agency in relation to larger forces and structures by moving from a middle level toward

---

both the micro and macro.”263 From a sociological perspective, Emirbayer and
Goodwin have similarly stated that “Individual and group behaviour…cannot be fully
understood independently of one another. By thus facilitating analyses at both the
individual and group level, network analysis makes it possible to bridge the ‘micro-
macro’ gap – the theoretical gulf between microsociology, which examines the
interactions of individuals, and macrosociology, which examines the interaction of
groups or institutions.”264

This allusion to multiple layers of interaction is analogous to Hannerz’s idea of
globalized culture as a multilayered “network of networks.”265 As Brinner points out, the
network approach to social and cultural analysis can be applied not only to networks of
individuals but also to the networks of institutions and events that make up a field.
Through examining networks, “We can trace the formation of institutions, the emergence
and reinforcement of a network, and individual trajectories while highlighting the key
roles played by hubs, gatekeepers, and other types of intermediaries.”266

Following Brinner’s suggestion, I think of my research field as three different
levels of connectivity: the micro, meso, and macro levels. The micro level consists of
Oliver, Nuala, Filippo, as separate individuals and as a closely linked triad; the macro
involves the complex transnational circuit of festivals, workshops, conferences,
institutions, and other venues in which they work. The meso level is a flexible, loosely
connected body of musicians, the wider network of individuals and groups, many of

263 Brinner, Playing Across a Divide, 165.
264 Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin, “Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency,”
266 Brinner, Playing Across a Divide, 165.
whom Oliver, Nuala and/or Filippo are connected to through collaboration. This also
includes musicians I met during field trips that may or may not have a personal
connection to my central collaborators (although most usually did).

While Brinner’s study, which is one of the first ethnomusicological works to
apply the network concept with depth, is a good model, his work differs from mine in at
least one significant way. His research focuses on people within a relatively small
geographic area – Israel and Palestine – that nonetheless contains great cultural gulfs. My
study, in contrast, focuses on networks that cross a greater geographic distance. Further, I
focus on connections between individuals who, in contrast to the Israeli/Palestinian
example, are generally not crossing boundaries that are as historically contentious. These
distinctions create different dynamics and research problems; for example, my work is
naturally more concerned with issues pertinent to the study of globalization, such as the
changing nature of community in relation to the collapse of time/space\(^\text{267}\) and the
changing meaning of cultural forms in transnational cultural spaces.\(^\text{268}\)

**A Folk Musician Researching Folk Musicians**

While I am characterizing Oliver Schroer as someone whose position as a hub initiated
my investigation of these networks, it is essential for me to acknowledge, in the interests
of ethnographic honesty,\(^\text{269}\) that I am also a hub and am implicit in the networks I am
researching. As a touring guitarist in the field of Celtic music who has played at folk


\(^{268}\) Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer, *Transnational Spaces*.

\(^{269}\) Luke Eric Lassiter, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography* (Chicago: The University of
festivals and taught at fiddle camps since the mid 1990s, I have much in common with my collaborators. Further, I am now performing on occasion with Nuala, an opportunity that developed as my research progressed, and which certainly offers professional and creative benefits for me. This so-called ‘insider’ subject position creates both opportunities for fruitful research and challenges that need to be addressed. Before I discuss these concerns about insider positionality, I will first give a further account of my own experience in relation to this field of study. This summary of my background in the same field as my collaborators both demonstrates the commonality of my experience with them and foregrounds some of the important themes that I will be revisiting in the coming chapters. In addition, it will serve to demonstrate that my ethnography will draw not only on research undertaken during my specified dissertation research period (2007–2013) but also on several decades of experience in the transnational folk festival field.

‘Backing’ my Collaborators

_During my first visit to Genoa, Filippo invited me to substitute for his guitarist at his regular weekly gig performing Irish music in a medieval theme restaurant. For Filippo, the restaurant provided a weekly source of income, a chance to maintain his repertoire of Irish music, and to play with musicians he liked, including the flute and uillean pipe player and maker Daniele Bicego, from Milan._

---


271 Bicego, in his late 20s, has lived in Ireland, studied pipe making at the Willy Clancy school in County Clare, and has played with the top Irish band in Italy, Birken Tree. He gave up his career as a French horn player in the Milan Opera Orchestra to make pipes, and now makes a steady income with it.
The opportunity to play with Filippo was an important moment of connection for us as musicians. Up until that point we had only played a few Brazilian choro tunes together in his practice space, which made me feel uncomfortable, as I do not know that music well. However this evening a shared body of repertoire and unspoken, commonly understood conventions in Irish music practice, such as the repetition of tunes three or four times, or the stringing together of “sets” of several tunes, allowed for an immediate level of comfort.

Our audience was sitting at a single, long table; they were a group of young people in their early 20s dressed up in medieval costumes. We did not interact very much with them, although they seemed to enjoy the music. Mostly, we were focused on each other, enjoying searching for tunes we shared in common, and taking the time to chat and joke in between sets. These aspects of the session were also very familiar to me from other sessions I had played at in Europe and North America, and I felt at home.

I am an acoustic guitarist who specializes in what is commonly called ‘backing’ in Irish traditional music circles: rhythmic guitar accompaniment to dance music on a chordal instrument. My experience as a backer was central to my research techniques. It allowed me to perform with Nuala and Filippo in a variety of contexts as part of a participant observation technique. It also affected my subject position in relation to my collaborators and encouraged me to reflect on the nature of competence within this complex, transnational field.

The status of guitar players in traditional Western European musics is contentious. In approaching any new group of musicians, whether fiddlers, accordionists, flute
players, or pipers, the guitarist is never sure of how he or she will be received, as expectations of what constitutes a competent backer vary greatly. Therefore, there is an important type of competence involved that is more social than musical. Being a successful and sought after backing guitarist requires a degree of social sensitivity, of ‘sussing out’ the tastes and attitudes of the musicians one is backing. In other words, a melody can be accompanied a number of different ways that align with particular sensibilities, and the preferences of the melody player are not always clearly articulated.

Therefore, in most performance situations, whether informal or staged, a backer must be sensitive to such expectations. Over my 20 years of experience backing Celtic music of various types I have become aware that these expectations vary and are in constant flux. Moving between performing situations, even with the same musician, requires sensitivity not only to the rhythmic feel of melody players but also to tastes that determine where stylistic boundaries are drawn, and whether pushing at these boundaries is considered acceptable.

Playing with Nuala during my research reinforced this shifting nature of performance in this field to me. Since I played with Nuala infrequently, each time I did so it required a conscious effort to reconnect not only with the rhythmic feel of her playing but also with elusive aspects of style, in particular her preferred ‘groove.’ The first rehearsals together sometimes involved somewhat strained communications, as we established expectations and parameters. Of course, such negotiations are familiar to collaborating musicians in all genres. It is revealing however to identify the particular expectations within any field or genre.

An example of such expectations around various notions of folk and traditional
music can be drawn from my last few experiences of playing with Nuala before the time of writing. I accompanied her in a memorial concert for Oliver in Toronto in May 2012, and then did not play with her again until February 2013, for a performance at the North American Folk Alliance Conference in Toronto and a small tour in Southern Ontario. For that tour, we had just a few days to rehearse. During these rehearsals, Nuala was mostly concerned with getting the right feel for the rhythm; while we had some discussion of chords and arrangement, which I had learned through practicing along with her recordings, the rhythmic feel posed the most challenge. From my perspective, getting the correct feel involved a conscious shift from the various styles of accompaniment I had been engaging with over the previous year, as I had been playing with some musicians with a more strict notion of traditional dance music feel at my neighbourhood sessions in Toronto. Nuala favoured a more contemporary approach that involved syncopation and influences from pop music and swing.272 My day-to-day music making in Toronto had ingrained in me a particular feel that was at odds with Nuala’s tastes.

This observation illustrates a shift between presentational and participatory fields, two co-existing modes in professional folk music, with its historical and rhetorical links to highly participatory practices. The tension between the two is also evident in the fact that performing in different spaces with Nuala put pressure on me to alter my accompaniment style. At the Folk Alliance Conference, for example, I was very aware that I was likely to be compared to other accompanists there, and that putting on an

272 In my accompaniment, I alternate between tunings depending on the sensibility and style of the musician I am backing. For example, in backing those with a more traditional Irish music sensibility, I often tune my guitar in DADGAD, a tuning that invites chord voices employing a lot of open strings. It is therefore amenable to a drone-like sound that emulates the pipes. Nuala favoured my using regular tuning or ‘dropped-D’ tuning, in which the lowest sounding string is tuned down a tone from E to D. She preferred what she called the “chunky” sounds I could achieve in these tunings over the “ringy” sound of DADGAD.
impressive show would serve the goal of attracting concert presenters and obtaining gigs. I made certain choices in my accompaniment: I used a little more rhythmic ‘flash,’ such as the use of syncopations and strummed triplets, and more chord substitutions. I compare this to the way I play at my regular session in Toronto, with musicians who perform locally and are more invested in specific notions of traditional music style. In those circumstances, I use fewer chord substitutions and play with fewer accented syncopations, opting for a more downbeat feel (a feel that I have learned is often preferred by those with traditional sensibilities). In my home session I feel little pressure to set myself apart in a competitive way, as I do in a performance situation.

Being an accompanist/researcher therefore means engaging with the shifting expectations, feels, and aesthetics around traditional music and new folk music in a very direct way. There is a paradox in the positionality of a backing musician that is analogous to that of the participant observer. One of the variations in expectation a backer can encounter relates to his or her role as either a supporter of the melody as it is played on other instruments, or as what is often referred to as a ‘driver’ of it. The meaning of driving can vary, but generally it refers to taking a leading role in shaping the rhythmic feel of the ensemble, whereas a more supportive approach ‘follows’ the feel of the melody player. Backing a melody player can therefore be seen as a supporting or even subordinate position, or it can be seen as an equivalent one. With the rise of commercialized Celtic and other Northern European musics in the latter decades of the twentieth century, particular guitarists who lean to one or another of these approaches have achieved high status, and their playing styles have become models for many.273

---

273 Two of the most influential backers in Irish music in recent decades, who represent very different approaches, include the Irish guitarists Daithi Sproule and John Doyle. Sproule is known for a more
The shifting role of the backing guitarist is an apt metaphor for the shifting subject positions I encountered in my fieldwork. At times I was “driving” the social situations I was in, while at other times I was trying to fit in, to simply sit back. As with backing, in fieldwork it is difficult to know when to take one or the other stance. At the risk of stating the obvious, being a professional musician (at least a professional backing guitarist) can place the emphasis on taking centre stage in a way that runs counter to the idea of the unobtrusive ethnographer. During my research I was the subject of observation as much as I was the observer.

Backing as participant observation also means becoming aware of competencies through the process of ensemble playing. As Benjamin Brinner notes, “More aspects of competence are foregrounded in ensemble than in solo performance.” Thus my role as a backing guitarist made me more aware of some of the competencies needed in this transnational field, and initiates a consideration of these competencies that I apply to my case studies of Oliver, Nuala, Filippo, and their networks.

My Story

Researching these musicians evokes emotions and memories that relate to my experience as a touring musician on the same circuit of which I write. These feelings are often conflicting. There are feelings of belonging, as I recall a sense of community with the musicians and other culture workers with whom I was connected; as I think about staying at my agent’s house for weeks while on tour in Northern England, getting to know the supportive, “downbeat” rhythmic approach than Doyle, who is known for “driving” the rhythm through syncopations.

local folk music community there; as I remember the exhilarating sense of gaining privileged access to people and places in a way that I believed took me beyond being a mere ‘tourist’; as I bring to mind the warm sense of communion with strangers when playing for a packed dance floor in Whitehorse, Shetland, or Basel. There are feelings of loss, as I think about my marriage that fell apart, in no small part due to the pressures of touring and the dynamics of being in a band together with a life partner; the bonds made, with friends on the road, that have since dissolved; the memories of missing marriages, deaths, and births at home due to my touring schedule, and of feeling the link with old school friends dissolve as I spent less and less time at home. And there are memories of a competitive desire, when I recall trying to carve a place on the Canadian Celtic music scene.

My interest in folk, roots, and traditional musics developed as a teenager in the early 1980s, in the decade that I argue was transformative for folk festivals. My musical taste was shaped by the exposure to performers at the Vancouver Folk Festival, one of the festivals I examine in Chapter 4. Further, my entrance into professional folk music coincided with the intensification of transnational interaction and exchange in folk festivals that I contend occurred in the 1990s.

Most of my early exposure to traditional Celtic music, which I would later play, came through the Vancouver Folk Festival, and the local concert series it promoted. The Scottish/Irish band Boys of the Lough, Scottish bands Silly Wizard and Capercaillie, and Québécois band La Bottine Souriante were some of the first bands that drew me to traditional music and Celtic music. Towards the end of high school I became increasingly interested in Irish music in particular, and my developing love of it led me to search out
Irish musicians in Vancouver. To my dismay, I could not find a local Irish music scene with which to get involved, thus my early experience with Irish music involved learning tunes off of commercial recordings of The Bothy Band, Planxty, and other popular bands playing Irish traditional music. I travelled to Ireland in my early 20s, taking a break from my music degree in classical voice at the University of British Columbia. This trip broadened my understanding of Irish culture and began to diminish some of the overly romantic ideas about Ireland that I had had since my teens.

Like Oliver, and many other Canadian musicians learning traditional music, I did not immerse myself predominantly in a single tradition, but dabbled in several. While in University, I jammed regularly with two friends I had met during my undergraduate studies: the fiddler Cam Wilson and the singer Amy Stephen, whom I eventually married. Not having a common knowledge of much Irish music, we played a range of styles: songs that we had written, Canadian fiddle tunes, Scottish and Irish tunes, and even pop-oriented tunes. With the addition of a bass player and drummer, this unit developed into the band Mad Pudding in the early 1990s. Our first festival booking was at the Goderich Celtic Festival in Ontario, and for the subsequent seven years the band provided a substantial part of our incomes through a regular touring schedule. Acting as the manager and North American agent, I booked tours of Canadian and American festivals, folk clubs and community concerts and dances. We performed informal and formal showcases at conferences for the North American Folk Alliance in Washington (1997), Cleveland (2000) and Vancouver (2001). These events were crucial for us and led to bookings at a number of festivals in North America and Europe, as well as connecting us with agents, record labels and folk radio programs.
A UK-based agent organized several tours though the UK and Europe. We released our second and third albums on a small Scottish folk music label, Iona records. Our fourth recording was released on the Sliced Bread label, based in Philadelphia and run by a radio deejay associated with the folk music revival since the 1960s, Gene Shay. Our connection with Sliced Bread came through frequent visits to Philadelphia, where we played at a local folk club and at the Philadelphia Folk Festival (1998, 1999).

With Mad Pudding’s eclectic background and lack of firm grounding in a single tradition or genre, we had some of the problems of categorization faced by my research collaborators. In particular, we lacked the clear identification – and, importantly, the prestige – that comes with connection with an easily identified, locally based “tradition”. Being from British Columbia did not help. As one of the provinces in Canada with the most recent European settlement, British Columbia is not known as a home of any European-based traditional music, in comparison with the provinces of Canada’s east coast. Other acts from eastern Canada could be similarly eclectic, yet could draw on a powerful local identifications for their image. Cape Breton fiddler Ashley MacIsaac’s album *Hi™, How are you Today?*, for example, which drew on punk and techno, was released on a major label (A&M) in 1995, reached platinum status in Canada, and won two Juno awards.

How we attempted to raise our reputation, and thus increase our potential for gigs, highlights some of the processes and politics of touring on the transnational folk music milieu. Touring in the UK became a way of developing our reputation at home, and in order to get work in Europe we exploited the lack of awareness there of our supposed folk music ‘inauthenticity’ within Canada. We identified ourselves as interpreters of
Anglo-Canadian folk music from Central and Western Canada, a move that, in retrospect, was partially meant to differentiate ourselves from associations as East Coast music. We arranged tunes from our fiddler’s repertoire that he had learned from his father, whose family was from the Ottawa Valley and who was a competition fiddler on the Canadian fiddle competition circuit.\textsuperscript{275} We sourced several of our songs in collections by Canadian folklorists such as Ontario lumbering songs collected by Edith Fowke and British Columbia folk songs collected by Phil Thomas.\textsuperscript{276} Rather than drawing predominantly on Irish and Scottish music for our repertoires, we attempted to play what we could claim was our music, in order to distinguish ourselves from the tide of bands that were emerging in a trend that later became known as the ‘Celtic Wave.’

This tactic only had partial success. On the one hand, positively, we carved for ourselves a place within the scene and yet could still be associated with some big name Celtic acts under the Canadian umbrella.\textsuperscript{277} Importantly, however, while our reputation was improved to some extent, it did not expand the market at home enough that we could support ourselves touring locally within Canada. We found the UK proved the most reliable market for us, perhaps due to our ‘Otherness’ there and the positive attitude towards Canadian music at the time. However, the cost of international touring did not make it a lucrative venture. For most tours we relied on grants from the provincial and

\textsuperscript{275} For a comprehensive examination of the cultural dynamics of this competition circuit, see Sherry Johnson, “Negotiating Tradition in Ontario Fiddle Contests,” PhD diss., York University, 2006.
\textsuperscript{277} When our album was released in Scotland, it was part of a promotion called “The Canadians are Coming”, which included a release by well known Cape Breton fiddler Nathalie MacMaster.
federal government (MITAP in British Columbia and FACTOR at the national level) to allow us to come home with any kind of reasonable profit to cover living expenses.

The effort we put into international touring, despite the lack of immediate financial rewards, is something I was constantly reminded of while pursuing my research. In the course of it, I found that, for cottage industry musicians such as Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, while touring is part of an overall career plan, it rarely results in the kind of financial success (even relatively speaking) that it does with star status performers. What it does provide are opportunities for increased status, new creative possibilities, and expanded social networks. In turn, these have a bearing on the possibility for maintaining a living as a touring musician.

Along with pointing to the relationship between touring and status, creativity, and networks (all of which I will examine), my experience with Mad Pudding highlights how industry categorization both limits and expands horizons. Mad Pudding was largely labelled as ‘Celtic rock’, but this was a category that none of us ever felt comfortable with. We marketed ourselves as ‘Celtic funk,’ referencing the funk grooves and slap style bass that underlay many of our instrumental sets. It was an unusual label at the time to which we could lay claim. This combination of grooves was not new however; in particular the Irish band Stockton’s Wing and the Scottish band Capercaillie, both of

---


279 During the period we were touring, we aimed for each of the band members (there were five of us) to take home 100 to 150 dollars per day while we were on tour, plus a per diem of between 40 and 60 dollars a day to cover expenses on the road. Tours were between two weeks and a month long, with gigs six to seven days out of the week. A good tour therefore could net around 2,000 dollars for each musician to take home in a two-week period, although often times it was less. Combined with other gigs or teaching at home, we usually made enough to sustain ourselves.
whom had already established strong ‘traditional’ credentials before attempting fusion, had used funk grooves to accompany traditional tunes. However, for us, the hybrid marketing label both served to differentiate us from other Celtic acts. It also further isolated us from the more prestigious, traditional music circles. My collaborators face similar binds with their categorizations, and they negotiate them in various ways.

**Insider Research: Theoretical Perspectives**

In certain respects, then, I am an insider in the milieu who has experienced many of the challenges and anxieties related to transnational touring that my collaborators face. There are benefits to such positioning, and my experience is in accordance with other insider researchers who “have contended that they have unique methodological advantages in the research process.”

My familiarity with the social and professional field of folk music was indeed helpful in that I did not have to go through a long period of gaining cultural literacy. For example, I have an awareness of the relative prestige of particular festivals, the practical aspects of touring on this circuit, and many of the controversies and tensions that keep arising in this milieu. Further, my contacts from years of touring allowed me to locate and connect with musicians quite easily and quickly, whether through already established contacts or through the social network site Facebook, which is near universal in its use among my research collaborators. Through Facebook I could introduce myself to musicians I did not know by reference to common acquaintances or to common experiences as a touring musician on the same circuit, even

---

without meeting them face to face. Playing with Nuala Kennedy, who is well respected on the scene, also garnered me a certain amount of prestige and access, as did some aspects of my own biography, such as winning a Juno Award in 2006 as a member of the Canadian band The McDades, and my current association, as a guitarist, with the champion Canadian fiddler, Pierre Schryer.

A further example of how my experience as a musician created opportunities for me was during my first field trip in June 2008 to the small Haelker festival in Denmark. An American musician living in Copenhagen, with whom I had toured in Germany in 2007, helped me out not only by housing me but also by providing me with a contact with two Danish musicians. He arranged for these musicians to sit with me en route to the festival, which allowed for an informal interview with them. Further, my connection with them got me an invitation to stay the night before the festival at the festival director’s house. That visit provided some insight into the Danish music scene and some fruitful conversations. For example, while at his house, I saw posters on the wall of English musicians I knew from the scene, with whom he had collaborated. This opened up the topic of conversation to transnational collaboration.

Along with these advantages, this insider positioning raises issues, particularly concerning bias. In debates over insider/outsider positioning, criticisms of the former have focused on the potential danger that “For an insider bias may be overly positive or negligent if the knowledge, culture, and experience she/he shares with participants manifests as a rose-colored observational lens or blindness to the ordinary.”

As I progressed through my research, I was increasingly aware that I was writing about

---

281 Chavez, “Conceptualizing from the Inside,” 475.
musicians with whom I have much in common in terms of experiences and musical taste, and about issues that have a great deal of meaning for me. Further, the majority of musicians, like myself, were Euro-American, identified as Caucasian, and middle class, and had an experience of having first experienced folk and traditional musics through recordings, concerts, and festivals.

A Particularly Heterogeneous Field

In recent decades, the notion of a strict insider/outside dichotomy, both with respect to traditional ethnographic research and ‘native ethnography,’ has been problematized in anthropology. Critiques have pointed to factors that complicate strict divisions between insider and outsider, such as the often under-recognized heterogeneity of research populations and the de-familiarization created through ethnographic methods by the professional status of the researcher.282

In response to the inadequacy of the insider/outside dichotomy, anthropologists have advocated alternatives to the insider/outside paradigm. Kirin Narayan suggests that the relationship between researcher and research population be viewed in terms of “shifting identifications and a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations,”283 a description which seems apt in relation to musicians touring on the folk festival circuits. My experience attests to the shifting subject position within this heterogeneous field, particularly in light of its transnational, transcultural character.

---

283 Ibid.
Such shifting subject positions occur even within so-called conventional ethnography that takes place in supposedly bounded cultures. Narayan notes that in the process of participant observation, researchers become increasingly implicated in the populations they research, thus even if one begins as an ‘outsider’ the distinction becomes increasingly blurry as research progresses.\(^{284}\) In ethnomusicology, James Kippen has noted this phenomenon recently.\(^ {285}\) As is evident in the recent collection of papers *Constructing the Field*, arguments such as Narayan’s and Kippen’s have provided theoretical rationale for ethnographies in which researchers study situations in which they are not only culturally but even professionally implicated.\(^ {286}\)

In a more heterogeneous research population, the researcher’s subject position shifts not only over time but also, to a greater degree than in more homogeneous populations, between encounters in the field. This type of experience of brief and shifting meetings is typical of musicians on this circuit; in this way my subject position as a researcher echoes that of participants. Performers on the international folk scene encounter the Other on a regular basis, and the depth of such encounters vary; therefore my own relationship with my collaborators is typical of the temporary and shifting cross-cultural interactions of musicians on the scene.

Framed as a type of participation technique this shifting subject position can be seen as in keeping with the idea of participant observation. However, it also creates a

---

\(^{284}\) Ibid., 682.


complex situation that demands a high level of self-monitoring, or a constant reflexivity. 

*Distancing*

In researching an environment that feels very much familiar to me, I face some of the methodological questions faced by those conducting ethnography ‘at home’ in their locality. As anthropologist Rob Van Ginkel has aptly put it, “whereas for anthropologists doing fieldwork abroad the problem is how to get into a culture, those conducting fieldwork at home may face the problem of how to get out in order to enable them to have an ethnographic gaze at familiar social environments.” This process of “getting out” has been termed as “distancing.” Part of the shifting subject position I discuss above involves a type of stepping back from whatever situation I find myself in to take a more observational stance.

Sometimes an immediate distance was created through my shift from performer to researcher. An example of this comes from my first field trip to Scotland in 2009. Part of the goal of this trip was to follow Nuala’s project Voyage de Nuit on tour, and hopefully to sit in on some rehearsals. When I initially contacted Nuala to ask if I could attend the rehearsals, she told me that she had no problem with it, and had vouched for me with the group. However, the fact that I was a researcher made the group uncomfortable with the

---

287 As Dorrine Kondo writes, “To merely observe the Other as exotic specimen, or equally unacceptable, to see the Other as a clone of the Self, is the worst sort of projection. Instead we must constantly aim for a critical awareness of our assumptions and those of our informants, to trace the parameters, the limits and the possibilities of our located understandings.” Dorinne Kondo, “Dissolution and Reconstitution of Self: Implications for Anthropological Epistemology,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 1.1 (1986): 86.


idea, and when I arrived in Scotland expecting to attend a rehearsal they decided that they
did not want me there. I later found out that the rehearsal I was to attend was a
particularly tense one, and that it raised some issues that were relevant to my research.
Even though I am a musician with much of the same touring experience as them, the
transformation to ethnographer created distance that I later had to work through.
Eventually, the trust and comfort level between the musicians and me changed. After
spending a week following them on tour, one of them told me “you should have been at
that rehearsal, we were really getting into some tense issues!”

While in some respects this distancing occurred through the mere act of assuming
the position of researcher, in other respects, my insider status was reinforced through the
research process. By playing with Nuala, who has a good reputation as a player in some
circles, my own reputation is enhanced, for example. Further, as a researching perform-
my subject position regularly switched between being an observer and being observed,
something that became clear during the same trip to Edinburgh I described above.
Following the rehearsals that had caused tension, Nuala asked the guitarist and
percussionist to observe a session in Edinburgh in which she and I were taking part, to
get a sense of accompaniment in Irish and Scottish music. This was because the tensions
at the rehearsal I missed were due to the fact that the band members’ stylistic differences
were not easy to negotiate; one issue was that in the more Celtic-oriented tunes in the set
she was pushing for an Irish rhythmic feel from the French guitarist and Bolivian
percussionist, which led to frustrations. This tension led to me being involved in an
unexpected way; I was for them a Celtic music insider. On the other hand, I am clearly
much more of an outsider with respect to the individual musical traditions of most
This is another example that points to how, in a music scene that is defined by collaboration across several boundaries, subject positions are regularly shifting, relative, and ambiguous.

While this example demonstrates that my insider status was always present, another example shows that I could make choices to aid the process of distancing to some degree. The most important of these choices was to visit areas and festivals where I have not been, and most importantly, where few or no musicians know me. In Denmark in 2009 I was very aware of my presence as an ethnographer as opposed to a gigging musician, with its privileged level of access. I was a lone paying customer, in contrast to my field trip to Italy and France in which, as a touring musician, I was allowed access to performers and backstage areas. Aside from my first night at the festival director’s house I slept on couches in the concert hall, as I couldn’t afford a local bed and breakfast. This gave me a different perspective, one of separation from the performers. I had my guitar and jammed with people, but rather than playing with the professional musicians, few of whom were at the late night party (Filippo went back to his hotel), I played with a group of young musicians in their teens and twenties, who were connected with a traditional music program at the high school. I also participated in the open stage part of the festival.

**Multi-Dimensional Fieldwork**

The research described above was part of a multi-dimensional method that challenges the Malinowskian ideal of fieldwork in a few ways. My research field as I conceive it consists of four dimensions: multi-sited fieldwork, fieldwork ‘at home’, online fieldwork, and my current and past experiences as a touring musician.
Multi-sited approaches to ethnography are now well established in anthropology and ethnomusicology, yet they still invite critiques that I will address separately later in the chapter. The strategy for much of this dimension of fieldwork was to spend brief yet deeply interactive periods with Nuala and Filippo. In the course of following them, I met a number of other musicians with whom I conducted interviews or solicited to answer questions, mostly through the Internet.

Ethnography ‘at home’ is now commonplace, especially in urban anthropology. This dimension of my research consisted of interviewing Oliver several times over a period of roughly seven months in the final year of his life, and immersing myself in his local network through participation and attendance at shows. Living in Toronto, I had regular and easy access to several of his musical collaborators, and also to events such as the annual Oliver Schroer memorial concerts at Hugh’s Room in Toronto. I attended this event in 2009 and 2010 as an audience member, and in 2011 and 2012 as a participant. I interacted with several of Oliver’s musical acquaintances as part of my musical life in Toronto and in British Columbia, and have performed with them on occasion: these musicians include his musical collaborators David Woodhead and Anne Lindsay, and his students Chelsea Sleep and Emilyn Stam.

Online research consisted of 1) regular correspondence with collaborators; 2) unstructured interviews (conducted on Google Chat or Facebook); 3) a questionnaire posted on SurveyMonkey.com; 4) tracking Oliver’s tunes in circulation; and 5) website research into discourse and representation of musicians and festivals. I kept a detailed log of my Internet correspondences with collaborators.
My research method therefore does not comply with the concept of fieldwork defined as travelling to a single locale, in which the ethnographer is immersed for several months or years. Due to the multi-sited nature of my research and the corresponding expense, my actual field trips consisted of relatively short and intense periods in which I travelled to meet with Nuala and Filippo in their towns of residence, and on the road at various festivals. My *in situ* fieldwork consisted of the following:

September 2007-March 2008: Visits and interviews with Oliver at St. Margaret’s Hospital, Toronto

September 2007-June 2012: Participation in various concerts with Oliver’s musical collaborators in Toronto, including three annual memorial concerts

May 30-June 15 2009: Visits to Edinburgh and other areas of Scotland to follow Voyage de Nuit (Nuala) and to Denmark to meet Filippo Gambetta at the Aalborg Festival

Mar 21-30 2010: Genoa, Italy with Filippo

Aug 6-18 2010: Tour with Nuala Kennedy band in Canada (Goderich Celtic Festival, Ontario), France (Lorient Festival Interceltique, France) and Italy (3 concerts in Northern Italy)

April 1-5 2011: Holland for concerts with Nuala and Filippo

April 16-20 2011: Genoa

February 2013: Attended North American Folk Alliance and undertook Southern Ontario tour with Nuala

While the multi-sited and so-called ‘virtual’ and ‘backyard’ dimensions of my research have numerous precedents in contemporary ethnography, the level of experience I have with this field, described in my reflexive accounts above, problematize dominant notions of fieldwork in a way that is perhaps less common. To what extent can my previous and current experiences as a touring musician be considered as fieldwork?
Certainly, while I can distance myself in some situations, I cannot distance myself from the extent to which working on this field has been a profound aspect of my life, and informs my current interpretations. As Timothy Rice has pointed out, “All individuals operating within tradition continually reappropriate their cultural practices, give them new meanings, and in that process create a continually evolving sense of self, of identity, of community, and of ‘being in the world’”\textsuperscript{290}

The notion of re-appropriating and giving new meaning to cultural practices is pertinent not only to my collaborators but also to my current position as a researcher. For me, the alternation between academic study and performance is a process through which I seek to gain knowledge and understanding by a series of “hermeneutical arcs”.\textsuperscript{291} The symbol of the arc represents the progression from pre-understanding to appropriation of new knowledge or experience, culminating in a new level of understanding. I came to my research with years of experience in the festival field; this brought me to an understanding of the milieu that, along with a range of assumptions, prejudices and theories, informs my work. With this cycle of pre-understanding and appropriation of knowledge in mind, I contend that my previous experiences form an essential part of my interpretation and are worth considering as fieldwork. It is important to keep in mind that the strength of this dimension is not in depictions of ethnographic detail, but in reflection on more general experiences from my current perspective.

Finally, throughout the research period, as part of my professional life, I continued touring on folk music circuits, not only as a member of Nuala’s band as


\textsuperscript{291} Ibid., 56.
mentioned, but also with Pierre Schryer. Further I taught at music camps that are also important sites of interaction and exchange in folk music. The events I have participated in since commencing research are as follows:

Festival Mémoires et Racines (Québec)
Goderich Celtic Festival (Ontario)
Home County Festival (Ontario)
Hillside Festival (Ontario)
Canterbury Folk Festival (Ontario)
Red Rocks Folk Festival (Ontario)
North Atlantic Fiddle Convention (Derry, Ireland)
Saltspring Fiddle Camp (British Columbia)
Sunshine Coast Summer School of Celtic Music (British Columbia)

**Constructing the Field: Multiple Sites and Strategies**

In mapping the network of these musicians, I am not constructing my field according to a predetermined genre or geographic locale. I am starting with a few interrelated musicians and then expanding to broader networks. With an eye to examining the varied notions of self and collectivity that musicians negotiate are engaged with as they make their livings on these circuits, I followed the various projects of my three central collaborators. My rationale for this project-based approach comes from their touring practice and is theoretically supported by David Chaney’s work on lifestyles and George Marcus’s

---

292 Chaney, *Lifestyles.*
The concept of multi-sited ethnography.\textsuperscript{293} The latter concept has recently been the subject of critique, some of aspects of which, following a summary of my methodological approach, I will address in relation to my research.

\textit{Sites and Strategies}

As I have written in the introductory chapter, the affinities shared among my collaborators to some extent resemble what David Chaney identifies as sensibilities, a term that indicates the tastes and consumption practices associated with what he calls particular ‘lifestyles.’ As the reader may recall, I pointed out that I am examining these musicians as both producers and consumers, in that the line between them is often unclear.

The project-based aspects of my collaborators’ careers calls for an approach that identifies relevant “sites” and “strategies” in their lives: “Sites are the sorts of places and spaces that lifeworlds inhabit, and strategies are the sorts of projects that are pursued.” While Chaney is referring to projects in the daily lives of people such as “maximizing child growth, or spiritual development, or acquisition of certain types of expensive consumer goods,”\textsuperscript{294} the idea of conceiving life in terms of a series of projects is one that is common among musicians. The project concept is polyvalent, in that it often references personal growth, artistic growth, and career growth. Thus, Nuala’s project with the world music group Voyage de Nuit grew out of her personal philosophical interest in transcultural interaction, a professional interest in developing her networks, and a musical

\textsuperscript{293} Marcus, “Ethnography in/of the World System.”
\textsuperscript{294} Chaney, “From Ways of Life to Lifestyles,” 86.
interest in expanding her creative palate. It is easy to see how Oliver’s project of recording music in spaces along the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage trail in Spain, the recordings of which became his popular album *Camino*, can be seen as spanning these different modes as well.

Further, Chaney makes a point about the symbolic power of such sites that is relevant to my examination of musical projects among these professional musicians: “Sites are meaningful […] because they are physical metaphors for the spaces that actors can appropriate or control”, while “strategies must be acknowledged because lifestyles are best understood as characteristic modes of social engagement, or narratives of identity, in which the actors concerned can embed the metaphors at hand.” Echoing Giddens’s idea of “reflexive narratives of the self”, Chaney asserts: “Sites and strategies work together then because lifestyles are creative projects – they are forms of enactment in which actors make judgments in delineating an environment.”

Following Chaney’s formulation, it is useful to consider the symbolic import of the sites, or the places and spaces my collaborators interact with – whether it is Facebook, festivals, fiddle camps, or in Oliver’s case, the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage trail – and how particular projects utilize these symbols, both as resources in self-making and, as they are professional musicians, in career-making.

**Problems and Limitations with Fieldwork**

At the 2011 International Council for Traditional Music Conference in St. John’s, Newfoundland, a colleague approached me after a presentation I gave on my fieldwork.

___

295 Ibid.
researching touring musicians, with the comment that “your work seems very interesting, but it seems like you are trying to hit a moving target.” This insightful comment speaks to the challenges I faced during my research. Undertaking touring as a type of participation raises a number of difficulties, both practical and theoretical. These problems revolved around the very fluidity of the social life I am trying to analyze.

I have touched above on the fact that touring involves superficial encounters with a large number of people. During my research it was very difficult to establish relationships with musicians to a point at which I felt comfortable interviewing them in person. I often met musicians at festivals that were three days long, in which they were running between performances, or relaxing in the bar afterwards. Following the festival, we would go our separate ways. Although I have addressed some of the ways in which I dealt with this limitation, there is no getting around the fact that, if there is the potential for thick description in this analysis, it was more likely to lie with the micro level of Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo than the meso level of musicians’ networks.

Another problem I encountered while touring with Nuala was that as a professional performer I felt that my job as a musician at times got in the way of my ability to observe. Her music was challenging to memorize, and I was expected to perform at a professional level and thus spent much of my spare time going over my parts or listening to her CDs on my laptop. This part of my fieldwork is thus best seen as an opportunity for reflexive observation: in other words to observe myself as a participant in the touring process.

A further problem was with language. The importance of learning the language of collaborators, interlocutors, or informants has long been a hallmark of ethnographic
research, including in ethnomusicology. One of the benefits of ‘traditional’ extended research within a locale with one language is that one has time to learn it through day-to-day contact. I had hoped to learn Italian at a deep conversational level for my fieldwork, however, even though I had taken an introductory Italian course in my undergraduate years and studied with a private Italian teacher on a weekly basis for six months before traveling to Italy, I did not have the time in that locale to master the language. In addition, at the meso level of contacts, I was communicating with musicians whose first language was Finnish, Flemish, Spanish, and other languages I do not speak (I do speak French).

While this is a weakness, when considering myself as a participant on the touring circuit, it can also be seen as an aspect of this participation. I noticed that in the festival scene, English and French, which I both speak, are the two most commonly accessed languages. Filippo communicated in English with Galician and Swedish musicians, I often heard Nuala speaking French, and I communicated with some local Italian musicians I met in French.

**Multi-sited Research**

My research plan falls into the methodological research paradigm of ‘multi-sited’ ethnography. George Marcus’s widely cited 1995 article “Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography” provided a conceptual framework for this methodological approach and much subsequent translocal and transnational research that utilizes it.296 As Anthony Falzon has recently pointed out, the multi-sited approach was brought on by theoretical insights into the socially constructed nature of

---

296 Marcus, “Ethnography in/of the World System.”
space, the perceived inadequacy of notions of bounded locality, and various pragmatic reasons related to the careers of researchers. Such conceptual and practical issues were closely aligned with academic discourses on globalization; thus many multi-sited projects are transnational and connected with topics such as diaspora, migration, and transnational cultural circulation. In response to such developments, Marcus called for research methods involving following people, objects, conflicts, stories, and lives in circulation within the so-called “world system.”

In terms of research design, Marcus writes “Multi-site research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography.” Thus, according to Marcus, the research field is not pre-determined but unfolds in the process of “putting questions to an emergent object of study.”

Along with having been useful in the study of diasporic social formations, multi-sited ethnography has been employed in ethnomusicology to study the diffusion of instruments, the global circulation of genres, and the emergence of festival circuits, among other topics. My study shares aspects with some of these latter approaches in that its “logic of association” is not based primarily on a diasporic

---

298 Marcus, “Ethnography in/of the World System.”
299 Ibid., 105.
300 Ibid., 102.
301 Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje, Fiddling in West Africa: Touching the Spirit in Fulbe, Hausa, and Dagbamba Cultures (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).
formation or affiliation with a single musical genre, but is developed according to networks that cross boundaries of nation, language, and musical genre.

Anthropologist Marc Anthony Falzon has recently dealt with some of the criticisms that have risen in what he calls the first generation of multi-sited research, and presents new case studies with the aim of outlining “a programme for ‘second generation’ multi-sited ethnography as a legitimate proposition for contemporary research.” Falzon identifies three “charges” that are often raised regarding multi-sited ethnography: the ‘lack-of-depth’ charge, the ‘later-day holism’ charge and the ‘abdication of ethnographic responsibility’ charge. The common thread in these criticisms is that in its pursuit of describing transnational cultural formations, much research of this type resorts to broad abstractions and misses the nuance of daily life that so-called conventional ethnography describes. Is “thick description” possible in such research methods? As in pursuing this research plan I leave myself open to these charges, it is worth taking some time to deal with two of them that directly relate to my work: the “lack of depth” charge and the “later-day holism” charge.

Problems of Depth

The first charge that Falzon claims is regularly laid against the multi-sited research paradigm, the “lack of depth” charge, is based on the fact that extended stays in one location are near impossible when one needs to visit several places within a research period. Falzon states that, in so-called conventional ethnography, spending a long time in

---

one area is the means through which understanding comes; in many ethnographic
narratives, there is a point at which the researcher has a key “ethnographic moment” at
which insight is achieved, usually after a period of several months or even years in one
place.  

One response to this criticism that Falzon claims is often cited by multi-sited
researchers is that “multiplicity makes up for the inadequacy of multi-sitedness”; in other
words, several short visits to a place are equal to one long one. Falzon points out that the
flaw of this rationale is “two or more shallownesses do not make up a depth”. In
response to this I argue that many studies, such as mine, do not purport to examine a
place – or several disconnected places – in depth. Rather they seek to examine processes
of interaction in a transnational and transcultural space of cultural production, which
includes interconnected locations ‘at home’ and ‘out there.’ As I have identified above, I
am interested in how places and spaces are appropriated as symbols within this
transnational space.

