Notes and Comments

The Fiddle in Shetland Society

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This report of research-in-progress was read to the Royal Musical Association in London on 10 March 1976. It first looks briefly at the question of which instrument was forerunner to the fiddle in Shetland, and then surveys what has already been published on the role of the fiddle in Shetland society supplementing it with data collected in field research during 1970–4. Four questions concerning style are discussed, bearing in mind the physical demands of the instrument and that the musical repertory evolved as dance music: (i) irregular phrasing in older indigenous reels; (ii) unequal time-values in the playing of older fiddlers; (iii) influence of convenient finger patterns on melodic structures; and (iv) intonation, particularly the use of 'neutral' tones.

Lack of data is usually a severe problem for those who research into historical aspects of oral traditions. This is particularly true of so-called 'folk' musical traditions as opposed to 'classical' traditions like those of India or the Arab world, where there is in fact a surprisingly large body of theory and observations on performance practice available for study. There is very little reliable information on the early history of the fiddle (or violin—the terms are used synonymously here) in Shetland. Tradition still carries information on famous fiddler characters from about 1740 onwards, so one can assume that the fiddle was introduced some time during or before the early eighteenth century. Yet George Low, who visited Shetland in 1774, made no mention of instruments when discussing dancing and other forms of social activity including ballad singing. In the island of Foula at least, it seems that only singing accompanied dancing: Low described the music as a Norn *visick* (1879 : 163). By 1809, however, Edmondstone commented that 'among the peasantry almost one in ten can play on the violin', adding that before violins were introduced a two-string instrument called the *gue* was used (1809 : 2.59). It has been generally assumed that this was a type of bowed lyre. Such was the view of Otto Anderson (1956), though apart from Edmondstone's shadowy reference no further information on, or remnant of such an instrument has ever come to light. However, the recent researches of E. Y. Arima and M. Einarsson among Hudson's Bay Eskimo, where a stringed instrument known as the *tautiruut* or 'Eskimo violin' was played up until very recently, led them

to conclude that this bowed zither, somewhat similar to the Icelandic *fiðla,* probably came not from Iceland itself but from Britain's northern isles, Orkney and Shetland, from where so many sailors were recruited for the ships of the Hudson's Bay Trading Company. This lends weight to J. R. Tudor's report that the *gue* 'was said to be identical with the Icelandic *fiðla,* (Tudor 1883 : 176). Edmonston's *Glossary of the Shetland and Orkney Dialect* (1866) includes the term *gue*—'a musical instrument formerly used in Shetland', and *posh*—'a rough kind of violin made in Shetland'. The term *posh* is occasionally used by such late nineteenth-century writers as J. H. Burgess (1886 : 113). Could the *posh* have resembled the French *pochette,* known in Britain as the *kit*? If so, it is unlikely to have come to Shetland with dancing masters: J. F. and T. M. Flett record that 'country districts of Shetland, unlike those of Orkney, do not seem to have been visited by dancing-masters' (J. F. and T. M. Flett, 1964 : 64) and apparently Shetland and Orkney lairds usually sent their daughters to Leith and Edinburgh to be 'put to the Writing, Dancing, and I think the Singing Schools' (Steuart 1913 : 143 and Goudie 1889 : xxxviii). The question remains then—was the Shetlandic predecessor of the violin a type of rebec or, like the *fiðla*, a bowed zither?

Whatever the truth may have been, there seems to have been a lively string-playing tradition which adopted the violin. The variety of nineteenth-century references commenting on the popularity of the fiddle suggest that by the first decade it was playing an important part in a number of rituals. One instance was the custom of playing the tune *Da Day Dawn* on the morning of New Year's day; another was the frequent performance of a sword dance at village weddings (Catton 1838 : 111), though the only detailed information we have on this custom is of the sword dance of the island of Papa Stour (Johnston 1912 : 175). Throughout Shetland dancing seems to have been, and often still is, the most important feature of the wedding ritual, and a wedding celebration spanned three days and nights, with dancing throughout each night until 5 or 6 *a.m.*—except the third, which was usually Saturday night, when dancing had to end before the Sabbath began. Even the religious revival which reached Shetland about 1840 had little effect on the custom of dancing at weddings. Despite what J. T. Reid wrote, 'There is an opinion in many country parishes, particularly among the old people, that every kind of music not sacred is sinful' (1869 : 57), it seems there was biblical justification for the wedding dance, and many people who would not attend other dances would happily take part in the wedding festivities. In any case, not all ministers were opposed to the fiddle and its music. One in South Yell—the Reverend Watson—was an enthusiastic violin-maker, quietly turning them out while colleagues elsewhere were preaching against the fiddle as 'the devil's instrument'.