According to Falzon, a second response to the lack of depth charge is particularly
compelling; this is the argument that travel between sites can be a form of participant
observation. This position is also related to the notion of space as constituted through
movements and social interaction. Falzon writes that, rather than being in contrast to
what is often thought of as the Malinowskian paradigm of the bounded field site, the
multi-sited approach actually

... brings us back to Malinowski, in the sense that the need for participant
observation – as the main portal to the native’s point of view – perhaps constitutes
the strongest case for multi-sited ethnography.... If our object is mobile and/or

[307] Ibid., 8
spatially dispersed, being likewise surely becomes a form of participant observation – as Clifford (1992) puts it, it is ‘fieldwork as travel practice’. And, if conventional depth is hard to come by in unsettled circumstances, that is probably as things should be, in the sense that it represents the way our people themselves experience the world.\(^{308}\)

These rationales are indeed pertinent to my work. More particular to the way I have designed my research, however, is the fact that I seek to obtain depth by concentrating on three individuals, their biographies, and their connections, with the broader research population of musicians as an outgrowth of this focus. The fact that I chose hubs and tried to limit my study to festivals and individuals with whom at least one of them is (and often all of them are) connected is crucial to this method. Even in brief periods of time with these well-connected musicians at festivals I observed their shifting encounters and relationships, relationships I then followed up with, if possible, interviews, email correspondences and an online questionnaire I created.

*Problems of Holism*

Another charge that Falzon identifies is what he terms the “Latter day Holism” charge. He states that while multi-sited ethnography developed in part due to perceived holism in locally focused ethnography, critics charge that multi-site research simply totalizes on a grander scale, by attempting to describe transnational collectivities. In a critique on multi-sited research, Matea Candea writes: “far from challenging the totality of the object of study, with multi-sitedness we have eschewed the contrived totality of a geographically

\(^{308}\) Ibid. 9. Cites Clifford, “Traveling Cultures”.
bounded space for the ineffable totality of a protean, multi-sited ‘cultural formation.’”

I am attempting to describe the relationship between the shared sensibilities of my collaborators and the transnational festival circuit in which they tour. In so doing I could be accused of just creating an overly totalistic picture of the transnational folk festival field. I hope, however, that my analysis highlights that these circuits are dynamic and flexible. I do not present Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo as typical subjects shaped by a unified transnational folk music scene. Rather, by switching in my ethnography between the micro, meso and macro levels I try to identify trends, tensions, and the shifting expectations they encounter working within what is a complex and fluid field. For example, I have found that with respect to individual attitudes towards collaboration with non-Western musics, Filippo, Nuala and Oliver have contrasting points of view that are a result of their local circumstances, and festivals also vary greatly in what they consider to be desirable collaborations. Finally, and importantly, the notion of touring circuits such as folk and Celtic festival circuits is emic; it is how many of the musicians themselves think of the field.

In the volume *Constructing the Field*, Vered Amit points to ethnography’s contextualization of individuals within the transnational fields in which they operate:

Anthropology’s strength is the ethnographic spotlight it focuses on particular lives, broadly contextualized. In this focus, anthropology, at best, collapses the distinction between micro and macro and challenges reifications of concepts such as diaspora, state, globalization and so on which, in their geographic, political and social reach, can easily appear distant and abstract.\footnote{Matea Candea, “Arbitrary Locations: In Defence of the Bounded Field Site,” in Falzon, ed. *Multi-sited Ethnography*, 38.}

\footnote{Vered Amit, *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World* (London: Routledge, 2000, 15--16.)}
The focus on an intimate triad of musicians allows for depth and a nuanced understanding of how locally situated yet cosmopolitan individuals relate to this transnational field that is a big part of their lives. I now continue with the broad contextualization of Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo through a closer look at the transnational folk festival field.
In the present chapter, I focus on festivals as the most influential institutions in professional folk music. My main aim is to discuss how the themes evident in their promotional texts construe notions of transculturality, a term that I explore below. I wish to suggest a link between transculturality within transnational folk festivals and the types of cosmopolitan subjectivities, sociality, and new folk music sensibilities I am discussing, a link that I explore further in the final three chapters.

While I am positing festivals as quasi-institutions, I would not go so far as to argue that there is now, to quote Veit Erlmann’s characterization of the world music industry, a “ramified, all-encompassing” transnational folk music industry. I do suggest that there is an interconnected field of large festivals that share some common characteristics. Thus, it is worth asking whether there is a dominant ethos in the transnational folk festival field. To this end, I examine recurring themes in the way these festivals are represented by their organizers and in the press. The interconnection of these festivals has been intensified by, among other things, the increased mobility of touring musicians and the speed of information exchange in recent decades. This chapter is therefore a step towards understanding the relationship between this large, complex,
shifting and loosely configured transnational network of festivals and individuals who must negotiate it in their pursuit of a musical career.

**Historical Emergence of the Transnational Festival Field**

*International Folklore/Folklife Festivals*

Before the late 1950s, the ‘international folk festival’ was associated strongly with the Herderian concept of the Folk and consisted of the presentation of music and dance by costumed performers. Owe Ronström points to the 1947 Prague Youth Festival as an important moment that indicates a post-WWII shift in this type of public presentation of folk music from being primarily intended for ‘insiders’ within a nation towards display on a world stage. The Prague Youth Festival represents a type of folk music presentation that was specific to socialist East European nations, one in which the performance of folk music involved “larger events, stages, audiences and ensembles, and more elaborate performances of ‘national folklore’.”

The extent to which there was an historical link between this Eastern European festival model and later Western European transnational festivals is a compelling question that is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and that Ronström merely suggests rather than demonstrates. A major festival that made the transition from Eastern bloc, state-run folk dance festival to contemporary transnational folk festival is the Tanz und

---

312 Ronström, “Concerts and Festivals,” 53.
FolkFest Rudolstadt, founded in 1955 in the former GDR, which considerably changed its format to an “open concept” following the fall of the Berlin wall, in 1991.  

An earlier event that presents a demonstrable connection to the 20th century EuroAmerican folk music revivals that spawned the late 20th century folk festival type is the successful International Folk Dance Festival and Conference in 1935, organized by folklorist Maud Karpeles. The aim of the organizers was “1) to promote understanding and friendship among nations through the common interest of folk dance; 2) To demonstrate the value of folk dance in the social life of today; 3) To further the comparative study of folk dances.” A link to later festivals can be established by the fact that English Folk Song and Dance Society was a direct precedent of the popular folk music revival in Great Britain of the 1950s and 1960s. Influential figures in what are commonly called the ‘second wave’ North American and British folk revivals, such as Alan Lomax and A.L. Lloyd, were closely linked to research projects and social networks that had been established through the EFDSS.


315 Ibid., 3.

316 David Gregory’s discussion of Lomax’s influence on the English folk music scene gives a sense of these social networks and his link to the EFDSS and Maud Karpeles. Of Lomax’s first visit to London in 1950, Gregory writes that “On arriving in London, Lomax called at Cecil Sharp House. The Director of the English Folk Dance & Song Society, Douglas Kennedy, was a friend of one of Lomax’s buddies, folk-singer Burl Ives, and his son Peter had just spent the best part of a year working for the BBC West Region in Bristol and making his own field recordings of West Country folk-singers, using one of the first tape-recorders manufactured commercially in the UK. Not surprisingly, Peter and Alan quickly became friends and agreed to collaborate on the English volume of the Columbia series [a series of recordings of traditional music from various countries that Lomax was in the process of researching and producing]. Peter also took on responsibility for Yugoslavia, making the required recordings there in 1951 at a five-day national festival of folk music planned to coincide with a conference of the International Folk Music Council organized by his aunt, Maud Karpeles.” E. David Gregory, “Lomax in London: Alan Lomax, The BBC and the Folk Song Revival in England, 1950-1958,” *Folk Music Journal* 8.2 (2002): 138.
In North America, the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife Festival became a model of multicultural display that has had a strong musical element since its conception. The festival, founded in 1967 and still in existence, takes place on the Mall in Washington D.C. Performers, artisans, craftspeople and other participants in ‘folklife’ are invited based on annual themes based on geographic region, ethnicity, cultural practices, and other categories. I performed there in 2006 with The McDades as part of the delegation representing the province of Alberta, one of the three major categories that year along with ‘Latina Chicago’ and ‘Native Baskets.’ Benjamin Filene goes into detail regarding the politics that surrounded the establishment of this festival, in particular tensions between the “professional academic” mode of folklore and attitudes that valued public performance, a populist appreciation of folk culture that folklorist Richard Dorson dubbed as “fakelore.”

While it had varied manifestations in North America, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe, the international folk festival model became institutionalized at a transnational level in the 1970s with the founding of the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and the Folk Arts (CIOFF). The creation of this

---

318 The CIOFF website states that its goals are to work for “the safeguarding, promotion and diffusion of traditional culture” and that “At present, CIOFF worldwide membership covers 91 countries with 67 National Sections (full members), 5 Associate Members, 19 Corresponding Members.” [http://www.cioff.org/about-intro.cfm] accessed March 26, 2001. In its “Guidelines for Groups” document, available on its website, it very clearly states three categories of folkloric ensemble. The first is the “authentic group” which is “A group that, playing authentic instruments or instruments faithfully reconstructed or in harmony with the folklore of the country, dance traditional regional dances, without any arrangement or choreography and wear authentic costumes or costumes that have been recreated as faithfully as possible. The group’s intention is to perform folklore in the way it was transmitted.” The second is the “elaborated group” which is “A group that adapted certain elements of authentic folklore in order to provide entertainment: harmonization of traditional melodies, modification of elements in the dance, adaptation of elements in the costume, widening of repertoire with folklore from neighbouring regions. In the creation of new dances, the composer and the choreographer respect and utilize the traditional elements of authentic folklore. The group’s intention is to use elements of folklore while taking
organization in a period in which another folk festival model was emerging, one connected to a burgeoning folk music industry, demonstrates an ideological and aesthetic schism in notions of the public presentation of folk music that intensified with the professionalization and commercialization of folk music from the 1950s through the 1970s.

The 1960s: Beyond Folklore Festivals

The late 1950s and early 1960s was a period that saw the establishment of large folk festivals in Europe and North America that were related to popular mid-late 20th century folk music revivals. Some of these festivals are still in existence. One of the first, the Sidmouth Festival in Southern England, was founded in 1955, under the auspices of the EFDSS, later becoming independently run in 1981. Brandenberg Sidmouth demonstrates a pattern that occurs in several countries, particularly in Western Europe. Festivals that begin on a small scale, representing rural traditions, expand in the course of their history to become more transnational and transcultural in character. Another major festival that made this transition is the Kaustinen International Festival of Folk in Finland, which was founded into account contemporary expression and creation criteria.” The third is the “stylized group” which is “A group that, while drawing its inspiration from the folklore of the country, has modified the costumes, the dances, the function of the orchestra in order to adapt them to the needs of choreography and modern staging. The group’s intention is to use elements of folklore to perform its own creative ideas.” It is clear that the power to determine what constitutes “the authentic” lies in the hands of those who hire groups for the festivals and place them into these categories. There are some similarities here between these three categories and Baumann’s constructs, although within the overall ethos of preservation that is indicated by the mission statement, it is unlikely that the “elaborated concept” takes such precedence as the kind of new folk music I am discussing takes at transnational folk festivals.

in 1968 with a strong emphasis on the music of Ostrobothnia, but since the 1990s has presented a range of internationally touring, professional folk music performers.\textsuperscript{320}

In North America in this period, the major festivals associated with the North American folk boom were founded. Foremost among these are the Newport Folk Festival (1959), the Philadelphia Folk Festival (1961), and Canada’s Mariposa Folk Festival (1961). These three festivals are still in existence, although they have gone through a number of transformations in format and programming over the decades.\textsuperscript{321} In England, the Cambridge Folk Festival (1965), now one of the world’s most prestigious folk festivals for performers, was closely associated with the popular folk music revival, as evidenced by the fact that Paul Simon was on the roster of the first festival, shortly after releasing his hit single “I am a Rock.”\textsuperscript{322}

\textit{Influence of Rock Festivals and Counterculture}

Ronström points to a paradigm shift in the presentation of folk music in Sweden, occurring from the 1970s onward, that I argue has parallels in other countries. He refers to this as a “phase” during which “a new type of folk music event emerged, in which the horizon was neither national, nor international, but rather transnational.”\textsuperscript{323} Discussing this new paradigm, he states that “Modelled upon rock festivals, these events typically present many successive musical acts, from large stages served by professional crews, to

\textsuperscript{320} Ramnarine, \textit{Ilmatar’s Inspirations}, 51–53.
\textsuperscript{321} Sija Tsai, a PhD candidate at York University in Toronto, is presently writing a dissertation that closely examines the history of the Mariposa Folk Festival. This study promises to be a revealing examination of the transformations in presentation of folk music over the decades.
\textsuperscript{322} Cambridge Folk Festival, “History,” http://www.cambridgefolkfestival.co.uk/about/history [accessed April 26, 2013].
\textsuperscript{323} Ronström, “Concerts and Festivals,” 53.
large and often young audiences, and offer foods and local beers in excessive quantities.”\textsuperscript{324} Indeed, the influence of rock festivals on the folk festival concept on both sides of the Atlantic was a significant aspect of this transformation. It is difficult to assess the impact of an event such as the Woodstock Festival, but the massive media exposure that it received, both through television newscasts and the subsequent album and movie, helped foster its image as the archetypal counterculture festival. It is important to remember that Woodstock presented folk music icons Joan Baez and Arlo Guthrie. Further, Country Joe’s performance of the Vietnam protest song “Fixin’ to Die Rag”, with which he succeeded in getting masses of ‘hippies’ to sing along, was evocative of folk music performances associated with the folk boom of the 1950s that occurred a generation earlier. Content aside, a semiotic connection between the outdoor festival and the counterculture was firmly established after Woodstock.

\textit{European Festivals}

While some of the now major European transnational festivals have grown from local festivals that were developed in the folklore festival model or as showcases for local traditional musics, many that came into being in the 1970s and 1980s were founded specifically to present professional touring musicians who were part of a growing transatlantic folk music industry that was intersecting with the countercultural aesthetic associated with rock music. Demark’s Tønder festival (1975) and Belgium’s Dranouter Festival (1975) are two prominent examples. From the beginning these festivals did not present costumed performers in regional dress, but drew internationally touring

\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 54.
performers associated with transnational notions of Celtic music or other broadly defined
genres.

The European circuit grew in tandem with an increasing professionalization of
touring of folk music, and especially with the growing popularity of Irish Traditional music in the
1970s that spawned a number of popular, internationally touring bands. There is much
common lore among Irish musicians that attests to the fact that in this period it was a
viable and attractive possibility for touring musicians to make a living playing ITM
abroad, particularly in Germany, due to the poor state of the Irish economy at the time.
Few of these bands were on major labels, and thus touring to maintain a living was
essential. Even the most popular bands with the largest followings were on smaller labels:
two of the most popular bands in Irish music in the 1970s, The Bothy Band and De
Dannan, were signed to independent labels Gael Linn and Shanachie, respectively. Yet as
the popularity of the Irish traditional music revival grew in the mid part of the decade,
these recordings were distributed internationally through major labels: the later
recordings of Planxty, for example, were distributed through WEA. This was part of the
process that encouraged a transnational infrastructure of agents, managers, and other
music industry professionals that facilitated the kind of circuits I am examining.

*Western Canadian Folk Festivals*

The major Western Canadian folk festivals (in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary, and
Edmonton) have become significant nodes on international folk music touring circuits.
Taking place in the summer, they are prized gigs for internationally touring performers
for several reasons. They are large, with weekend audiences ranging from 20,000-40,000,
and they present between 40-80 acts per festival. They are very well organized with established infrastructures of volunteers. The potential for on site CD sales is significant. As a performer, I was disappointed if my band sold less than 50 or 60 CDs at a major festival, and sometimes we sold well over 100, even performing solely on ‘workshop’ stages. Further, their regional proximity to one another means that performers can often play at two or three festivals, making tours viable. These festivals can serve as ‘anchor dates’ for summer tours that include smaller festivals or teaching at music camps, or sometimes the festivals will pay ‘hot’ performers enough to make a festival viable as a one-off gig.

The major Western Canadian folk festival phenomenon began with the founding of the Winnipeg Folk Festival in 1974 by Mitch Padolak, a documentary maker who had strong connections with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. With the success of the festival model he had established in Winnipeg, Padolak founded the Vancouver Folk Festival in 1978 with members of Vancouver’s social planning department and Gary Cristall, who became the festival’s artistic director. The impetus behind the founding of both festivals was strongly political. Padolak and Cristall were both committed socialists, and saw the festivals as platforms for causes ranging from Latin American revolutionary struggles to North American labor movements and feminism.325

The Edmonton Folk Festival, founded in 1980 by Don Whalen, has a different orientation. While Vancouver and Winnipeg avoided presenting star performers with a broad mainstream appeal, the current director since 1989, Terry Whickam, follows a

325 Michael MacDonald’s Masters thesis looks at the revolutionary and Trotskyist motivations behind the founding of the Winnipeg Folk Festival. Michael MacDonald, “THIS IS IMPORTANT: Mitch Podolak, the Revolutionary Establishment, and the Founding of the Winnipeg Folk Festival,” M.A. Thesis, Carlton University, 2006.
strategy of hiring ‘headline’ performers to attract a broad audience base. Such ‘big name’ performers in recent years have included David Grey, Linda Rondstadt, and Wilco. This strategy has been successful, as the festival is unique among Western Canadian festivals in terms of consistently avoiding an annual deficit, and often times selling out tickets.

Music Camps

Finally, I include folk and traditional music camps as a type of festival within this circuit. They have a great deal of confluence with transnational festivals. Many camps have the same transnational and transcultural character as the festivals I am describing. Indeed, as they are part of the same circuit of work for musicians, they often are places at which musicians connect and re-connect, strengthening or establishing relationships in the same overall social field.

An early example of a transnational folk music camp, and one that had a substantial impact on local music practices in the region in which it took place, was the 1947 summer camp of the Bodadeg Ar Sonerion organization (“The Gathering of the Pipers” in Breton) in Brittany, France. The participants at this camp were various Breton biniou players, Irish uilleann pipers, and the Glasgow City Police pipe band. The encounters at this event had a direct impact on the creation of the first bagad, or Breton pipe band, in 1948. Such pipe bands are now widely acknowledged as a badge of identity not only in Brittany, but also in the Breton diaspora in France.”

The Bodadeg camp is an early representative of a camp based on the theme of a particular instrument. This is a model that exists in the phenomenon of fiddle camps in North America, a trend that has grown in popularity since the late 1990s. Many of these are associated with well-known fiddlers and bring in teachers from around the world. The Mark O’Connor String Camps, founded by the famous bluegrass fiddler, are some of the best known of these. The Scottish fiddler Alisdair Fraser’s Valley of the Moon camp in California is another popular camp that has spawned the careers of several young touring fiddlers. Even some of the smaller camps have a transnational element. A camp in British Columbia at which I teach regularly, the Sunshine Coast Summer School of Celtic Music, founded in the early 2000s, has a close connection with Scotland and annually flies in teachers.

A now transnational phenomenon in music workshops and camps, with a stated purpose of interaction and exchange, are the Ethno events, founded in 1990 in Sweden as part of the Falun Festival.\(^\text{327}\) Now under the auspices of the organization Jeunesses Musicales International, these events are advertised as “a space for intercultural learning, friendship, and exchange” at which “young folk musicians meet to teach each other, by ear, traditional folk songs from their cultures.”\(^\text{328}\) I discuss the Ethno camps in greater detail in the following chapter.

Below is a table that includes several of the festivals listed above. Included in this table are some other transnational festivals that either my collaborators or myself have performed at or are known as prized gigs among performers. I include the date of their founding and who has performed at them:

\(^{327}\) Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds*, 68.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Established or Significant Development</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Andy Hillhouse or Collaborators Performed at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>First International Youth Festival</td>
<td>Prague, Czechoslovakia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Sidmouth Festival</td>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Newport Folk Festival</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Philadelphia Folk Festival</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Mariposa Folk Festival</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Cambridge Folk Festival</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>NK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Kaustinen Folk Festival</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Lorient Festival Interceltique</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>FG, NK, AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Walnut Valley Festival</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Winnipeg Folk Festival</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>OS, FG, AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Dranouter Festival</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Tønder Festival</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Brosella Folk and Jazz</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Vancouver Folk Festival</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>OS, FG, AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Calgary Folk Festival</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>OS, FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Edmonton Folk Festival</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>OS, FG, AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Shetland Folk Festival</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Festival Internacional de Folk de Getxo</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Falun Folk Festival</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Virton International Workshop of Acoustic Music</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Forde Internasjonale Follkmuisikkfestival</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Ethnocamp</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Rudolstadt “remodeled” to transcultural model</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>NK (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Goderich Celtic Festival</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>OS, NK, AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Viljandi Folk Music Festival</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Halkaer Festival</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Festival Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Celtic Connections Festival</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>OS, NK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Vancouver Island Music Fest</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>OS, FG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Celtic Colours Festival</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>NK, FG, AH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Ethno Flanders</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Big Tent Festival</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>NK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Celtfest</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>NK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1: List of Transnational Festivals**

**Baumann’s Mental Constructs**

The emergence of the transnational folk festival field calls for a re-theorization of folk festivals; however so far there has been little effort toward doing so. One notable exception is Max Baumann’s article on international folk festivals in a 2001 edition of *The World of Music*, a collection that focussed on the public presentation of traditional music. Taking into account the shift towards pluralistic festivals in Europe in the 1980s, Baumann differentiates between what he terms as three aesthetic and ideological “mental constructs” that have emerged from a “general change in the consciousness of folk musicians” in recent decades.\(^{329}\) These are the *traditional* construct which “excludes the Other as ‘non-authentic’ or ‘alien’; the *inclusive* construct, which conceives of regions as places ‘of intercultural and multicultural encounters’; and the *transnational* construct, a


\[330\] Ibid., 20.
Baumann sees pluralistic festivals, such as the Rudolstadt Tanz und Folkfest in Germany (at which Nuala is booked to perform in 2014) and the Falun Folk Festival in Sweden, as forums for the creative inter-relation of these contrasting constructs:

[In such festivals] opposite perspectives are thus to be understood in a complementary way, and less in contradictory terms. For no perspective can claim exclusivity, neither in an aesthetic nor in a cultural-political context. The creative potential of differentiation lies in the alternation of focus: once from the familiar ‘church-spire’ perspective, another time from the farther perspective of ‘space shuttle’.

Baumann is correctly observing that such festivals are complex events that encompass a variety of sensibilities among musicians. Further, he identifies some important processes of transformation that are occurring in the pluralistic festival environment. These include musical mixing between national and regional musics and an emerging taste for innovation in musical forms thought of as folk or traditional music.

While Baumann’s article suggests that transnational refers to a type of personal taste and sensibility among musicians, he implies in the above quotes that it describes the festivals themselves, which adopt this transnational construct as a dominant, overarching ethos.

Baumann’s examples are primarily European festivals: I will demonstrate through several examples that this festival ethos is transatlantic in scope. While festivals in North America, Europe and Australia can be seen as having national traits and tendencies – for instance, as Filippo told me, Canada is known among Italian folk musicians for its large outdoor, musically diverse folk festivals that would, to his mind, not be successful in Italy – a comparative look at festival promotion and mission statements for both sides of the Atlantic reveals commonalities among festivals in several countries.

---

331 Ibid., 23.
In Baumann’s recognition of a creative tension that emerges from the relationship between traditional, inclusive and transnational constructs – ‘constructs’ being analogous to what I am terming throughout my dissertation as sensibilities – he is making an important point that adds nuance to analyses of transnational festivals. It raises the question: what are the dynamics and politics of the interaction between these sensibilities? Does the tension from this interaction result in new sounds and styles?

Further, Baumann’s identification of a relationship between individualism and transnational musical practices (and I would suggest other practices that can be characterized by the prefix “trans” such as transregional and transcultural) within the context of pluralistic festivals is relevant to my investigation, the central question of which is to investigate the relationship between individualism and collectivity among musicians on the festival circuit, from various backgrounds, who have developed personalized networks through interactions occurring in the transnational festival field. These networks cut across various styles and sensibilities.333

333 While Baumann’s recognition of such a construct is correct, I argue that his description of the traditional construct mischaracterizes how many musicians of what is often characterized as a “purist” sensibility conceive of vernacular musics. It implies that the devotion to a regional musical style is equated with a narrow, intolerant perspective that “excludes the other as non-authentic or alien”. In my experience, such a perspective is rare among even those musicians most devoted to a local style. Rather, I see the “inclusive” construct more as the norm among these musicians. While I meet many musicians who devote themselves to the dogged study of a particular style, I am not aware of any who think that traditions outside the one that they are devoted to are “non-authentic”. A more common narrative is that the diversity of regional styles, through processes of commercialization, has been subsumed by the homogeneity of the music industry.

In addition, by positing this construct as a conception in which the “other” is “alien” there is an assumption that adherents to a particular local style of music identify themselves culturally with that region; that they are from that place. However, it is clear today that many musicians are devoting themselves to the intense study of particular styles in musics from countries and regions other than their own. In some cases, they become acknowledged masters. One example is my fiddle teacher Patrick Ourceau, who was raised in France and discovered Irish music at age 16, devoting himself to the fiddle styles of County Clare and ultimately becoming a respected musician in Irish traditional music. Further, recalling Mantle Hood’s concept of “bi-musicality”, musicians are devoting themselves to the intense study of more than one style. Another example from Irish music is the Seattle flute player Hanz Araki, a sixth generation shakuhachi player, and the son of Kinko Ryu Grand Master Kodo Araki and an Irish-American mother. Araki is equally proficient on both the Irish wooden flute and the shakuhachi, and concurrently
Baumann suggests in his theory of constructs that there is a relationship between what he sees as a “change in the consciousness of folk musicians” in recent decades that parallels the growth of the transnational festival type. However, he leaves thorough exploration of this parallel to future research. My dissertation seeks to address the relationship between individual musicians and this emerging transcultural and transnational milieu. A first step in identifying this connection is to examine the role of festivals in fostering sensibilities, such as those shared among my collaborators.

**Welsch’s Transculturality**

Before looking more closely at particular examples of festival promotion, it is necessary to explore the concept of ‘transculturality’ that I utilize in my analysis. This exploration proceeds from Baumann’s three constructs, which echo distinctions that the anthropologist Wolfgang Welsch has made between different concepts of cultural interaction and exchange; the traditional culture concept, the closely related ‘intercultural’ and ‘multicultural’ concepts, and the transcultural concept.

Baumann’s traditional construct is reminiscent of what Welsch calls the “classical concept of single cultures” which “is characterized by three elements: by social homogenization, ethnic consolidation and intercultural delimitation.”

Welsch argues that the classical concept of single cultures, which he argues was drawn from Johann Gottfried Herder and is evident in Herder’s *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, is now “untenable,” for three reasons:

---

First: Modern societies are differentiated within themselves to such a high degree that uniformity is no longer constitutive to, or achievable for them (and there are reasonable doubts as to whether it ever has been historically)…. Secondly, the ethnic consolidation is dubious: Herder sought to envisage cultures as closed spheres or autonomous islands, each corresponding to a folk’s territorial area and linguistic extent. Cultures were to reside strictly within themselves and be closed to their environment. But as we know, such folk-bound definitions are highly imaginary and fictional; they must laboriously be brought to prevail against historical evidence of intermingling; and they are, moreover, politically dangerous, as we are today experiencing almost worldwide. Finally, the concept demands outer delimitation….  

In regards to the third reason, Welsch quotes Herder, who wrote “Everything which is still the same as my nature, which can be assimilated therein, I envy, strive towards, make my own; beyond this, kind nature has armed me with insensitivity, coldness and blindness; it can even become contempt and disgust.” According to Welsch, “Herder defends the double of emphasis on the own and exclusion of the foreign. The traditional concept of culture is a concept of inner homogenization and outer separation at the same time. Put harshly: It tends – as a consequence of its very conception – to a sort of cultural racism.”

Baumann’s second construct, the inclusive construct, resembles Welsch’s interculturality (different cultures from different societies coexisting) that, along with the related idea of multiculturality (different cultures coexisting within the same society), “seeks ways in which such cultures could nevertheless get on with, understand and recognize one another.” Welsch argues that both interculturality and multiculturality “conceptually presuppose” the notion of bounded cultures and therefore are themselves problematic. Interculturality and multiculturality, he claims, are seeking to remedy...

---

335 Ibid.
338 Ibid., 196.
problems that have emerged from the notion of cultures “constituted as spheres of islands,” while they nonetheless depend upon that notion.\textsuperscript{339}

Welsch proposes transculturality as an alternative to the notions of discrete cultures, interculturality and multiculturality. According to Welsch, transculturality “seeks to articulate” the “altered cultural constitution” today in which “Cultures de facto no longer have the insinuated form of homogeneity and separateness.” He writes “they have instead assumed a new form, which is to be called transcultural insofar that it passes through classical cultural boundaries. Cultural conditions today are largely characterized by mixes and permeations.” He claims that transculturality paints a picture of relations between cultures that is “Not one of isolation and of conflict, but one of entanglement, intermixing and commonness,” and states that transculturality “promotes not separation, but exchange and interaction.”\textsuperscript{340}

Ethnomusicological studies of world music have pointed to a gap between discourses of transculturality and the actual extent to which music that is promoted as fusion exhibits “entanglement and intermixing”. One of the main issues is that the superficial manner with which musics are engaged in fusion reduces them to emblems of cultures, even while they exhibit the “trans” qualities of “exchange and interaction” of which Welsch writes. Often, as much as music fusion is an attempt at creating “new” music, it results in a non-integrated mixture of existing styles. For example, writing of Swedish world music festivals, Owe Ronström states that “The much praised creolisations, hybridizations and syncretisms propoganded in these festivals presuppose a standardized set of reified ‘pure’ elements that can be mixed but not blended, so that the

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., 197.
mixing itself is highlighted.”\textsuperscript{341} The act of mixing cannot hide the fact that “these events are staged as a global botanical garden of musics, forms, styles, etc., often used as ‘brands’ or ‘trade marks’ of villages, regions, nations, ethnic groups, bands, artists, record companies, and agencies.”\textsuperscript{342}

The example of world music is one that points to the difficulty of actualizing transculturality in terms of how Welsch presents it. Nonetheless, I argue that transculturality is a useful term to indicate a general aesthetic sensibility that not only encompasses notions of diversity but also emphasizes exchange, interaction, and innovation. Further, by employing a broad concept of culture that can include subcultures, transculture can refer to processes of exchange and interaction among not only ethnically, regionally and nationally identified musics but among various genres of popular music that do not have such identifications.

Welsch insightfully identifies two levels at which processes of exchange and interaction can occur between cultures; these are the “macro” level and the “individual” level.\textsuperscript{343} This is useful in light of my investigation of the relationship between individual networks of musicians within large-scale circuits. As individuals we operate within complex spaces of cultural exchange among a variety of networks at various levels. The complexity of these spaces plays an important role in determining our identities. As Welsch argues, “For most of us, multiple cultural connections are decisive in terms of our cultural formation. We are cultural hybrids.”\textsuperscript{344}

\textsuperscript{341} Ronström, “Concerts and Festivals,” 54.
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid. 53.
\textsuperscript{343} Welsch, “Transculturality,” 198.
\textsuperscript{344} Ibid.
There is a sense in Welsch’s conception of transculturality that ultimately it should replace the other concepts of culture. I reiterate that such clearly drawn lines between these concepts does not represent the reality of cultural dynamics in today’s transnational music systems. Returning to the discussion of festivals, with Baumann I agree that while a festival or group of festivals may exhibit a dominant sensibility, whether tending towards a transcultural sensibility or a celebration of discrete, bounded cultures, in fact they rarely are purely representative of such ideals. Rather, they are spaces in which these conceptions of culture themselves interrelate and are at tension. With this complexity in mind, I now turn to an examination of how transnational festival promotion often constructs a dominant ethos of transculturality.

**Three Recurrent Themes in Transnational Festival Promotion**

The following examples are drawn from festival websites, festival mission statements (in many cases placed on the websites), interviews with festival directors, and newspaper articles. This analysis is in two parts: in the first part, fifteen festivals were examined that contain the following shared characteristics: 1) they predominantly present professional, cottage industry musicians (in some cases alongside the presentation of amateur performers); b) they are represented by organizers as folk festivals or celebrations of cultural and musical “roots”; c) they represent a variety of nations in their performer rosters; and d) they have been established for more than ten years. I have not included folkloric festivals, those festivals that primarily present folk troupes in regional costumes. While some performers may cross over between the more transcultural festival type and the folkloric festivals, the relationship between the circuits, while a compelling topic, is
beyond the scope of this dissertation. I am also drawing on my own experience with these samples; as a performer on this circuit I observed that the festivals I am including have a high visibility at festival conferences such as WOMEX and the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance, and are seen as worthwhile gigs, in terms of exposure and pay, among folk musicians.

The second part draws on three specific festivals with which at least two out of three of my research collaborators (and myself) have been associated: The Lorient Festival Interceltique, The Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, and the Vancouver Folk Festival.

The following is a thematic analysis, identifying three recurring themes that indicate aspects related to transculturality. These themes are expansion, boundary blurring, and innovation. All three themes are not evident in all the samples I investigated; however even if one of the themes is prominent in promotion I have used it in my analysis. In many cases, themes are intermingled in promotion, demonstrating their interrelation. Due to the large number of festivals in diverse locations, it was impossible for me to conduct a comprehensive study that surveyed all available press for these festivals. Taken together, however, I believe these examples represent an interrelated cluster of concepts that indicate a common ethos.

*The Ever-expanding Festival*

Many transnational festival websites provide their own festival histories. One approach to constructing a narrative of the history of a festival focuses on the festival origins, and
emphasizes the roots of the festival in a locale. Another type of festival history presents a narrative in which the evolutionary growth of the festival is emphasized. This latter narrative often indicates a point at which the festival transformed from an earlier model to a new style of festival, one that becomes increasingly stylistically inclusive and, importantly, in which lines between genres and regional styles are increasingly blurred.

This narrative is one of growth and expansion. The increased diversity of styles is sometimes associated with growth in audience numbers, for obvious reasons; more diversity in styles means a larger audience to draw on. For many of these festivals, these expansions occurred between the late 1970s and the mid 1990s. For example, the Dranouter festival in Belgium, which had started in 1975 with a program of primarily Celtic music, changed its programmatic focus in the late 1980s. At this point, according to the website, Dranouter “became open to the world,” and the programmatic emphasis shifted towards what it calls “new tradition.” According to the website, the audience increased at this time, with 1997’s audience totaling 65,000. From that point Dranouter has “remained in evolution, with much attention to folk, fusions, contemporary and world music singer songwriting.” These statements demonstrate the interrelation of the idea of growth with boundary blurring and innovation, the two other concepts I will explore. A similar trajectory is cited on the German Rudolstadt festival website. The festival was initiated in 1955 as a folkloric dance festival, however according to the website the festival “in the late eighties started to change. The programming was pulled open to the

---


world and mergers between different genres were introduced. The interest grew, resulting in "bigger names" being programmed. In 1995 the number rose to 45,000 spectators."³⁴⁷

In North America, several festivals also began to transform to include other styles of music than Euro-American vernacular musics in this period. This expansion is associated with growth and highlighted on some festival websites. For one of Canada’s largest international folk festivals, the Winnipeg Folk Festival, this period of growth was after the departure of the festival founder, Mitch Podoluk, in 1986. Under the subsequent directorship of Rosalie Goldstein, which lasted until 1991, “the festival’s musical scope broadened to include groups and styles pushing the boundaries of what was considered folk music.”³⁴⁸ This expansion beyond earlier notions of folk continued with the director Pierre Guerin, who continued “developing the festival’s world music programming and renewing its commitment to presenting excellent but relatively unknown performers.”

This is connected to unprecedented growth for the festival:

Since 1999, the Winnipeg Folk Festival has seen significant growth. Extended artistic programs now include concerts throughout the year, youth training programs, a year round venue, outreach programs, and a larger, better resourced festival. Internal staff resources have grown and each staff position has taken on a significant leadership role…. Recently, the Winnipeg Folk Festival’s annual operating budget was more than $3.5M and attendance at the summer event exceeded 70,000, including performers, volunteers and guests.³⁴⁹

In North America, this transformation in festivals is a shift from the earlier festival model associated with the ‘folk boom’ of the 1950s and 1960s. This festival type emphasized acoustically oriented acts³⁵⁰ and presented primarily singer songwriters and

³⁴⁹ Ibid.
³⁵⁰ As Bob Dylan’s infamous electric performance at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 demonstrates, the electric/acoustic tension at folk festivals goes back to the 1960s, and in my experience on the folk scene
Anglo-American vernacular musics. In many nations in Europe, the earlier type of festival tended to be folkloric festivals, or traditional music festivals. For example, Kaustinen Folk Festival in Finland, at which Filippo has performed, began as a festival presenting predominantly “traditional” performances in 1968, although with international representation. It is now advertised on the WOMEX website as “the largest annual international folk music and dance festival in Finland and in the Nordic countries.” The festival website currently states:

Kaustinen Folk Music Festival, invaded by a new generation, summons a wide range of artists from local folk musicians to foreign professionals together in the summer 2011. The year’s theme invites us to get closer, experience the living tradition of our neighbours and let the summer festivity get to our skin…. Among the participants will be a convincing amount of interesting and wonderful music groups from around the world. The new program coordinators have been working hard to find the best music for the biggest folk music happening of Finland both culture and experience-wise. The new program also offers more opportunities for folk musicians to perform and get together in spontaneous jam sessions.

As can be seen from all the above examples, growth in festival size is closely connected in the discourse to an expansion of the folk music concept to include an increasing number of genres. As the Kaustinen website states, it also is connected with interaction among musicians.

---

351 Ramnarine, Ilmatar’s Inspirations, 134.
From Diversity to Interaction

According to Tina Ramnarine in her study of Finnish folk music, the Kaustinen Folk Festival now includes equal representations of “traditional” Finnish folk, “new” folk, and “world music.” Reminiscent of Baumann’s observation of the interrelation of constructs at festivals, she writes “in bringing together musics that are categorized as stemming from local, national, or global arenas, the boundaries between them are explored in a public music display.” As the Kaustinen website indicates, such a festival offers both diversity and interaction (as suggested by the increased opportunities for jamming).

Diversity is among the most frequent concepts in the marketing of transnational festivals. The Mission Folk Festival near Vancouver, for example, was recently cited in one newspaper as “one of the most diverse and eclectic ranges of music from across Canada and around the world.” “Diverse” and “eclectic” are two words that are frequently used in promotion.

Ethnic diversity has long been an aspect of folk festivals, including folkloric festivals that stress preserving cultural homogeneity and continuity over innovation and exchange. At transnational folk festivals, the combination of diverse musics on display and an increase in onstage jam sessions, festival-sponsored collaborative workshops, along with the hiring of fusion-oriented acts indicates a sensibility, as Baumann describes it, “that understands cultural diversity as a single, large source, as the heritage of all humankind, from which every artist, every group, independent from a principle of

354 Ramnarine, “Ilmatar’s Inspirations,” 135.
356 Such as those festivals represented by the CIOFF.
location, can draw in order to cultivate their own creativity in a singular way.\textsuperscript{357} While diversity is apparent at both types of festivals, transnational festival promotion indicates that there is a prominent valuing of borrowing, exchange and the freedom for individuals to create new hybrids.

It is common for festivals to list diverse styles available for maximum impact. This diversity encompasses both ethnic music styles and music industry genres. For example, England’s largest folk festival, the Cambridge Folk Festival, presents an “eclectic mix of music and a wide definition of what might be considered folk.” According to the festival website, at Cambridge “The best traditional folk artists from the UK and Ireland rub shoulders with more contemporary acts, the finest American country, blues and roots artists, acclaimed singer songwriters and even the odd pop star. Bluegrass, gospel, cajun, zydeco, jazz, world, klezmer and a ceilidh are also regular features.”\textsuperscript{358}

In some cases, the dissolution of boundaries between such categories is highlighted. For example, the Calgary Folk Festival is portrayed on its website as “a village where indie singer-songwriters, roots and country veterans and blues masters rub sonic shoulders with global electronica divas, Latin rhythm masters, Ukrainian rock bands and Congolese hipsters. Where on-the-fly collaborations create once-in-a-lifetime magic.”\textsuperscript{359} An interview with the Calgary Folk Festival director on the festival website further explains the diversity and cultural mixing that can come under the umbrella of folk at Canadian festivals:

\textsuperscript{357} Baumann, “Festivals, Musical Actors and Mental Constructs in the Processes of Globalization,” 20.
\textsuperscript{358} Cambridge Folk Festival, “About,” http://www.cambridgefolkfestival.co.uk/about/history (accessed March 26, 2011).
Interviewer: What’s with the word Folk in the title? How strict are you about that? How diverse is the line up?

Festival director: Folk is more of an attitude and atmosphere than a musical genre…. To us, folk as a genre comes from two branches: a singer/songwriter history and traditions from around the globe – not just limited to those from Western Europe. But songwriting takes many forms so a great song can be delivered in a hip-hop or blues style, sung in Yoruba or by a white guy with a guitar. We explore the roots and evolution of the music we like to call folk; a genre-bending smorgasbord where acoustic, ambient and electric styles combine, including blues, indie-rock, traditional music, roots, world music, cutting-edge sounds, dub, bluegrass, funk, country, reggae, hip-hop, R&B, Celtic, old time, Norteño, jazz and orchestral pop.360

In this type of narrative that recounts a dizzyingly varied array of styles, seemingly endless diversity is often presented hand in hand with notions of freedom from restrictive borders. The Rudolstadt Festival states on its website that the festival promotes the idea of “no borders” and that when it switched its structure from a folkloric dance festival to an international folk festival the goal was “to reflect the broad and unlimited variety this musical sector has to offer: folk and world music, stage and participatory dances, concerts and workshops, loud and intimate sounds – a cheerful playground for the (music) cultures of the world.”361

As is evident in the promise of spontaneous jam sessions in the promotion of Kaustinen cited above, some festivals are represented as unique spaces in which one-time encounters between diverse musicians can be witnessed. The Calgary Folk Festival website invites attendees to “soak in our evolving programming on 6 stages in the park, where musicians collaborate in unpredictable and exquisite songwriter-in-the-round and

themed jam sessions.”\textsuperscript{362} With the blurring of boundaries between folk and world music, such spontaneous happenings promise to bring together European folk musics with other musics of the world, as the Swedish Dalarna regional tourist website states with regards to Sweden’s Falun Festival:

\begin{quote}
...the unexpected encounter takes place here, too, the magical moments when a Swedish folk musician playing the “nyckelharpa”, a traditional Swedish instrument, meets an accordion player from Madagascar or when the tones of the mouth organ meet those of the bagpipes in an Irish reel – unforgettable music created here and now.\textsuperscript{363}
\end{quote}

As I will discuss further below, at least one festival has institutionalized the notion of such collaboration. Since 2002 The Vancouver Folk Festival has instituted a week-long collaborative workshop, the collaboratory, that includes musicians from different stylistic backgrounds, bringing together styles associated with various ethnic groups, regions, nations, and popular music genres such as hip hop and electronica.

\textit{New Folk Music and Innovation}

As the allusions to encounters between traditional folk and contemporary musics in festival promotion above indicate, a recurrent theme that accompanies the themes of diversity and boundary blurring in festival promotion is the reference to an evolving relationship between tradition and innovation. Festivals often sell themselves as examples of the balance between tradition and innovation. The Tønder Festival in Denmark offers

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}}

186
“balance between renewal, continuity and comfortable familiarity,”\textsuperscript{364} while the Newport Folk Festival aims “To present performers who respect and honor folk music traditions, and at the same time reflect the changes in today’s musical trends; To present all forms of jazz and folk music from yesterday, today and tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{365}

In festival promotion, descriptors such as “traditional and contemporary folk and roots music”\textsuperscript{366} encompass this dialectic. In the case of the Cambridge folk festival, the mixture between tradition and change is represented as dynamic, as it creates a “hotbed mix of the old and the new.”\textsuperscript{367}

The music at such festivals and the locales in which they occur may be presented in promotion as being symbolically interrelated, with both the music and place representing the tradition/innovation dialectic. Lunenberg Folk Harbour festival, at which Nuala Kennedy performed in the summer of 2011, offers such an example in the historical narrative on its website: “Like the Town of Lunenburg, folk music is undergoing a transformation of its traditional boundaries. Folk Harbour would foster experimentation while respecting our maritime musical heritage. Such a festival would put Lunenburg ‘on the map’ in an entirely new way.”\textsuperscript{368}

Innovation is often termed as new folk music or ‘new traditional music’ and is apparent in some festival promotion. I have found this notion to be more common in European festivals, likely due to the fact that there are long traditions of collecting and

\textsuperscript{366} “Warwick Folk Festival,” http://www.warwickfolkfestival.co.uk/ (accessed March 26, 2011).
\textsuperscript{367} Cambridge Folk Festival, “About Us,” http://www.cambridgefolkfestival.co.uk/about/history (accessed March 26, 2011).
preserving local musics as part of nationalistic projects; in short folk music tends to refer to national or regional vernacular traditions rather than guitar-playing singer songwriters as it does in Anglo-North America.\textsuperscript{369} For example, the Estonian Villjandi festival website states that at that festival “Next to the authentic recital of traditional music the “new” traditional music is gaining importance – traditional music here forms the material on which the performer has based its style.”\textsuperscript{370} Tina Ramnarine writes of the difference between new folk music and traditional music in her study of Finnish folk music.\textsuperscript{371} At the Lorient Festival Interceltique, the physical layout of which is divided into tents that represent various Celtic ‘nations’, at least one culture on display in August 2010 made this distinction evident in their own self-promotion. In front of the Galician tent is a prominent sign that distinguishes between “traditional music” and innovations and what it simply refers to as “folk music” (my translation from French):

This folk group performs traditional songs adapted to our time, trying not to lose the essence, the spirit, and the perception of Galician music of our ancestors:

Traditional music: vocal pieces, percussion from different regions of Galicia: pure music, without arrangements to enable the public to listen and to learn how the older generation playing the music were playing percussion instruments without any kind of influences. Spectators will have a true taste of our folklore.

Folk Music: Mix of traditional melodies with arrangements, a merger of the tradition and the avant-garde that gives rise to a particular sound and quite new.

The fact that this sign was posted in front of the Galician tent indicates a perceived need on the part of the Galician organizers to explain this difference to the festival audience. This is evidence in support of Baumann’s notion of the co-existence of different “mental constructs” of folk music at such large transnational festivals.

\textsuperscript{369} New Québécois music based on traditional music idioms is often called “neo-trad” in a similar terminology to that used in Europe.
\textsuperscript{371} Ramnarine, “Ilmatar’s Inspirations.”
Celtic Connections, The Vancouver Folk Festival, and Lorient Festival Interceltique

The above examples are drawn from a broad range of festivals, and demonstrate recurring language in the promotion of such festivals. After brief introductions to each of these three festivals – at which at least two out of my three research collaborators, Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo have performed – I will conduct a thematic analysis of festival promotion at them. This is in order to demonstrate a close connection between these musicians and the emerging discourse that I have been discussing. In the remainder of this dissertation, I will explore the relationship between self-making, cosmopolitan subjectivities, and the transnational circuit that I am discussing here. These examples are further evidence of the emergence of transnational festivals that use broad concepts such as folk and Celtic music as a point of reference in their conceptualization and marketing. In addition, as with the festivals above, they also demonstrate an emerging discourse of transculturality.

Lorient Festival Interceltique

The Lorient Festival Interceltique is promoted as a celebration of a diasporic Celtic culture. It was founded in 1971. In 2011 it celebrated its 41st anniversary with what it billed as “l’année des diasporas celtiques”; the “year of Celtic diasporas.” It is the largest Celtic festival in the world, and most years receives around 100,000 paying audience
members. Since early in its inception, it has included music from several regions and nations that recognize themselves as Celtic, such as Ireland, Scotland, Cape Breton, Asturias, Galicia, Wales, and Cornwall. As I discuss further below, the festival still remains within this Celtic framework, however it is expanding, based on a broad conception of what constitutes the Celtic.

In the summer of 2011, Nuala Kennedy asked Filippo Gambetta and me to play with her band at the festival. Nuala and Filippo both had connections within Brittany; in particular, each has worked with the Breton flute player Jean Michel Veillon. For Filippo and Nuala, the festival served both to broaden exposure within the Celtic music world and to strengthen contacts with musicians in the region such as Veillon.

**Celtic Connections**

Glasgow’s Celtic Connections Festival has occurred annually since it began in 1994. Lisa Jenkins, in a recent dissertation on Celticism in Scottish music, focuses on the festival as a case study. She gives a comprehensive account of the history of the festival over its first decade and discusses its role in constructing a Celtic identity in Scotland and in the touristic promotion of Glasgow. However, since Jenkins undertook her research in the late 1990s, in the period leading up to a significant transformation in booking at the festival in 2005, her dissertation does not examine what constitutes a new, increasingly transcultural paradigm for the festival. In 2005 Celtic Connections increased significantly its practice of hiring performers from musical genres not conventionally considered to be

---

Celtic. That year performers came from “a dozen different countries,” as the website indicates. The festival’s transformation was furthered with the arrival of Donald Shaw, who became artistic director in 2007, a year in which the festival “broadened its horizons with a line-up that featured more international artists than ever before.” 2007 was the year that Oliver Schroer performed at the festival, as well as Nuala Kennedy. I also performed there with the Canadian band The McDades.

The Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow is particularly important to Nuala, as it is a major festival within an hour’s drive from her home; however while it is local for her it has also played a role in developing her transnational connections. Nuala has played annually at the festival since 2008 with her own band. She also performed there in earlier years with other groups, starting off playing at smaller venues such as the festival club and eventually moving to larger venues at the event. This upwards trajectory points to the festival’s usefulness in the progression of her career. She invited Oliver Schroer to join her in a collaborative project for the “New Voices” segment of the festival in 2007, which included Canadian fiddler Daniel Lapp and American singer songwriter Will Oldham (Bonny Prince Billy). Oliver also performed his multimedia Camino show at the festival the same year. 375

I first met Nuala at Celtic Connections, backstage at the festival club in 2007, through Oliver’s introduction. That same night Oliver joined the group I was with, The McDades, along with members of a Galician group Baraguetto and English accordion player Tim Edey, for an onstage jam at the festival club. We performed a tune written by a member of our group, Jeremiah McDade, that came to be known as “Frank’s Throat

375 I will discuss Oliver’s Camino project in depth in the final chapter.
“Song” as it was based on a groove that our percussionist, Francois Taillefer, came up with while experimenting with Tuvan throat singing technique. It was a melody composed with what is commonly referred to as the Middle Eastern gap scale with the finalis on D (D-Eb-F#-G-A-Bb-C):

![Musical notation]

Eg. 4.1: “Frank’s Throat Song” by Jeremiah McDade

We had found at several festivals that the repeating, two-measure chord progression (D-Eb-D-Cmin), the 4/4 time signature, the relatively short and memorable melody, the repeating rhythmic figure in the bass that underlay both the tune and improvisations, and the sense of a constant drone on D all facilitated onstage jamming with musicians from various backgrounds. Its ‘middle easterness’ signified a generalized idea of World Music while being non-specific enough to invite participation. We had performed it over the years with a Chinese erhu player, an Indian tabla player, a Romanian violinist, and various Irish and Scottish musicians.

The ‘exotic’ sound of the melody (to Western folk music audiences) and the danceable groove regularly proved to be successful with crowds and inspired dancing and cheers; this was the case that evening at Celtic Connections. The festival club is known
for this kind of spontaneous interaction, and the director of the stage in the club encourages musicians to jam with performers from other groups. This example demonstrates one way that the festival creates situations for interaction, enacting the “connections” aspect of its title.

The Vancouver Folk Festival

The Vancouver Folk Festival, established in 1978 by Winnipeg Folk Festival director Mitch Padolok, has been transnational in orientation since early on in its existence. This aspect is related to the political orientation of both Padolok and his successor Gary Cristall, who took over as festival director in its second year. Both directors were self-professed Trotskyists. As Cristall told me, his purpose in taking the festival job was to use the festival as a tool for fostering revolution.\textsuperscript{376} For Cristall, folk music was a means to express solidarity with Marxist and other leftist political movements around the world. For example, Cristall and Padolok both hired a large number of Latin American Nueva Canción performers between 1982 and 1994, and sponsored fund raising concerts and other events to help support leftist rebels in Guatemala and El Salvador, as well as the Nicaraguan Sandanistas.\textsuperscript{377} This relationship with groups in other countries was a type of transnational networking that was based along political ideological lines. In fact, the festival ultimately pursued a broad agenda of solidarity with social movements, including a strong feminist and gay rights element. As the brief history of the festival, recounted on


\textsuperscript{377} Gary Cristall, personal communication, February 2008.
the website indicates, the overall ethos of the festival is one of inclusivity of difference, creating a utopic space into which “You enter a special world. You step outside normal society for three days and enjoy a totally non-alienating experience,” as Mitch Podoluk is quoted as stating on the festival website.378

The internationalism already established at the festival laid the groundwork not only for an easy shift to the diversity of world music in the 1990s but for a general sense of transcending boundaries of genre, nation, class, and gender. This openness towards various styles is part of the reason that the Vancouver folk festival has been significant in the growth of Oliver’s career. Oliver, who lived in Vancouver from 2002-2007, performed at the festival several times. In fact, my first encounters with him were at that festival: in 1989 I first saw him as a member of the Toronto based Harbord Trio with guitarist Don Ross, and in 1994 we were part of a workshop stage together. He also brought his students in the Twisted String ensemble to perform there in 2004, a performance that I also witnessed. Through his contacts with the festival director, Dugg Simpson, he helped procure a booking there for Filippo, also in 2004. It was on that same tour that I first met Filippo at the Mission Folk Festival, close to Vancouver. I will discuss the social capital each of my collaborators gained from each of these (and other) relationships and bookings (and others) in Chapter 6. For now, the above examples serve to demonstrate a close connection between these musicians and the three festivals I am discussing here.

Aside from the connections they have fostered between Oliver, Nuala, Filippo, and myself, these three festivals present a spectrum of notions of transnationalism. The

Lorient festival celebrates transnational affiliations based on shared notions of shared Celtic heritage, or ‘intercelticism,’ as its title, Lorient Festival Interceltique, indicates. It is close to a temporary territorialization of what Arjun Appadurai terms as an ‘ethnoscape’ in that it is based on notions of diaspora.\textsuperscript{379} The festival presents both contemporary groups based on musics identified as Celtic and Celtic traditional, with a very small minority of groups from other areas of the world (in 2010, for example, it presented a sole world music performer, Mali singer Rokia Traore, among hundreds of Celtic performers). Alongside contemporary performers, it has an element that is reminiscent of folkloric festivals, with costumed, folkloric dance groups. The Celtic Connections festival, while organized around a Celtic concept, since 2005 has presented a broader range of performers from nations outside of those with Celtic identifications. In this case, ‘Celtic’ and ‘connections’ are paired concepts that represent what I identify as recurring tendency: the use of a roots concept as a point of reference for the establishment of a discourse on boundary crossing. The Vancouver Folk Festival uses ‘folk’ in an equally ambiguous way; as has been noted recently with regards to the Winnipeg Folk Festival, in recent years the Vancouver Folk Festival has come to embrace popular music genres that use electronic instruments and other forms of technology that would have been out of place in earlier folk festivals. The implication is that folk is an increasingly transcultural concept that can be applied to any music, an observation that has recently been made with respect to the closely related Winnipeg Folk Festival.\textsuperscript{380} With the origins of this transculturality in notions of solidarity among politically like-minded groups, the Vancouver Folk Festival has developed along the lines

\textsuperscript{379} Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” 30.

195
of Appadurai’s notion of transnational ‘ideoscape’ rather than the notions of Celtic ethnoscape that initiated the Celtic Connections and Lorient festivals.\(^3\)

### Themes of Transculturality at Lorient, Celtic Connections, and Vancouver

#### Expansion

As indicated in the above examples, a common theme in transnational festivals is the inevitability of opening up to a broader, transnational and transcultural scope as the festival grows in size. The Lorient festival’s mission statement indicates the foundational concept of interceltique. It also points to an expanding notion of what constitutes the Celtic:

The Lorient Festival Interceltique was born 39 years ago on the willingness of its founders to contribute to the development of music and culture of Brittany and was also open to the nations of Celtic settlement in the British Isles (Scotland, Netherlands, Wales, Cornwall, Isle of Man, Ireland) but also in northern Spain (Galicia and Asturias).

This gave it a special place in all the festivals in Brittany, but also nationally as it has created a meeting place featuring Brittany alongside other nations, thus forging a new concept to foster exchanges: intercelticism (interceltique).

With its success, intercelticism moved beyond Celtic British and Spanish borders and turned towards other places more recently settled after migration of the Celtic British and Spanish. Thus we saw the arrival of pipe bands in Australia, players from Latin American and Canadian gaita singers.\(^2\)

\(^3\) Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” 30.

This narrative of expansion is echoed in a recent article previewing the 40th anniversary festival in the Irish Times:

In Lorient – a town that was built in the 17th century as a gateway to far-off lands and now serves as “an emblematic crossroads” between cultures, as Lombardio [the Galician-born festival director] puts it – the focus has widened with the festival’s passing years. Whereas the early delegations came from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and the Isle of Man, the line-up now includes not only Galicia and Asturias, but countries with big “Celtic diasporas” such as Australia, Canada, Argentina and the US.  

The notion of an ever-broadening conception of the Celtic world is evident in an interview with the festival director, Asturian Lisardo Lombardia (my translation from French):

It will be the year of the Celtic diaspora. I really mean diaspora. The migration history of our Atlantic Celts has given birth to different communities, especially in America, but not only there. The Welsh in Patagonia, the Asturians or Cornish in Mexico, Argentinian Galicians, the Irish, Scots and Britons in North America, these people have been established for generations, and remain attached to the culture of their roots, claim a Celtic identity, are living the music and language of their origins.  

Thus, there is much room for diversity in Lombardia’s conception of the festival. Nonetheless, it overwhelmingly sticks to the presentation of musics that are readily identified as Celtic. The sense of growth at Lorient takes the form of innovations within the realm of Celtic music more than an adoption of globalism.  

A more global sense of progression within a Celtic framework is evident in press related to the Celtic Connections festival. A preview of the festival in The Scotsman in 2011 indicates that the process of expansion evident in 2005 at the festival continues:

---

From its earliest years, back in the mid 1990s, the second half of Celtic Connections’ name has encompassed a strong international dimension within its programming.

At first, those overseas connections extended mainly via the Scottish/Irish diaspora to the US and Canada, and to the kindred Celtic territories of Brittany and north-west Spain.

More recently, though, and particularly in the five years since Donald Shaw took over as artistic director, pretty much the whole world has become the festival's oyster.

The 2011 line-up will see musicians descending on Glasgow from four continents and 30 countries, including India, Senegal, Cameroon, Japan, Cuba, Venezuela, Israel and the Middle East.385

The current director, Scottish accordion player Donald Shaw, has also highlighted the increasingly transnational trajectory of the festival in his interviews with the press. He relates this trajectory to an inevitable expansion and intermingling of music cultures. Shaw states, “Folk musicians from different countries always jump at the chance of meeting each other, making music together, trying to find a common language.”386 It is interesting to note the emphasis on nations in this statement, raising the question as to whether festivals reify the idea of national musics, even when transculturality is promoted.

Shaw gives the example of Zakir Hussein, who appeared at the festival in 2011 and told Shaw that “working with Scottish musicians was something he’d wanted to do for years: he already knew about things like bagpipe scales, and the similarities between puirt-a-beul387 and Indian rhythmic singing.”388 Shaw describes the expansion to include

---

386 Ibid.
387 Puirt-a-beul is Gaelic “mouth music,” the use of vocables to sing dance melodies.
388 Ibid.
other forms of world music as a natural evolution of the festival and as the enactment of a process of breaking down genre barriers that is already occurring due to changes in technology and the growth in urban multiculturalism. Festivals are therefore taking the process that occurs outside of the bounds of the festival space – momentary, spontaneous boundary crossing – and using it as a selling point. His comment draws on the notion of folk as a universal category:

Folk music anywhere has come from essentially the same collective experiences, the same human fundamentals, it's originally been passed down the generations in the same way, so that bringing in traditionally rooted acts from Africa, Romania, India or wherever never seemed hugely radical to me - more of a natural progression. Also, so-called Western musicians on both sides of the Atlantic are experimenting a lot these days with music from other cultures – partly because it’s just so much easier to hear it; the world is much smaller now, thanks to technology. Plus most towns and cities are much more cosmopolitan, musicians from different countries just end up hanging out together, absorbing all these different influences, so in that sense I'm just reflecting the scene as it’s happening.\textsuperscript{389}

I will take up the tensions between this universalist discourse of folk music and the reality of the transnational folk festival circuit as predominantly Euro-American in the following chapter. For now, I will point out that Shaw cites several forces associated with globalization: the globalization of cities, speed and ease of communications related to technology, and increased mobility. Accompanying these is a sense of inevitability, evident in Shaw’s use of the term “natural progression.” I interpret this as a tautological, evolutionary narrative. Along with the narrative that all folk music, regardless of culture, emerges from the same human fundamentals, it can be seen as part of an emerging sense that festival expansion and growth is tied to an unstoppable interconnection of cultures. Interpretations of this perceived process could be dystopic, as with Alan Lomax’s cultural

\textsuperscript{389} Ibid.
greyout thesis,\textsuperscript{390} or utopic, as with the celebratory discourse of these transnational festivals. In addition, this discourse also indicates a push towards a redefinition of folk that expands beyond the term’s predominant Euro-American associations. This push has led to a shifting and sometimes uncomfortable boundary between folk music and world music as categories.

\textit{Diversity, Boundary Blurring, and Innovations}

At Celtic Connections, the inclusion of non-Celtic world musics is mentioned in press reports as part of a general trend towards genre blurring at the festival, in which not only nationally associated musics but also transnational popular music genres are included. An article from \textit{The List} states:

\begin{quote}
The Celtic/folk core of the festival has always remained, but eclectic expansion rather than rigorous adherence to generic classification has been the hallmark of the event, and big names from jazz, rock and classical music all take their place alongside the traditional singers and instrumentalists from the heartland Celtic traditions in a celebration of music.\textsuperscript{391}
\end{quote}

Although, in terms of world music, it is not as stylistically inclusive as Celtic Connections, the Lorient festival’s broad conceptualization of Celtic diaspora allows for an expansive range of styles to be included at the festival. As the Irish Times preview states,

\begin{quote}
The Lorient festival casts an open and scrupulously wide embrace, both in its definition of culture and of the Celtic heritage itself. Over the 10-day event, which kicks off with a concert by The Cranberries on Friday night, the programme takes in traditional/folk, rock, jazz, dance and visual art from everywhere from the Isle
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{390} Lomax, “Folk Song Style and Culture.”
\textsuperscript{391} Kenny Mathieson, “Beyond the Boundaries,” \textit{The List}, January 8, 2009
of Man and Galicia to Canada and Australia.\textsuperscript{392}

While Lorient emphasizes diversity of genre and nation under the banner of Celtic, diversity of social movements has long been part of the Vancouver Folk Festival marketing image and soundscape. While the consistently dominant concept at Celtic Connections, and to a lesser extent at Lorient, is the ability of Celtic culture to be expansive and inclusive, the Vancouver Folk Festival has maintained a fairly consistent focus on socially progressive movements rather than an ethnic conception of folk music. At the Vancouver Folk Festival, the overarching ethos of social change still provides an umbrella concept to encompass diverse musics. Local Vancouver music reviewer Alexander Varty wrote in 2010:

It’s striking how many festival artists use music as a tool for social change, and how diverse they sound: head to Jericho Beach Park between Friday and Sunday July 16 to 18, and you’ll hear everything from the guitar-driven voodoo funk of Haiti’s Boukman Eksperyans to the one-world optimism of the [transnationally constituted] Playing for Change collective to the folk-pop broadsheet ballads of the lower-case lesbians in emma’s revolution. Other progressive types who’ll be seen on-stage include folk-rocking environmentalist Sarah Harmer, bluegrass-driven biofuel advocates Fish & Bird, and guitar-strumming peace activist Brett Dennen.

What all these artists have in common, though, is the knowledge that the world is in urgent need of repair.\textsuperscript{393}

The move from this type of diversity to boundary blurring is most evident in an increase of situations for collaborations that are sponsored by festivals, including the Vancouver Folk Festival. The festival sponsors a ‘collaboratory,’ established by artistic director Dugg Simpson in 2002. In this event, the festival chooses and funds a group of musicians from different musical practices to work together in the week leading up to the

festival, in order to work out new arrangements based on the concept of fusion. They then perform on the mainstage at the festival on the Saturday night, which is the most well attended evening of the festival. Dugg Simpson states that the idea of the collaboratory grew out of a sponsored performance at the festival in 2001 by the Vancouver World Music Collective, a large ensemble that included Persian, Irish, Jewish, Chinese, South American, and West African musicians, among others.  

The mainstage Saturday night placement of the collaboratory performance indicates the importance the concept of collaboration and boundary crossing now takes at the festival. The collaboratory process has lead to the formation of at least one permanent touring ensemble, the group Delhi 2 Dublin, which draws on elements from bhangra, hip hop, Irish traditional music, Hindustani classical music, rock and funk. Members of the group first performed together during the collaboratory performance. One of Oliver Schroer’s protégés, fiddler Jaron Freeman-Fox, now tours with Delhi 2 Dublin.

The annual, eclectic collaboratory is emblematic of the Vancouver folk festival as a space that fosters connections across an increasing number of styles. I suggest that the Vancouver Folk Festival tends towards a globalist ethos, as it based on a notion that all musics could potentially be included in the collaboratory. The Lorient festival, in contrast, has a more limited, less global concept of transnationalism. Since early on in its existence, the concept of the interceltique indicates a general aim to link what it sees as the ‘Celtic nations’ together. Its mission statement claims that the festival “has created a place of rendezvous featuring Brittany alongside other nations” thus forging” a new concept to foster exchanges: the interceltique.” The festival aims to “participate in the

394 Dugg Simpson, personal communication, March 2011.
The development of exchanges with the Celtic countries and all countries and regions interested in these cultures. In a recent interview with the Irish times Lisardo Lombardia has stated what he sees as the deeper aim of the festival: “The party is the vehicle…. But beyond the party, people sense that there’s something deeper there…. We have created a place for encounters.” These encounters establish networks between peoples with strong regional identities: “No one is from nowhere…. We are citizens of the world to the extent that we are rooted in a specific place on the planet…I think we’re the defenders of a strong identity, but that doesn’t in any way contradict the idea of being open to the world.”

The Celtic Connection festival ethos aims to bring together the notion of Celtic roots evident at Lorient with the globalism apparent at the Vancouver Folk Festival. Despite its association with Scottish Celtic identity that Jenkins discusses in her dissertation, it is apparent that the importance of “connections” in the festival title is equally important as “Celtic” and is taking on increasingly global connotations. The musicians are often cited as the impetus for this trend. Jenkins cites the festival’s first director, Colin Hynd, who points to festivals as sites where connections are made between musicians (and to other festivals). Hynd states that, “Nowadays there are so many great festivals happening all over the world; the musicians are going from festival to festival and guesting on each other’s albums. And the musicians are great about coming to me and to other festival organizers and saying ‘you must hear this’.”

While musicians may contribute to transculturality, the goal of fostering

---

398 Jenkins, “Celtic Connections,” 322.
connections is explicitly stated in the Celtic Connections “Aims and Objectives” statement. Relevant to the particular sensibility I identify amongst my research collaborators, the aim of the festival is to encourage the spread of a new, emerging repertoire of music, inspired partially through collaborations initiated at the festival. It is evident in this statement that the performance of ‘tradition’ is something through which new connections are made. The goal of such performance is not primarily to preserve a bounded notion of culture. The emphasis on collaboration in this statement brings to mind Welsch’s notion of transculturality:

Connections are at our core and the fundamental aim of the festival is to make links through traditional music and culture….

The festival not only concentrates on traditional music but focuses strongly on connections and by doing so embraces different cultures from around the world allowing new collaborations and commissions to be premiered. Ideally, these collaborations and commissions are then performed at different festivals to ensure the legacy of new works to be sustained.  

As is evident in the statement, this concept of exchange beyond the Celtic world and the suggestion of the porous boundaries of culture nonetheless depends on existing notions of tradition, home, and nation. This brings us back to the persistent concepts that are necessary in the discursive construction of the boundaries of folk and traditional music.

**Broad Categories**

Several of the above examples suggest an emerging narrative of expansion and growth. It is presented as part of a natural evolutionary process for categories to break down, as the

---

399 Claire Snedden, personal communication, March 2011.
emphasis on diversity transforms into an emphasis on interaction and exchange. Folk becomes a totalistic term that places a discursive universalism above the particularism it once implied, in the sense that Herder used it. Yet, despite this universalistic trend, these festivals still define themselves in relation to folk and traditional music revivals, and celebrate the uniqueness of the places in which they occur.

The use of broad, vague categories as catch-alls to encompass a wide range of musics is apparent not only in folk music but also in jazz and blues as well. Two examples from Canada are the Ottawa Blues festival, whose headlining act in 2010 was the alternative band Arcade Fire, and the Montreal jazz festival, at which I have seen Brazilian MPB, hip hop, and West African musicians perform. The process of boundary blurring I have associated here with a transcultural ethos is apparent in several fields of music making. As a result, it is apparent that as ethnomusicologists and popular music scholars we must sometimes think in large terms in our analysis. What are the discursive boundaries of these seemingly ever broadening constructs? We can begin to conceive of a broader festival aesthetic that goes beyond even vague concepts such as folk music to speak to shared desires for community across broad categories.

Baumann has suggested boundary-crossing collaborations are an important aspect of his notion of this transnational construct. He claims that such practices challenge essentialist notions of authenticity:

…encounters in workshops…often produce music making that leaves behind Individual styles and bring out new expressive forms. Such folkloristic jam sessions continually break through essentialist interpretations of an ‘authentic’ tradition. Syncretism, fusion and world music have all softened the traditional borders since the 1980s. Today, free access to all possible musics, musical instruments, styles, sounds and musical conceptions is much more comprehensive
compared to 25 years ago, when this diversity was not yet so widely available.\textsuperscript{400}

While Baumann elsewhere describes the interrelation of various constructs in transnational festivals, here he is signalling the coming end of romantic collectivism in folk music and what he terms as the traditional construct, or in other terms, what Welsch sees as a classical concept of single cultures. Such a notion is challenged by Erlmann’s comments regarding “the relationship between different musical subsystems” in World Music: “While the loops of these circuits may open up new spaces for creativity, the globalization of artistic production also creates new possibilities for romanticizing authenticity and mythologizing local talent.”\textsuperscript{401} The above examples from transnational folk festival promotion suggest that both processes are occurring: festivals are promoting the ideal of transculturality, and the possibility of new forms of collectivity, while reinforcing national and ethnic categories. How musicians negotiate these varied notions is the subject of the remaining chapters.

\textsuperscript{400} Max Peter Baumann, “Festivals, Musical Actors and Mental Constructs in the Process of Globalization,” 19.

CHAPTER 5

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS AND TURNING HOME

In this chapter I will focus on the various projects with which my collaborators and interlocutors are engaged, and the broader networks of musicians that are involved in these projects. I examine how involvements in a range of what I call folk music transnationalisms – those activities, relationships, collectivities, and imaginaries that cross national borders – impact individual musicians’ relationships to places. While I continue to assert the increasing significance of transnational connections in daily life, I will nonetheless argue that transnational connections among folk musicians who share what I call a new folk music sensibility can reinterpret and contribute to, rather than erase, a sense of home that is grounded in particular localities.

As I will demonstrate forthwith, touring and collaboration allow individuals to re-imagine and reconfigure the concepts of the local and home within the context of – and in relation to – this universalistic milieu I have been analyzing. Many touring folk musicians are involved in various musical processes through which they represent their home nations and localities as being constituted historically though exchange and interaction. Further, they position themselves in various ways in order to navigate varied expectations as locals and cosmopolitans that they encounter in the transnational folk festival field. This contributes to what I term as a glocal sense of place, bringing together the work of
Roland Robertson\textsuperscript{402} and Doreen Massey\textsuperscript{403}, both of whom have theorized that localities are constructed through transnational processes.

In seeming contrast to the outward-looking tendencies evident in the collaborations and fusions of new folk musicians, the ‘turn homeward’ is something I have observed that these musicians often make at one or several points in their flexible, project-based careers. As I will show below, this process of turning homeward is undertaken by some of my other research collaborators as well. On one level this is a reaction to transnational processes, whether it is a personal need to reconnect with their local identity, or a sense of balancing out the tradition/innovation dialectic in their own artistic development. Or, it indicates a reflexive awareness of loyalty to the culture of one’s region or nation. As I will argue, while on the surface this seems like an insulating move, it is really part of a dialectic that touring folk musicians engage in as they negotiate living both at home and ‘out there’. Turning homeward, then, is a key part of a transnational musical process that involves travel, interaction, and exchange.

This interrelation between the local and transnational I will be examining resonates with the notion of glocalization, a concept that has been succinctly defined by Roland Robertson as “the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies.”\textsuperscript{404} The term, which Robertson drew from Japanese business literature of the 1980s and introduced into an emerging academic globalization debate in the early 1990s, refers to both the ways in which global processes and institutions

\textsuperscript{402} See Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” in Space, Place, and Gender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994): 146-156.
constitute the local and how globalization occurs in specific localities. I will demonstrate how the leaving and returning dynamic of touring contributes to this process of glocalization. In particular, it contributes to a reinterpretation of places as constituted through transnational processes.

A Glocal Sense of Place

In an early article before Robertson had adopted the term ‘glocalization’ to describe the interrelationship between globalizing and localizing tendencies, he wrote that “we are in the late twentieth century, witnesses to – and participants in – a massive, twofold process involving the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism.”

While Robertson argues that globalization is not a new process, he asserts that it is this aspect of interpenetration that particularly characterizes contemporary culture. Expressing this concept in another way, elsewhere he points to the paradox that “we appear to live in a world in which the expectation of uniqueness has become increasingly institutionalized and globally widespread.” The transnational folk circuit exemplifies this interrelation between the universal and the particular. The institutions and quasi-institutions of folk music – festivals, camps, and music schools – often actively promote transnational exchange and interaction, fostering networks across boundaries. Meanwhile, they have not abandoned romantic collective notions of folk music as representative of local community, and in fact trade on such

---

notions. As I argue throughout this dissertation, as folk musicians negotiate the contradictory expectations inherent in the above concepts, they engage with various interpretations of a concept that is central to the historical, Herderian concepts of the folk: the concept of locality.

In her book on Finnish new folk music, Tina Ramnarine applied the concept of glocalization to her nationally focused analysis. While Ramnarine argues that Finnish “new folk music” (a term that is in common use there) remains “tied to a particular place” she demonstrates how the “particular place” is constituted through non-Finnish symbols and cultural forms. Illustrating glocalization at work, Ramnarine proposes that in Finland today “at the same time that new folk musicians borrow from ‘others,’ conform to global trends, and establish a place for themselves on world music stages through performances and recordings, they continue to imagine and represent their music as localized expression.” Ramnarine, along with Juniper Hill in a later study, pointed to the contemporary conception of Finnish folk music (particularly among academics) as challenging certain romantic-collective concepts of genuine folk music as inherently ‘pure,’ unchanging, and resistant to outside influence. I argue that the glocalization Ramnarine and Hill observed in Finland is part of a wider phenomenon in the transnational folk festival field, thus I am examining it through transnational networks of collaboration.

---

408 Ramnarine, *Ilmatar’s Inspirations.*
409 Ibid., 200.
410 Hill, “‘Global Folk Music’ Fusions.”
“The Network Society”

Academic discourse on globalization has recently mobilized the network concept as a means of illuminating contemporary transnational economic, social and cultural relations, sometimes as a basis for ethnographic method, as with Benjamin Brinner’s work, and other times arguing that it is a morphological reality of contemporary society. This latter argument has been made in the study of the relationship between technology and transnational relationships, a subject to which I will give greater attention in Chapter 6. The networks I examine push against the global/local dualism influentially theorized by one of the most prominent network theorists in the social sciences, sociologist Manuel Castells.

Castells has argued that contemporary society is organized around the predominant structural framework of the network. He claims that every age has an associated technological paradigm that shapes social relations, and in this age that paradigm is information and communication technologies, including the Internet, which leads Castells to adopt the common usage term the “information age” for this era. Since the Internet allows people to create and maintain links on a global scale in a way that was not possible in other times, he argues that we now live in a “network society.”

Castells formulates his argument around the notion of the Internet as a “space of flows” that stands in contrast to the “space of places.” According to Castells, in contrast to “places,” which are local and involve face-to-face interaction, there is now a “new

---

411 Brinner, Playing Across a Divide.
spatial structure of the information age,"⁴¹³ a “space of flows” constituted by the “... material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows."⁴¹⁴ He defines flows as “the material arrangements that allow for simultaneity of social practice without territorial contiguity.”⁴¹⁵ The space of flows is “made up of a technological infrastructure of information systems, telecommunications, and transportation lines” and of various “networks of interaction.”⁴¹⁶ Castells argues that in the network society, while place-based interactions remain important to people, the global space of flows is dominant, and power now lies in certain networks, particularly those with global scope. While networks of resistance may form, they ultimately are subordinate to dominant networks in the society, such as networks of capital, information and business alliances. The dualism behind this conception, which equates power with globality and subordination/opposition with locality, is apparent in Castell’s statement that “elites are cosmopolitan, people are local.”⁴¹⁷ His argument minimizes the agency of local forces in the face of the global space of flows: “While organizations are located in places…the organizational logic is placeless, being fundamentally dependent on the space of flows that characterizes information networks.”⁴¹⁸ Elsewhere he writes, “On the one hand the

---

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.
space of power is being transformed into flows. On the other hand, the space of meaning is being reduced to microterritories of new tribal communities.\textsuperscript{419}

Castell’s work has been received, particularly within sociology, as an important contribution to understanding the relationship between technology, power, and changing notions of place.\textsuperscript{420} However, the dualism underlying his argument has been challenged, particularly in relation to how it presents culture and meaning as local, and industry and capital as global. For example, cultural geographer David Ley criticizes Castells and other globalization theorists as problematically positing the global as “a space that is dynamic, thrusting, open, rational, cosmopolitan and dominant” and the local as “communitarian, authentic, closed, static, nostalgic, defensive (but ultimately defenceless) and the site of ethnic, sexual, regional and other fragmentary identities.”\textsuperscript{421}

I have raised Castells’ work here due to the fact that it demonstrates how globalization theory can tend towards grand theories that totalize the global and grant it too much power. Castells reinforces a dualistic notion of global space and local place; he situates particular cultural meanings firmly at the face-to-face level, in opposition to a transnational internet space that is devoid of such meanings, a type of virtual non-place.\textsuperscript{422} I argue here that folk music touring circuits are one example that complicates this dualism. Indeed, the local can be inscribed with new meanings through the very processes of flow, interaction, and temporariness that Castells aligns with lack of

\textsuperscript{420} For example, see John Urry’s discussion of Castells’ work in Urry, \textit{Global Complexity}, 8–12.
\textsuperscript{422} Augé, \textit{Non-places}. 
meaning. I will discuss this point further in my exploration of the relationship between technology and sociomusical networks in Chapter 6.

Although dualistic conceptions of the global and local leave themselves open to such criticisms, it is important to acknowledge that in actuality musicians must contend with opposing expectations based on similar dualism as they try to pursue livings in folk music. Folk musicians in particular must negotiate what Will Straw has described as “two countervailing pressures within spaces of musical activity: one towards the stabilization of local historical continuities, and another which works to disrupt such continuities, to cosmopolitanize and relativize them.”\(^\text{423}\) In professional folk music, these pressures are particularly intense, due to the connection between the historically interrelated concepts of the Folk, nationalism, and bounded, specific notions of place and culture. On the one hand, the transnational is sometimes seen by musicians, audiences, and presenters as synonymous with forces of commodification that lead to homogenization, while local continuities, along with long held local meanings associated with specific practices, are in need of protection from obliteration. At another extreme, some may see the emphasis by musicians, festivals, and others on the maintenance of local continuities as restrictive to individual creative freedom and engagement with contemporary, living culture. I reject the need to place these two in opposition, and argue instead that musicians are utilizing flexibility as a means of negotiating this dualism. Folk music practices, which are powerfully emblematic of regions and nations, are coming to becoming emblematic of localities as dynamic, open and cosmopolitan. The ways musicians negotiate these dual expectations leads to new musical expression and transformed meanings of folk and

traditional music. As Robertson argues, these processes are not always leading to cultural homogeneity. Rather, he makes a case for more nuanced contemporary analysis of globalization in which “we should be careful not to equate the communicative and interactional connecting of such cultures with the notion of homogenization of all cultures.”

**Producing Home by Leaving and Returning**

The practice of touring causes musicians to reflect upon the tensions between who they are at home and who they are on tour in the world. In so doing, they produce ‘home.’ This dynamic is what has led anthropologist Susan Rasmussen to refer to touring musicians as “temporary diaspora” in her ethnography of Tuareg musicians on tour. She explores the phenomenon of Tuareg touring musicians who regularly return home, and the consequences of them becoming “increasingly self conscious about their culture and history and how these are represented.” Within the context of touring, she examines the role of memory in constructing notions of the homeland, a prominent aspect of diasporic cultures. While Rasmussen’s post-colonial study concerns non-Western musicians touring in the West and returning home, my own work is focused on a different cultural distinction, as these Western musicians tour mostly within other Western countries. However, Rasmussen’s example demonstrates how touring as a general practice encourages a process of reflexivity. Such reflexivity transforms one’s idea of their place in the world. Mobility – in particular the cycle of leaving and returning –

---

426 Ibid., 793.
causes individuals to reinterpret their lives, and then base subsequent decisions upon this
reflection.427 As Robertson writes, “globalization has involved the reconstruction, in a
sense the production, of ‘home,’ ‘community,’ and ‘locality’”.428 Rasmussen’s
exploration of touring Tuareg musicians points to how their reinterpretation of home is
possible due to their increased mobility, one of the defining features of contemporary
globalization. Temporary diaspora is an evocative concept that helps conceive of the
leaving and returning dynamic of touring: however it is not sufficient to encompass all
the transnationalisms with which my collaborators are involved, as I will discuss further
below.

Filippo’s Transnational Links

Filippo and Nuala share the experience of having collaborated with Oliver (as well as
with each other); in addition, like Oliver, they are each drawn to collaborations with a
variety of musics in different parts of the world. This outward looking perspective is a
defining aspect of a new folk music sensibility, whether or not it results in actual
transnational collaborations. As I have been discussing, the collaborative relationships
and the touring practices that facilitate these musicians’ relationships contribute to a
glocal sense of place. A look here at their collaborative projects will introduce a
number of national and regional music scenes that are characterized by such
glocalization.

427 For a study which employs the concept of the hermeneutical arc as its central analytic, see David
Harnish, “A Hermeneutical Arc in the Life of Balinese Musician, I Made Lebah,” The World of Music 43.1
When I began my research in 2009, Filippo’s main touring partnerships were with Breton, Belgian and Finnish musicians. These particular collaborations were indicative of his interest in European folk musics, for which he clearly stated preference over North American traditional musics (such as bluegrass and Southern old time music). Even the North American musicians with whom he has collaborated – Oliver and American violinist and nyckelharpa player Sandra Wong – have an extensive engagement with European (in particular, Finnish) folk musics. This demonstrates his preference for ‘continental’ styles. In this regard, he contrasted his interests with those of his father Beppe, a touring finger-style guitarist. Filippo stated poetically that “when my father opens the windows of his house he looks out to many types of American music, while for me I look out on European music.”