J. F. and T. M. Flett documented in some detail a composite view of the fiddler's role in wedding rituals at the beginning of the present century, allowing for a great deal of variety from one island community to another (1964 : 65–74). Dancing to the fiddle sealed the contract made in the bride's home some time before the actual

wedding. The groom visited a selected fiddler to ask him to be principal fiddler at the wedding, and invited him to his own 'stag' party the night before. The fiddler often led the procession to and from the church, played a tune on arrival at the bride's home and, of course played for dancing each night, usually from 9 onwards. In places where the bride was ceremonially put to bed the fiddler was also there to play. When masked guisers appeared at the wedding (these are usually uninvited masked persons from another community) they often brought their own fiddler with them, but in any case they danced for a while at the wedding. The principal fiddler was usually paid for his services—in more recent times by the groom personally.

The other time for a great deal of dancing was in the period known as 'the Helly days of Yule'—the period around the winter solstice. This is a longer period than is the custom on the British mainland, for in Shetland all activity was geared to the seasons, and winter was a time when there was virtually nothing to do: one could rarely fish, and the croft was not ready for spring cultivation. Laurence Williamson of Yell summed it up thus (in notes compiled *c.* 1900):

> Shetlanders are much addicted to fiddling. Formerly there were large numbers of fiddlers in every parish. Weddings were usually in the winter and lasted three days and usually there were several fiddlers to play. The chief amusement was music and dancing and fiddlers followed them to church, striking up tunes as they went along. Rants were balls open to every comer. They were held in winter and very frequent, and on almost every one of the 24 Hely nights of Yule, and old and young wended to the spot for miles and miles around. A whole family would even shut up the house and go miles away where their relations stayed. And in the long winter evenings the fiddler would play to the children around the fire. And each Greenland ship used to carry a fiddler, sometimes a Southerner, sometimes a Shetlander, to play to the men while at work to enliven them. And sometimes the fiddlers from several ships would meet and try their skill. And I think I have heard of a Shetland fiddler competing with the Dutch from a buss or ship. No wonder that tunes are so abundant. Several of them are fairy tunes, and are likely very old; many are of Norse origin and many Scotch; and many of them must have been learned from the sources indicated above. There is even a Yaki, i.e. Eskimo tune. (Johnson; 1971 : 125).

Naturally the repertory of the fiddle is almost entirely dance music and the mark of a good fiddler has been traditionally an ability to play strongly and rhythmically at the right tempo for dancing. The listening repertory has always been, until very recently, small and relatively unimportant. It is easy in our own society to undervalue dance. Its meaning and value are little studied, and are virtually ignored at university level. It plays little or no part in the important rituals of modern industrial society unless one regards solemn armistice parades, or the rhythmic walk of coffin bearers as types of dancing—a legitimate view perhaps. Yet today in many parts of Shetland dance still fulfils important functions. It validates a wedding and is a means of bringing a whole community together and strengthening social bonds. In some of the smaller communities there is still a strict protocol observed in respect of who dances with whom, and when. In Cullivoe in North Yell, for instance, all the inhabitants of

the north end of the island without exception are invited to wedding dances—even those who are not usually on good terms with bride or groom's family. Friends from other islands, or from South Yell and Mid Yell are invited to the dance on the second night. Men, women, children and infants come to the first night dance and if any others are ill and confined to their homes there is a proper time of the evening when the bridal couple go off and visit them. Inviting such large numbers could only happen after community halls were built—between the two world wars. Even so, before this time, if it were possible, there would be more than one dancing house prepared for the wedding night, so that as many as possible could be invited.

Though the custom is dying out now, some communities still begin the wedding dance by having the three principal couples—the bride and groom, the best man and best maid, and 'the married folk'*—open the dance. Since World War I this has traditionally been the three-couple Shetland reel, but danced in such a way that the bride and groom do not come together until the third repeat of the reel. This is still the tradition in North Yell and Fetlar.

The First World War and the building of community halls coincided with and acted as a catalyst for other changes. Concertinas, accordions, guitars and even banjos were introduced, particularly in the Mainland of Shetland, and instruments such as harmoniums and pianos were adopted as accompanying instruments. The larger floor space permitted more than one set (of 6 dancers), sometimes three or four sets, to dance at the same time, and required a greater volume of sound than a single fiddle could provide. By the 1970s, as in mainland Scotland, the usual band consisted of one or more accordions, piano, electric guitars and drum set. Although almost every cottage is still likely to have at least one fiddle, other instruments are more popular with younger people: they have less leisure time to devote to mastering fiddling skills.

In spite of these changes, the fiddle is still regarded as a rather special instrument. For instance, whenever a Shetland reel is called during dances in Whalsay, a fiddler is asked to play for it, and other instruments temporarily take a subsidiary role. The formation of several fiddle bands (the well-known 'Forty Fiddlers' of Lerwick, which operates in association with the Shetland Folk Society, being the longest established) reflect an interest in perpetuating the habit of fiddle playing and in preserving traditional styles and repertories. Shetlanders form an appreciative and most discriminating audience for any concerts featuring folk fiddlers, and they accepted that it was only natural that a Shetlander should win the Scottish fiddle competition sponsored by the B.B.C. in 1969. Three years ago the local education authority appointed a local fiddler and folklorist, Tom Anderson, to teach traditional fiddling in schools and he has since been awarded the MBE in recognition of his service to Shetland music. He now (1976) has about 100 pupils (equal numbers of boys and girls) and teaches in three islands.