By contrast, Nuala, to a greater degree than Filippo, has collaborated with a number of North American musicians, particularly Cape Breton musicians, as well as some singer songwriters who market their music as Americana or alt-country. She has also worked with musicians from Brittany and Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. I will now turn to look at these scenes, through both individuals I have encountered during my fieldwork, and who often are connected with Oliver, Nuala, and/or Filippo.

Finland

Filippo’s collaborations point to his affiliation with three national and regional musical scenes – the Finnish, Belgian, and Breton folk music scenes – in which the new folk music sensibility is apparent in institutions and community music organizations. Each of

---

429 Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, April 2010.
these musical scenes has a discernible local character and, to use the term in its more traditional sense, a distinct culture. However, a close look at the scenes also indicates a common glocal dimension; musics that are emblematic of national or regional identity are, to a high degree, sites for the intersections of various transnationalisms.

Finland is notable for the institutional support for transnational collaborations. Filippo’s Finnish collaborator, Nyckelharpa player Emilia Laujunen, studied at the Sibelius Academy, which as Hill has examined, encourages professionalization, new composition, and what it calls global folk fusions, based on the reconstructed conception of Finnish folk music that the institution promotes.\textsuperscript{430} This support for the type of collaborative projects Filippo and Laujunen undertake extends to the Finnish government. Filippo and Laujunen have worked together a few times in Finland, and are planning on recording a CD and undertaking an Italian tour, for which they are applying for funding from the Finnish government. Laujunen told me that it is easier for her to get funding for her collaborative project with Filippo than it is for Filippo to get money from the Italian government, and that she is happy with the amount of funding available for Folk music in Finland. However, she states that it is difficult to obtain gigs in Finland without a CD, as it is very competitive.\textsuperscript{431} A possible contributing factor to this increased competition is the institutionalization of folk music in universities, which is producing a high number of highly accomplished folk musicians with professional aspirations.\textsuperscript{432} This topic is in need of further verification; it is certainly a common topic of discussion among younger folk musicians.

\textsuperscript{430} See Juniper Hill, "Rebellious Pedagogy, Ideological Transformation, and Creative Freedom in Finnish Contemporary Folk Music".
\textsuperscript{431} Emilia Laujunen, personal communication, September 2011.
\textsuperscript{432} I have heard Scottish musicians complain of the same thing in Scotland, with many highly accomplished young musicians coming out of programs expecting to have performing careers.
Like Filippo, Lajunen cites Oliver as an important inspiration for her work. She obtained her first CD of Oliver from her teacher Maria Kalaniemi at the Sibelius Academy of Music in 2002, and currently plays the 5 stringed fiddle based upon her hearing Oliver’s use of it on that album, O2.\textsuperscript{433} She now is an instrumental teacher at the Sibelius academy and teaches Oliver’s tunes in amongst Finnish tunes and her own compositions.

Oliver had a strong connection to Finnish folk music. He told me that he encountered Finnish folk music live for the first time at the Harbourfront festival in Toronto in 1993, where he heard Maria Kalaniemi play. He became so interested in the music that he traveled to Finland to visit the Sibelius Academy, from which Maria Kalaniemi had graduated as a member of the first class ever in the field of folk music studies.\textsuperscript{434} Oliver composed “The Secret Life of Maria K.” for her, and she played on that track, which was included on Oliver’s Stewed Tomatoes album.\textsuperscript{435}

As I have discussed, two recent studies have investigated nykykansanmusiikki, or contemporary folk music, in Finland. Juniper Hill’s doctoral dissertation, along with her subsequent published articles,\textsuperscript{436} focuses primarily on folk music pedagogy in the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, while Tina Ramnarine’s book Ilmatar’s Inspirations focuses on continuity, change, identity, and representation in new Finnish folk music and conducts case studies of some of Finland’s most well-known contemporary folk

\textsuperscript{433} Oliver Schroer, O2, Big Dog BD9901, CD, 1999.
\textsuperscript{434} Oliver Schroer, personal communication, October 2007.
\textsuperscript{435} Oliver Schroer and the Stewed Tomatoes, Stewed Tomatoes, Big Dog BD001, CD, 1996.
musicians. These studies make clear that a sensibility that values new composition, fusion, and transnational collaboration is pervasive on the Finnish folk scene, and that musicians, audiences, and the Academy embrace this sensibility as being “Finnish.” As Hill writes, “it is common practice for Finnish contemporary folk musicians to collaborate with foreign artists, dig for source materials in neighbouring countries, play traditional instruments from multiple cultures, market their creations as ‘world music from Finland,’ and speak of ‘global folk music communities’. Hill notes that folk music practices represent various notions of what constitutes Finnishness. She identifies differing “transnational identities among Finnish folk musicians: Pan-Nordic, Finno-Ugric, (Western) European, and ‘global folk’. Tina Ramnarine, who also acknowledges these multiple affiliations among Finnish folk musicians, points to the importance of transnational collaborations in Finnish new folk music, with the practice of touring playing a role alongside the institutional support for them. She writes that, in composing new folk music, musical choices “are often determined by individual encounters between musicians, whether in, for example, an institutional context like the Sibelius Academy or on musical tours.” She further writes, “Since the choices (or borrowings) of new folk musicians are often based on musical collaboration, they have a sense of engaging in a shared musical experience.” I would go further and add, following Hill’s observation, that they have a sense of a shared culture that transcends the nation, whether a Nordic culture, a pan-European culture, or even a quasi-global ‘world music’ culture.

437 See Tina Ramnarine, “Ilmatar’s Inspirations”.
438 Juniper Hill, “‘Global Folk Music’ Fusions,” 50.
439 Ibid.
440 Ramnarine, “Ilmatar’s Inspirations,” 218.
Belgium

The Belgian instrumental folk music scene, with which Filippo has a strong connection, is marked by openness to original composition and embraces a diversity of regional and national styles. Further, it allows for its participants to identify with a notion of pan-Europeanness. Unlike Finnish folk music, folk music in Belgium is a topic that has not been explored to any depth by ethnomusicologists. Yet the folk music scene is vibrant, particularly with young people. In 2011, I communicated with two of the countries most active folk musicians, bagpiper Rémi Decker (who is one of Filippo Gambetta’s collaborators), and guitarist Philip Masure, about the contemporary folk music scene in Belgium. In addition, I spoke to two Canadians, connected with Oliver, who have been involved with the Belgian folk scene: Canadian flute player Jim Goode, who worked for Oliver in the 1990s on his promotion, and Emilyn Stam, who was Oliver’s protégé and who was active on the Belgian folk music scene in 2010-2011.

Philip Masure, whom I met at the Goderich Celtic festival in Ontario in August 2011, where he was performing with the Irish traditional music group Comas, has been active with several of Belgium’s best-known folk bands since the early 1980s. As such, he has witnessed transformations in the music scene over three decades. As Belgium is a bilingual country in which communities are often divided sharply along linguistic lines of Francophones (Waltons) and Flemish speakers, an immediate question I had for Masure was whether folk bands were formed around these categories. According to him, in this

---

441 The involvement of a Belgian guitar player in a traditional Irish group is another example of Irish music’s pervasiveness, as discussed in Chapter 4.
regard the scene has changed since the late 1990s. He told me that in the first few decades of the Belgian folk revival that began in the 1960s, bands identified themselves as specifically Flemish or Walloon, a minority dialect of French (or an independent language, depending on the interpretation).\textsuperscript{442} However, over the last decade, according to Masure “the whole scene has been changing into something more European.”\textsuperscript{443} The most common dance forms played by musicians are bourrées from central France, Breton an dro dances and gavottes, polkas, waltzes, and Swedish polskas, according to Masure. He states that nowadays “there’s only a few bands that would still play Flemish music. Also the typical Flemish dances like Kadrils are not commonly danced anymore.”\textsuperscript{444} He also notes that in bands, there is a rise in the adoption of instruments from other countries in Europe, including the Swedish nyckelharpa, Irish uillean-pipes, saxophones, and French bagpipe (cornemuse). According to this description, Belgian folk music is pan-Western European rather than emphasizing bounded notions of local tradition. In light of Belgium’s role as the home of the European parliament, this pan-European aspect to Belgian folk music is worthy of more research that is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

As with several other national folk musics in Western Europe, Belgian folk music experienced a resurgence in the last decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. According to Masure, local vernacular dance music traditions in Belgium died out and the only available collections of tunes are reproduced 19\textsuperscript{th} century manuscripts. Therefore, while there is a

\textsuperscript{442} Walloon is a minority language in the country that was once spoken by 70 percent of the population and is now spoken by roughly 4 million people. Flemish is spoken by 7 million people. Bernard A. Cook, \textit{Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World}. s.v. “Belgium” (Oxford: Oxford University 2008): http://www.oxford-modernworld.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/entry?entry=t254.e169 (accessed November 9, 2011).

\textsuperscript{443} Philip Masure, personal communication, Aug. 2011.

\textsuperscript{444} Ibid.
body of melodies that can be thought of as Flemish, the ornamentation and other aspects of playing style had to be imagined. This scenario is well known in the promulgation of national folk culture in the service of national identity, a process Eric Hobsbawm called the “invention of tradition.” However, Masure suggested that the lack of recordings of earlier performance styles (as there were in, for example, Irish traditional music or klezmer music with recordings from the early 20th century) has meant that there is more room for interpretation of what Flemish or Belgian traditional music should sound like to those who would wish for an historical basis from which to invent Belgian folk music. This has established a kind of diversity and open-endedness in Belgian folk music that allows for the incorporation of other elements. This contrasts to Irish music in particular, which has a reputation for conservatism and what Nuala called “restrictiveness.” The reasons for this are obviously complex and beyond the scope of this study. However, the establishment in 1951 of a powerful ‘official’ institution for the promotion of Irish traditional music, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, is one factor that has been cited by Rachel Fleming as a key element in contributing to this image of Irish music.

Diversity is apparent in the contemporary, participatory folk dance scene known as balfolk. Balfolk dances are often presented by an organization called Boombal, which was founded in 2000 by a well-known Belgian accordion player, Wim Claeys; many Belgian folk musicians, including Filippo’s Belgian collaborator Rémi Decker and the

---

members of his band, are active in the balfolk scene. Balfolk events include a broad range of European dances, which are taught to participants by a facilitator. As Philip Masure mentions above, the music at balfolk dances is not restricted to music traditionally associated with the dances in their home countries. Oliver’s protégé, Emelyn Stam, who played in a balfolk band while living in Holland in 2010 and as of 2013 has started regular balfolk dances in Toronto, told me that the group performed mostly original compositions from the group members, which only had to “fit” the dances rhythmically. Another remarkable aspect of the balfolk scene in Belgium is that the dances are attended by a high proportion of teens and people in their 20s, as Stam, Decker, and others involved in the scene have told me. This fact counters the stereotypical association of folk music revival with the generation that was young in the 1950s through to the 1970s and was active in the revivals of that period.

The engagement of youth with folk music evident in Balfolk is also apparent in the Flanders Ethno, a gathering of young musicians from several countries that occurs in a weeklong music camp-like format. At this event, participants learn melodies from a number of countries on instruments from their home country. In advertising the event, the organization’s website describes (in English):

During one week a group of talented folk musicians from all over the world between 16 and 30 years of age will meet. We are looking for musicians who can teach their traditional music to the other participants during the workshops and who are interested in adapting the music of other countries for their own instruments. The teaching and learning will be mainly by ear. Both singers and instrumentalists are welcome.

Since 1999 Flanders Ethno has been the meeting place for participants from Belgium, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Scotland, England, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Spain, Slovenia, Cuba, Ecuador, Senegal,

---

448 Emelyn Stam, personal communication, April 2011.
Uganda, India, China, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, Cyprus, Macedonia and Austria. Oostende is a great city at the seaside in Belgium.

The program of the week consists of a series of workshops, social events, excursions and some concerts where all the musicians will perform together. The final event is a concert on the famous Folkfestival Dranouter one of the biggest in Europe, with professional artists from all over the world.  

The Flanders Ethno website lists the performance of the Ethno students at the Dranouter Festival in 2010 as having presented tunes from numerous countries: Romania, England, Croatia, Sweden, India, Argentina, Bulgaria, Jordan, Estonia, Uganda, Armenia, Denmark and Belgium. The Ethno event does not only occur in Flanders, but also in Estonia (where it is connected with the Viljani Folk Festival) Croatia, Sweden, Denmark, France, and Uganda. The inclusion of an African nation amongst other European ones in this list raises questions about the cultural politics of this organization that are worthy of a focus beyond the scope of my research. Ethno is an intriguing organization that idealizes global participation; a close study could examine the extent to which it is challenging the western dominated concept of folk music.

The piper Rémi Decker, Filippo’s close friend and collaborator, is a regular teacher at the Ethno. Filippo was a guest musician on Decker’s CD *Fil de l’air*, and played on several tours as a substitute accordionist in Decker’s six-piece band, Griff. Filippo told me that he and Decker “became professional” around the same time as one another, and that they “helped each other get gigs” in their respective countries.

Griff’s English website gives a description of the band that is very general in its representation of folk music. The final phrase in the band’s promotional biography,

---

449 “Flanders Ethno,” http://www.flandersethno.be/concept (accessed November 2, 2011). The Flanders Ethno’s connection with the Folkfestival Dranouter is evidence of that festival’s orientation towards a universalistic ethos, such as I described in Chapter 3.

450 Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, April 2010.
“guided by intuition, rather than convention,” describes the emphasis on individual creativity in the new folk music sensibility, while the notion of “balance” between tradition and new composition assures audiences that the reference point for the music is traditional music. Flemish or Belgian folk music is not mentioned, but a more generalized traditional music:

The band Griff was formed by Rémi Decker and uses the skills of three virtuoso bagpipe players as a starting point (either playing solo or in polyphony), arranged in a modern, though not superficial way. Their repertoire is a balance between new composition and traditional music, using different types of bagpipes, as well as whistles and singing. Guitar, diatonic accordion and double bass provide an attentive and inventive accompaniment that adds rhythm, colour and dynamics to a band guided by intuition, rather than by conventions.  

Decker is also involved in other transnational projects. He has toured extensively with the French band Minuit Guibolles, is collaborating with Portuguese accordion player Eva Parmenter, and has another project with a Moroccan guembri (a type of Moroccan bass) player. In addition, he is trying to organize a collaboration with some Senegalese musicians he met through the Flanders Ethno. He says through participating in the Ethno project he has always “always been in contact with music from all over the world” and that he “would like to work with more people from abroad,” but is limited by practicalities in that, as he says, “distance is money in this world.”

Crucially for my argument, Decker believes that the kind of stylistic musical borrowing employed in the creation of Belgian folk music that Philip Masure mentioned has to be understood within the particular Belgian context. Decker states that “Belgium has always been a big crossroads in Europe: on the road between UK and Southern Europe (Italy), between France and Germany…so, people just did what they always did

---

452 Rémi Decker, personal communication, September 2011.
before: let's see what neighbors do…and let's borrow what is nice.” This sense that cultural interaction and exchange is part of the cultural roots and history of a nation is reminiscent of what Juniper Hill has identified in the ideology behind the Sibelius Academy in Finland.

While this has been a very preliminary and brief discussion of Belgian folk music, my communications with two of the country’s most active folk musicians suggest that in Belgium several of the characteristics typical of a new folk music sensibility coincide with a glocalized sense of the local. First, there is an awareness of the recently re-imagined nature of Belgian folk music that borrows from other musics; in their discourse, the musicians do not shy away from this in defence of any notion of purity, but rather embrace it as part of the identity of their folk music. Second, Belgian folk music is increasingly transnationally constituted in recent years, through collaborations with musicians from other countries and through the engagements with various folk musics as part of an increasing Europeanness.

**Brittany**

The third region with which Filippo has had a close relationship – as has Nuala – is Brittany, a region on the west coast of France with a recently resurgent Celtic language, Breton, and a strong regional identity. This area has one of the most successful regional late 20th century traditional music revivals in Europe, both in terms of promotion of Breton music on a global stage and revival of interest in Breton music (and dance) at home. Significantly, the contemporary traditional music revival in Brittany has been

---

453 Ibid.
marked by a diversity of approaches to the reinterpretation and presentation of traditional music. This diversity is partially a result of Breton music’s identifications with the transnational category – and ethnic identification – Celtic, as well as with the music industry category World Music.

Since the 1960s Breton musicians, most famously harpist Alan Stivell, have been involved in transnational imaginings of Celtic music and a Euro-based interpretation of world music that have involved the use of various instruments and repertoires.\textsuperscript{454} Stivell’s 1971 breakthrough album, \textit{Renaissance de la Harpe Celtique}, stood out in commercially marketed French folk music of the time not only for its focus on Breton traditional melodies but for its evocation of Irish, Welsh and Scottish music, as well as its inclusion of non-Western instruments such as Hindustani \textit{tabla} (performed not by a gharana trained musician, but by Michel Delaporte, a French percussionist). As Sherif Gemie argues in a recent article on Breton traditional music, with his inclusion of other so-called Celtic musics Stivell was “attempting to place Breton culture within a wider Celtic universe.”\textsuperscript{455} I would add that the inclusion of tabla is indexical of an exoticism and sense of the ancient, positioning Brittany as an exotic Other within the context of Europe. With such a representation, Breton music is presented as taking its place not only in the Celtic world but also within a broader, modern and increasingly globalized society, in which local, ‘ancient’ cultures on the periphery of Europe claim affinity with non-Western Others in a

\textsuperscript{455} Ibid., 109. As has already been discussed in Chapter 4, Brittany is also home to the world’s largest and oldest transnational Celtic festival, Lorient Festival Interceltique, which continues to represent Brittany as part of “wider Celtic universe” that is being increasingly more broadly interpreted.
type of intercultural identification.\textsuperscript{456} This interpretation makes sense in regards to Finnish music’s role as world music as well. While not identified as a Celtic nation, as Tina Ramnarine has argued, the Finnish history as a much-conquered nation under Russia and Sweden creates a sense of affinity with the Irish and other self-identified Celtic nations.\textsuperscript{457} Bretons share this fringe stature in Europe, and a desire to protect their language and cultural practices from dominant surrounding cultures.

In regards to contemporary Breton music, Gemie argues that “the first characteristic of modern Breton music seems to be its variety,” which includes music intended for dance, music for costumed, folkloric presentations, and music for professional concert presentations. Consequently, he resists the term ‘Breton music’ in favour of ‘Breton musical culture’ to more accurately represent what is a broad and constantly transforming aggregate of musical practices. This diversity has been a key to the success of music from Brittany both at home and on the global stage, according to Gemie. He writes that the breadth of styles available and inclusion of other influences has led to a wider audience: “The new Breton musical forms have succeeded because they are not doctrinaire. Consider their essential features: they are performative, often non-verbal, eclectic in their influences, innovative in their borrowings, and often sometimes sung in a language that the overwhelming majority of its listeners cannot truly understand. These features mean that it is hard to tie down this milieu to a single ideology.”\textsuperscript{458} Elsewhere, Steve Winick remarks on the same aspect of Breton music, remarking that it ”comes in an

\textsuperscript{456} Another example of such cross-cultural identification is the Breton protest singer Gilles Servat’s identification of Celtic peoples with Native Americans. See Stephen D. Winick, “Breton Identity, Breton Folk Music, and Alan Stivell’s Again.” \textit{Journal of American Folklore} 108 (995), 342.

\textsuperscript{457} Ramnarine, “Ilmatar’s Inspirations,” 190–192.

\textsuperscript{458} Sherif Gemie, “Roots, Rock, Breizh,” 117.
astonishing array of forms and styles.” Gemie’s description insightfully points out how extremely local features, in particular the Breton language, allow the music to be interpreted in a variety of ways to a transnational audience, as the lack of comprehension of the language amongst international listeners opens it up to multiple interpretations. I would add that it increases its ‘exotic’ appeal. Brittany is culturally close enough to other Western countries to have recognizable features, yet it contains an appealing Otherness. As Yann Bévant states that in relation to the adoption of other influences into Breton music, “it must be noted that hybridity, far from displacing traditional music, was the means to return its status as a privileged cultural channel. Far from being a symbol of backwardness, Breton music showed resilience and an ability to adjust to a modern, globalized world.”

The diversity Gemie and Winick highlight is evident even among musicians that have strong reputations as tradition bearers. Foremost among these is the flute player Jean Michel Veillon, with whom Filippo and Nuala have both collaborated. Veillon, who has performed as a member of some of Brittany’s most well known bands, claims to have developed his style in traditional circumstances. He grew up playing the Breton bombarde, however he now predominantly plays the wooden simple system flute, having closely studied recordings to gain competency with a range of traditional styles from various parts of Brittany. Veillon claims strong affinity with Irish traditional music; in fact, his introduction to the wooden flute came through Irish music, and he was a key individual in the introduction of the instrument into popular practice in Breton music in

---

459 Stephen D. Winick, “Breton Folk Music, Breton Identity and Alan Stivell’s Again,” 352.
461 Ibid.
the 1980s.\footnote{Winick, “Breton Folk Music,” 351.} He plays with Filippo in the Irish music group Valerio, which also includes Breton guitarist Julien Biget. Irish traditional music is a shared practice among many European and North American folk musicians, and serves as a point of convergence for musicians on transnational folk music circuits. In addition to Irish music, Veillon expresses affinity with musics from non-Western regions. For example, his promotional biography claims that he “also draws on traditions of oriental flutes (Turkey, Iran, India, China…)” in his personal style.\footnote{“Jean Michel Veillon,” http://www.jmveillon.net/fr-biographie.html (accessed October 30, 2011).} This affinity is an example of a transnationalism that is based around shared association with an instrument, such as can be seen with accordion and fiddle and can be the unifying thematic in camps and festivals.

It is notable from the above examples that the Breton, Belgian, and Finnish folk music scenes, with which Filippo has been engaged, emphasize exchange and interaction in both local and internationally marketed folk music practices, and that festivals (Lorient Festival Interceltique), cultural organizations (Boombal and Ethno) and university programs (Sibelius academy) are active in fostering these scenes. A significant point is that these folk musics, while local, connect with multiple transnational imaginaries and identifications, ranging from ethnic constructs such as Celtic and Nordic to instruments that have global reach such as flute and fiddle. This availability of a range of transnationalisms is a feature of the transnational folk festival field.

Musicians like Filippo find affinity with the above-examined scenes due to their openness. At home in Italy, as Filippo told me often, audiences for folk music have expectations of national musics that his own collaborations challenge. Thus, while Filippo’s sensibility is not always comfortably placed in the Italian folk scene, his
connection to Finnish, Breton, and Belgian scenes draws him to a larger world in which such innovation has more support from institutions and cultural organizations. These institutions and organizations help to legitimize the new folk music sensibility in a field in which the traditional nonetheless still carries a great deal of import.

**Nuala’s Transnational Links**

While Filippo’s collaborative networks tend to be predominantly European, Nuala’s networks involve several North American musicians and connect with a number of North American music scenes and categories. Their different affiliations demonstrate various types of transnationalisms encompassed under folk, such as Celtic, continental, and Americana. Nuala’s affinity with North American performers was evident in a collaborative project sponsored by the “New Voices” series of concerts in the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow in 2007 that was performed again at the festival in 2013. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the element of “connections” at the Celtic Connections festival is stressed as much as “Celtic,” particularly through the sponsorship of collaborations between so called Celtic acts and musicians from numerous other genres. Nuala’s project, entitled Astar, included Oliver Schroer and his fellow Canadian, trumpeter/fiddler Daniel Lapp, as well as Kentucky-based Americana singer songwriter Will Oldham, alongside several Scottish musicians.\(^{464}\) As she told me, “Astar is Gaelic for ‘journey’, which was the concept of the piece. It also can mean a distance covered. I wanted to represent my own musical path with Astar…trying to tie in different people I'd met along the way…. Oliver, Daniel Lapp, some musos from Scotland with whom I don't

\(^{464}\) Astar was performed at the Celtic Connections festival again in February 2012.
usually play.” The project, and Nuala’s own characterization of it, demonstrates the importance of personalized, boundary-crossing, transatlantic networks to her self-identity as a traveling musician.

*Cape Breton*

Nuala has a strong affinity with Nova Scotian music, in particular Cape Breton music, and has toured several times with fiddlers Troy McGillivray, Andrea Beaton and Kimberley Fraser, who are from the region. Her Cape Breton connections came about largely through her repeated appearances at the Celtic Colours Festival, in 2002 with the group Fine Friday, in 2004 with Harem Scarem, in 2006 with McGillivray and Fraser, in 2010 with her own trio of Scottish musicians, and most recently in 2012 as a solo performer. After so many tours there, she now feels a close affinity with Cape Breton.

The Celtic Colours festival, at which I performed with my own band in 1999, has a similar structure to the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, in that concerts occur at various venues. Late at night musicians often return to the “Festival Club,” at which there are usually organized performances and impromptu sessions. In such an environment, musicians often meet and make connections. Nuala now has a strong connection to the Cape Breton traditional music community, largely through her appearance at the festival. When I was with Nuala in 2010 at the Goderich Celtic Festival in Ontario, I was impressed with her knowledge of Cape Breton tunes, as I observed her playing continuously for several hours in a late night session with several Cape Breton musicians who were also performing there.
McGillivray says that transnational collaboration is rare among Cape Breton musicians, even those who tour internationally. This places the Cape Breton scene in contrast to musicians from European countries and regions I discussed: Finland, Belgium and Brittany. The reasons for this are complex. While scholars have critiqued the notion that Nova Scotia has been regarded in folklore as an isolated place in which a relatively pure folk culture exist, as Burt Feintuch has argued, Cape Breton has nonetheless remained relatively isolated until quite recently. Another important aspect of this is the perception of Cape Breton as a site in which a style of fiddling long since disappeared from its motherland, Scotland, has been preserved.

The relatively minimal degree of transnational collaboration among Cape Breton musicians does not mean however that the place is not defined or shaped by transnational forces. As Kathleen Lavengood has explored in depth, traditional music in Cape Breton has now become an integral part of the tourism economy, and in shaping the future of life on the island. Cultural tourists come to Cape Breton to visit the Celtic Colours festival in October, or to participate in fiddling workshops and camps. Due to its very reputation as a living folk culture with unbroken links to the past, Cape Breton is experiencing an influx that is transforming the island.

Cape Breton has therefore gained a high degree of global visibility in terms of folk music due to its perceived preservation of a traditional folk culture. This has made it

---

465 Troy McGillivray, personal communication, September 2011.
466 See McKay, The Quest of the Folk.
469 Lavengood, *Transnational Communities through Global Tourism.*
a touchstone of folk authenticity for musicians working in the folk scene. When I asked
McGillivray how he labeled himself as a musician, his response pointed to this fact. As
far as his own view of himself, he stated that “I have no idea how to label me. I love the
music of my ancestors, which is the music and language that was brought over to Nova
Scotia from the highlands and islands of Scotland during the clearances. That is the basis
of my music. But I have huge appreciation of all the styles of fiddling of Canada, and
beyond to other countries. And I am a big fan of rock, and country, Appalachian, and
French and so on. There is no one title for me.” While he hesitates to label himself, when
performing outside of Cape Breton he is known as a Cape Breton fiddler. However,
MacGillivray is not strictly a Cape Bretonner; he is from close to Antigonish, a town in
mainland Nova Scotia, not far from Cape Breton. According to him that area has a
distinct repertoire that, in addition to the Scottish reels, jigs and strathspeys that constitute
Cape Breton music, consists of polkas, which he says are unusual in Cape Breton. He
says he did not think of himself as a Cape Breton fiddler until he started to tour, when he
felt he needed to represent himself as such due to the recognition Cape Breton music
enjoys on the folk music circuit. He is not entirely comfortable with being in this
situation; while he identifies himself as a Cape Breton fiddler for the sake of easy
recognition, he worries “that people from there might not think it’s an appropriate
title.”

This is a clear example of how regional distinctions can be obscured in the
process of transnational promotion of traditional music. It further demonstrates how
touring can present opportunities for several self-representations and even sense of what
home is. For MacGillivray, when is he an Antigonisher, a Cape Bretoner, a Canadian?

---

470 Troy McGillivray, personal communication, October 2011.
**Voyage de Nuit**

Of course, Nuala’s connection with Cape Breton music clearly ties into the global Celtic imaginary,\(^{471}\) and common aspects of cultural practice, such as sessions, that led Kathleen Lavengood to identify a transnational Celtic community of practice.\(^{472}\) While these Cape Breton collaborations stay within this larger Celtic world, at least one of Nuala’s other projects has pushed the boundaries of folk music up against what is commonly thought of as world music. In 2007 Nuala participated in a multi-genre musical collaboration workshop, the International World Music Residency in upstate New York, at which she met French Flamenco guitarist Philippe Guidat. The two formed Voyage de Nuit to play their compositions. Voyage de Nuit clearly advertised its global diversity, with the nationalities of its Brazilian bass player, Bolivian percussionist and English accordion player emphasized in its promotion.\(^{473}\) Guidat came to the project with no experience of Irish or other Celtic music, and very little experience even with French folk music. He states that “the most important challenge for me was trying to create a real mix between two different languages, mine (from the jazz and flamenco experience) and Nuala’s one

---


472 Lavengood, *Transnational Communities through Global Tourism*.

(from the folk and ‘modern-folk’ world), which was not a small deal. I didn't want just to mix the style and the instruments and create a music mixing just the ‘shape’ of the music, I really wanted to mix languages.”

Philippe told me that, due to his lack of objectivity in evaluating the project, he is unsure of whether Voyage de Nuit was successful in obtaining such a level of integration. Rather, upon reflection, he judges the project in terms of his personal benefits. Chief among these is a newly found relationship to folk music, and particularly an interest in his local music. Philippe, who lives in Clermont Ferrand in the Auvergne region of France, one of the most vibrant areas in France for traditional music research and practice, says that since Voyage de Nuit he has increasingly been meeting and collaborating with traditional musicians from his region. This is another example of how transnational collaboration can lead to a reflexive process and a reconsideration of home: the turn homeward.

Other Projects

Branching further out from so called folk or world musics, other projects of Nuala’s have crossed into indy rock and pop fields, through collaborations with performers whose audiences do not identify primarily as folk fans; one such project was a 2009 collaboration with Euros Child, from the Welsh alternative rock band Gorky’s Zygotic Mynci, and Norman Blake from the Glasgow alternative rock band Teenage Fanclub, along with Caoimhin O Raighilligh, another Irish traditional musician who composes new tunes. In 2012 Nuala performed in a project that she says has been trying to get

---

474 Phillipe Guidat, personal communication, August 2011.
together for five years. This suite of pieces, entitled “A Suite of Scottish Industry,”
involves jazz bass player Euean Burton and pop vocalist Ziggy Campbell, as well as the
regular members of her band. As her website states, it involves “the composition and
performance of a suite of six pieces of music, each inspired by a different Scottish
industry, and composed by six different and highly regarded Scottish
musician/composers.” This Scottish theme is an unusual local focus for Nuala, who has
been traveling extensively and working mostly out of Scotland in recent years. While
projects such as “Astar” and “Voyage de Nuit” evoke an imaginary of travel, as I shall
examine, the process of travel is also bound up with reflections on ‘home.’

The Turn Homeward: Filippo

The Ambiguity of ‘Home’

In April 2010, after I had been in Genoa for a week, Filippo told me he had arranged for
us to go hear some traditional music in the Appenines, the mountains that separate the
coastal city from the interior of Northern Italy. A few days later, we borrowed a car and
drove along the winding road that follows the Trebbia river inland.

We arrived at the town of Bobbio, the site where the Irish monk Columbanus had
established an abbey in the sixth century, a symbol of cosmopolitan Christianity. This
ancient town, a mere 88 kilometres yet a two hour drive from Genoa, has the feel of a
tourist site, with buses idling in the central piazza and several shops displaying neon
signs advertising regional salami and other local specialities. Filippo, his girlfriend
Roberta, and I walked through its spotless medieval streets. In stores that were clearly geared towards tourists, Filippo bought some local wine and Roberta bought some local honey: treasured purchases. “It’s good to get products of the place you visit, this has more meaning than just buying in the department store,” he said.

After our afternoon at Bobbio, we returned to the car and wound our way through the steep, narrow roads to the hamlet of Santa Maria, and finally pulled into the parking lot of the place where the dance was to be held that evening, the Cristal pizzeria. A few middle-aged people were standing around as we entered the building, passing glances at us, sometimes warm and friendly, sometimes curious and inquisitive. Filippo, who in Genoa was always running into musicians, actors, and other performers with whom he had worked on some project or another, did not have anything like that sense of connectedness and recognition in this place. We had a coffee and settled at the bar to watch the local people file in.

Moments after we entered the pizzeria, Stefano Valla walked in. Stefano is one of the few practitioners in the region of the piffero, a double-reed instrument that is used to play the dance music of the Quattro Provinci, this region of tight river valleys in a segment of the Appenines where the provinces of Genoa, Allesandria, Piacenza and Pavia all meet. The growing crowd of people standing in the lobby became more animated. After acknowledging a few friends with smiles and jokes, Stefano, to whom Filippo had mentioned I was an ethnomusicologist, walked over to me and thrust his CD into my hand. He then joined some men and started to sing in the regional part-song style: three parts - a high falsetto, medium tenor and very low bass – sung at constant high volume with singers facing each other at close proximity. The timbre of the voices had a

239
combination of nasality and chest resonance that I imagined I could never reproduce. To my uninitiated ears the singing resembled the trallalero male choral singing of Genoa, however Filippo told me the three-voice configuration was what made this mountain style different from Genovese group singing, even if some of the repertoire crossed over. A crowd gathered around to listen.

The title of the CD Stefano handed me, “Per Dove?” (“From Where?), humorously reflects an idea that I encountered regularly that evening. There is a sense – in comments about musical uniqueness, in the slow winding journey to get there, and in the distinctive instrumental and formal features of the music – that the Quattro Provinci is an “undiscovered” corner of Italy. Consequently, the discourse surrounding the regional dance and vocal music of Quattro Provinci is that it is uncommercialized and part of an unbroken oral tradition. One gentleman, who had moved to the area from Milan was now firmly involved in the local community, said that in terms of the musical culture it was like a “lost world,” and mentioned that it is not well known to international tourists; “Per Dove?” echoes the sense that people from the outside have not heard of the place. Of course, the nearby town of Bobbio and its touristic salami and wine stores tended to contradict this statement, but this was not Bobbio. In this region of valleys, as the ex-

---

475 Trallalero singing is associated primarily with Genoa, and is a practice that went through a resurgence following American folklorist Alan Lomax’s and Italian ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella’s recordings in October 1954. A high male contralto voice and a singer who vocally imitates guitar accompaniment, in addition to tenor, baritone, and bass parts, distinguish the sound of the tralleleri make up groups known as squadra. Tralalero singing was popular in Genoa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries among working class men, particularly longshoremen. There is relatively little in-depth scholarship in English on trallalero, however the extensive liner notes to a recent release of the Lomax/Carpitella recordings were written by the leading authorities on the subject, including Edward Neill, who was instrumental in the Trallalero resurgence in the 1960s and 1970s. For more on trallalero, see Various Artists, Italian Treasury: The Trallaleri of Genoa, Rounder CD 1802, 1999.

Milano told me, a walk over a hill could bring a different spoken dialect, and a different style of playing or singing.

Filippo himself referred to the event we would be attending as “the real thing.” Such a notion of authenticity surrounding the music and the region is enhanced by several factors. Stefano Valla told me that the piffero tradition has never been subject to mass mediation in the way that other regional folk musics have. Further, and perhaps this is the most important thing, it plays a role in the daily life of local people; it is their dance music, particularly in the summer when there are regular outdoor village dances. It offers an experience of participation and face-to-face community that seems to contrast to the transnational, infrequent interactions of my collaborators and their idiosyncratic approaches to folk music.

I paid twenty euros to enter the dance, which included dinner and wine. I sat down next to Stefano and his musical partner, accordionist Daniele Scurati; the keyboard accordion (fisarmonica) became part of the practice in the late 19th century, replacing the regional bagpipe (the musa) as the accompanying instrument for the piffero. Stefano and I found it was easier to communicate in French, as my Italian and his English were not proficient. We did not speak long before we discovered a mutual acquaintance in the Québécois accordionist and instrument builder Raynald Oulette, who organizes the Festival Mondiale l’Accordeon in Montmagny, Quebec. Stefano and Daniele had played there; in fact, they toured regularly to festivals as major professional representatives of Appeninian traditional music. This place was not so remote to me after all.

After dinner, the tables were cleared except for one, which became the stage on which Stefano and Daniele placed their chairs. The dance began: polkas, mazurkas,
waltzes, dance forms that constitute the social dance traditions of many European traditions. Filippo told me that on this night they were not intending to focus on the distinct dances of the region such as the Allesandrina, a skipping dance. He was disappointed, as he wanted me to see these older, regional dances. Ultimately, they did play one Allesendrina, much to Filippo’s delight. Filippo and Roberta jumped up to dance.

Throughout the evening, Stefano invited other piffero players, all his students, to come up on the table-stage and perform. As they went up to perform, there were cheers of support from members of the audience. At one point, Stefano invited Filippo to play with them. Filippo played two tunes by himself; a Belgian mazurka and an Italian polka that was not from the region. While he was playing these tunes, nobody got up to dance. Then, he joined Stefano and Daniele in a popular tune from the area. The dance floor filled.

I did not get the chance to ask any of the participants why nobody danced to Filippo’s tunes. Filippo was puzzled about it himself. After the dance ended and we headed back to the car, Filippo commented that nobody danced when he played. He was clearly disappointed. I asked him if he knew why and he did not know, as he played tunes with the same form and tempo as the tunes they had been playing.

Liguriani

While I cannot deduce much regarding the social milieu of the dances of Quattro provinci, a task that is deserving of much more extensive study, I can comment on Filippo’s relationship to it. The above account stands as an example of how traditional
folk music can signify the local in powerful ways. This is true particularly in Italy, a country in which regions are strongly perceived as distinct. Simultaneously, it also reveals the ambiguity of what individuals can claim to be their locality. For Filippo, an hour and a half drive within the same province was an encounter with a culture with which he had a peripheral relationship, and which he encountered as exotic. Added to this is a contemporary rural/urban divide; as an urban Genoan who grew up in the city, Filippo has a complex relationship with rural traditional music in Italy. For Filippo, the music of the Quattro Provinci is a regional folk music that he experiences as an outsider. Yet, as a Ligurian, he can also claim it as ‘his’ music, as he identifies with the larger region. His group, Liguriani, draws on this regional music (among other Ligurian styles) for part of its repertoire. Such regional music offers for Filippo the necessary touchstone of rural folk authenticity in a market that, despite the cosmopolitan orientation of many of the musicians who perform on it, trades on romantic-collective notions of the local.

However, as I shall demonstrate, through Liguriani and other national and regional projects, Filippo does not entirely hold to essentialist representations of locality, and in fact challenges them in several ways, through his engagement with various transnationalisms.

Liguriani is an important sign of what is a recent turn homeward for Filippo, as his focus is turning to more local and national projects after playing in an array of projects with Finnish, Belgian, Breton, American, Canadian, Irish, and Scottish

---

477 I discuss this aspect of regionalism in Italy further below.
478 As urban, middle class musicians creating their own arrangements of musics associated with working classes and rural people, Liguriani are much like groups that characterize many contemporary folk music revivals since the 1960s. Filippo claims that the group was formed to improve upon some of the Ligurian revival groups of that generation, which he does not see as being musically compelling as to his mind they were more interested in research and preservation than in creating interesting arrangements. Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, April 2011.
musicians. In addition to Liguriani, he has a duo with Italian fiddler Marco Fabbri, and an Italian accordion trio, Triotonico. Most of all, he is putting a great deal of energy into Liguriani, a group Filippo said he formed in order to present Ligurian folk music in the kinds of arrangements characteristic of many Celtic music revivals since the 1970s.\footnote{Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, April 2010.}

The group was formed partially as a result of Filippo’s awareness of Italian folk music presenters’ expectations of regional authenticity.\footnote{When I began to follow Filippo’s career in 2007, there were no Liguriani shows listed on his website. As of July 2011 shows with Liguriani constitute over half of his touring dates up to November 2011, the rest being a mixture of the Filippo Gambetta trio, Triotonico, his Irish group, Careelon and various projects in which he is a sideman.}

When I visited Filippo in Liguria’s capital city, Genoa, in May 2011 I watched Liguriani perform as part of a comic play entitled “Mauro Garibaldino (Per Caso),” which translates as “Mauro Garibaldino (by accident).” In the play, the members of Liguriani appear in peasant clothes, playing music the promotional material states as being from the “Ligurian risorgimento,” Ligurian songs related to the mid 19th century Italian unification movement. Mauro, the main character of what is essentially a one-man play with a band, is a Genoese peasant who through various humorously-recounted circumstances has been present at several points in the life of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the leading figure of Italian unification. Throughout the play, Mauro tells stories of his encounters with Garibaldi. The play, nationalistic and celebratory of Italian unification, was sponsored as part of the 150\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the unification, and is set on the docks in Genoa, as Mauro is about to leave for America.

Genoa, historically one of the Mediterranean’s most active ports, has a strong maritime culture, and was the point from which many Italians left to emigrate in the 19\textsuperscript{th}
The trope of Genoa as a site for leaving and arriving is evident in Liguriani’s promotional material. Their website, with the subtitle “suoni dai mondi Liguri,” or “music from Ligurian worlds,” states:

I Liguriani offers a show in which the images and sentiments of Ligurian culture and history are evoked through words and sounds. Setting sail from Genoa, a place of departure and much longed-for return, which has always been “home” for the people of Liguria, an imaginary journey takes us through old snapshots that reveal the Ligurian customs, traditions and themes of these people, squeezed between the steep mountains and the waves of the sea, closed in by geography and by character, but remaining open to contact with other people, either by visiting them or being visited by them across the sea.

The repertoire of “Liguriani” is varied and diverse, as diverse as the souls that influence it and, starting from our land, also arriving in places where Ligurian migrants have settled. The strictly Ligurian melodies appear alongside other types of songs related to the tradition of the surrounding areas, such as the melancholy mazurkas and the lively monferrine of the Piedmont, or the languid waltzes of places that are culturally similar to Liguria, like France.

This quote captures how, through historical associations with travel, the fluid and dynamic qualities of a place can be invoked discursively. In a similar way that promotional material for the Lorient Festival Interceltique emphasized that port city’s openness to the world, Liguriani’s bio emphasizes that Ligurian culture, while maintaining its uniqueness, is not isolated and static, but has been shaped, and continues to be shaped, by travel, return, and intercultural encounter. This image of Genoa is characterized by simultaneous in-migration and out-migration, at least over the last few centuries, is borne out by statistical analysis. Giuseppe Felloni demonstrates that at many points in the 19th century, both processes occurred simultaneously and the influx of in-migration to Genoa was slightly more than the out-migration. Giuseppe Felloni, “The Population Dynamics and Economic Development of Genoa, 1750–1939,” in Population and Society in Western European Port Cities, 1650–1939 ed. Richard Lawton and Robert Lee (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) 74–90. Genoa was the main port through which Italians from other regions of Italy migrated to America; many Eastern Europeans also went through Genoa en route to America as well. Augusta Molinari, “Emigration Traffic in the Port of Genoa between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Problems of Social Hygiene,” Journal of American Ethnic History 13.1 (1993): 102–118.

This image of Genoa as a city characterized by simultaneous in-migration and out-migration, at least over the last few centuries, is borne out by statistical analysis. Giuseppe Felloni demonstrates that at many points in the 19th century, both processes occurred simultaneously and the influx of in-migration to Genoa was slightly more than the out-migration. Giuseppe Felloni, “The Population Dynamics and Economic Development of Genoa, 1750–1939,” in Population and Society in Western European Port Cities, 1650–1939 ed. Richard Lawton and Robert Lee (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) 74–90. Genoa was the main port through which Italians from other regions of Italy migrated to America; many Eastern Europeans also went through Genoa en route to America as well. Augusta Molinari, “Emigration Traffic in the Port of Genoa between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Problems of Social Hygiene,” Journal of American Ethnic History 13.1 (1993): 102–118.


See page Chapter 3 for a discussion of this representation of Lorient.
naturalized in this band biography through a seemingly dichotomous evocation of geography; while the mountains “close it in,” its role as a Mediterranean port means it has also long been “open to contact.” It is simultaneously open and closed. Further, Liguriani celebrates alliances with other places, presumably “Ligurian worlds,” that are “culturally similar” to Liguria. This interpretation allows an ambiguous definition of what is “strictly Ligurian”; it is inclusive of the music of immigrants and of other regions that are said to share an affinity with Ligurian culture, while it is also particular.

In light of recent political and cultural tensions in Northern Italy, this representation of Genoa can be seen as a stance against hyper-regionalism and exclusionary politics that are evident in the right wing Lega Nord party and that evoke primordial connections to an indigenous Celtic people in their push to separate from the so-called Mediterranean south. It can also be seen as a means to reclaim a sense of national pride and belonging that Filippo and many other musicians I spoke with believes has been undermined by the far right and by Silvio Berlusconi’s overwhelming personal influence on the national culture in the past few decades.

484 Lega Nord has been the subject of several recent studies that examine the connection between racism and regionalism in the party. See, for example, Benito Giordano, “Italian Regionalism or ‘Padanian’ Nationalism: The Political Project of the Lega Nord in Italian Politics,” Political Geography 19.4 (2000): 445–471; Euan Hague, Benito Giordano, and Edward H. Sebesta, “Whiteness, Multiculturalism, and Nationalist Appropriation of Celtic Culture: The Case of the League of the South and Lega Nord.” Cultural Geographies 12.2 (2005): 152.

485 An instance in Europe in which the left has “taken back” folk music from recent far right movements is in England, where the leader of the far right British National Party, Nick Griffin, used folk music to promote the party’s devotion to English national identity. For example, the party used one of singer Steve Knightley’s songs “Roots” on their website, initially without his knowledge. Knightley’s objection to this was widely discussed in the British press. The organization Folk against Fascism was formed in order, as fiddler Eliza Carty put it in an article in the Guardian newspaper, “to distance folk music from the far right.” The Folk Against Fascism website states that “FAF came about because of an obvious campaign by the BNP to co-opt folk music and culture for their ideal of ‘Englishness’. They began selling compilation CDs of folk music on their website, against the wishes of the musicians concerned. In the national media, Nick Griffin has cited various high-profile folk artists as his favourite singers[...]Folk Against Fascism was formed because many in the folk community wanted to say that you can be proud of England’s music,
At the time of my first visit to Genoa in 2010, Filippo had been performing infrequently with Liguriani. By my next visit to Genoa in April 2011, things had changed: Filippo told me that the band was becoming his main project. Since then, they have released their self-titled first CD and performed in 2012 at Celtic Connections in Glasgow.\(^{486}\) One of Filippo’s reasons for starting Liguriani was to create more work at home. Filippo tells me that the concept of Liguriani is more suited to the hiring practices of Italian festivals and other events. He says that more funding and performance opportunities are available in Italy for groups that perform regional cultural music than for groups that do not fit presenter and audience expectations of folk music. While he is currently involving himself increasingly in Liguriani (therefore catering to these expectations), he nonetheless regularly complains of the classification of music in Italy according to region or nation. He points out that work at home is scarce for his Filippo Gambetta trio, a group that is difficult to classify due to Filippo’s idiosyncratic compositions that reference Irish, Finnish, and Balkan forms as much as they do Italian music. Filippo claims the trio had a much warmer response at Canadian transnational folk festivals, where people just see it as Italian folk music, and at which the trio may be one of the only Italian acts, an example that could be used to counter Baumann’s notion that the national associations of folk music are disappearing at transnational folk festivals.\(^{487}\)

\(^{486}\) Liguriani, **Liguriani**, Felmay 972353, 2011.

\(^{487}\) Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, April 2008.
Pan-Italian Projects

Another of Filippo’s projects that is a means of asserting his political stance against hyper-regionalism is a new duo project with a fiddler, Marco Fabbri. The duo performs music from various regions of Italy.

This is an appropriate point to contextualize Filippo’s ideal, which might be thought of as one of unity in diversity, within the context of the relationship between Italian nationalism and regionalism. As even the casual tourist to the nation can observe, Italians tend to identify with their regions. The nation state of Italy came into being in 1860, and national pride is often in tension with campanilismo, or regional pride. Loyalty in Italy is strongly oriented towards cities and local regions. This is due to the dominant role of city-states in pre-unification, medieval and renaissance Italy. In addition, Northern Italians and Southern Italians perceive themselves as culturally distinct from one another, a point that I heard from Italians regularly during my visits. This regionalism is evident in the musical diversity. As the New Grove article on traditional music in Italy states: “Unlike other European countries, Italy saw the appearance of no broad initiatives, either in the mass media or under state auspices, to promote oral musical traditions, nor is there any folk music genre or idiom that is felt to express national identity. The musical picture is one of great diversity and creative independence; there is a rich variety of types of expression, which generally highlight specific regional quality.”

Therefore, within the context of Italy, it is unusual for individual folk musicians to perform melodies from a range of regions, as Filippo’s duo with Marco Fabbri does. A third project, Triotonico, exhibits this pan-Italian character as well. Triotonico is a diatonic accordion trio involving the young Piedmontese musician Simone Bottasso and one of the musicians Filippo cites as his main mentors, the widely respected Tuscan musician Riccardo Tesi. I saw Triotonico perform twice during a small tour of Holland in April, 2011. The trio’s repertoire is pan-Italian in purview, with the organetto, which is an instrument that is played in many parts of Italy, as the unifying element.\textsuperscript{490} Within the concert, there were Sardinian tunes, Occitanian tunes from the region of Val d’Aosta bordering France, a Southern Italian Moorish dance, a tune usually played on the double reed piffero from the Quattro Provinci area, and original compositions by Riccardo Tesi. After the concert, Filippo commented that Tesi, who is now in his mid-50s, was one of the first Italian accordion players to bring together references to diverse regional Italian styles in his compositions, when he started to become well known in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{491}

In Italy, being cosmopolitan therefore means embracing the music of several regions as much as it does transnational engagement. These musicians nonetheless also are interested in transnational collaborations and drawing styles of other nations into their music. Talking to Tesi after a performance of Triotonico in the south of Holland, it was evident that, as with Filippo, his interest in Italian traditional music does not prevent him

\textsuperscript{490} The website www.organetto.it (accessed October 20, 2011) maps out well known diatonic accordion players in Italy. While not a scholarly source, the map gives a good idea of the topography of diatonic accordion playing in Italy. While all regions list at least one diatonic accordion player, the majority are in the South of Italy. An exception to this is the Northern region of Piedmont. Filippo Gambetta is the only organetto player listed in Liguria, a region with which the keyboard accordion or fisarmonica is more closely associated.

\textsuperscript{491} Tesi told me that he had been invited to a conference of Italian ethnomusicologists to discuss his relationship with traditional music; this is almost certainly due to his important role in Italian music as a cosmopolitan in a country that is starkly regional.
from pursuing transnational collaborations. While he has delved extensively into many Italian regional styles over the course of his career, he has also fostered close connections with musicians in other parts of the world, with festivals being the main setting for encounters. In fact, our discussion raised a ‘small world’ moment that reinforces just how closely connected the folk circuit is and how festivals play a role in fostering such ties. Just days before this particular concert in Holland, he had hosted the former Vancouver Folk Festival director Gary Cristall at his home in Tuscany; apparently Cristall’s initial hiring of Tesi’s band Ritmia in the late 1980s (a concert I saw that stands out as one of the experiences that got me interested in contemporary folk music) led to an ongoing friendship. Further, Tesi’s encounter with Brazilian guitarist Celso Machado (who resides in Vancouver) at the Vancouver Folk Festival and with the late French hurdy gurdy player Pierre Imbert at a festival in Italy led to a collaboration among the three musicians. This resulted in a performance sponsored by the Vancouver World Music Collective.

Returning to Filippo, it is striking to note that his Italian-based projects are so strongly connected to pan-regional national unity. This, along with the glocalized regionalism represented by Liguriani, undermined assumptions I had made about Filippo

---

492 In particular Tesi has often participated in transnational diatonic accordion groups, due to the presence of that instrument in several European regions. In 1993 he recorded and subsequently toured with Basque diatonic accordionist Kepa Junkera and English diatonic accordionist John Kirkpatrick in Trans-Europe Diatonique. Recently, in 2010 he toured with The Samurai, a group consisting of diatonic accordionists Bruno Le Tron (France), Didier Laloy (Belgium), David Munnely (Ireland), and Markku Lepistö (Finland).

493 The Vancouver World Music Collective was founded by Pierre Imbert and his wife Diana Stewart-Imbert in 2001. This organization consisted of several Vancouver-based performers including myself, Celso Machado, Zheng player Mei Han, her multi-instrumentalist husband Randy Raine-Reusch, Vietnamese musicians Khac Chi and Hoang Bic, Klezmer musician and composer Moshe Denburg (who is the artistic director of Vancouver’s Intercultural Orchestra, known as VICO), and Uruguayan multi-instrumentalist Joseph Pepe Danza.
based on my initial conversations with him, his own music, and his touring history. I saw him in many ways as the quintessential cosmopolitan, as a boundary-breaker who seemed to challenge place-based notions of tradition at every turn. My impressions were based upon the extent of his collaborations, and the aesthetic of his own idiosyncratic compositions. His Italian projects, rather than being anti-nationalist, are reinterpreting Italian nationhood in light of contemporary Italian tensions related to immigration and politics, albeit with strong references to the regional distinctiveness, to history, and particular sense of place. While they embrace regionalism, they emphasize exchange and interaction, and cosmopolitan “diversity of experience.”

Filippo’s home-based projects serve to identify local musical particularities while it fosters what Doreen Massey has described in her argument for a “global sense of place,” perhaps more accurately expressed, in light of Roland Robertson’s adopted portmanteau, as a glocal sense of place. She characterizes this as an “alternative interpretation of place”:

In this interpretation, what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus…. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings…. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.

In Massey’s view, this interpretation of place, therefore, does not negate the specificity of place, but re-imagines it:

494 When I first met Filippo at the Haelker festival in Denmark in 2008, he shocked me when he told me he wanted to “destroy tradition”. Since that time, his actions have belied those sentiments.
496 Ibid., 154.
There is the specificity of place which derives from the fact that each place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations. There is the fact that this very mixture together in one place may produce effects which would not have happened otherwise. And finally, all these relations interact with and take a further element of specificity from the accumulated history of a place, with that history itself imagined as the product of layer upon layer of different sets of linkages, both local and to the wider world.\textsuperscript{497}

**The Turn Homeward: Nuala**

As Filippo has done, Nuala has also recently turned to the local music of her homeland, with a very specific regional focus. She has created a group, Oirealla, which her promotional material states, “performs the music and song of her native South-East Ulster in Ireland,”\textsuperscript{498} with Ulster fiddler Gerry O’Conner, Ulster accordion player Martin Quinn and, notably, Breton guitarist Gilles LeBigot.\textsuperscript{499} Significantly, this is her first project that has focused on Irish traditional music since she left Ireland for Scotland in 1995. As with Filippo, while she has an interest in transnational collaborations and genre-crossing projects – in fact currently involving herself in them to a greater degree than Filippo – this recent development marks a significant re-engagement with a conception of personal roots in her home region. Referring to the project, Nuala states:

> It feels somehow like coming full circle, back to my origins. It’s very satisfying for me to play this music, I think it’s good for me to be associated with these high calibre Irish musos as well, as most of my life I’ve been playing with Scottish/other ones!\textsuperscript{500}

\textsuperscript{497} Ibid., 155–156.
\textsuperscript{498} Nuala Kennedy, “Nuala Kennedy” www.myspace.com/nualakennedy (accessed November 2, 2011). Oirealla is the name of the Gaelic kingdom that covered much of the area of current South-east Ulster. According to Nuala, the music of the area has been shaped through extensive historical links with Scotland.
\textsuperscript{499} LeBigot is one of the most active Breton folk guitarists. As well as being a founding member of two popular Breton bands, Skolvan and Barzaz, he has been collaborating with Irish musicians since 1980. Gilles LeBigot, “Career,” http://www.gilleslebigot.com/bio_en.htm (accessed November 2, 2011.)
\textsuperscript{500} Nuala Kennedy, personal email communication, August 2011.
The benefits of being associated with musicians who have a high degree of traditional music credibility raises the issues of social and cultural capital in relation to expectations of authenticity, a topic that I take up in the next chapter. As I was aware that Filippo had stated a financial reason for his recent turn homeward, I asked Nuala what kind of professional benefits this project might have for her. While, at the time of writing, Oirealla has not toured extensively, Nuala feels that “it will be just as easy to book as [her] other projects, perhaps easier in America.” This is because she has the sense that in America “they like what they perceive as ‘authentic’ Irish music”. The turn homeward can therefore serve as a means to take a musician back out into the transnational circuit, as the supposed authenticity of such projects have appeal on the world stage. The same process can be seen with Filippo and Liguria, whose recent performance at Celtic Connections marks their entry to the festival field as representatives of Ligurian music.

While Oirealla is an Irish traditional music project, it is transnational nonetheless, with Nuala living in Scotland, Quinn and O’Connor in Ireland, and LeBigot in Brittany. The inclusion of a Breton musician in what is a very locally-focussed project is evidence of both the alliance between Irish and Breton music in the broader Celtic world as well as the practice of Irish traditional music in other parts of Europe.

The transnational constitution of Oirealla has potential benefits for the group. Nuala told me that the various members of the band help obtain gigs, something Nuala sees as an asset, as they are all soloists and have developed different contacts in different circles and regions, and will suggest Oirealla if it seems appropriate for the venue. Each
member serves as a bridge to new networks in different circuits; this bridging is an important factor that is increased in such transnational collaborations, a topic that I will explore in greater depth in the next chapter.

Nuala and Filippo’s move toward more involvement with music associated with their home regions is partially related to some presenters’ expectations of folk music as synonymous with local, regional, identifiable styles. This harkens to an interpretation of folk music that on the surface is more Herderian and particularistic. However, as I have demonstrated, the particular and the local are not always as constituted in the repertoire choices and representation of these groups as bounded spaces, but of locales of interaction and exchange.

Along with the glocalization argument I make through the above discussion of Nuala and Filippo’s musical activities, these examples demonstrate the cosmopolitan, project-based nature of these musicians’ careers. In general this approach allows them to access a variety of networks, some more locally-based and others transnational, that all are embraced by the broad and fluid notion of folk that is evident at many transnational folk festivals. They engage with the music of particular regions or nations, transnational affinities such as Irish diaspora, pan-Celticism and pan-Europeanism, along with various popular music subcultures. As we will see in the next chapter, which is a closer look at the relationship of Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, these folk musicians are often assessed according to their proximity to two ideas of folk, one tending toward an individualistic emphasis on innovation and the other toward a collective emphasis on continuity. These

---

501 See Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties.”
assessments play a role in the value they have to one another both creatively and in terms of their individual career trajectories.
CHAPTER 6

OLIVER, NUALA, AND FILIPPO

The folklife festival is a practical investigation of the genesis of social experience in a world where the boundaries between cultures are no longer geographical or political but personal, in which the person is in himself or herself culturally not one but many, capable of moving within and among many communities, in which “culture” itself has emerged as the force that secures the connection between reality and the individual soul. 502

In Robert Cantwell’s interpretation, contemporary, pluralistic folklore festivals engender a social phenomenon that Max Baumann has called “the individualization of experiences in the multicultural context.” 503 According to Cantwell, while such festivals are organized along the lines of cultural categories, in reality they encourage the formation of alliances, however fleeting, across boundaries of nation, class, and ethnicity. During the duration of a festival, the interactions of individuals – crafts people, musicians, volunteers, audience members – are not restrained by confining notions of tradition. Cantwell suggests folklife festivals look to a brave new world of transcultural interaction, in which “folklife is not the culture of the rude peasant or the rustic mountaineer but a very model of the ways in which we are at this moment learning to reinvent our humanity”. 504

504 Cantwell, “Feasts of Unnaming,” 303.
Cantwell is writing about American folklife festivals that were established after World War II in what is commonly called the North American Folk Revival period. Yet the question of whether festivals have the potential to model new forms of heterogeneous community continues to be relevant in the context of transnational folk music festivals, and the touring circuits that connect them. What makes the topic particularly current is that the festivals promote themselves as sites of transcultural interaction, as I demonstrated in Chapter 4. Do boundary-crossing relationships formed through transnational festival encounters serve as “a very model of the ways in which we are at this moment learning to reinvent our humanity”? If there are new forms of sociality and new affinities emerging from folk festivals, what do they look like, and what are their dynamics? In order to begin to address these questions, here I consider the relationships between the three musicians who have been my main research collaborators: Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo.

As was evident in the examples in the previous chapter, Oliver, Nuala, Filippo, and other musicians with whom they are connected have each developed personalized, transnational sociomusical networks through their collaborations with individuals in different countries. Their musical collaborators are affiliated with a range of local practices. In most cases, these musicians met at transnational festivals and related events, and meet up at such events at various rates of recurrence. In this chapter I demonstrate that, within the broad, ambiguous categories of folk and traditional music, these relationships facilitate career strategies. Through fostering multiple collaborative connections, musicians can negotiate various expectations related to folk and traditional music.
Such networks can become the basis for expanding creative and work horizons. They also can serve as a means of fostering social solidarity based on shared values and tastes. Therefore, to truly address Cantwell’s hypothesis it is necessary to consider that “network” is too thin, too one-dimensional a concept to describe the deeper connections between people. For this reason, I also engage with community, a concept with deep historical ties to folk music and traditional music. These terms signify types of sociality that are in fact in tension with one another. I conclude this chapter with a consideration of the ways in which community as a construct continues to have meaning, yet is being reconfigured, within the transnational folk festival field. I raise the question, addressed further in the next chapter, as to whether new forms of folk music speak to tensions related to the changing nature of community.

The Social Network

I have stated that Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo have developed personalized, transnational social networks through collaboration. The term ‘social network’ has entered public discourse in recent years, largely due to the advent of social networking sites such as Facebook and aided by an Academy Award winning film entitled The Social Network. The creation of online social networks has now become the focus of sociological research, due to the fact that the ways people interact through such sites raise sociological questions about continuity and depth in contemporary non-contiguous interpersonal relationships.505

505 For a summary of studies related to theorization of online sociality, see Jan Fernback, “Beyond the Diluted Community Concept: a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective on Online Social Relations,” New
Sociality in so-called cyberspace has parallels in, and is interconnected with, sociality in transnational occupational relationships, such as those between my research collaborators. To explore current transformations in the sociality of these musicians across space and cultural categories it is useful then to turn to scholarship that examines the relationship between the Internet and the transformation of contemporary social relations. While, as I argued in the previous chapter, the Internet may fall short of being the dominant structural force in society, as Manuel Castells argues, the types of sociality it engenders make it a useful entry point to discussions of contemporary non-contiguous social relations in general. Although my focus is on long distance relationships that involve face-to-face contact to some extent, I nonetheless draw on scholarship from the fields of sociology, anthropology, and ethnomusicology relating to online sociality throughout this chapter.

“Network Sociality” and Community

Sociologist Andreas Wittel has coined the term ‘network sociality,’ stating that this form of interaction is “based on individualization and deeply embedded in technology; it is informational, ephemeral but intense, and it is characterized by an assimilation of work and play”. Wittel examines such sociality as exemplified by workers in what he calls “new media”, a contemporary segment of the culture industry that emerged from “the convergence of information and communication technology, old
media, art and design. Significantly, he contrasts network sociality to community.

According to Wittel, community “entails stability, coherence, embeddedness and belonging” and “involves strong and long-lasting ties, proximity and a common history or narrative of the collective.” Michele Willson, in a recent critique of various network and community concepts, has drawn on Wittel and other authors to summarize and critique the various ways in which network and community are often characterized in sociological literature. I reproduce her summary in Table 6a:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of being together</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporal and spatial form</td>
<td>Fluid, dynamic, seeking equilibrium</td>
<td>Inherent stability, coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Ephemeral, internal, flows</td>
<td>Longevity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>Dispersed</td>
<td>Dense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Protocols, code</td>
<td>Norms, culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>Complementary, degree of heterogeneity assumed</td>
<td>Homogenous, common identity, needs and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Outward</td>
<td>Inward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical positioning/affiliations</td>
<td>Postmodern</td>
<td>Modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>More than nodal aggregate</td>
<td>More than individual aggregate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1. Willson’s Comparison of ‘Network’ and ‘Community’

508 Ibid. 52.
509 Ibid. 51. In this concept of community, Wittel evokes the notion of gemeinschaft, which was developed by Ferdinand Tönnies in his 1887 work Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, republished in English as Community and Society (New York: Harper and Row, 1963). Gerard Delanty writes that “Community as Gemeinschaft is expressed, to follow Tönnies terms, in family life in concord, in rural village life in folkways, and in town life in religion.” Gerard Delanty, Community (New York: Routledge 2003): 33.
In her article, Willson rightly problematizes such dualisms. She argues for instance that that the idea of community as being stable and homogenous “fails to take into account more contemporary work on community that acknowledges its fluidity and multiplicity”. Nonetheless, this distinction between network sociality and community brings into focus the question of whether long distance connections, in particular those among people with different cultural identifications, are able to develop the “stability, coherence, embeddedness, and belonging” that Wittel associates with community, which in contrast is associated with “proximity” and a “common history or narrative of the collective”.

There are features from both sides of these binaries in the sociality of touring musicians. On the one hand, there are particularly instrumental aspects to these musicians’ careers that are closely linked to the network type of sociality Wittel’s new media workers exemplify. My three collaborators, Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, all have working lives that are characterized by a high degree of flexibility and individualized social networks of contacts; in other words, they have all been involved in a casual, even unintentional type of “networking” that enables the development of transnational careers. Social interactions are infrequent and involve periods of brief yet often intense contact as musicians encounter each other at festivals, or even engage in projects such as recordings or tours together. Further, these relationships are increasingly “embedded in technology” in that they are perpetuated and maintained online. Finally, Wittel’s observation that network sociality involves a combination of work and play has some relevance to touring

---

511 Ibid., 752.
musicians, particularly in the social milieu of folk music, in which a late night session after a festival can serve as an important career networking opportunity as much as a fun or inspirational musical experience.

On the other hand, while musicians’ networks demonstrate these characteristics, the opportunity for intensive face-to-face connection, alternating with online contact, facilitates a type of sociality that begins to resemble what Wittel identifies as community. Through organizing collaborative tours, performances at the same festivals and camps, and other types of ‘on the road’ encounters, relatively frequent interaction among musicians from different locales is possible. Friendships deepen, and romantic relationships sometimes grow. Making music together is often based on shared sensibilities, tied to shared values and beliefs about art, culture, and politics. However, the desire to establish more stable relations – what Wittel identifies as community – can face challenges related to distance, cultural difference, and tensions between touring and homelife, a point to which I will return later in the chapter. Whether or not these are classified as communities, these musicians exhibit the desire for the kind of stability and connection associated with that term.

**The Internet and Touring**

Scholarly examinations of current transformations in sociality often focus on the importance of the Internet in contemporary social relations. The Internet has altered both the organizational and social aspects of touring. In my case, while the Internet gradually

---

512 I discuss the milieu of the session in Chapter 1.
513 Kathleen Lavengood has written about the transnational “dating scene” on the Celtic music circuit in her doctoral dissertation. Lavengood, “Transnational Communities through Global Tourism,” 246–249.
became part of my day-to-day communications in the mid 1990s, I was rarely using it for booking gigs, buying tickets, or other logistical purposes. By the late 1990s, things had changed: as a bandleader I spent hours a day online conducting band business for tours in Canada, the United States, and Europe. More recently, preparations for my August 2010 tour to France and Italy as a member of the Nuala Kennedy band demonstrate how central the internet has become to the business of folk music.

When a project is transnationally constituted, the Internet becomes crucial. In making arrangements for the 2010 tour, speed of communication between Nuala and me was essential, particularly when booking my airplane ticket to Lorient, France, where I was to play with the Nuala Kennedy Band at the Lorient Festival Interceltique. It required being in touch on at least a daily basis; Nuala had to coordinate my own ticket purchase to the U.K. with the flight from there to France, and then book a flight from France to Italy after the Lorient festival. In light of the time pressure, real-time discussion on Facebook and Google messaging came in very handy. As the shows in Italy, to which we were to travel after Lorient, were not organized as far in advance as the Lorient festival there was a sense of uncertainty regarding the timing of flights. The need to remain in touch was essential to alleviate my anxiety that it might all fall apart and I might lose money (I had bought the ticket to the U.K. myself). I also had to provide information for my Italian work permit, which I emailed to the agent. In all these transactions, it was necessary to be at the computer for several hours a day, or my place in the tour would be in jeopardy.

In addition to the role of the Internet in tour planning, online communication also facilitated our music making; Nuala emailed me MP3 recordings of tunes to learn,
sometimes immediately after she had finished a band rehearsal in Edinburgh. I was in touch with her other guitarist as well, who sent me charts of some of the arrangements. In addition, I had the benefit of YouTube, on which Nuala had posted several videos of performances of her band. On more than one occasion, when I had trouble figuring out a part by ear, I watched the hands of her regular guitarist online in order to see what chords or voicings he was using, and played along with the videos for practice.

Touring practicalities and musical preparation for my role in Nuala’s band were greatly facilitated by the Internet. It is obvious that ease of communication makes transnationally constituted ensembles easier to maintain. Perhaps less obvious is the fact that communications technologies encourage flexible membership in such ensembles, as there is now immediate and everyday access to video, audio and printed material from around the world that make stepping into a project more possible, and proximity less necessary. However, musicians often expressed the limitations of this approach. For example, Andrea Beaton, a Cape Breton fiddler who has toured with Nuala, remarked that while long distance collaborations between musicians seem to be more frequent due to the internet, the “creative buzz” is not the same when musicians are exchanging files online as when they are working face to face.514

The internet also increasingly plays a role in the social life of touring musicians working on the folk festival circuit. Since I began my research in 2007, the centrality of social network sites (in particular Facebook) in the daily life and social life of many musicians – as with many other segments of the population – has also increased dramatically. This is evident in the way it has affected my research techniques, and has

514 Andrea Beaton, personal communication, March 2012.
facilitated the type of multi-sited research I have been undertaking. Since my fieldwork in specific places was often brief I needed to contact people online after I returned home from the field. The ease with which I located many musicians on Facebook attests to its popularity among these musicians (although this did not mean that musicians always responded to me in a timely manner). My initial communication regarding research with Nuala – whom I had only met briefly in person on one previous occasion – actually occurred on Facebook. Filippo was in fact the only musician I was in touch with who was not a member of Facebook when I began my study; he did not join it until the final year of my PhD program. Prior to this it was very difficult to keep in touch with him. While he did have an online presence through Skype, he tended to log in once a day, often after I had gone to bed. After he created a Facebook account, he was much easier to keep in touch with; further, I saw his updates regularly which kept me aware of his activities and where he was in the world (an admission that I suppose would qualify me as a ‘lurker,’ a point that raises some interesting questions about research ethics). At the beginning of my research, I did not consider Facebook to be an interviewing tool, yet three years later I use it regularly due to the fact that it is the most reliable way to communicate with people.

These interactions may seem mundane to many readers, as so many people now have developed these types of online social networks. Nonetheless, this mundanity itself is a sign of how the Internet is transforming our understanding of social relations. It is now a truism that technology is allowing individuals to operate within transnational cultural spaces on a regular, and often daily basis. My main point is that, due to the
Internet, touring musicians do not simply experience the world in a binary fashion in which ‘at home’ and ‘out there’ are distinctly separate.

The idea of online communication as part of daily life evokes a consideration of what ethnomusicologist Rene Lysloff has termed as technoculture, or the “understanding of technology…as a cultural phenomenon that permeates and informs almost every aspect of human existence.”\(^{515}\) Lysloff examines the question of community and the Internet in his 1997 online ethnography of the online “mod” scene, “Musical Life in Soft City: An Online Ethnography”. He argues that the practice of exchange and interaction that takes place online defines the mod scene as a community that is as real, in many ways, as a face-to-face community. Lysloff writes that “The Internet lays the groundwork for community by providing access to sustained communication, informational resources, and, most important, a common locus for members to gather (even when that locus is virtual).”\(^{516}\) In contrast to Wittel’s understanding of community, Lysloff stresses the centrality of relationships, not face-to-face contact, and argues that communities are emerging from the Internet “out of communication, exchange (of information, ideas, even goods and capital), common interests and purpose, and mutual commitment.”\(^{517}\) The idea of commitment is an important aspect in Lysloff’s understanding of community, which he identifies as a “collective sense of identity,” or the “feeling that one belongs and is committed to a particular group.”\(^{518}\)

Since 1997, when Lysloff wrote this article, social networking practices have been rapidly changing, and these changes make the consideration of depth and

\(^{516}\) Ibid., 55.
\(^{517}\) Ibid.
\(^{518}\) Ibid.
commitment in network types of sociality particularly relevant. With the rapid
development of Facebook and other social network sites it seems that social groups rise
and fall on a weekly basis. Individuals can switch affiliations regularly and use it as a site
through which they can experiment with attachments to various groups. One’s
membership in a group is not necessarily a sign of commitment to a “common interest”; individuals may join and leave in an ad hoc fashion. This kind of flexibility is not an
aspect of Lysloff’s case study, and has implications for the centrality of commitment in
both Wittel’s and Lysloff’s understandings of community. There are also parallels with
the kind of networked flexibility of my collaborators, particularly in the tendency toward
individualization. When musicians foster geographically dispersed project based careers,
is there commitment, and how meaningful is it?

Networked Individualism

Sociologist Barry Wellman places more emphasis on flexibility in his
eamination of Internet sociality, and challenges the position that the Internet is
promoting belonging. Drawing on Castell’s network society hypothesis, Wellman argues
that the Internet is encouraging networks between individuals over networks among
groups, in a sociality he terms as ‘networked individualism.’ Wellman stresses the
flexibility of this sociality, the increased agency that he argues comes with such
flexibility, and the loss of commitment and stable belonging. He writes that “in
networked societies, boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others,
linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are both flatter and more
complexly structured”. Asserting that complex social networks, while having always existed, are now the dominant form of social organization, he further states that

...this is a time for individuals and their networks, and not for groups. The proliferation of computer-supported social networks fosters changes in “network capital”: how people contact, interact, and obtain resources from each other. The broadly-embracing collectivity, nurturing and controlling, has become a fragmented, variegated and personalized social network. Autonomy, opportunity, and uncertainty are the rule.

Wellman employs the term glocalization (used somewhat differently than Roland Robertson) to describe a state between more local forms of face-to-face interaction (what he calls “little boxes”) and the emerging dominance of networked individualism. In contrast to what Wellman calls glocal networks, which are based on “place to place connectivity” and in which place remains important, networked individualism is “person to person connectivity”, as due to mobile technology, location has less meaning in non-contiguous interactions. Wellman writes that the cost of such networked individualism is “the loss of a palpably present and visible local group at work and in the community that could provide social identity and a sense of belonging” while “The gain is the increased diversity of opportunity, greater scope for individual agency, and the freedom from a single group’s constrictive control.”

The theory of the networked individual has parallels in an increasing individualism and choice that characterizes the personalized transnational networks of my collaborators. Willson points out that this theory fits “neatly with work on new social movements, affinity groups and issue-based politics where allegiances and participation

---

520 Ibid., 11
521 Ibid., 15
are aligned around temporally prominent issues rather than broader ideology or loyalties to collective. “Musical projects have a similar temporariness to such affinity groups.

As Willson points out, the networked individualism concept offers the potential to describe social connections beyond the Internet. However, I argue that in its instrumental focus on connections made through technology it can under represent the cultural associations of place and community that individuals may have, a point Willson makes as well. Nonetheless, there are aspects of the networked individual that ring true with the experience of my collaborators. There is a relationship between the mobility associated with international touring and the establishment of multiple cross-cutting, personalized networks. These are in tension with face-to-face, group oriented interaction, and this tension is particularly evident within the transnational space of folk music, as the dialectic between individual and community carry particular meaning within the histories of folk music and revival movements.

Social Capital, Transnational Networks, and Strength of Ties

Studies that focus on the network concept emphasize how social ties can provide benefits for or constrain individuals. For example Barry Wellman, writing of workers that conduct their work interactions online, draws a connection between the development of personalized, flexible social networks and individuals’ access to resources:

---

523 Ibid., 756.
524 The notion that mobile communications are creating person-to-person rather than place-to-place connectivity is challenged by Kenichi Ishii’s study of the effect of mobile communications on interpersonal relationships in daily life in Japan. Ishii found that mobile communications were mostly used to reinforce face-to-face relationships rather than establish new ones. See Kenichi Ishii, “Implications of Mobility: The
No more are people identified as members of a single group; they can switch among multiple networks. Switching and maneuvering among networks, people can use ties to one network to bring resources to another. Indeed, the very fact of their ties to other networks will be a resource, creating the possibility of linkage, trade and cooperation. Knowing how to network (on and offline) becomes a human capital resource, and having a supportive network becomes a social capital resource.\(^{525}\)

This quote demonstrates how the network discourse is linked to a parallel concern with social capital, a concept that is well expressed in anthropologist Alejandro Portes’s concise definition: “the ability of actors to obtain benefits through membership in networks and other social structures.”\(^ {526}\) The emphasis in many applications of the concept is the value of network connections to access resources such as jobs, money, or social solidarity.\(^ {527}\) Social capital is therefore a useful term through which to examine the dynamics of the relationship among Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, who have received career benefits from their collaborations with one another.

The benefits for Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo of their mutual associations are multiple. As I pointed out above, their interactions with each other share a complicated mix of something akin to the “work and play” in Wittel’s network sociality; their ties are both deeply interpersonal and instrumental in terms of gaining work opportunities. For an internationally touring musician, such relationships can indeed provide access to new touring circuits. However, they can also expand creative horizons through the special skills their musical collaborators possess. Further, there are gains in social solidarity that


come through strengthening ties to others that share a particular sensibility and career strategy. Through these ties, musicians find an important source of affinity and mutual inspiration in a diffuse, complex cultural space that is often confusing to negotiate. There is a sense among Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo of a deep and very personal affinity and of having located kindred spirits in an eclectic and spatially diffuse milieu.

There are a number of examples of how Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo’s links to one another created work opportunities for each of them. For Nuala, Filippo’s access to Italian touring circuits has expanded her touring possibilities; an agent who had booked gigs for Filippo arranged the Nuala Kennedy Band’s small tour of Italy in 2010. This was largely due to his recommendation and the fact that he was part of the band. Oliver and Nuala’s connections to one another also opened up new professional circuits for the two of them. Nuala’s connection with Oliver deepened her exposure in Canadian folk music circles; this has been true even after his passing. Relocating temporarily to New York City for part of 2012 before moving back to Edinburgh in 2013, she tried to secure more gigs in nearby Eastern Canada and in the United States. For part of this period, she toured the material from her album with Oliver, *Enthralled*, and approached me a few times about setting up concerts in Southern Ontario. In the Spring of 2012 we performed some shows together playing this material. It was clear that a substantial part of the audiences for these shows were familiar with Oliver and knew him and his music. Nuala continues to develop her Ontario audience from this base. We undertook another small tour of house concerts in February 2013.

---

528 Some authors, most famously Robert Putnam, have emphasized the community building quality of social capital; networking allows groups to coalesce around particular values. See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
An example of how Oliver was set to benefit from his association with Nuala was his performance with her at the Celtic Connections Festival Glasgow in 2007 that increased his exposure within the professional network of Celtic music, particularly in Europe. Previous to this, Oliver did not perform his own music on this circuit, and so the festival served as a showcase for him. The potential outcome of this for him is impossible to know because of his passing. Oliver helped Filippo’s career in practical ways as well, by serving as a bridge to North American networks, which led to annual Canadian tours for the Filippo Gambetta trio between 2001 and 2004.

Of course, an individual’s specific musical skills provide essential benefits. Nuala told me that Filippo’s musical flexibility is very useful to her. Filippo tours with two types of diatonic accordion, one with two rows in the keys of B and C (very common in Irish traditional music) and another with three rows: G, C and a chromatic row. Thus, he can perform in an Irish style when called upon to do so, or can perform in other styles. This musical flexibility suits Nuala’s diverse musical needs.

Sociological work on social capital has tended to focus on the relationship of the types of links, or ties, among individual actors in a network and how these affect opportunities. This is the subject of what Mark Granovetter in an oft-cited 1973 article theorized as the strength of weak ties. Granovetter’s article focused on what he called the “bridges” between individuals’ distinct personal networks. His study examined the use of social connections in getting jobs. His hypothesis was that ties between individuals who are deeply connected usually involve a high degree of overlap in terms of common friends and social contacts. As a result, these ‘strong ties,’ as he called them, are not as

---

529 Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties.”
beneficial in terms of gaining access to new resources and information as ‘weak ties’ are. Weak ties – relationships that are more marginal and less intense – can serve as bridges to new social circles, new resources, and new information, since there is less likelihood of overlap of contacts among individuals. This highly influential hypothesis has played a part in developing the now mainstream idea of ‘networking’ as a means of expanding career horizons.⁵³⁰

The transnational nature of many such networks calls for a re-examination of his hypothesis, which does not consider the transnational and long distance dimension of contemporary relationships. To date, there is little research on how Granovetter’s hypothesis has relevance to such relationships. One exception is the recent work of anthropologist Vered Amit, who applied Granovetter’s theory in her examination of transnational networks of internationally traveling consultants within the field of international development. Drawing on Granovetter’s above observation that weak ties facilitate the expansion of networks, Amit argues that weak ties are central to “extending global connections”. She classifies the ties of the consultants she interviews as weak, as they “do not involve a large amount of time spent in ongoing interaction” and “for the most part they are formal rather than intimate and therefore do not usually evoke much emotional intensity.”⁵³¹ She argues that in general with traveling professions “the absences necessitated by spatial mobility are likely to constrain the scope and intensity of relationships formed across [these] distances and encourage the formation of alternative

⁵³⁰ When I searched for “Weak Ties” and “Granovetter” on Google, sites included a psychotherapist’s office, job finding workshops, and a business card company. All these sites endorsed the application of Granovetter’s theory as a means of finding work.
⁵³¹ Vered Amit, “Globalization through ‘Weak Ties,’” 58.
sets of social connections.”\(^{532}\) The effect of these weak ties, according to Amit, is that they contribute to the global diffusion of a particular network structure. Amit states that the movements of her informants, consultants who were involved in setting up projects for organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency, worked to “extend a set of transnational institutions, protocols, and networks across the globe.” She writes, “this extension facilitated the movements of these consultants because it standardized the framework within which they worked in otherwise enormously diverse and disparate locales.” In addition, “with the standardization of these procedures, the ‘expertise’ of the professional who applies them was buttressed and legitimized.” She argues that this process thus “extends global connections by encouraging the disposability – or, to use Granovetter’s term the “weakness” – of many of the interpersonal relationships it creates.”\(^{533}\) The picture Amit presents is of a circular process in which globalization (in particular the mobility associated with it) increases weak ties, which in turn increase global connections.

Benjamin Brinner has suggested that weak ties can provide important “links to cultural practices beyond an individual’s immediate circle,” and that “Granovetter’s chief finding has direct relevance for explaining the formation of musical ensembles.” He provides two examples. One explains that Israeli musician Shoham Einav found his Palestinian collaborator Jamal Sa’id “through a chain of casual acquaintances who knew of Jamal through his work on Israeli television, rather than through the musicians with whom Shoham had been performing up to that time.” The second is of a bass player in the group Alei Hazayit, who was found through weak ties to perform on the group’s

\(^{532}\) Ibid., 69.
\(^{533}\) Ibid., 65.
demo recording, and who eventually became a member of the band. Brinner points out that “when musicians play as guests on an album their links to the project are generally weaker than the links among the regular band members, although their contributions may be key to the final product.”

These analyses have implications for understanding the relationship between touring musicians and festivals. In Chapter 4, I identified how certain themes – expansion, boundary-crossing, and innovation – were recurrent in transnational folk festival promotion. These themes have parallels in the new folk music sensibility I have been describing. Thinking of the role of weak ties can help understand the relationship between the sensibility and the appearance of it in an increasing number of festivals. Assuming Granovetter’s theory to be accurate, boundary-crossing projects create opportunities for musicians as they allow them to access new resources through weak ties. This in turn encourages such projects. With an increase in such collaborations, instead of festivals simply being sites of occasional encounters between representatives of different groups, over time they become defined by such encounters.

Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo have clearly opened up opportunities for one another. However, how do these connections resemble those described by Amit and Brinner? In particular, to what extent are collaborative relationships between them weak or strong ties, and what relationship does this have to their transnationality? According to Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin, strength is dependent upon the “relative frequency, duration, emotional intensity, reciprocal exchange, and so on which characterize a given tie or set of ties.” Using this definition, I argue that despite the infrequency of contact,

---

534 Brinner, Playing Across a Divide, 71.
there is an “emotional intensity” to these relationships based on musical collaboration and shared sensibilities that makes them strong. This was evident in several ways: when Filippo and Nuala both flew to Toronto upon hearing that Oliver was sick; when Nuala flew to Toronto at her own expense to participate at a low fee in Oliver’s 2011 memorial concert; when Nuala requested from me that what she wanted in exchange for participating in my research was a recording of my interviews with Oliver; and when Filippo referred to Oliver as a “mentor”.

Unlike Amit’s development workers, examples of collaborative relationships such as those among Oliver, Nuala and Filippo demonstrate that transnational touring circuits among musicians can foster the establishment of strong ties. This concurs with Brinner’s observation that musical relationships established through weak ties can develop over time into stronger ones. The reasons for this are in need of more research. Ethnomusicology offers extensive evidence on the affective power of music in terms of consolidating ties on the grounds of shared ethnicity, gender and religion, for example. However, case studies of interpersonal ties that cross-cut these categories are more rare. On the transnational touring circuit, musicians encounter an enormous range of other musicians with whom they may share certain affinities, yet few develop into strong ties. Why do these ties develop? What kinds of anxieties can accompany the desire to deepen relationships across space and cultural boundaries?

Network Variety and the Transnational Dimension

Before addressing these questions further, it is important to point out an aspect of transnational networks that has implications for Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo: network
variety. Bonnie Erickson has argued that a common observation of many of the most important studies on social networks is the value of weak ties but also of the diversity of weak ties in creating benefits: in short, large, diverse networks are more beneficial than homogenous ones. Erickson points to the specific benefits of cultural variety in networks. She writes that “the most widely used cultural resource is cultural variety and [that] cultural variety is closely linked to social network variety. Those who interact with a wider variety of people must respond to a wider variety of culture by others and, hence, develop a wider repertoire of culture themselves.”536 This suggests a link between social network variety and the development of cosmopolitan subjectivity.

In the case of Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, network variety minimizes competition. While it cannot be said absolutely that Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo would never compete for work with each other, nevertheless due the fact that they play different instruments, come from disparate locales, and engage with different local musical communities, their connections with one another are more mutually co-operative than they are competitive. The same festival could theoretically hire all three musicians based on their national affiliation, and not seem to be doubling up on a category of performer. Despite their strong personal ties, they have differences from one another – related to language, musical upbringing, and local social affiliations – that guarantee a constant degree of “Otherness” between them. These differences enable cooperation. Within the transnational context, musicians can utilize the factors of distance and its associated network complexity to expand their own career horizons. In other words, if a musician can make the effort and can foster the resources to work with musicians from distant

locales, new touring circuits can open up that offer an alternative to local scenes that may only provide limited work.

As Wellman argued above, flexible, networked individualism can increase social capital, as it fosters weak ties to new networks. I argue that when personalized networks are transnational in scale, they are more heterogeneous. Thus, transnational interactions also have the potential to foster social capital. This value placed on an individual’s cultural affiliation is particularly relevant to the dynamic of transnationally collaborating musicians, and is the topic to which I now turn.

**Cultural Capital and Essentializing Place**

Among the triumvirate of Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, each one’s reputation and public image poses benefits for the others in terms of elevating their positions, at home and on the transnational scene. The above examples focussed on how these benefits come through their links to new touring circuits and resources, such as agents. However, these musicians also possess reputations that make them valuable as musical collaborators.\(^{537}\) These reputations are based upon various legitimizing aspects of their life experience, such as their musical education. Such legitimation is often associated with the possession of “cultural capital,” the “forms of cultural knowledge, competences, or dispositions”\(^{538}\) that can give someone an advantage within a field of cultural production.\(^{539}\)

---


\(^{538}\) Ibid.

\(^{539}\) In the following chapter, I will discuss how these concepts are directly linked what Deborah Battaglia has identified as two “rhetorics of self-making,” the rhetoric of individuality and the rhetoric of relationality.
There are of course several reasons a musician may be viewed as a valuable collaborator, such as aspects of personality. Further, the types of value musicians bring to projects are varied, and range from their prestige to the perception that they can increase beneficial connections within a particular network. Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo demonstrate that within the transnational folk festival circuit a musician’s perceived closeness to tradition or, inversely, his or her perceived ability to challenge or transcend tradition, can be factors that affect his or her value as a collaborator. The perception of a musician as being either close to tradition or as emancipated from it is strongly influenced by where he or she comes from. While individuals may connect across national boundaries, they are in a sense representative of their nation within the relationship. They represent what George Herbert Mead called the “generalized other.”540

Nuala’s reputation among these three musicians, and the benefits Filippo and Oliver had from their collaborations with her, serve as an example of how perceived closeness to tradition is dependant on where one comes from, and can be a form of cultural capital. The potential benefits for Filippo in his association with Nuala became apparent during my first visit to Genoa in March 2010. While I was there, Nuala was in contact with both Filippo and me about setting up an Italian tour with her band for August of that year, following a performance at the Lorient Festival Interceltique in Brittany. She also asked Filippo to be part of the band for the tour. On the night before I left to come back to Canada, Filippo told me told me that working with Nuala would be good for legitimizing his reputation within the Irish music scene in Italy, which was a

540 Of this concept, Mead wrote “The organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self may be called the ‘generalized other.’ The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community. Thus, for example, in the case of such a social group as a ball team, the team is a generalized other insofar as it enters – as an organized process or social activity – into the experience of any one of the individual members of it.” Quoted in Aboulafia, Transcendence, 79.
potential local source of work for him there.⁵⁴¹ According to Filippo, to presenters in Italy, performers of regional and national traditional musics are not seen as authentic unless they are from that place; therefore it was difficult for him to gain credibility in the Italian Irish music scene. He hoped that his association with Nuala would lead to more playing opportunities at home as a result, since he was trying to focus more on working locally (a change that has since been realized with the growing success of his regional Ligurian folk music band Liguriani, rather than through Irish traditional music).

Nuala’s reputation as a ‘traditional’ Irish musician in this context is notable considering the cosmopolitan image she promotes, the stylistic diversity of her projects, and her reputation as a ‘modern’ folk music performer among ITM practitioners. Despite her competency with traditional music, Nuala is arguably on the fringes of what is commonly called pure drop or traditional ITM in Ireland; at the very least it is safe to say that within ITM circles her reputation is that of an innovator rather than a tradition bearer. This is something that Nuala acknowledges herself. For example, she told me that there is a clear perception in the more ‘traditional’ group Oirealla that many of her own, ‘modern’ compositions would not be acceptable.⁵⁴² As a musician living outside of Ireland and fully engaged with the Scottish music world, as well as with various other cosmopolitan projects, she is known as someone whose work brushes up against pop music, world music, and other genres. Her flexibility has made her difficult to easily

---

⁵⁴¹ Filippo considers Irish music to be a fundamental influence on his style. In describing how he differed from the other members of Triotonico, he identified the Irish music component as a defining aspect of his playing. Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, April 2011.

⁵⁴² A sign of the ambivalence within ITM circles towards new folk music sensibilities became evident as I discussed my project with some musicians. When I said I was writing about Nuala I often received puzzled reactions. Knowing that I was interested in researching composing players, a few musicians wondered why I wasn’t researching older, more established musicians with deep traditional credibility, such as East Galway fiddler and composer Paddy Fahey. This could be changing with her engagement with Gerry O’Connor, who has a great deal of traditional capital. Nuala described her surprise at the positive reception she received playing with O’Connor at a recent festival in Ireland for a very traditional audience.
categorize. Up until her recent work with fiddler Gerry O’Connor in Oirealla she has not invested a great deal into legitimizing processes (at least within Irish music) that help define musicians as traditional. According to Filippo’s account, in Italy this matters little; the fact that Nuala is Irish, and can claim to be raised in a tradition, gives her sufficient traditional music credibility there. This dynamic, in which a nation becomes more associated with tradition than others, is evident in the transnational field of folk music. Ireland has a particular image within this field as a place of deep traditions.

One’s perceived ability to challenge tradition also can play a role in the transnational folk festival field as it projects a particular high value competence. Individuals with a high degree of cultural capital based on their reputation as innovators attract collaborators who are drawn to the possibility of expanding their own creative horizons, and to the possibility of liberation from the perceived constrictions of tradition. This ability to attract collaborators in turn expands touring circuits, which increases one’s cosmopolitan image.

Oliver was a musician who possessed this form of cultural capital. While Filippo primarily expresses the benefit of his relationship with Nuala in terms of her association with tradition, he valued his connection with Oliver for its artistic benefits. Oliver’s musical freedom and openness to explore “whatever he felt like”, was an inspiration to Filippo. Filippo associated this aspect of Oliver’s creativity with his nationality as well; he considered this quality as “very Canadian” (presumably in contrast to the ‘traditions’ of Europe). Filippo’s characterization of this relationship to Oliver differs from that of his relationship to Nuala. He places more emphasis on the creative
inspiration provided by Oliver. While I do not mean to suggest that Filippo does not value his artistic affinities with Nuala, or that Nuala does not have a creative influence on Filippo’s work, his statements demonstrate that the benefits from collaboration with Nuala have more to do with a form of cultural capital based on a perceived association with tradition, while with Oliver the value lies in his association with innovation.

The relationship of these two forms of cultural capital is complex. Association with a certain institution or educational process can be legitimizing in terms of an individual’s traditional music image, or it can detract from it, depending on the party that is interpreting the value of such institutions or processes. In the transnational context, the identification with tradition that an institution may have at the local level can be obscured or amplified in one’s promotional materials. A further aspect of this complexity is that, in an individual’s biography, the relationship one has with such institutions plays a role in developing the extent of their cultural capital. For instance, Oliver’s association with the Ontario fiddle competition circuit served to give him a rhetorical identification with roots that he then utilized in establishing his self narrative as an auteur; it positioned him as a maverick in relation to tradition in a way that ultimately increased his reputation as an innovator. The following example demonstrates this.\(^{544}\)

Although Oliver grew up not far from Shelburne, Ontario, which is the homeland of one of the province’s most prestigious and long running fiddle competitions, he did not interact with the Ontario fiddle scene until his late 20s. He only competed a few times in Ontario fiddle contests and never won one. Winning such a contest or placing in the top

\(^{544}\) The auteur and maverick, along with the eccentric, are a web of concepts that signify individuality, and which are often used in reference to Oliver. I will explore this more deeply in the following chapter, which concentrates primarily on Oliver and the tensions between transcendence and immanence in his life story.
three is a highly consecrating achievement in that field. However, he eventually became involved with the Ontario fiddle competition scene, not only competing but also working as a transcriber for Norm Gibson, a documenter of Canadian fiddle tunes. This was a legitimizing enterprise in terms of association with the Ontario fiddle tradition; in fact it gave Oliver sufficient cultural capital at that point to be interviewed for the 1989 CBC television documentary *Fiddleville* as an expert in that scene. However, as one story related to me by Ontario fiddle contest champion Mark Sullivan illustrates, Oliver’s engagement with that scene allowed for an opportunity to foster a reputation as a maverick. Oliver challenged the conservative Ontario fiddle world when he was invited to perform in the early 1990s as a guest artist at the Shelburne fiddle competition. On that occasion, he appeared sporting a mohawk haircut in a trio that included a bagpipe and drummer, which transgressed the norm of such performances in what is a relatively musically and socially conservative milieu. Such stories, and others like them that Oliver recounted in his own narrative of his life story, illustrate how challenge to orthodoxy can serve to increase one’s cultural capital. However, the value placed on such experience varies from audience to audience within the broader folk music circuits. Audiences may value adherence to notions of tradition or the idea of boundary pushing to greater or lesser degrees.

As I will explore in the following chapter, behind these two types of cultural capital are contrasting notions of authenticity, continuity, and the relationship of the individual to community. I will demonstrate how Oliver negotiated the tension between

---

545 For a thorough examination of the changing meaning of fiddle contests in Ontario, see S.A. Johnson, “Negotiating Tradition in Ontario Fiddle Contests” (Phd Diss., York University, 2006).
546 *Fiddleville*, directed by Bay and James Weyman, (Toronto, Close Up Films 1989).
547 Ontario fiddle music, both in informal and formal performances, utilizes fiddle, piano, and guitar primarily, with mandolin and banjo occasionally in use.
these notions in some compelling ways. For now, this small case study of three individuals suggests that interpersonal dynamics on this milieu are strongly related to associations between individuals, places, and assumptions of tradition or innovation that can intensify across space. As was evident with the glocalization processes described in the previous chapter, these examples demonstrate that one’s association with place continues to play a role in the dynamics of this transnational field. In particular, nuanced regional distinctions are obscured on the transnational stage. Persistent associations based on an individual’s home country and associated musical tradition can be a determinant in what kind of value they may have to their musical collaborators. In this process, nations can become essentialized; for example Ireland is emblematic of tradition while Canada is emblematic of newness and cultural diversity.

**Interpersonal Commitment, Risks, and Challenges**

While I have discussed mainly the career benefits of these connections, I stress that this approach risks a one-dimensional representation that minimizes the interpersonal, emotional connections. As Willson’s criticism of the networked individual concept seemed to suggest, in stressing the instrumental benefits of collaboration and networks there is a danger in under representing individual differences. To this, I would add that an emphasis on flexibility can avoid discussion of the kinds of anxieties and tensions that can arise in the maintenance of such relationships. Therefore, to finish this chapter, I will focus on one particular tie among my collaborators: the relationship between Oliver and Filippo.
One night in April 2010, Filippo and I went to his rehearsal space, where we listened to *Filiology*, the 2001 unreleased recording of improvisations that Oliver and Filippo performed together as a duo. Filippo talked about his relationship with Oliver, and was very generous and candid with me about what was for him a deeply emotional connection to Oliver and his music. Filippo viewed Oliver as a “mentor” and as an “artistic reference,” particularly in terms of how to manage a career in a way that employs commercial pursuits as a strategy to pursue projects of passion that are unlikely to be financially successful. In terms of the benefits of that relationship, Filippo stated that the process of improvising with Oliver had a very important effect on him as a musician and as a person. Filippo said that Oliver

…was the kind of the guy arriving in my house who would say “why don’t we just plug in a microphone and just play”…so it was with this pretty simple purpose and idea he was kind of changing…not changing my life…but he was able to make some deep things come out of myself.\(^{548}\)

In the same conversation Filippo said the experience of improvising with Oliver made him cry and “feel very deep sensations.” Filippo even called it “music therapy.” The process of these collaborations was more important to him than the product. He told me it was “very hard to conceive it as a performance thing.”

Oliver and Filippo’s relationship came to a head when they ran into differences over whether or not to further develop Filiology and seriously pursue it as a major project. They both told me that Oliver wanted to continue the project after their initial tour together in 2001 in which they performed their improvisational “folk music from nowhere” repertoire that led to *Filiology*. However, Filippo had doubts about whether he could entirely go along with Oliver’s direction. Filippo referred to Oliver as the *emblem*.

---

\(^{548}\) Filippo Gambetta, personal communication, March 2010.
(emblem) of *malleabilita* (malleability). He used this description in reference to elements of Oliver’s individual style that he found difficult to play with at times: his extensive use of glissandos, what he called “tempo shifts” (rubato), and quarter-tones. With Oliver’s new compositions at the time employing these techniques – the “fractal compositions” that I discuss in the following chapter – Filippo was unsure of the accordion’s suitability for the project, stating that he had thought to himself that “I don’t know if in this kind of musical language and vocabulary that you [Oliver] are developing, such a fixed, tempered instrument can work together [with the fiddle].” Filippo told me that Oliver “proposed to me that maybe at a certain point I would come over to live in Canada and we should do music together, but you know… it is quite a big decision… a big thing… so you really have to think about… to balance what you would have there and what you have here. Here I have many things that I love as well, in my kind of crazy daily life.” The reference to daily life is telling, as it reveals a sense that he considers this transnational relationship, even though close and personally meaningful, as not “daily life,” but in tension with the day-to-day experience.

Thus, for Filippo there was a risk that he was not willing to take in coming to Canada to commit to working with Oliver on a regular basis, even with the depth of his connection to him. The outcome of this may have been very different had they lived in the same locality or region. Without having to consider making such a major life change, there may have been more incentive to stay longer with the project and to invest time in it, despite doubts concerning whether it could work musically. Further, while Oliver’s

549 Oliver developed these stylistic features over a lengthy period in the 1990s, but they are most evident in the period associated with what he called his ‘fractal compositions’ that I discuss further in the following chapter.

550 Ibid.
idiosyncratic approach to music had value to Filippo, his extremely individualistic approach (at that time in his career), though inspiring, posed challenges for him in terms of developing the collaboration further. My interpretation of this situation is that it was an attempt on Oliver’s part to transcend the strictures of tradition by bringing two supposedly emancipated individuals together in deep collaboration.

In a track from Oliver’s album *A Million Stars* entitled “The One I Remember,” Oliver sonically represents the straddling of the Atlantic and a bridging of the distance between him and Filippo. He employs his technique of using ‘found sound,’ captured outside of the studio context, to bring together sounds emblematic of Genoa and Toronto. While in the maritime city of Genoa on a visit to Filippo in the early 2000s, he recorded moving pylons on a dock rubbing up against each other, a sound that captured his ear. He used this recording in combination with sounds of the Toronto subway (trains, voices, turnstiles) to provide an evocative backdrop for a relatively simple melody that is repeated several times, played on fiddle and whistled by Oliver, the fiddle and whistling out of phase with each other and performed in a highly flexible tempo:

![Fig. 6.1: Melody from “The One I Remember” by Oliver Schroer](image)

---

552 The transcription I provide is a ‘skeleton’ of the melody that Oliver plays on the recording. As Filippo suggests with his statement regarding Oliver’s malleability, from the mid 1990s on Oliver used a high degree of rubato and melodic and rhythmic variation in his playing. This differed from his earlier arrangements, in which tempi were often strict, in the manner of traditional Euro-American dance musics.
Oliver’s ability to represent such longing and distance in sound is an aspect of his music that speaks to the experience of transnational space. His adoption of such symbols is best exemplified by his Camino project, which I explore in the following chapter.

While Nuala experienced a deep connection with Oliver as well, and recorded a CD with him in the final years of his life while he was in hospital, Enthralled, she did not ever get to the point with Oliver at which such a decision had to be made. At the time of writing, however, she is pursuing a different strategy to that of Filippo in her career. She is touring regularly in Canada and the U.S., with many of the collaborations discussed in the previous chapter, in order to establish a touring circuit on this side of the Atlantic.

I have given details of these very specific concerns and anxieties in order to provide a glimpse into the role such interpersonal dynamics play in the maintenance of networks. I have considered important instrumental aspects related to social capital, however each relationship carries its own specific, emotional meanings that are affected by distance and approaches to music making and career paths. Nonetheless, my examination of various forms of capital helps to “recognize the structures and expectations that tend to channel the course of such relations.” The shared sensibility that I have identified thus has limitations in terms of its ability to foster community.

Transnational Community, Individualism, and Folk Music

The relationship of Oliver and Filippo returns us to the question of the strength of ties among these musicians. As the above examples demonstrate, discerning whether ties

---

553 Brinner, Playing Across a Divide, 170.
among touring musicians in the transnational context possess these qualities is not straightforward. Long lasting, intense ties do not necessarily result in commitment, as Filippo’s example demonstrates. As Jan Fernback has argued, the study of online relationships would benefit from a focus on “a considered turn toward commitment in online social groups”, and such questions as “how commitment is symbolically formed online; how commitment to online social relationships is manifested in everyday life; or to what extent the meaning of commitment to group is enacted in the online sphere.”

Such questions can also be applied to long distance, transnational relationships. Anxiety in such relationships is related to tensions between committing to one’s home locality and developing long-distance relationships across space.

As evident in my research, place remains significant in terms of the value it has within the dynamics of transnational networks and as in terms of understandings of community. As I will explore in my examination of Oliver’s music in the following chapter, a sense of loss of place-based community pervades transnational musical projects. There is a gap then between what people long for and what they actually experience as they operate within transnational and transcultural contexts. This returns us to Robert Cantwell’s musings on the folklore festival:

Though many may yearn for it, many struggling to create or to recreate it, the homogenous cultural community is precisely what most of us do not experience, and we would feel culturally suffocated if we did. In the information age, community no sooner forms than it deteriorates – and its deterioration is perpetual. In the evanescent, momentary reality between these impermanences culture springs forth out of acts of making essentially imaginative. The idea of the homogeneous cultural community, which in spite of recent theoretical refinements is still tinged with the old socialist romance, must ultimately give way to a

---

concept of culture grounded not in specific social formations but in the agencies of psychic differentiation in which those formations are themselves grounded.\textsuperscript{555} The interconnection between community and place in longstanding definitions of folk music thus remains. This is part of the irony of Oliver and Filippo’s project “Folk Music from Nowhere”, which to Filippo implies a paradox; he told me the name is a comment on the loss of sense of place in contemporary society, while at the same time the improvisations are not easily identifiable in terms of a local musical style. An analysis of these networks suggests a similar paradox at work on their touring circuits. Even for these musicians, whose original music and networking practices seem to challenge placed-based notions of folk music, identification with sometimes essentialized notions of place remains important to their careers. The reasons for working with a musician can have much to do with the national or regional associations he or she has, even if these are not absolute, as is evident in the ambiguity of Nuala’s ‘traditional Irishness’ or in Oliver’s ‘multicultural Canadianness.’ Pointing out such pragmatic reasons for collaboration, while it is necessary, somehow paints a cold, one dimensional picture of ties that are deeply affective. Following on my above look at “The One I Remember,” a question that I will now address further is: how is the sense of loss, longing, and belonging engendered by such sociality manifest in musical sound and style?

\textsuperscript{555} Robert Cantwell, “Feasts of Unnaming.” 302.
CHAPTER 7

OLIVER

Relationality, Individuality

In the previous chapter I discussed some recent claims from sociology that changes in technology are transforming sociality in contemporary, globalized society. In the sociomusical networks of musicians such as Oliver, Nuala, and Filippo, I see some resemblances to Wittel’s network sociality\textsuperscript{556} and Wellman’s networked individualism,\textsuperscript{557} however I argue that these two concepts, while useful heuristics that shed light on important processes in contemporary culture, do not address the cultural dimensions of this type of sociality. In particular, they create too stark a division between networks and communities. Applied in an ethnomusicological context, these concepts invite more culturally-focussed questions: what kinds of processes, desires, and anxieties are associated with the kind of networked relationships that occur in a transnational cultural space, and what role does music play in relation to these desires and anxieties?

In order to address these questions, in this closing chapter I return to the musician who inspired my study of new folk music sensibilities, Oliver Schroer. I will examine various aspects of his music and life, including his tunes, their reception and circulation, his use of instrument modification, his conception of his compositional process, his role

\textsuperscript{556} Andreas Wittel, “Toward a Network Sociality.”
\textsuperscript{557} Barry Wellman, “Little Boxes, Glocalization, and Networked Individualism.”
as a mentor, and his album projects. I describe the social consequences of his drive to push boundaries, as this drive came into friction with the participatory and relational ideals of folk revivals. His varied projects kept him on the fringes of a range of cultural cohorts. At points in his life, it is apparent that as Oliver pushed the boundaries in pursuit of his own style he did not align himself predominantly with any particular cohort; instead he had to generate his own cross-cutting social networks that were highly individualized and scattered. At other points, he engaged with sites and projects that were symbolic of longstanding tropes of folk music: community continuity and belonging rooted in place.

I argue that Oliver’s varied musical practices were a means of negotiating tensions that are related to what sociologist Gerard Delanty has called “the crisis of belonging,” which refers to the fact that “new kinds of community – which in effect are reflexively organized social networks of individuated members – have not been able to substitute anything for place, other than the aspiration for belonging.”

This chapter is divided into two parts, each taking a different approach to examining how he navigates these tensions through different musical practices. The first part takes a chronological look at Oliver’s development as a composer and thus examines this navigation at various times in his life. The second part focusses on his album *Camino*, which was recorded live during his two-month trek to the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage trail in Northern Spain in 2004. I demonstrate how this project brought together two seemingly paradoxical notions in the symbolism of the pilgrimage. On the one hand, it resonated

---

with the collectivist values and ideals of his audience, while it evoked the idea of a deeply individual quest that takes place in a heterogeneous social environment.

Before I commence with a look at Oliver’s life and career, it is essential to reiterate that, in presenting Oliver as an individual case study, I am not representing him as a ‘typical’ representative of a musical style. It is actually his public image and self-conception as atypical and of being beyond category that is of interest to me. How did he maintain and promote this individualistic and transcendent image while maintaining such strong identifications with folk music and fiddle music, labels that are emblematic of collectivity? What tensions arise between individualist and collectivist imperatives, and how does he negotiate them?

Oliver presents a compelling case study for how one musician working under the folk music umbrella has negotiated these varied expectations. In the late 1990s he received a relatively lucrative contract (in folk musician terms) with the Solitudes label, a label that produces mass-produced ‘relaxation tapes’ sold at kiosks. This meant that, in the latter part of his career, he did not need to tour extensively to make a living, as most full time professional folk musicians have to do in Canada. Therefore, the choices he made after this point present a case study of a musician who had a somewhat rare opportunity to foreground creative, socio-musical, and personal development imperatives over the economic. This clearly makes his experience exceptional, yet also presents an intriguing possibility to examine how notions of the autonomous artist came into tension with those of the socially engaged folk musician.

When Oliver talked about the situation he found himself in after receiving the Solitudes contract, it reminded me of the way we often talk about the great Western art
music composers and the way that patronage is often said to allow artists the freedom to compose great works. In such a discourse, the new art that is created is somehow perceived as pure and unsullied by commercialism. I will demonstrate how Oliver’s engagement with mass produced New Age relaxation music, which he presented as an economically driven choice rather than an artistic one, actually deeply informed the Camino project, which was both critically hailed and his most popular recording. For this reason, I will be reading Camino in relation to the New Age genre, even though the album was not primarily aimed at a New Age audience but rather his folk music audience.

As with the preceding chapter, in this biographical account I will therefore also be demonstrating that while Oliver’s music expresses the longing for community mentioned above it also enmeshed in economic and industrial processes, with their associated pressures and expectations. Another area in Oliver’s career that shows a complex relationship between social imperatives and economic imperatives is his teaching at fiddle camps. I contend that the larger context of his work as a fiddle teacher took place in a burgeoning fiddle camp economy, the growing success of which is due to the fact that such camps have tapped into a sense of loss of localized community within contemporary globalized society.

**Tensions and Longings**

I frame this biographical narrative by identifying tensions between individuality and relationality apparent in Oliver’s life story. These tensions are evident in Oliver’s account
of his early engagement in fiddle music, and how his early relational motivations compare with later motivations to compose and improvise:

Socially I was drawn to traditional music first because it was a kind of music where a lot of people would play the same thing, you know? You sat down and played St. Ann’s Reel with somebody from Nova Scotia or somebody from B.C. or somebody from the Prairies and you’d all know that tune, and a number of tunes from the fiddle music canon. So socially I found that fiddle music had created these very strong ties, and was able to bring people together…and improvised music almost fights against that in a way, because it means that you’re creating more individualists, and more individualism and more people who are doing their own thing…. So if you find other people to play with at your level, or in general, then it’s a great thing, but if you don’t and you get away from the traditional stuff then you can be kind of isolated. So in a way, the social thing was stronger with the traditional music I found.\(^{560}\)

This tension was a source of some anxiety for Oliver, particularly in the mid part of his career (which I will discuss below), in which his music was idiosyncratic, soloistic, and difficult for other musicians to play. This became apparent to him during his 2007 visit to the Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow. He realized that his connection to what Kathleen Lavengood termed a “Celtic community of practice”\(^{561}\) – and what Oliver called the “traditional world” – was waning, as he no longer knew enough tunes to participate in the after-hours sessions as much as he would have liked:

So it is a constant tension, because I can find myself out on a limb, more isolated from the traditional world, feeling very much that I came from there, that this is the world that spawned me, but also feeling at this point in my life much more isolated from it.\(^{562}\)

Oliver’s comments evoke what anthropologist Debbora Battaglia has called the “tension between rhetorics of an individuated, autonomous self and rhetorics of a

\(^{560}\) Oliver Schroer, personal communication, September 2007.
\(^{561}\) Kathleen Elizabeth Lavengood, “Transnational Communities through Global Tourism,” 52–61.
\(^{562}\) Oliver Schroer, personal communication, September 2007.
collective or relational self”\(^{563}\). Oliver is evoking a participatory, relational, “traditional music world” that he has had to transcend in pursuit of finding his own, individualized style, or “dialect”, as he called it.\(^{564}\) In this statement, he suggests that he made a choice to emphasize the individualistic over the relational in his musical practice. The consequence was that as he pursued his own dialect he became alienated from the social contexts that informed his music, and the sense of belonging they engendered.

Oliver is voicing an anxiety that constitutes a recurring theme in contemporary music labeled as folk: a sense of alienation and loss of community continuity in modernity. A sense of loss or nostalgia for an imagined past is one of the common themes of folk and traditional music in commodified folk music revivals.\(^{565}\) As Gillian Mitchell has observed, this is especially true of the kinds of named-system revivals that became increasingly popular in the 1970s, as the counter culture youth engaged in such revivals as a way to escape from social and economic problems mainstream society in that period.\(^{566}\)

I contend that, as with the sensibilities associated with earlier revivals, new folk music sensibilities likewise involve a sense of loss. However, new compositions address this in a different manner than those earlier revivals did. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has observed, sensibilities favouring processes such as new composition and fusion do not primarily appeal to preservation of local heritage, as more traditionalist sensibilities do. This has caused some to interpret new compositions in so called


\(^{564}\) I will discuss Oliver’s use of the term “dialect” below.


traditional music practices as emptied of meaning, and as purely “listening” music. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett sees this trend in new klezmer as pure aestheticization, a kind of art for art’s sake. According to her, the resultant music sounds like it is, as she states, “from nowhere.” To reiterate Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s quote previously cited in chapter 1, “‘Nowhere’ is a space of abstraction where sounds unmoored from other times and places can be engaged as sound for its own sake. In that place called nowhere, musicians can play anything.”

According to the article, what drives such musicians is “not roots and heritage, but technical challenge, fun, and the market.” I argue that, while it may be true that the variety of sounds being employed by many contemporary folk musicians is seemingly without bounds, there is not the pure aestheticization occurring that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states is evident in new klezmer music. Oliver’s music does evoke a more specific meaning: it remains very connected with longing for the kind of collective belonging that folk music revivals have long promised.

Oliver identifies himself with folk and collective belonging through a variety of means, only some of which have to do with musical sound. The discourse that surrounds the music – song introductions, tune titles, liner notes – is often the place where such evocations reside. For example, he often differentiates folk music practice from “art” music practice through discursively connecting the former with the body through distinguishing between ‘fiddle’ (aligning with folk music) and ‘violin’ (aligning with art music) playing based on a concept of mind/body dualism. The liner notes for his album 02 identify him as a fiddler, and state, “On these explorations I may go to strange and distant places, but the fiddle dialect of my playing roots always pokes through in the end.”

---

I consider myself a fiddler, not a violinist, because my music primarily comes out of my body, my feet, my belly – not just my mind.” In conversation, Oliver evoked this connection with the feet regularly as a way of identifying himself as a fiddler, even though some of his music, by the sound of it, could have been classified as art oriented new music.

While Oliver claimed this connection with “the feet,” in fact his music was very difficult to dance to. This was a tension in his music that contrasts to named system revivals, in that sessions, dances, and other participatory events are commonplace in many scenes. Original compositions by musicians such as Oliver, in contrast, are often not easy to pick up and participate in. On the one hand, much of Oliver’s music, and the discourse around it, suggests the potential for the type of connection of bodies engendered through dance. On the other hand, it also creates longing, as it is not suitable for social dance; it does not fulfill expectations of rhythmic regularity associated with fiddle music. Therefore, while it may be connected with the feet, it does not connect bodies.

By evoking the feet, the dance, and the body, Oliver is reaching for a universal symbol that can connect the various strands within what he calls the “traditional world.” It therefore rhetorically links his new music to more traditional dance musics, even though it often sounds so different from them. The community for which Oliver expresses longing is transnational; it is a community that is enacted temporarily in face-to-face interaction (the session) yet temporary and diffuse. This is not nostalgia for community in a specific place; it is nostalgia for a relational process that historically has

568 Oliver Schroer, liner notes to 02.
occurred in a range of local practices, yet now increasingly takes place across space and therefore faces the challenge of maintaining continuity.

*The Value of Relational, Individual, or Collective Selfhood*

In her examination of relational and individual selfhood, Battaglia challenges essentialist conceptions of selfhood. She states that, rather than being a “natural object, unproblematically given,”569 “Selfhood…is a chronically unstable productivity brought situationally – not invariably – to some form of imaginary order, to some purpose, as realized in the course of culturally patterned interactions.”570 From this perspective, she considers that anthropology can most fruitfully examine the ways that “rhetorics of self”, employed in particular situations, should be examined for “what use a particular notion of self has for someone or for some collectivity.”571 I argue that notions of self among professional musicians can develop concurrently with the process of negotiating expectations in contradictory and complex music fields.

Battaglia’s understanding of selfhood is consistent with a broader postmodern perspective that views self-identity as “multiple, produced in discourse, and potentially contradictory…,”572 a topic that I addressed in Chapter 2. This questioning of essentialized notions of the self leads Battaglia to challenge the commonplace equation of non-Western and/or rural selves with relationality and Western and/or urban selves with

---

570 Ibid.
571 Ibid., 3. Italics in original.
individuality. In thinking of folk music circuits as vehicles for self-making, I argue that it demonstrates a complexity that also challenges this dualism. On the one hand, commercial folk revivals have reified notions of the relational self, as represented by the rural Euro-American folk. This reification of relationality is paradoxical to the idea of individual competition in liberal market economies, or to the idea of the autonomous individual artist who transcends categories. Evoking Battaglia’s question, what use does employing either relational or individual rhetorics of self in any given context have in this particular field?

This question can be given further nuance based on a recent study of the individual and relational self from psychology. In this study, the authors recognized a third category, the “collective self.” While the individual self represents “unique attributes,” and the relational self “partner-shared” or “interpersonal” attributes, the collective self highlights “ingroup-shared attributes” and “consists of attributes that are shared with ingroup members and differentiate the ingroup from outgroups.” Further, “this self-representation reflects membership in valued social groups.”573 This is a compelling distinction to make when considering the various projects or modes of sociality with which musicians such as Oliver, Nuala and Filippo engage on folk circuits. They correspond roughly to three types of projects – solo projects, cross-cutting collaborations, and projects that are more firmly within genres and styles – that emphasize three different aspects of the self. According to the authors, different selves assume primacy at various times within one individual, a conception that is aligned with multiplicity of identifications.

Fiddle as Individual, Collective, and Relational

An example of how the individual and relational are brought to the fore at different points is evident in Oliver’s engagement with the fiddle. His relationship with the collective is somewhat more difficult to ascertain.

The fiddle is an instrument that brings forth a range of semiotic meanings, some specific to a particular local or ethnic context and others cross-cultural. The fiddle represents relationality, due to the fact that, in many European cultures, it is has a long history of connection to social dance and communal gatherings. The profusion of national and regional fiddle styles gives it strong collective meanings. It is also associated with soloistic virtuosity and is a highly valued instrument in Western art music. Of course, this semiotic complexity is true of a number of instruments, however I contend that the fiddle is exceptional for the historical associations it has with relational and collective practice as well as individual expression and achievement.

Oliver’s originality as a musician was accentuated by his use of the 5-string fiddle, which has an extra C string, a perfect fifth below the G that is conventionally the lowest open string on the violin. I did not get the opportunity to ask Oliver about why he played this fiddle, however I did ask some people whom he knew well. One long time collaborator sent me the following email message: “Funny, it’s hard to imagine Oliver NOT playing the 5-string. He so much liked to underline a part, or sonically explore down there – adding low harmonies, and of course the cross-bowing where you pick out a

---

574 I have found that the association of the fiddle with virtuosity also holds true in the anglo-Celtic traditions. In my experience, hiring fiddlers for my bands, the most popular fiddlers, whether from Irish, Scottish, or Canadian traditions, were in high demand due to their status as virtuoso solo performers. This is my impression, and is in need of further study.
counterpoint low line under the melody.” Similarly, another long-time friend told me that Oliver

…never said specifically why he liked the 5 string but I’m sure it’s because of the harmonic grounding it supplies (especially for the solo works), the possibility of layering parts in different ranges when he was looping or overdubbing and the lower extension of the violin’s range both for single line playing (sounding more like a viola or cello)…. Oli was all about being different, original, creative. The 5-string fiddle was an excellent vehicle for him and man did he know how to drive it!

These two comments raise two relevant points. First, they suggest the strong association of Oliver’s unique personality with the instrument itself, that Oliver “was all about being different, original, creative.” The five-string fiddle is thus a strong index of originality. Secondly, the comments point to how the instrument played an important role in Oliver’s self-accompanying style, thus being emblematic of his individuality. This was particularly pertinent in his solo compositions on his solo fiddle album 02.

An interesting aspect of instrument modification as a symbol of originality is that a particular modification gets adopted by others, leading to a type of collective of individualists. Oliver’s use of the 5-string fiddle has directly inspired some other musicians to adopt the same modification. The Finnish fiddler and nyckelharpa player, Emilia Lajunen, says that her current use of the 5-string fiddle is inspired by Oliver’s use of it on 02. His student, Jaron Freeman Fox, also uses the 5-string fiddle. Other musicians have taken the basic idea and adapted it to their own sensibility. My own musical collaborator Zavellenah Rokeby Thomas, who also composed her own tunes, plays a 5-string fiddle with a viola-sized body that she calls a ‘fiddola,’ an idea directly inspired by

---

575 David Woodhead, personal communication, March 2012.
576 Anne Lindsay, personal communication, March 2012.
577 In his discussions with me, Filippo also pointed this contrapuntal aspect as a prominent feature of Oliver’s music.
Oliver’s playing. Although not common, outside of the circle of Oliver’s influence there are others who play the 5-stringed fiddle, including well known Irish American fiddler Athena Tergis.

While instrument modification and the sonic explorations it made possible became part of the toolkit for creating Oliver’s unique voice, he also regularly evoked the fiddle’s relational possibilities. Along with the numerous tunes that were difficult to transmit, he wrote simple tunes that could be picked up easily. However, despite the fact that he would write tunes that were more participatory, it was rare that he evoked fiddle music as a symbol of “in group” belonging; that is, as a symbol of belonging to a particular collective, whether ethnic, national, or otherwise. When I asked him if his work with the Smithers fiddle group represented his connection to that particular community, I was surprised when he responded quite emphatically that it did not. Considering his strong involvement in Smithers in building a sense of group belonging through the fiddle group there, his reaction seemed puzzling. One interpretation is that he valued the relational over the collective in the regional or national sense; that is, the interpersonal, individual-to-individual experience of music, as a process that potentially challenges group categories rather than symbolic of them. This is a sense of community that is reminiscent with the idea of communications community rather than symbolic community, as Gerard Delanty refers to it. It is “a community of individuated members.”

Another interpretation is that Oliver’s music did foster a sense of collective belonging; one of belonging not to a place-based collective, but to a collective defined by

---

578 Delanty, Community, 158.
the group of people who played his music and who he mentored. His insistence on developing his own style led to a situation in which, in order to foster relationality, he had to teach his tunes to others in order to have people to play with him. This is evident in his experience with the Smithers fiddle camp, which I discuss in greater detail below. In the process, he developed a group of young people who shared a strong sense of belonging, in which his personality and musical style serve as the main point of reference. This has bred its own orthodoxies. Some of his young students are now devoted to preserving and transmitting Oliver’s music with the fervor of folk music preservationists of an earlier era. I recall one rehearsal for an Oliver tribute concert in which discussions over the ‘correct’ interpretation of one of his tunes become somewhat heated. One of the musicians appealed to the opinion of one of Oliver’s students as an authoritative source, while another appealed to his own longstanding experience with Oliver.

Oliver seemed to challenge the role of the fiddle as a symbol of “in-group belonging” – the collective – through his lack of interest in committing to a national or regional style. However, as I will now discuss, his emphasis on choice did not dissolve the idea of the collective, but in fact depended on it; in other words, while the sound of his music was not purely hybrid – that is, it was not a combination of various musics that maintain their own distinctive qualities – his discourse reveals that he still regarded the integrity of styles as being important.

The Dilemma of Choice: Fiddle “Dialects”

A point of friction between individuality and relationality can be found in Oliver’s use of the concept of “dialects” to articulate his conception of fiddle style. While in the early
part of his career Oliver spent some time engaging with various regional and national fiddle styles, he ultimately saw these engagements as steps towards the development of an individual style that would transcend these particularities. He used the concept of dialects to describe both the diversity in Euro-American fiddle styles and also the way he thought about his own compositional development; in his conception, he drew on a range of dialects in order to develop his own. Although we did not discuss his formulation of the idea in depth, he did use the term consistently and therefore it is worth examining as a faithful, emic representation of how Oliver conceived of style. I see his concept of dialects as important as it demonstrates the high value he placed on personal choice. This value must be contextualized by his cultural upbringing; how much choice is considered acceptable or even possible is highly variable within the broader, transnational folk music field.

Oliver told me he had developed his own personal dialect only after engaging in his early years as a fiddler with a number of different regional dialects that informed this emerging style. He saw this individualized approach as increasingly common in contemporary, pluralistic Canadian society, such as in the British Columbian fiddle camps at which he taught, where he said “kids are exposed to different dialects” through a variety of teachers from different traditions. He contrasted this approach with what

579 In an interview discussing the recent establishment of an “American Roots” music program at Boston’s Berklee College, contemporary jazz/bluegrass violinist Matt Glazer describes a trend toward multiplicity of stylistic expertise in young musicians who apply to the recently developed program. Glazer directly remarks on the influence of music camps on this phenomenon: “There’s suddenly in America an awareness among young string musicians that they should be able to play classical music, jazz, country music, bluegrass, old time, Celtic, all at a very high level simultaneously. That’s like a paradigm shift in the thinking of these young kids. One sociological component probably accounts for this, these fiddle camps...where kids from all over get together and hear other kids do amazing things, and it just kind of stokes the fire.” Joel Brown, “Berklee Launches American Roots Program,” Hubarts.com, http://www.hubarts.com/weblog/2009/12/berklee-kicks-off-new-american-roots-music-program.html (accessed March 12, 2013).
he saw as more traditional modes of learning style and repertoire:

…[the learning of various dialects] is sort of a new thing. The old traditional way would be for example for somebody to grow up in Cape Breton and just really talk in their dialect, they play in their dialect, they sit around and they learn from the old timers and from teachers that all play in that dialect…what’s happening in the fiddle camps is kids are going far…it’s more pick and choose.\textsuperscript{580}

While the degree to which Oliver characterizes Cape Breton culture as being homogenous and bounded is debatable,\textsuperscript{581} his point nonetheless illustrates that he sees choice of cultural affiliation as a predominant feature of contemporary, particularly Canadian, society. He related this to Canada’s multiculturalism, stating that in most of Canada “a lot of people aren’t from within one culture, as say the Cape Bretonners are from within that culture.”

Oliver told me that in his early development as a fiddler he struggled with finding a style to commit to in this Canadian climate of choice. He would try different styles but eventually would move on to learn others. One of his stated reasons for doing this was that he felt inauthentic in his pursuit of particular styles. For example, he said that while early on he learned a lot of Irish music, and for a while tried to emulate particular Irish fiddle styles, ultimately he realized that he would “never be Irish”. He said that when he realized this it “freed him up” to pursue a musical path based on trying to develop his own dialect.\textsuperscript{582} This statement aligns with an essentialized notion of folk authenticity in which being from a place allows for a more genuine connection with the spirit of its traditional music.

\textsuperscript{580} Oliver Schroer, personal communication, September 2007.
\textsuperscript{581} Oliver’s example of Cape Breton culture as bounded has to be critically considered in light of a long-standing essentialization of Nova Scotia in general within Canadian folklore. See Ian McKay, \textit{Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia} (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2006).
\textsuperscript{582} Oliver Schroer, personal communication, September 2007.
As a Western Canadian of European origin who plays Irish music, I can relate to Oliver’s dilemma of choice. In my case, it is a characteristic of living in a place such as British Columbia in which immigrant settlement is very recent (only since the 1860s), and in which the bulk of settlement has occurred only since 1900. It is easy to assume that this type of anxiety is something that is less common in most other parts of the world, where communities and places have deeper local cultural continuities.

Oliver’s relationship to choice can be fruitfully contrasted to that of Nuala. I asked Nuala about her compositional approach, aware that she was raised in a local, Catholic Irish community, which contrasts to the multicultural Canadian context. Compared to Oliver, Nuala considers herself grounded in Irish Traditional Music in particular, but says that in recent years she has developed her own style of playing and composing that is “heavily influenced by Scottish music/musicians,” due to her years living in Edinburgh, which has a thriving folk and traditional music scene. When I told Nuala that Oliver had conceptualized his compositional approach in terms of “dialects”, I asked her if the concept made sense to her in terms of her own approach. She responded that, unlike Oliver, she did not pick and choose from numerous styles, and that it is only recently that she has felt she is developing her own style:

For a while I was aware of being very adaptable and seeking to fit in and blend with the others around me, as closely as possible. For many years in fact, especially while playing as part of bands, which was how I began as a child, and how I began as a professional musician. It’s only relatively recently I have begun to find and realize my own character/style of playing. I think it’s good not to be too self-conscious about this aspect, and I don’t compare my own playing to anyone else’s.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸³ Nuala Kennedy, personal communication, January 2012.
In short, Nuala indicates more of a sense of working within a tradition. For her, a personal style developed gradually from a confident grounding in Irish music, and was shaped by her years of playing with Scottish musicians, while Oliver had always played a diversity of musics. She perceives this as a gradual, almost organic development. She told me that in contrast to Oliver she is “not so methodical” about the choices she makes in developing a style, while Oliver “liked to sift through and dig into past recordings of his musical ramblings to find the patterns and things that made up his own dialect.”

The comparison between Oliver and Nuala’s different approaches to developing a personal style demonstrates how particular rhetorics of individuality can be shaped by one’s local or national self-identification. Oliver’s concept of dialects makes sense within the Canadian context since there is no single, dominant Canadian traditional music, as (at least in terms of mainstream perception) there is in Scotland and Ireland. This is a level of difference among musicians that shapes the dynamics of interaction in the transnational folk festival field and adds nuance to an understanding of the new folk music sensibility. While musicians may share an openness to new forms of composition and performance, the degree to which they feel free to choose, and the manner in which they choose, varies according to the cultural values they have inherited.

Nonetheless, common to both Oliver and Nuala is the high value they place on both diversity and individual choice. The idea that the contemporary, globalized era is characterized by choice has resonance well beyond the topic of traditional music. Anthony Giddens identifies the pervasiveness of choice – and the anxiety related to it –

---

584 Ibid. With this comment she refers to Oliver’s practice of recording ideas that he later revisited and reworked, a process that I discuss further below.
as conditions of what he terms as globalized “late modernity”. He applies this to contemporary societies in general.

It is…a global society, not in the sense of a world society but as one of ‘indefinite space.’ It is one where social bonds have effectively to be made, rather than inherited from the past…. It is decentred in terms of authorities, but recentred in terms of opportunities and dilemmas, because focused upon new forms of interdependence.  

For Giddens, making social bonds is an active process rather than an inherited one, and necessitates a narrative construction of self in relation to society. As I discussed in Chapter 2, his ideas have been challenged by the degree to which he presents life as being rationally constructed by an autonomous self. Nonetheless, as I shall now discuss, for Oliver, the concept of dialects was part of a self narration in which he rhetorically brought together the disparate strands of musical style that he encountered in his musical development, an account to which I will now turn.

The Trajectory of Oliver’s Creative Projects

An examination of Oliver’s career trajectory reveals varying rhetorics of individuality, relationality, and collectivity, and of the “constant tension” between these of which he spoke.

It was clear in my discussions with Oliver that he perceived his musical development and career trajectory as having occurred in stages. In the narrations he gave to me of his life story, he identified each phase with a particular stylistic orientation in his fiddling and composing. According to Oliver, his development involved the alternation

---

and overlapping of intensely solitary musical experiences and pursuits with more social ones. Of course, the alternation of solitary and social experience is normal among most musicians, as they move between private periods of practice and public performance. In Oliver’s case it is compelling to point to how this aspect of his career trajectory takes on meaning in light of the tensions he expressed between individuality and relationality as he experienced them in the fiddle music milieu. While I am cautious about presenting a problematically compartmentalized account of Oliver’s life, nonetheless, his self-perception and, consequently, the way he presented himself publicly, were based upon this notion of developmental periods.

Dividing Oliver’s compositional and career development into periods has the use of illustrating his varying social connection with communities based in specific places. Tied to the more ‘relational’ periods was a tendency to compose tunes that people could play, and that formally resembled what Canadian fiddlers think of as traditional tunes. The first of these is his engagement with the Ontario fiddle scene at the beginning of his career, and the second is his strong relationship with Smithers, British Columbia, at what was unexpectedly the end of it.

There are of course dangers in associating periods with either pole of a “relational/individual” binary. No period is without elements of both. However, perhaps more than a lot of musicians, Oliver did make strong musical statements in either direction and did identify these periods as either solitary or community oriented.
Early Career

Oliver began by playing locally in the area surrounding his hometown of Flesherton in Southern Ontario. His self-identification as a fiddler really developed in this period, in which he played a lot of dances with the Traverston band, and learned some traditional repertoire in this social context. Following his move to Toronto, he made his living busking in the Toronto subway, for up to ten hours a day. While he did sometimes perform with others in that venue, generally he played by himself. In his reflection of the period, he saw it as the most prolific in terms of expanding his repertoire as a fiddler. He mostly played traditional tunes, whether Irish, Scottish, or Canadian “old time” tunes. Overlapping with this solitary activity, he began to engage with the Ontario fiddle circuit, and started to compete in contests.

Within this milieu, he immersed himself in the style and wrote some tunes that emulated it. One tune that Oliver composed during this period, “Millie’s Waltz, has since become fairly standard on the Canadian fiddle competition circuit.” This tune appeared on an early (1989) cassette by the same name, on which Oliver performs mostly tunes that are popular on the Ontario fiddle circuit, with the conventional instrumentation of fiddle and piano, along with occasional guitar. “Millie’s Waltz” is clearly an attempt at writing a standard sounding waltz in the Ontario old time style. Ontario old time waltzes demonstrate a strong influence of Viennese waltzes. With their major tonalities, secondary dominant harmonies, and disjunct melodic lines, they have a sentimental quality that Oliver captured in Millie’s Waltz. If Oliver’s intention was to compose a tune

---

586 According to personal communication in 2011 with three fiddlers who have won championships on the fiddle circuit in the 1980s and 1990s, and who now serve occasionally as competition judges, the tune is now played in competitions and is well known.

587 This recording has been re-released recently by the Borealis folk music label. Oliver Schroer, Millie’s Waltz, Big Dog, BD0801, CD, 1989.
that would be played regularly, then he was successful. The tune appears in some popular fiddle tune books, including the Mel Bay publication *Canadian Fiddle Music, Volume 1*, which includes seven other Oliver Schroer tunes.\(^{588}\) Other than “Millie’s Waltz,” however, no others among Oliver’s tunes have caught on in the competition circuit to anywhere near the same degree.

Figure 7.1 is a transcription of the first AABB of Oliver’s performance on the cassette. It illustrates not only the standardness of its form as an AABB waltz, but also performance elements that are consistent with the Ontario fiddle competition style waltz playing. These include slides up to notes, usually at the peak of a phrase, such as at measure 15. Another common stylistic trait is mixed use of vibrato and straight tone on longer notes. Oliver is fairly conservative in his use of both these traits in this performance, but they are nonetheless clearly present.

---

Throughout Oliver’s career he alternated between writing easily transmittable tunes and relatively idiosyncratic, complex and – for many traditional musicians – difficult tunes. This duality is evident early on in Oliver’s career on his two 1994 companion CDs, *Whirled* and *Jigzup*.

The release of these recordings marks another stage in his development: his immersion into the Canadian festival circuit and the Canadian music industry at large. *Whirled* and *Jigzup* were recorded in a single series of recording sessions, and later were divided into two separate CDs. Oliver decided to group performances together and present different products to serve different purposes. As the titles humorously suggest, *Whirled* was geared more towards the world music market that had been burgeoning since the late 1980s, while *Jigzup* was aimed at the Celtic music market that gone through a period of rapid growth in Canada in the early 1990s.\(^589\) This word play is typical of

\(^589\) Today people involved in the Canadian music industry often refer to the “Celtic wave” of the early 1990s. My own band Mad Pudding rode this wave, and found at the time that major festivals would book at least two or three Celtic acts. While some of the most prominent performers of the period such as Ashley MacIsaac and Natalie MacMaster were from Cape Breton and region, the British Columbia band Spirit of the West was one of the first Celtic influenced bands to have broad success, beginning in the late 1980s.
Oliver’s playful and slightly ironic manner of poking fun at such categorization while utilizing it.

There is a general sense among fans of Oliver’s music that *Jigzup* is relatively more traditional and relatable for fiddlers, while *Whirled* is more complex and idiosyncratic. Oliver echoed this perception to me in the discussion of the CDs. Indeed, *Jigzup* contains several tunes that, while not clearly within any particular tradition, are nonetheless well known to many Canadian fiddlers, particularly through their transmission by fiddle camp teachers. The *Jigzup* tunes are not conventional Ontario style fiddle tunes, as “Millie’s Waltz” is, however they contain elements that have given some of them, and in particular one tune – “Horseshoes and Rainbows” – a place among the repertoires of many younger Canadian fiddlers. I will discuss “Horseshoes and Rainbows” in greater depth below, due to its relatively wide diffusion. In contrast to the tunes on *Jigzup*, very few, if any, tunes on *Whirled* have made their way into fiddlers’ repertoires, in Canada or elsewhere.

A shared aspect of the *Whirled* and *Jigzup* recordings is that the tunes were conceived from a very early stage simultaneously with their arrangements, with a strong emphasis on groove. This is significant as traditional fiddle music in most Euro-American traditions is transmitted as single melodic lines, even in contemporary transmission in tunebooks. In the case of Oliver’s tunes, often people know the arrangement along with the predominant “fiddle tune” itself. Further, Oliver often spoke of his tunes in a way that demonstrated he conceived of his arrangements and the melody as inseparable.

Oliver’s accounts of his recording process offer clues to why this is so. According
to him, the tunes grew out of a compositional process in which he used a 4 track Tascam recorder. Significantly, he would usually record what he called “grooves” first, and develop his melodies based on these grooves. Then he would record the melody, followed by overdubbed parts such as counter melodies or harmony parts. The predominance of the accompanying parts within his conception of the music was evident in how would describe the tunes to me. He would often describe aspects of rhythm and metre that were in fact not in the main fiddle melody as inherent to “the tune,” but were in what I heard as accompanying parts.

Within the context of fiddle music, this is an important point that distinguishes his approach as modern, and highlights a distinction between his own music and what is considered as traditional music in the regional practices from which he developed his personal dialect. In Irish traditional dance music, for example, accompaniment remains a clear signifier of innovation. There is little evidence for harmonic accompaniment for Irish dance music until the advent of recording in the early 20th century. As someone with 20 years of experience accompanying Irish dance music, I can attest to the controversial reputation of guitar accompaniment, for example, within Irish music circles. For many melody players, the ideal accompanist ‘follows the tune’ and does not create a rhythmic groove that overpowers of the melody player, who is perceived as driving the groove.

Another important point this process raises is that Oliver conceived of most of the arrangements himself, even though, ultimately, he used other musicians on the recordings. The idea of being able to accompany himself found ultimate expression in his CD 02, which I discuss below.
One of the best-known tunes from *Jigzup*, the reel “Horseshoes and Rainbows,” demonstrates Oliver’s tendency to base arrangements on a fundamental, repetitive groove. I recall hearing the tune for the first time in 1995. This was my first encounter with Oliver, at a side stage at the Vancouver Folk Festival. His group, the Stewed Tomatoes, played it, and the tune’s memorable “hook”\(^{590}\) – a rephrasing of a section of Richard Rodgers’ song “My Favourite Things” – stood out to me from his other melodies, which seemed more complicated and less accessible. The catchiness of this melody is perhaps one reason it has become the most widely circulated of Oliver’s tunes among fiddlers.

At a basic level, “Horseshoes and Rainbows” stays within a very recognizable form for musicians who play Canadian, Irish or Scottish fiddle music: the reel. The structure of the sections is AABB, in which each section is 8 measures each. A further conventional element is the length of phrases – 4 measures – within these sections.

On the CD, after the first performance of the “Horseshoes and Rainbows” AABB melody by solo fiddle, the underlying groove figure is introduced: a repetitive two measure, syncopated rhythmic pattern played on overdubbed solo fiddle (figure 7.2):

![Fig. 7.2. Underlying Groove for “Horseshoes and Rainbows” by Oliver Schroer](image)

---

\(^{590}\) I discuss the concept of the “hook” in newly composed Irish dance tunes in my Masters thesis, “Tradition and Innovation in Irish Instrumental Folk Music”.

317
On the fourth repetition of the tune, the syncopated accompanying figure transforms to a 9/8 figure, creating a polymetre with the main melody. The B section contains the quotation of “My Favourite Things” in the first four measures (figure 4):

```
| 17 | 21 |
```

Fig. 7.3: B Section of “Horseshoes and Rainbows” by Oliver Schroer

“Horseshoes and Rainbows” is one of the few Oliver Schroer tunes that is starting to be played commonly in fiddle communities. I will examine how this tune has been transmitted and circulated towards the end of this chapter.

The companion CD to Jigzup, Whirled, contains several arrangements that are more rhythmically and melodically complex than those on Jigzup. Of the thirteen tracks on Whirled, seven are in mixed metres, and one tune, “Gurka’s Retreat” is in “free” time, in that it does not contain any metric periodicity. Further, the specific arrangements on the CD are even more integral to the performance of pieces than on Jigzup, as Oliver made clear to me. For example, while a fiddle can easily perform the melody of “Horseshoes and Rainbows” with any type of accompaniment as a fiddle tune, the effect of “Into the Sun,” which is on Whirled, is really dependent upon the juxtaposition of two time signatures. Oliver seemed proud of this particular performance on Whirled, and mentioned it several times in our interviews. For him, it was a significant early
accomplishment in his experimentation with juxtaposing different time signatures. It consists of two concurrent melodies; the first (figure 7.4), in the steady eighth note style of fiddle tunes, consists of two-measure long antecedent/consequent phrases in 4/4 time, while the second (figure 7.5) consists of dotted quarter notes and spans two repetitions of the first melody. It contains 22 equally spaced beats over the length of 4 antecedent/consequent phrases. Thus there is a sense of metric juxtaposition between the symmetrical 4/4 melody and a more expansive 11 beat melody:

![Fig. 7.4: “Into the Sun” eighth note melody, A section](image_url)

![Fig. 7.5: “Into the Sun” dotted quarter-note melody, A section](image_url)

This use of short repeating fragments increasingly became an aspect of Oliver’s compositional style that is both a reference to generalized Celtic dance musics – which as
I discussed in chapter 1 also contain repeated short phrases – and also was the basis of the compositional style that I will discuss below.

While in general *Whirled* is more complex in terms of time signatures and melodic structure than *Jigzup*, many of the tunes contain signifiers of traditional music. Usually the main signifier is the overall structure of the tune, as with “Horseshoes and Rainbows.” Other tunes, such as “Blue Sun in a Yellow Sky,” have strong melodic signifiers of tradition as well. Like “Horseshoes and Rainbows,” Blue Sun in a Yellow Sky is AABB in structure. The A section begins with a passage that is evocative of Irish traditional reels, however the phrasing soon becomes irregular. A further signifier of “tradition” in the tune is the instrumentation of wooden flute and uillean pipes. The performance also includes Trichy Sankaran on Mridangam, with whom Oliver established a student/teacher relationship while studying at York University in Toronto, and whose inclusion Oliver considered to be a major accomplishment due to Sankaran’s high reputation. In another tune, Humours of Plato, a mixed metre A section is contrasted with a B section that very briefly forays into a blues riff. In these tunes, references to particular traditions are clear but never overtake the “originality” of Oliver’s compositional voice. The tunes do not have enough conventional content to be identified with particular styles; they just make reference to them.

Thus, there is a pattern in many of Oliver’s tunes on both albums of contrasting the accessible with the difficult to access. Some musicians do play these difficult tunes, however, they are not easily transmitted. As a result, the musicians who incorporate them into their repertoire do so in a context of focused study, an aspect that increases the tunes’ associations – along with Oliver’s association – with art music. This trend towards
idiosyncratic and difficult to transmit folk music is underexamined in folk revival literature, but it raises some interesting questions. Are these tunes being absorbed into common repertoires, or do they constitute an elite repertoire that has a stratifying effect?

**O2: The Individualist Auteur**

At the North American Folk Alliance Conference in Vancouver in 2001, a bandmate of mine rushed up to me to let me know that he was off to see Oliver Schroer performing an all night showcase in his hotel room. Oliver was performing his fiddle unaccompanied, playing tunes from his latest CD at the time, O2. I dropped by Oliver’s room, in which a few people sat on chairs or stood in the doorway, listening to his new pieces. Up until this point, most people who were familiar with Oliver’s music knew of the type of material that I have been describing thus far; tunes that were ensemble oriented and relatively complex arrangements, as Oliver had been primarily a collaborator and bandleader (of his group The Stewed Tomatoes). It was arresting for those of us who knew about him to see him take this solostic approach. In addition, it seemed totally unique at the time, especially in the folk scene.

The music that Oliver performed on this occasion, and predominantly for the next several years, was stylistically very idiosyncratic. For those of us that had heard his music, there was little in these new melodies that had discernible references to fiddle music styles. The tunes consisted of short melodic ideas, executed with a range of left hand and bow techniques, with sounds such as harmonics, string popping, brushing across strings, and wide vibrato. Discussing this music with a Canadian music industry magazine upon the 1999 release of his CD O2, he later stated “I’m not even sure if these
can rightly be called tunes…they are a bit more fluid and larger in scope…. Sound gestures arranged in patterns. Gestures which repeat and subtly mutate; patterns which repeat and mutate. Fractal coastlines of notes….” He described the process of how he composed them, again using recording and playback as he did on *Whirled* and *Jigzup*:

“The pieces are the result of many hours of taped improvisation…. During my playing sessions, fragments would surface and resurface in a cyclical way. I began recognizing melodies from the same families…. After much playing, one version would assert itself as the most eloquent member of its family. For every piece on the album, there are between five and 60 previous versions that are still evolving. This is very much living music for me.”

While the result of these experiments were tunes that few fiddlers could pick up and circulate easily in the manner of much so-called folk music, Oliver claimed his aim was nonetheless to communicate with an audience, and not to alienate them. Speaking of other solo fiddle recordings he had listened to, he remarked in the same article that “Some of it was just barbed wire walls of notes…. You’d never want to put it on again. I wanted to do something different, to simply communicate. It’s not a lot of notes, it’s about finding areas of melody that actually affect people in a positive way. *O2* is very much about expression.”

Despite this stated aim for connection, Oliver’s focus on uniqueness was clear. In the liner notes for *O2*, he wrote, “What if I discovered a music no one had heard before? What would it sound like? That’s often what motivates me to play.” Nonetheless, he balances this rhetoric of individuality with a rhetoric of relationality, through the use of the notion of “dialect.” For Oliver, these compositions emerged dialectically in relation to

---

his engagement with fiddle music. To revisit a quote I cited earlier from the liner notes for O2, “On these explorations I may go to strange and distant places, but the fiddle dialect of my playing roots always pokes through in the end. I consider myself a fiddler, not a violinist, because my music primarily comes out of my body, my feet, my belly – not just my mind.” According to Oliver, these new explorations exist in tandem with an ongoing relationship with traditional music: “…I used to write a lot of jigs, reels, waltzes, as I matter of fact I still do. But over the years new kinds of melodies emerged- more rarified, harder to pin down…‘Compositions’ sounds too pretentious and rigid. Let’s just call them shapes. Shapes made out of smaller shapes, which in turn are made out of smaller shapes…. Concatenations of vibrations.”

Two tunes – or rather one tune that was recorded with two different titles, “A Million Stars” (recorded on A Million Stars) and “Field of Stars” (recorded on Camino) – are strongly representative of the approach he developed on O2. A striking feature is a rubato in Oliver’s performance that gives the sense of free metre. I actually have not provided transcriptions for these tunes, as I did not find a faithful way to represent the high degree of rhythmic flexibility – of stretching and shortening beats, of variation in pause lengths – on the page. Further, the range of tone colours he acheives, through use of harmonics, sliding the bow across dampened strings, and other techniques, somehow seems very flat when translated into a score.

---

592 One of Oliver’s students, Jaron Freeman-Fox, has transcribed a large portion of Oliver’s catalogue. Jaron told me, however, that he decided not to transcribe the types of tunes represented on O2, for much the same reasons I state. He told me “There were certain pieces such as Field of Stars [closely related to “A Millions Stars”] that I left out. There are a lot of subtle rhythmic elements at play in these tunes, influenced by Swedish and ‘African’ rhythms, among others. It’s for rhythmic reasons why I think certain tunes should not be written down. Not just that it would be over-simplifying the rhythm, but setting in stone certain rhythmic decisions which are supposed to be improvised.” Jaron Freeman-Fox, personal communication, April 2013.
“A Million Stars” begins with a melodic idea that consists of three distinct asymmetrical phrases. This opening melodic idea is repeated four times. After this point, the performance, which is 5 minutes and 55 seconds in length, consists of a variety of melodic ideas, many of which draw on this first melodic idea, and many of which do not. “A Million Stars” thus resembles a theme and variations form in places, but soon develops into a much looser form. Its structural logic is based on taking subdivisions of the initial melody and working with them in various permutations. The effect of this rhythmic flexibility and melodic variation is of an intuitive and spontaneous meditation, rather than the kind of rationalized organization associated with the Baroque tradition’s use of retrograde and inverted phrases and motifs.

Oliver’s “O2 style” or “fractal” tunes, as he called them, were designed to be varied from performance to performance. His student Jaron Freeman-Fox, who painstakingly learned several of these tunes, described the form of “A Field of Stars” as follows:

There are several sections to “A Field of Stars.” Almost never are all of them played in any one given performance. There are certain sections that have an optional repeat (with variation), however if you repeat them, you’re likely sacrificing the repeat of a later section.593

Jaron raises the opening of Oliver’s performance of “A Field of Stars” on Camino as an example. The opening melodic section, which runs at roughly 15 seconds in length, repeats with one significant variation, a change from G to C as his lowest note. According to Jaron, Oliver rarely repeated this first section in performance, but may have repeated other sections. This element of variation contributes to a perception of these

593 Jaron Freeman-Fox, personal communication, April 2013.
styles of tunes as more spontaneous than Oliver’s earlier compositions.

**Individualist Authenticity vs. Folk Authenticity**

In the liner notes for 02, Oliver is simultaneously linking himself to both the larger fiddle world and to the emancipation from that world. These rhetorics of individuality and relationality are closely tied to competing notions of authenticity. On the one hand, Oliver is presenting himself as an authentic auteur, or the unique, transcendent artist. On the other hand, Oliver is drawing on a notion of authenticity that is more grounded in the concept of the folk.

The process by which 02 was recorded captures an important signifier of authenticity that is valued in both folk music and art music: spontaneity, which suggests inspiration and authentic creativity. Oliver “recorded the album in its entirety and in order more than 15 times. From 90 minutes in the original run-through, he pared it down to 48 minutes before finally deciding on a two-CD version with approximately 37 minutes of music on each.” Oliver tried to recreate the spontaneity of a live performance as much as possible. “When I pared it down to 48 minutes, I started to lose things I felt were important.” He stated that on the final session he “got the tape machine rolling, recorded the first tune, took a deep breath, recorded the second tune, and then went through the album without stopping the tape. There’s a bit of editing, but it’s pretty marginal.”

Folk music authenticity and art music authenticity find a common value in the concept of spontaneity, and thus O2 can be seen as a way of negotiating tensions between

---

594 Larry LeBlanc, “For Canada’s Oliver Schroer, One Man, One Violin Is Enough,” *Billboard* 111.33, August 14, 1999, 80.
folk music and art music. Both notions of authenticity, folk and auteur, rely on an idea of naturalness that a spontaneous, inspired performance evokes. Folk authenticity depends upon a notion of closeness to nature, while the auteur is supposedly blessed with a natural and unique talent that is able to spill forth on command. As Matthew Gelbart has examined, Western European views of “art” music in the 19th century were a synthesis of late 18th century idea of folk music, the only rule of which concerned the “dictates of nature,” and 18th century idea of “cultivated” or “scientific” music, in which rules were based on conventions. A sense of spontaneity, and both these types of authenticity, are also central to Oliver’s Camino project, which represents a strong value placed upon live, unmediated performance. It is no surprise then that the tunes Oliver played on his Camino recording were mostly O2 style compositions, which have a strong rhetorical connection with spontaneity.

Smithers: Mentorship and A Local Legacy

Beginning in the late 1990s, Oliver made a shift from soloistic projects such as O2 and the subsequent CD Restless Urban Primitive. His 2005 CD A Million Stars signaled a shift towards collaborations with other musicians he had met during his life as a touring musician, including contributions from Filippo Gambetta and the African-American vocal group Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir. Also, in this period he began what was to be a deep connection with the Northern British Columbia community of Smithers.

---

595 Gelbart, The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music,” 204.
Oliver was introduced to the community of Smithers in 1999, when he played in the Northern British Columbia town while on tour with the Canadian singer songwriter James Keelaghan. The fiddle camp hired him to teach later that year. According to Leslie-Jean McMillan, the founder of the Smithers youth fiddle group Coast Valley Fiddlers:

We were all excited, as we had just learned Mason’s Apron [a well known fiddle tune] and he arrived and taught us Exodus [a Bob Marley song], and made his violin make all sorts of incredible noises. The following year, we had our first fiddle camp, and were short one instructor at the last minute. I tried every instructor I knew in BC, and no one could come. On a whim, I tried Oliver, never believing he would be willing to come. He was. He was a hit with the kids from the start, and a very natural, gifted teacher. He came up for the camp the following year, then began mentoring individual kids and groups. Over time, he grew to become part of our community, staying with families, sharing celebrations and enjoying surprising us as much as we liked surprising him. He knew how important relationship was in teaching, and he cared as much about the kids as he did about their music. We miss him very much.

Oliver transmitted his aesthetic of pushing the boundaries to these students:

He spoke…about the importance of having your own repertoire, and not just playing the same old standards like Mason’s Apron. We were a tad deflated, but he had no idea. We were playing Cabbages, Irish Washerwoman, Arkansas Traveller, Devil’s Dream [all very well known, “standard” fiddle tunes in Anglo North America]. Certainly nothing in odd metre, nothing French or Métis. We also had very straightforward arrangements before he got a hold of us. We’d play everything straight through, two or three times, and that was that.

Oliver encouraged the Smithers students not only to learn traditional tunes but also to explore some of the musical processes with which he was engaged. These constitute a good summary of the shared traits among those who possess the new folk music sensibility: learning new compositions, acquiring a diverse repertoire of traditional musics (such as French Canadian or Métis tunes in addition to standard Canadian fiddle

---

tunes), learning tunes with asymmetrical phrasing and mixed metres, and focusing on arrangements of tunes.

Before Oliver taught at the Smithers fiddle camp, he had little experience teaching or working with youth. However, his teaching was successful, and he returned to Smithers several times a year until his cancer was diagnosed in 2007.

While Oliver transmitted the idea of pushing the boundaries, in fact this period saw a return to writing tunes that were more easily transmittable than much of his soloistic music. The evidence for this is on his CD Smithers, which is a testament to his strong identification with the Smithers community. Soon after finding out that he had cancer, Oliver recorded the CD with one of his young Smithers protégés, the fiddler and piano player Emilyn Stam. It consisted of 59 tunes, each written for a different member of the Youth Valley Fiddlers. The CD was a surprise gift for the students, whose parents gave it to them at Christmas that year.

Oliver’s mentorship, at Smithers as well as in Roberts Creek British Columbia where he had taught at the Sunshine Coast Summer School of Celtic Music, led to the formation of the Twisted String ensemble in 2003. He said that he started the group after noticing at the SCSCM one year that, along with sessions of Irish and Scottish music, there was a group of students playing his tunes. On one level, he saw the group as a chance to provide a social context for the performance of his idiosyncratic tunes:

The stuff like Camino and O2 that’s become very individual, stylized kind of music, nobody else plays that. Now some of my students are starting to learn some of that stuff, even the really weird stuff and the stylized stuff, but that was one the appeals of teaching these kids, because I could teach them a lot of my crazy tunes, so then I’d have someone to play the crazy tunes with.597

---

597 Oliver Schroer, personal communication, September 2007.
Further, Oliver taught them many of the grooves, countermelodies, and alternate fiddle techniques that he had recorded as part of these tunes, another sign that the tunes and their arrangements were often conceived of as inseparable. He eventually began to compose music for the group:

I realized that the best incentive for getting the kids to really play this music and put their hearts and bows into it was to write music that was fun to play. It was a revelation! I also realized I could use many of the experimental violin techniques I had evolved over the years to good musical effect. I want to stretch out the boundaries of what a group of kids on fiddles can do. So I composed stuff that showcases funky ensemble playing and alternative techniques, while never losing sight of a good strong melody.598

Twisted String were invited to perform a mainstage set at the Vancouver Folk Festival in 2004, where they also engaged in a type of performance that Oliver called “random acts of violins.” In this playful type of wandering performance art, they walked around the festival space in gaudy colourful outfits (echoing Oliver’s on stage dress style), playing tunes. They performed such ‘random acts’ in several places, including on the Toronto subway, when they traveled to the city to perform a benefit for Oliver while he was under treatment. The random acts concept was in keeping with Oliver’s value of creative engagement with supposedly mundane daily life that his use of found sound, which I will discuss further in relation to Camino below, also represents.

Oliver attributed the success he had with developing Twisted String partially to a particularly British Columbian sensibility that was receptive to his approach. Oliver believed that the British Columbian fiddle camps were “way more adventurous” than the camps in Ontario and other parts of central and Eastern Canada. He noted also that teachers from various backgrounds would “bring their strengths to the table,” giving the

598 Ibid.
students access to a range of fiddle “dialects.” He saw such camps as a “very modern thing” in which “people are encouraged to develop their own style.”

With Smithers in particular, he developed a sense of community very much in keeping with the idea of community as being collectivity based in a stable locality with ongoing interaction. Within this locale, he served as an influential figure in the development of a local musical practice. This practice highly valued individual expression, choice, and a cosmopolitan sensibility. Whereas musicians often think of the notion of continuity in folk music as the passing on of tunes, in Oliver’s case, a way of being a musician, and a sensibility, were what he passed on to his students.

_Tune Composition as Individual, Relational, and Collective_

As I discussed in Chapter 1, an aspect of Oliver’s, Nuala’s, and Fillippo’s compositions that blurs the lines between relationality and individuality is their frequent use of assymetrical phrases and metres. On the one hand, this tendency can be viewed as exclusionary, as it discourages participation among fiddlers from a number of dance music traditions that do not regularly use mixed metres, such as Irish and Scottish music. This is particularly true with some of Oliver’s compositions, which can be quite metrically complex. On the other hand, it links these musicians to a number of traditions in which assymetrical phrases are commonplace. Assymetrical composition can therefore be seen as expanding the boundaries of their musical connections beyond their regionally or nationally associated practices.

By “assymetrical phrasing” and “mixed metre composition” I refer to metric and phrase organization that is constituted by odd number of measures and beats. This
definition encompasses a broad array of structures, from “crooked tunes” in Appalachian music to “les tounes croches” in Québécois music, to Swedish polkas.

On several occasions I have had to learn some of Oliver’s tunes and Nuala’s tunes for concerts. There are often moments in learning them when, in the midst of a melodic line that falls easily under the fingers for players familiar with traditional dance music, a highly unexpected phrase length will occur. These are the parts I have to listen to several times, as my mind goes almost mechanically to the phrasing I would expect from numerous traditional or modern tunes I have played and heard.

One tune that I found to be challenging in this respect was Oliver’s “Shorelines.” I learned this melody for my tours with Nuala in the Summer of 2010. I performed it in trio with Nuala and the fiddler Dana Lyn, and also in Nuala’s 6-piece band in Lorient, France, as well as on our Italian tour. According to Filippo’s transcription of the tune (Fig. 7.6), which we used as a reference (Oliver had not written it down) the tune changes time signatures practically every measure; there are six different time signatures over all (7/8, 6/8, 3/8, 9/8, 4/4, 2/4). Relating the tune to Irish and Scottish music, “Shorelines” is neither a reel nor a jig. It contains 6/8 phrases that could be thought of as relating to a conventional Irish jig, 9/8 measures that resemble slip jigs, and 4/4 phrases that would be in place in a reel. In fact, when I am learning Oliver’s tunes, I find it easiest to think of sections in this way, for example thinking “these two measures are like a jig” and so on.
Oliver, Filippo and Nuala all have a number of compositions in mixed metres. To collaborate with them therefore requires a particular competence: ease with switching metres throughout a tune. This competence can serve as a boundary marker; the ability to perform mixed metre tunes can raise one’s access to social and professional situations in which these musicians are involved. As Benjamin Brinner writes, “The interactive knowledge and skills that musicians use in performing together constitute a central part
of competence that is complexly entwined with other modes of social interaction.\textsuperscript{599} For example, when Filippo told me that Nuala was interested in having me play with her group in Lorient and Italy, he asked if I was “okay” with mixed metre tunes. He knew that I accompanied Irish traditional music, as we had played at a session together in Genoa. None of the tunes played that evening were in mixed metres, as generally in Irish traditional music it is rare for tunes to be assymetrical. Therefore, he did not assume that I was competent or experienced at mixed metre tunes; however when it became evident that I could handle the tunes it was a skill that marked me as someone who could participate in performance with them.

While in some contexts assymetrical tunes are markers of originality, in other contexts they are signifiers of tradition. Some scholars researching these musics have recently explored the concept of so-called ‘crooked’ tunes.\textsuperscript{600} Assymetrical metre is part of the vernacular Balkan musics, Québécois music, Appalachian Old Time music, Métis music, and some Swedish polskas, although the concept of it as compound metre is not always emic.\textsuperscript{601} It is not a surprise then that Oliver and Filippo have expressed affinities with some of these musics at various times. Oliver and Filippo both claim to be greatly influence by Balkan musics and Oliver collaborated with several Québécois musicians and had a strong interest in Scandinavian musics, including polskas. Assymetry therefore


can be interpreted as either pushing the boundaries of tradition or as part of tradition. This ambiguity makes it useful as a marker of both individuality and relationality.

**Following a Tune: “Horseshoes and Rainbows”**

On July 3, 2008, Oliver Schroer passed away at St. Margaret’s hospital in Toronto, a block away from an entrance to the subway system in which he had honed his fiddling skills in the 1980s. According to press reports, his final words were “well, I guess no excursions today”.  

Oliver’s reported final words are particularly poignant considering his life spent in travel, both in terms of his musical imagination and his physical self. Travel, movement, and restlessness pervaded his work, whether through tune titles or through the narratives he used to introduce songs. In this final section of my account of Oliver’s career trajectory I consider how Oliver’s music has traveled.

Out of Oliver’s vast body of compositions, there are a few tunes that have spread into repertoires beyond his relatively close circle of fiddle camp students and the local southern Ontario folk scene in which he developed as a fiddler. As I mentioned earlier, Millie’s Waltz, played primarily within the Ontario fiddle competition circuit, and “Horseshoes and Rainbows”, from his album *Jigzup*, are his two best known tunes. The way in which “Horseshoes and Rainbows” has circulated points to a transnational network of fiddle camps and fiddle groups, by which new tunes are disseminated. I suggest that following this tune paints a picture of a fiddle culture for whom ‘fiddle music’ indicates a broad, generalized approach in which the instrument becomes the main

---

point of connection, more than commitment to particular styles. As with collectivities based on folk music, Celtic music, and other broad terms, fiddle music has become a useful catch all, within which musicians can create their own personalized social networks and from which they can draw on musics in the creation of their own styles. In this environment, tunes are often associated strongly with composers, and there are a number of circulating tunes in which this association is so strong that it subsumes the common signification tunes take on as representative of places.

Notation for “Horseshoes and Rainbows” is in some popular printed resources, including the popular Irish tune website www.thesession.org. It also was published in the 1996 Fiddler Magazine edition entitled “Fiddlers’ Favourites”, and was included on a CD that accompanied that edition. However, several of the people I have located who play or teach “Horseshoes and Rainbows” have learned it through oral transmission via face-to-face connections. One fiddler, who taught the tune to his Maine-based community fiddle group, told me:

I learned the tune from a [fiddle camp] camper, he’s a student at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY. I hadn’t even heard about Oliver’s work, and was instantly hooked.… For that particular tune, I love how it’s a mix of an original fiddle tune, but it still “quotes” [pays homage] to “My Favorite Things” from the Sound of Music. Also, it’s a tune that lends itself well to improvisation, which I like to incorporate into the experiences for the Franklin County Fiddlers. I’m now a fan of Oliver and his work, and now wish I could have met him.603

Another fiddler in the United States (in Florida) who directs a fiddle group, told me that she had heard the tune from Fiddle Magazine. Like the above interlocutor, she points to the catchiness of the tune as being appealing. She states “I loved the groove he had in his playing, and of course I thought the quote of “My Favorite Things” was

---

603 Name withheld, personal communication, July 2012.
ingenious. Once I learned it, I began to teach it to my students, who all loved it, too, and it went on from there.” She has also taught her group two other of Oliver’s tunes, “Fiddling In” and “Song for All Seasons.” Although she never met Oliver she “read up” on him and was aware of his illness and death. In fact, her group followed the practice of tying orange ribbons to their fiddles, an act of support for Oliver during his illness that his students in the Twisted String and other fiddlers participated in.604

Another fiddler who performs “Horseshoes and Rainbows,” a young Acadian fiddler from New Brunswick, pointed to Oliver’s unique compositional ability:

I learned “Horseshoes and Rainbows” from my fiddle teacher…. I never of heard him before I learned this piece. However, after I learned it, I became very interested in his music and bought a lot of his albums. What I find interesting about his music is that it can be very powerful and emotional. For the most part he uses simple melodies but he turns them into something great. I like the way he composes, because it is not the typical way that people compose nowadays. He is very inspirational to me and I one day hope to be able to compose pieces as great as he did.605

This comment also perceptively refers to a characteristic of Oliver’s music that highlights the individuality/relationality dialectic: his use of melodic material (often, as I have pointed out, based on short melodic fragments) that fiddlers think of as “simple” in combination with complex arrangements. Oliver found various ways to bring “complexity” into his music. “Horseshoes and Rainbows” is an example of how he used arrangement techniques such as counter melodies in contrasting time signatures to signify complexity, while maintaining the primacy of groove and the “catchiness” of the melody.

Other musicians who perform the tune include a young fiddler from Alberta who learned “Horseshoes and Rainbows” at fiddle jam sessions at a camp; a young Irish

604 Name withheld, personal communication, October 2012.  
605 Name withheld, personal communication, October 2012.
fiddler who learned the tune from a fellow student at the Berklee School of Music, who in turn knew Oliver from the camp scene in British Columbia; and students in a fiddle school in Scotland who have traveled to the Sunshine Coast School of Celtic Music in British Columbia. According to Iain Fraser, who leads the fiddle school and who is a regular teacher at the SCSCM, the students “picked up” the tune at jam sessions that occur at the camp. These examples demonstrate the degree to which oral transmission and face-to-face contact made at camps play a role in disseminating new tunes among musicians.

A further point to be gleaned from the example of “Horseshoes and Rainbows” is the extent to which the tune maintains, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s term, the “aura” of the composer as it is circulated among fiddlers. This contrasts the suggestion of anonymity in tunes identified as “traditional.” Oliver’s tunes were strongly associated with his personality. Even when musicians who played his tunes did not know him, they were aware of who he was and sometimes felt a personal connection with him. The Florida fiddlers tying orange ribbons to their fiddles is an example of this.

This strong identification with the personality of the composer/performer is reminiscent of the kind of association to individuals that pop and rock songs have. The comparison is not far-fetched in Canada; since the rise to fame of fiddlers such as Natalie MacMaster in the mid 1990s, the potential for a similar type of commercial success is ever-present and inspires the composition of new, potential “fiddle hits”. MacMaster’s tune “Catharsis,” for instance, has become almost universal in the repertoire of young Canadian fiddlers attending camps, and is also very popular in Scotland. It is now

606 Iain Fraser, personal communication, January 2012.
associated with teenage fiddlers and has a negative image among some musicians. Due to its catchiness and internal melodic repetitiveness, like a pop song, it receives the same critique that much pop music does; it is quick to remember and, for its critics, painfully slow to forget.

New tunes are circulated freely at fiddle camps and other sites of face-to-face interaction, becoming vehicles for shared experience and social cohesion. Yet when they are recorded they become “commodities that are seen to engender and concretize subjects’ attributes”\(^{608}\) (the subject being Oliver), subject to the same processes of reification, and the subsequent increase in exchange value, as rock and pop music. They are copyrighted and the performance of them generates income for the composer.\(^{609}\) Further, when they become well known through free exchange at fiddle camps and other venues they widen the composer’s audience, increasing the potential market for touring. Thus, as with the tension between network sociality and community discussed in the previous chapter, the circulation of tunes is marked by a similair tension of values between communalism and individualism. New tunes are subject to a process of free exchange that make them emblematic of community, yet they also help to foster loosely connected networks of competing individuals striving to distinguish themselves in the fiddle music marketplace.

Oliver spoke to me of this conflict of values, of which he was much aware. He claimed that fiddle camps presented an opportunity to find a middle ground between these two aspects of fiddle music in Canada:

---


\(^{609}\) For an in depth case study of the relationship between copyright and social relations in the contemporary transmission of ITM, see Anthony McCann, “All that is Given is Not Lost: Irish Traditional Music, Copyright, and Common Property,” *Ethnomusicology* 45.1 (2001): 89–106.
It’s a modern movement in the fiddle camps toward individualism, but as long as the camps are going strong, I think also there’s enough crossover that there’s a common repertoire created that people can play together. That’s a very important thing – *if everybody’s doing their own tunes, and everybody’s writing their own tunes, and every fiddle player has their own record out with only their own tunes then it becomes like pop music, it’s every man for himself.* But, at the camps what happens is people come and they’ll teach their best tunes…and a bunch of students will learn the stuff…and when they get together they’ll play those tunes. The camps themselves are creating community in that way. [My italics]

While “Horseshoes and Rainbows” has become a well-known tune in some fiddle circles, it is important not to overstate the popularity of Oliver’s tunes. Most of them are likely too idiosyncratic to have the kind of broad appeal of tunes that are more easily relatable to established styles and traditions. Oliver’s insistence on pursuing a unique dialect meant that relationality for him was found less in his participation with specific traditional music cultural cohorts, or in composing tunes that could be accepted by practitioners in more particular, identifiable fiddle music styles. Rather, it was through his assertion of uniqueness that he actually formed many of his connections, and it was this sense of individuality that often drew people to learn his music. This complex relationship between individuality and relationality is encompassed symbolically in his most commercially successful recording project, *Camino,* which is my final case study.

A Place of Transcendence, a Place of Immanence: Oliver Schroer’s *Camino*

---

610 Oliver Schroer, personal communication, September 2007.
I first learned of Oliver’s journey to the Camino de Santiago in Spain in July 2004. He and I were both teaching at the same fiddle camp in British Columbia, and he arrived at the initial teacher’s meeting on crutches, having just returned from the two-month trek with a twisted ankle. I was already aware that he had a penchant for capturing environmental sounds on DAT or disc, and then incorporating what he called found sounds into his CDs of original fiddle music. That he had packed his DAT machine and fiddle and ventured into the Spanish mountains to record himself playing in churches on the 1000 year old pilgrimage trail seemed to me an exceptional level of commitment, even for such an adventurous musical explorer as Oliver. I wondered what kind of a CD was going to emerge from this intensive recording project.

The resulting CD, Camino, was among Oliver’s most accessible recordings, and broadened his audience. He told me that listeners received Camino more enthusiastically than his preceding, sometimes difficult to access albums, particularly O2 and Restless Urban Primitive; in fact he said he received “more responses from this CD than from everything [he’d] done, combined.” While the musical material on the CD included some of his earlier work, including some of his highly idiosyncratic fractal compositions, the concept of the CD – an aural depiction of pilgrimage – seemed to have struck a fresh chord with audiences and critics. Oliver felt what was for him an unprecedented connection with audiences, stating to me that with Camino “something has translated from inside me, the subtle feelings I had through this instrument of wood and wires went into the hearts and consciousness of other people in a very powerful way.” This connection, Oliver thought (and with which I concur), was largely due to the “whole

---

611 Oliver Schroer, personal communication, January 2008. One response was an email from someone who had heard a track on CBC radio while driving and had to pull over the car, as she was weeping.
package” represented on the CD, and not just the music itself. On *Camino*, the “whole package” includes the pilgrimage context, the fiddling, the ambient and found sounds, the liner notes, and the photos. Intertextually, *Camino* potently represents tensions and paradoxes that are meaningful to audiences in two of the fields in which he engaged: folk music and New Age music. It appeals simultaneously to the notions of collectivity – of immanence – associated with the former and with the ideal of individual self-fulfillment through transcendence that characterizes the latter.

The pilgrimage trail is a potent symbol, the historic associations of which resonate in many ways with the poetics of Oliver’s music. In particular, pilgrimage represents the desire for community continuity in a globalized world characterized by temporary, in-the-moment connections, lack of contiguity, and social divisions. If in globalization these disjunctures are linked to network sociality and increased individualism, in pilgrimage overcoming them is fundamental to an experience of communion; the power of pilgrimage as a symbol of communion comes from its perceived ability to break down barriers between the temporary and eternal, the dispersed and the proximate, the divided and the unified. The goal of pilgrimage is to transcend time, space, social categories, and self-identity, and to come into a higher level of belonging, of immanence, with other pilgrims and, for believers, with God. However, despite this ideal of communion, the pilgrimage is, paradoxically, intensely personal. Each one’s journey is unique.

**Camino: The Setting and The Precedents**

*Camino* not only appealed to Oliver’s already existing audience, it expanded it by connecting him to a wider cultural phenomenon of ‘spiritual tourism.’ The medieval
route to the city of Santiago de Compostela in the region of Galicia, the site of relics of the apostle St. James, stands out as an increasingly famous destination for people with enough money to travel across the globe to undertake the trek in pursuit of self-fulfillment. Historically a destination for pilgrims from across Europe, today it is a place of interaction for an even more international array of travelers, many of whom are not affiliated with a religion, yet who nonetheless refer to themselves as pilgrims.\footnote{The image of the Camino de Santiago as a meeting place for diverse peoples, indeed a symbol of a united Europe, was reinforced by the organizing bid for the 2000 proclamation of Santiago as European City of Culture. Sharon R. Roseman, “Santiago de Compostela in the Year 2000: From Religious Centre to European City of Culture,” in \textit{Intersecting Journeys: The Anthology of Pilgrimage and Tourism}, Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman, 68–88.}

The popularity of the Camino de Santiago among travelers has made it a fruitful concept for albums in a variety of genres.\footnote{“Despite the secularization of much of Europe and the diminishment of specifically Catholic identity among peoples once firmly Catholic, the Camino de Santiago has surged in popularity in recent years, especially among Europe’s young adults. The number of pilgrims on the road increases with each passing year. Earlier this summer a local newspaper in León referred to the pilgrims passing through its city as an inundación (flood). The diocesan office for pilgrims in Santiago itself reported in August that over 1,000 pilgrims were arriving in the city daily, requesting their formal certificate of completion.” Kevin A. Codd, “El Camino Speaks,” \textit{The National Catholic Review}, http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=3337, accessed April 21, 2013.} Most notably, the Irish group The Chieftains capitalized on the widespread appeal of the trek with the success of their 1997 album \textit{Santiago}, which won a Grammy Award that year for Best World Music Album.\footnote{Philip Bohlman writes of the Chieftains album that “it inscribed a Celtic vision on record that was just familiar and exotic enough to epitomize the space of world music between the West and its other.” Philip Bohlman, \textit{World Music: A Very Short Introduction} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 44.} \textit{Santiago} presented the Camino as a place of communion among dispersed peoples. At one level, it evoked an imagined Celtic connection between the Irish and Galicians, through the theme itself and through collaborations with Carlos Nunez, a Galician piper with star status within World Music. Santiago also explored Galicia as part of a transnational Iberian imaginary by including collaborations with Mexican-American performers Los Lobos and Linda Ronstadt.
If Santiago represents the pilgrimage’s symbolic effectiveness in bringing globally dispersed peoples together, Camino portrays one individual’s experience of the journey. It is from a personal perspective. It consists of Oliver’s compositions and contains no overt references to traditional music, of Galicia or elsewhere. Further, importantly, all the fiddle performances are performed as solos.

Camino not only had meaning for Oliver’s audiences, but it took on meaning within Oliver’s self-narration his own life story. Pilgrimage symbolically brought together several paradoxes that Oliver attempted to negotiate in his career, paradoxes that are evident in transnational folk festival field. On the one hand is a desire to individually transcend boundaries and continuities of place, community and time. On the other is a desire to engage with these continuities, and to participate and connect with groups of people for whom they have meaning. As I discussed in the previous section, the tension between individuality and relationality marked Oliver’s development as a composer.

Pilgrimage as Performance Place

When I first heard the Camino album, what struck me immediately on the opening track was the sound quality; in contrast to the studio production of his previous recordings, the ambient, so called ‘live’ reverb of the stone churches was as prominent as the sound of Oliver’s fiddle. Indeed, Oliver later told me that he saw the album as a “series of duets with buildings” and that the experience of playing in these spaces felt like being “inside a thousand year old amplifier” as he interacted with the sound vibrations that bounced and swirled between the solid stone surfaces. The sense of collaborating with the sounds of the pilgrimage trail on the CD was not just due to the striking sonic ambience of his
fiddle performances; there were also recordings of bells, human footfalls, pilgrim’s voices, and birds singing interspersed through the recording. As I progressed through the CD, the impression grew that Oliver’s own compositions were in dialogue with other sounds from the journey. On this recording, the aural environment – the sound of the experience of pilgrimage – is clearly as important as the notes of Oliver’s idiosyncratic tunes themselves. This creates a sense of authentically “being there” that was essential to the of the project. As Oliver told me, “I could take a snapshot of the Taj Mahal but it’s not going to mean very much unless I was actually at the Taj Mahal to take the snapshot.”

This sense of authenticity pertains to the idea of pilgrimage both as a personal quest and as a social experience. Each of these aspects has appeal to a folk music market that values communalism. On the one hand, on pilgrimage one strives for authentic experience, represented by pain, sacrifice, and struggle in the pursuit of a closer relationship with the divine. On the other, through the transformative, shared and physically challenging ritual of the trek, pilgrims aspire to the possibility of achieving what Victor Turner terms *communitas*, a “relational quality of full, unmediated communion” with the other travelers, in which barriers are broken down.

Turner’s notion of “unmediated communion” describes Oliver’s account of what he valued in his pilgrimage experience. As Oliver told me when I asked him what pilgrimage meant to him, he told me he enjoyed walking a “a straight line toward a goal

---

615 Oliver Schroer, personal communication, January 2008.
that other people on the same road are sharing.” He felt that through this ritual he became “a little less Oliver, a little more a pilgrim,” noting that on the walk people would drop their last names and would “just become a man or a woman.” According to him, this simple purpose was a “great leveler” among people, noting that people’s professional identifications were virtually erased in the experience, as all just identified as fellow pilgrims. In Oliver’s account, the trek was experienced through connections with other travelers, whose diverse life stories, cultures and purposes for pilgrimage foster an experience of borderlessness.  

Although pilgrimage trails are liminal, transnational, and transcultural spaces they are also places with strong local identities and histories. Fortifying the experience of place for the pilgrim, the trek is a slow progression in which the senses, including hearing, engage with subtle nuances of the local physical environment. These include the sights, sounds, and smells of the countryside, as well as symbols of history, such as shrines and churches. Yet a pilgrimage trail is a place in which notions of place are shaped largely by the perceptions of generations of these temporary visitors, who are in constant motion and between the planes of leaving and returning, spiritual disconnection and reconnection, and familiarity and foreignness. For Oliver, this historical element was important. It was a communion that stretched across time. He cited the fact that “people have been walking on the same road for 1000 years” as being important to him. The personal sense of communion is therefore directly linked to what Doreen Massey wrote as the relations that constitute a glocal sense of place: “These relations interact with and take a further element of specificity from the accumulated history of a place, with that

---

618 Oliver Schroer, personal communication, September 2007.
619 Ibid.
history itself imagined as the product of layer upon layer of different sets of linkages, both local and to the wider world.\textsuperscript{620}

A further paradox characterizes pilgrimage trails in general: the interrelationship of embodiment and spiritual transcendence. This aspect ties the pilgrimage experience to Oliver’s philosophy on the fiddle/violin relationship. While the pilgrimage is experienced intensely in the body, resulting even in pain and injury from walking, its ultimate purpose is for the pilgrim to encounter the divine beyond the physical realm. I note that this particular dualism as it is based on the Cartesian divide between body and spirit that Oliver evoked in his discussion of fiddling, as when he told me that “On these explorations I may go to strange and distant places, but the fiddle dialect of my playing roots always pokes through in the end. I consider myself a fiddler, not a violinist, because my music primarily comes out of my body, my feet, my belly – not just my mind.”\textsuperscript{621}

Pilgrimage proceeds from the feet up, as fiddle music does, yet it aims to expand personal horizons. In the case of pilgrim age this expansion is spiritual. In the case of Oliver’s composition he primarily evokes the expansion of creative possibilities and development of an authentically personal style.

\textit{Ambient and Nature Sounds in Relaxation Music and New Age Music}

\textit{Camino} was embraced by Oliver’s already established audience (a large portion of whom are Canadian folk festival goers and fiddle music fans) yet it also appealed to an increasingly mainstream appetite for “spiritual” music – with the pilgrimage trail serving

\textsuperscript{620} Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” 155–156.
\textsuperscript{621} Liner notes to \textit{O2}. 

346
as a potent symbol – that made it compatible with the New Age genre. This broader connection to the New Age market is enhanced on Camino through a number of aural, textual, and visual markers. Camino is his only CD that incorporates the two aspects of site-specific ambience and found sound alongside his original compositions throughout the whole recording. By ‘found sound’ I refer to those sounds (usually not musical instruments) intentionally recorded, while ‘site-specific ambience’ refers to the sounds occurring in the environment of Oliver’s violin performance, including the reverberation, which is the sound that results from the bouncing of sound waves off of multiple surfaces. I use ‘site-specific’ to contrast with studio-generated reverb, which is the simulation of reverberation, created in the studio.

The origins of Camino can be found not just in Oliver’s original work, but also with studio projects in which he has participated, including those for the relaxation tape label Solitudes. The Solitudes recordings fall into the broader category of New Age music. This loosely defined genre, little explored in ethnomusicology, is predominantly instrumental, and tends to have minimal harmonic movement, with the aim of inspiring stillness and relaxation. Instrumentation can be either acoustic or electronic. In general, the music is “intended to provide a ‘sonic environment’ or ‘context’ rather than to present a musical dialectic.” It has been called “the cultural soundscape of the condition of liminality, serving to mark and so to recognize and ease the frequent experience of transformations” in modern life. There is a resonance between the New Age aesthetic

---

622 Oliver told me a large amount of the airplay for Camino was on CBC radio. His multimedia Camino tour, which included photographs taken by his pilgrimage companion Peter Coffman, spanned Canada.
and Oliver’s engagement with the Camino, a place in which time seems to stand still, yet is constituted through temporary encounters and movement. This resonance is also found in specific aspects of the sound production of Camino, in particular the aspects of found sound and ambience. As with much of Oliver’s work, he met some of the mainstream industry expectations of this genre while pushing up against others.

**Camino: The Recording**

*Found Sound on Camino*

*Camino* is Oliver’s most integrated use of what he called found sound. For Oliver, found sounds were essentially field recordings he made of sounds that he found compelling, which he would later incorporate into his recorded pieces. On *Camino*, these sounds include pilgrim footfalls, birds, cows, bells, and even the snores of sleeping pilgrims.

Oliver’s experiments with such sounds on disc began with the CD *Stewed Tomatoes* (1996). He included found sound on several of his recordings, including the sound of walking in snow on the track *Walking and Talking*, in which he utilizes the rhythm of feet in crunching snow as the basis of his composition, and, as I discussed in Chapter 6, the sound of moving pylons on an ocean dock on *The One I Remember*. In our discussions Oliver referred to the emotional impact that such sounds could have. He pointed to the sound of a ringing telephone on Pink Floyd’s 1979 album *The Wall* as an example of how such sounds can raise the emotional impact of a song.

---

625 Both tracks are on Oliver Schroer, *A Million Stars*. 
The use of found sounds in Oliver’s recordings has parallels with the work he did for the relaxation music label Solitudes. For Oliver, the opportunity to record on Solitudes presented “manna from heaven,” and allowed him to continue with his own compositional work at a time when it was clear to him he would not be able to sustain a career with the meager income he was earning from his own album sales. Albums that Schroer produced for Solitudes include *Seaside Retreat* (2002), *Lakeside Retreat* (2002) and *Celtic Serenity* (2005). In all he produced and played on eleven CDs for the label, two of which have gained gold status in Canada (over 50,000 units sold).

Solitudes CDs contain both classical and folk music repertoire, manipulated in the studio to create an ambience conducive to relaxation. In the production of these albums, instrumentalists record a track, onto which are mixed a variety of sounds associated with meditation and relaxation, such as crackling fire, chirping crickets, or ocean waves. The label’s founder, the late nature-film producer Dan Gibson, often recorded the nature sounds himself in the field. Oliver contrasted this approach, which he said “pastes sound over music” and which “sounds superimposed,” to that of *Camino*, which he wanted “to make sense, not to feel artificial.” Thus, it was clear that *Camino* was intended as a more “authentic” experience of “being there” for the listener than the kind of recordings he did for the Solitudes label.

A number of the short found-sound pieces mirror the soloistic polyphony of Oliver’s violing playing in that they demonstrate interplay between varying textures and qualities of a single class of sound object. For example, the track *Cowbarn Bells* consists of high and low pitched cowbell sounds, and *Astorga, Afternoon Bells* is a polyphony of

---

church bells of varying timbre and periodicity of sounding. The sounds of bells and birds reappear throughout the recording. Bird sounds can be heard in two of the violin tracks recorded in churches, and on most of the found sound tracks, as they were recorded outside. An accidental bell sound also occurs on two violin solos, *The Lord’s Prayer* and *The Light of Day*.

**Ambient Sound on Camino**

The approach to ambience on New Age recordings varies in terms of the extent to which they identify place-based specificity. Jazz flautist Paul Horn’s *Inside the Taj Mahal* album of 1968, and saxophonist Paul Winter’s use of the acoustic of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York on his recordings, all regarded as early New Age projects, show commonality with *Camino* in their use of located ambience with specific historical and spiritual associations. By contrast, George Winston (piano) and Kitaro (synthesizer), among the largest selling New Age artists in the 1980s and 1990s, use moderate amounts of studio-generated reverb. This historical shift in approaches to ambience indicates a trend that was concurrent with the popularity of synthesized sounds in pop music in the 1980s. But also, it coincided with a change in the requirements of the listening audience, as members of the so-called “baby boom” generation acquired affluence and property, and used music as a means of relaxation, to “ease the experience of frequent transformations” in their busy working lives.\(^{627}\) In addition, music became a means for creating a calm interior living space, as a focus on fostering a home-oriented middle-class

lifestyle increased. This music represented the utopian potential of technology to enhance the spiritual quality of contemporary life.

Harkening back to the Paul Winter Consort’s use of “natural” reverb, there was no reverb introduced during the mixing process of Camino. The reverb on each fiddle track is that of the specific buildings in which he recorded. The diversity of reverb quality, changing with each church, brings one into the locale; the individual, idiosyncratic buildings can be thought of as metainstruments with which Schroer creates a series of duets. In some spaces, the reverb is particularly long; this is evident on the first track, the violin solo A Million Stars, which is the longest on the CD. This track displays a very reverberant acoustic that rings out with a delay of at least six seconds, particularly on lower frequencies (appropriate for Schroer’s violin, which has an added low C string). In other church spaces it is much shorter, while in the tracks of found sounds from outside on the trail, there is of course no reverb. The effect is dynamic and contrasts greatly to the aesthetic and intent of New Age recordings such as those on the Solitudes label, even though it was to some extent inspired by them.

Contrasts with Solitudes Recordings

The late musicologist Adam Krims has argued that, through a combination of both close micing and studio-generated reverb, Solitudes recordings embody a “private-playback” version of classical (or other) music in place of concert realism. He proposes that such recordings are tools for the creation of urban living space. Referring to the presentation of

---

classical music on Solitudes and similar labels, and to the quality of the ambient sound, Krims argues that studio techniques in the genre create an “abstract musical space” that is “unachievable outside of the mediated presence of the recording itself.” He states that “This abstract spatial arrangement marks the coming into its own of the interior playback space as a cultural and commercial goal; now, where the listener sits to consume the music becomes the salient and sole reference location, in place of some putative concert hall or church.”629 (my italics). While classical music recordings tend to employ the reverberation in concert halls in their recordings, Solitudes recordings tend to use studio-generated reverb.

Krims is describing a process that seems to contrast sharply to the process Oliver took in recording Camino. Krims argues that the abstraction of the studio-generated ambient sound removes sense of place from the recording itself.630 In studio space that is chosen for its “deadness,” the performers are choosing not only to place reverb onto the recording artificially, but also to opt out of identifying with a particular place. As Krims contends with respect to relaxation recordings, the removal of any special identity is important, in order to allow for the listener to be able to create an “interior” space of his or her own.

While he discusses Solitudes as an example of this type of recording, Krims does not mention the affect of the added nature sounds, with which Oliver worked, on this experience of constructing place. These sounds are important to the effect of the

---

630 Of course, the options of recording in a “natural” acoustic and the use of pre-recorded or manufactured ambience have long been available to record producers. Rock, pop and folk artists have long had to make the choice between these two recording approaches. Some notable examples of use of “natural” space are alternative country band Cowboy Junkie’s The Trinity Session (RCA, 1988) and recordings by Icelandic pop band Sigur Ros. Sigur Ros prefers to perform their live shows in churches, as well as using live church acoustics on their recordings.
recording; I contend that the addition of sounds that are meant to evoke pleasant emotional responses in a large number of people evoke a generalized concept of a type of place and the feelings and experiences associated with it. The fire, the ocean waves, and the singing bird sounds on Solitudes albums are dislocated, and are usually without a specific place-located reference in the liner notes. Once they enter the home through the recording they become relocated as part of the home space, the aural interior design. As with ambience, the purpose is to erase specific place-related associations, in order that the listener can reconstruct them according to their own perspective. Thus, Lakeside Retreat does not refer specifically to such a retreat in Ontario’s Muskoka or any other specific region, but to a place to which the listener can bring his or her own, personalized experience.

Camino, on the other hand, incorporates specific sounds from Oliver’s experience of pilgrimage. Camino appeals to pilgrimage both as a generalized, universal symbol and to the specific, unique experience of Oliver’s trek.

Oliver’s Embodied Presence

The specificity of Oliver’s experience, indeed of his physical presence, is evident at certain points in the recording during which he walks while recording sounds. This is most apparent on the final track “Moissac Bellswirl.” Schroer describes the recording of the track in his liner notes:

On this day in Moissac an organ was playing in the cathedral and the bells were ringing outside. With my microphone I moved between these two places, the interior billowing with waves of mighty organ, and the outside alive with the
sounds of the square, its bells, bicycles and birds, the sonorous shuffle of people living their lives.\textsuperscript{631}

The sense of movement in and out of the cathedral is striking on Moissac Bellswirl. This is perhaps one of the aspects of \textit{Camino} that truly distinguishes it from most New Age recordings, in that it contrasts with the stillness and generality of place that is evident on the Solitudes recordings, for example. At a symbolic level, it represents the embodied self and the physical experience of the trek.

\textit{Accidental Sounds}

In addition to the specificity represented by Oliver’s embodied presence, the element of accidental sounds, those sounds not intended to be captured (as the found sounds are) intensify sense of place. The accidental sounds on the recording reveal an indeterminate human and animal presence, and introduce a quality that would be difficult to replicate in the studio. Framing these strongly site-specific references are the churches, repositories of generations of sound, which evoke a sense of historical continuity and spiritual transcendence.

Electronic generation of extra musical sound, such as that of wind on the Kitaro track “Estrella,” for example,\textsuperscript{632} is a means of reducing the indeterminate nature of noise. As the purpose of New Age music is relaxation, it is important to avoid accidents that might result in distracting stimulation for the listener. On the other hand, indeterminate noise adds to the experience of authenticity for the listener. As Stan Link insightfully argues with respect to vinyl record scratches, “noise reinforces the authenticity of

\textsuperscript{631} Liner notes to Oliver Schroer, \textit{Camino}.
\textsuperscript{632} Kitaro, \textit{The Essential Kitaro} (Domo, 2006).
listening even as it destroys that of the reproduction.” On Camino, however, noise is part of the effect of ‘being there.’

The placeless quality of much New Age music is undermined by unexpected noise; on Camino it adds to its sense of authenticity. Accidental noise can also be heard on six of the twelve solo violin tracks. “Field of Stars” is notable for prominent accidental sounds; there are the sounds of people speaking (possibly praying) and of doors banging shut. These sounds all fit into the image of a genuine pilgrimage experience, if genuine is defined as one that is the same as that experienced by pilgrims 1000 years ago. A rare entrance of modernity into the recording occurs on track 15, “The Light of Day,” in which the clear sound of a car driving away can be heard at 1:30. The car noise is a jarring reminder of contemporary urban life: that kind of accidental intrusion would not be acceptable on intentionally ‘clean’ new age recordings. Importantly, according to Oliver, he considered it an undesirable sound that he accepted only because the particular violin performance was otherwise very good. While its inclusion on the CD may be the result of compromise, it signifies the inevitable intrusion of the present into the constructed imaginary of rural pilgrimage as an encounter with the ancient.

**Studio Manipulation**

It is important to note that, while the album elevates the quality of liveness, it does of course include conscious studio sound manipulation. Multitracking occurs rarely and strategically in the CD. Following the opening track of the CD, which clearly establishes

---


634 Oliver Schroer, personal communication, September 2007.
the live, stone church ambience, the second track, “Camino Overture”, places Oliver’s violin in the background of a studio-constructed interplay of found sounds from the trek: church bells, cow bells, crickets, dog barks, footsteps which approach the microphone and fade away, birds and sheep. Thus it is a composition put together in the studio through the use of multitracking. Placed in the introductory position on the CD, it serves to contextualize what is to come as one progresses through the CD. Other than this, there is no further multitracking.

The manipulated polyphony of sounds on “Camino Overture,” and its introductory position on the CD, serves as a statement of the equal importance of all the various sounds on the album. When considering Camino as a fiddle album it is clearly a solo recording, yet it contains an array of sounds and textures, often simultaneously. There is a recurring polyphonic approach, not only in the violin itself, on which Oliver plays multiple lines (which he claimed was influenced by Bach violin partitas) but also with the ambient sounds from the trek. There is a layered element to it that sets Oliver’s intense subjectivity, as represented by the violin performances, within the context of an array of other subjectivities, both human and animal. While the self is constantly present, there is a sense of the “leveling” effect of pilgrimage of which Oliver spoke, not only between human pilgrims, but also between man and nature.

Of course, the ordering of tracks itself is an important element of choice and manipulation that occurred after the experience of the trek (keeping in mind that the listener can listen to the tracks in the order they choose). Camino is not a linear narrative; there is no correlation between the order of ambient spaces or found-sounds on the recording and the progression of the pilgrimage trek itself. Thus the order of tracks as
decided by Oliver (who was his own producer) is a reordering of the events of the trek. The track order highlights the interplay and balance between fiddle and sounds from the trek, as the tracks alternate between the two.

The remainder of the tracks feature less obvious mediation, although recording choices made by Oliver surely had a direct impact on the recordings. In particular, the violin tracks vary in terms of accidental noise, “size” of the ambient reverb and “closeness” of the sound of the violin. Choices of performance locations in the church and microphone proximity to the violin would affect the recorded signal; thus it is not always easy to identify the size of a space from the reverb. While this is not ‘manipulation’ it demonstrates that the effect of naturalness is in fact constructed and achieving it faced certain challenges.

Photographs and Liner Notes

Finally, and significantly, the visual aspects of the recording reinforce the liminal, transnational, communal qualities of pilgrimage that are represented by the music. These aspects are performed intertextually through the interplay between the multilingual liner notes (in German, French, Spanish and English), and the found sounds of pilgrims conversing on the CD. These are attempts to capture the traveling, interactive aspect of pilgrimage, while found sounds, particularly the bell sounds (especially when interpreted through the liner notes, which give actual descriptions of locations) represent sense of place in a more tangible way. Photographs taken on the journey by Oliver’s friend Peter Coffman accompany the liner notes, and – perhaps representing the embodiment of the
physicality of pilgrimage most effectively – they include a photo of Oliver’s foot wrapped in bandages.

Camino and Folk Music Collectivity

In keeping with Oliver’s self-positioning as a musician who works on the periphery of various musics and mediums, Camino shows many characteristics of a New Age recording, yet may offer too much specific sense of place and embodiment to be viable in that market, as the tracks are not sufficiently ambiguous for the listener to create an interior listening space in their home. Rather, the audience is asked to travel on the pilgrimage with Oliver. Through a combination of diversity of aural ambience, the site specific use of found sound, and choices made during track selection, Camino demonstrates a conscious choice to present the embodied and located idiosyncracies of Oliver’s specific and personal journey. At the same time, it situates him in an historical continuum of pilgrim visitors, whose impermanent presences represent liminality.

Since the early 1990s, the audience for Oliver’s CDs of original music have primarily been Canadian folk music fans, who have been introduced to his music either at folk festivals, fiddle camps, or through his touring with Canadian folk musicians such as James Keelaghan. For much of that admittedly broadly defined audience, Camino represents notions that are valued by listeners; music experienced live, music as means of facilitating community, and music that is rooted in a social and historical continuum. On the other hand, the “personal quest” aspect of pilgrimage, signified by the journey itself, expresses New Age associated, individualistic values of personal growth. It brings values of individualism and communalism together in a way that is at times harmonious, and at
others uncomfortable. For Oliver, *Camino* was a means of resolving, at least symbolically, tensions between relationality and individuality that characterize his life story, tensions that are fostered within the paradoxical cultural space of transnational folk festivals.
CONCLUSIONS

I began and ended this dissertation with Oliver Schroer. With this bookend structure I have hoped to foreground how one exceptional musician’s musical and social life, and his subjectivity, were formed within the transcultural and transnational environment of folk music that emerged since the late 1980s. While he was certainly idiosyncratic, he did not exist in a cultural vacuum. To contextualize him within this broad circuit, I mapped out musical networks to which he was linked. Some of these links were immediate and some tangential, but all were connected to either him or two of his closest collaborators, Nuala Kennedy and Filippo Gambetta.

While I have attempted to give a nuanced picture of Oliver’s, Nuala’s, and Filippo’s formations as musical and social subjects within this diverse field, I also aimed to make some general observations about the changing nature of the collectivist folk music ideal since the 1980s. This transformation hinges on a central tension that exists within the transnational folk festival field, the tension between the desire for stability and continuity that is often associated with notions of community, and the desire for transcendence of bounded categories. Such transcendence leads to cross-cutting, personalized sociomusical networks. This type of social formation is understudied in ethnomusicology, as it does not comply with the regional, national, or ethnic categories that are often the starting point for research. Oliver’s networks are particularly difficult to align with categories, as he fostered some strong relationships with musicians who, like him, did not overwhelmingly identify with – or even were identified by others with – definable genres or categories.
I have demonstrated the increasing ideal of transculturality promoted by transnational folk festivals, which are the most prestigious events on the folk music circuit. These events have fostered a favourable environment for interaction and exchange among touring musicians across various categorical boundaries. The boundaries being transcended correspond not only to national borders but also to the discursive limits of various folk music transnationalisms. Celtic music, Nordic music, Mediterranean music, accordion players, bagpipe players, ballad singers: these are all broad categories and imaginaries that intersect at transnational festivals and that continue to be both embraced and challenged by musicians.

With this transnational festival construct in mind, I argue that it is necessary for scholars of folk music revival to understand that contemporary, professional folk musicians negotiate a field of intersecting transnationalisms of various size and scope that form around a range of sensibilities. Considering these transnationalisms is important since they have become major reference points and resources for musicians. In terms of artistic growth, many musicians are embracing broad categories as a means of accessing the range of musics these encompass, combining various styles in the creation of their own musical selves. In terms of social capital, collaborations within and across transnationalisms broaden musicians’ weak ties and therefore create links to new opportunities. In terms of identity politics, transnationalisms allow musicians to position themselves in various ways, especially in relation to home (for example, Filippo’s identification as Celtic as a political stance against the ultra right in Italy, or Nuala’s association with Celtic as a means of accessing a local scene in Edinburgh that suited her sensibility).
The broadest of these transnationalisms are beneficial for touring musicians due to their categorical ambiguity and their internal diversity. Within such expansive constructs, musicians can manoeuvre and position themselves in various ways. This useful ambiguity applies to other categories as well. Even those based on an instrument, such as ‘fiddle music,’ allow musicians to draw on a range of styles and to gain access to heterogeneous sociomusical spaces of interaction.

A related, significant factor is that the opportunity exists under the umbrellas of folk, roots, and traditional musics for musicians to engage with multiple transnationalisms, to interact across broad categories and not only within them. This is a different yet related phenomenon to being bi- or tri-musical, or of knowing two or three regional or national styles. Rather, it is having access to several diverse transnational networks and having the competence to manoeuvre between them. Therefore, a musician such as Nuala has developed bonds not only with musicians who fall into the Celtic category but has also developed strong alliances with Nordic musicians, singer songwriters, and participants in world music circuits. Some of these transnationalisms are more oriented towards an idea of a particular national culture, such as Irish diaspora, while others, such as Celtic and Nordic, are defined by the multiplicity of nations contained within them.

Developing transnational musical collaborations does not always require facility with the styles of collaborators. For example, for Oliver to collaborate with Filippo it was not necessary for him to know Italian folk music. Rather, there were shared competencies and sensibilities in a transnational compositional and performance process that has a now decades-long history in professional folk music; the process of writing dance tunes for
concert oriented performance. In this process, just as folk music is a useful, ambiguous category, the generalized and changeable notion of the folk dance tune is as well. Local specificity is still apparent in this music, but often at the level of performance style rather than form.

Despite the importance of transnationalisms, when examining how musicians negotiate expectations on folk music circuits it is evident that romantic, essentialist notions of national music shape the choices they make. In certain places, this essentialism is challenged in part through the various ways that, through folk music practices and representations, nations and regions are being reimagined and represented as sites of cultural interaction and exchange. This raises the question: if musicians can find ways to be local while remaining cosmopolitan in attitude, is the local still the prime locus of belonging for them, or does transnational community, particularly that which is not diasporic, hold any promise in this regard? I am sceptical that the broader transnationalisms such as Celtic generate a genuine sense of collective belonging. Aside from the above-mentioned benefits that affiliation with these categories offers, as resources of stable meaning, such transnationalisms foster less of a sense of ‘imagined community’ than is apparent in nations or diasporic formations. I believe this is because many such transnationalisms are really loose alliances of various national and regional myths: they reproduce these local narratives rather than transcend them, and therefore to participate in such transnationalisms is to exercise national or regional belonging as it is transnational belonging. When considering individual musicians’ relationships to such transnationalisms, it is therefore important to consider the extent to

---

which they are embracing them wholesale as meaningful sources of belonging and the extent to which they are useful resources in self-making, and in the forming of new sociomusical networks that have more relevance to them.

By drawing on the symbol of pilgrimage, Oliver appealed to a transnationalism that transcended these other transnationalisms. This is not to suggest, unexamined, that the pilgrim trail is a truly transcendent experience – a cultural analyst needs to be sceptical of such an assumption – however in the realm of discourse the pilgrimage trail is perhaps as much of a symbol of universal human community as exists. This symbol speaks to a sense of loss and longing that is evident in the transnational folk festival field. Touring in this field generates promises of transnational community that are difficult to meet in reality. As much as local festivals can foster local community, emergent forms of transnational community that are suggested by discourses of transculturality, temporary meetings at festivals, and collaborations are more elusive. The personalized social networks that emerge place the emphasis on the individual and are fleeting. Participation in the transnational folk music field can therefore generate longing and desire for community continuity in a world constituted by transnational connections, fostering a creative tension that leads to new music. This new folk music can speak to contemporary issues of belonging because this experience of loss and desire resonates beyond the experiences of musicians. To return to Delanty, “these new kinds of community – which in effect are reflexively organized social networks of individuated members – have not been able to substitute anything for place, other than the aspiration for belonging.”

---

In instrumental music, the notes alone have little to communicate in terms of the meaning of transcultural community: as I discussed in the opening chapter, dance music, particularly since the onset of mass reproduction, has been evocative of a place, a homeland, not of communion among scattered people that have roots in different places. The appropriation of symbols such as the pilgrimage trail, as part of the construction of narratives of self and belonging, is one way instrumental music can acquire meaning in this contemporary situation. The more common way, perhaps, is through the participatory aspect of tune playing, through passing them on and playing them with other people. Distributed through recordings and tunebooks, and taught at workshops, tunes can enter into circulation and become part of the vernacular that links communities in different places.

I hope that this dissertation will serve as a model, to be critiqued and adapted as necessary, for how to conceive of large, complex, transnational fields. In the folk music field specifically, I have examined a particular sensibility, however there are others that could be examined and tested against my observations: transnational sensibilities that lean toward stricter notions of tradition, for instance, or singer-songwriters. Furthermore, more studies could follow on individuals that are hubs within this field, or that are difficult to classify. A musician such as Oliver, who seemed to evade categorization, can be seen as someone who takes us out of our preconceptions and invites us to examine and reassess preconceived boundaries.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hawe, Penelope, Cynthia Webster, Alan Shiell. “A Glossary of Terms for Navigating the


Massey, Doreen. “A Global Sense of Place.” In *Space, Place, and Gender.* Minneapolis:


Shelemay, Kay Kaufman. “Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music.”


Symon, Peter. "From Blas to Bothy Culture: The Musical Remaking of Celtic Culture in


Watts, Duncan J. “Networks, Dynamics, and the Small World Phenomenon.” *American


Wittel, Andreas. "Toward a Network Sociality." Theory, Culture & Society 18.6 (December 2001) 51–76.