* 'The married folk', two older married friends or relatives, not usually man and wife themselves, play important roles in helping ensure the smooth running of the whole occasion.

Even though Shetland reels as dances are going out of fashion, or have already done so in many areas, the tunes survive as a listening repertory, valued not just because they are attractive miniatures but because they serve to affirm the identity of Shetland and its people.

One notices three loosely defined categories of fiddlers: (i) the concert party and dance band fiddler, who can sometimes read music, and prefers to learn much of the Scottish repertory, including the compositions of James Scott Skinner, which have testing pieces such as slow Strathspeys, sets of variations, and marches and reels in imitative 'pipe' style; (ii) the traditional village fiddler of considerable skill who is expected to take his fiddle around with him to social evenings, or whose home is often used as a kind of music centre at which many young men and women will congregate during the winter evenings; and (iii) the so-called 'house' fiddler who can, when necessary, 'knock out' a tune for dancing in his own home, but does not regard himself as a real fiddler and who is not usually asked to play at weddings or other public functions. In some parts, particularly in Yell, there is still a very high percentage of men who, even if they will not admit it, can play the fiddle to a certain degree and fall into categories (ii) or (iii). One cannot help contrasting this situation with attitudes to the violin and string teaching in our urban society—where the violin is regarded as a difficult instrument, where frequently children are carefully screened, and given prognostic tests to help their teachers decide if they have sufficient musical ability to attempt the instrument. Incidentally, Suzuki's methods which lay stress on the innate ability of all children to make music, the importance of general family participation (particularly a parent) and on teaching basic techniques and early repertory principally divorced from the learning of notation, may be admirable: but—to Shetlanders—they are not new.

This then is a very general picture of the changing role of the fiddle in Shetland society. There is a particular danger in generalizing however, for, in the case of Shetland, there is no simple picture: there is no typical Shetlander, nor a typical community. Until recently, communities have been very much isolated from each other and sometimes have contrasting economies. In islands where there are good natural harbours—Whalsay for instance—there is today considerable affluence because of the success of the local fishing fleet. Fetlar, just a few miles north, presents a very different picture: there is no natural harbour, no oil base, just fertile land, and a small community survives through crofting alone. North Yell contrasts with Mid Yell and the south end. Within these tightly knit communities different ways of life have developed, a difference which is particularly noticeable in the playing styles of fiddlers who are typical for their own community. Thus, whereas one can analyse each different style, it is difficult to point to common features that are, or were, distinctive of Shetland as a whole. Unaccompanied fiddling persisted longer in Fetlar, North Yell and Whalsay than elsewhere. Repertories also differ considerably. The older indigenous dances known as the Auld Reels or Muckle reels (see Flett 1964) have

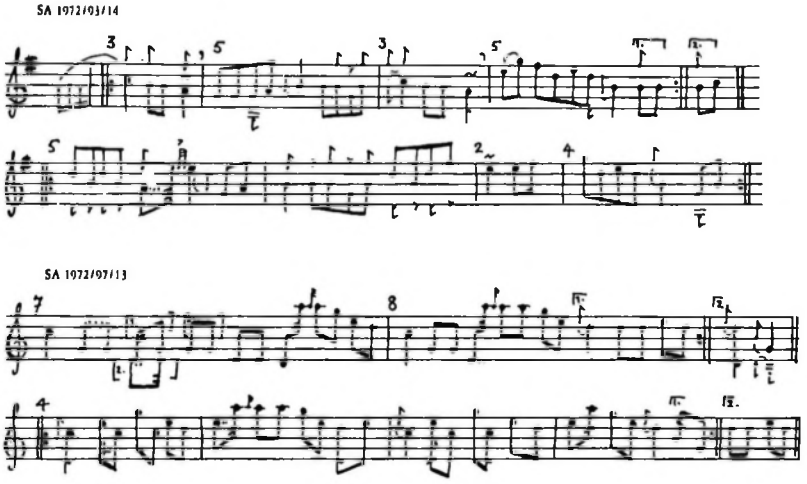
faded from living memory in Yell and Unst, but fiddlers from Papa Stour, Whalsay and Walls (West Mainland) still know their local Auld Reels even though they are no longer danced. Similarly, the later reel, known as the Shetland Reel, is rarely danced on the mainland of Shetland today, being considered old-fashioned, but is still well known elsewhere, particularly in North Yell, Whalsay and Fetlar.

Short pieces of 16 mm sound film made in the islands for purposes of analytical study and now in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies illustrate these regional differences in fiddling and dancing. Andrew Poleson of Whalsay, a notable exponent of his island's traditional fiddling style, held his instrument against his chest and had a stiff but powerful bow arm; he produced a rich harmonic and strongly accented musical texture. (Examples of this can be heard on Side 1, Bands 2 and 3 of the disc TNGM 117). Two fiddlers filmed in North Yell, however, the late Willie Barclay Henderson of Gloup and the late Bobbie Jamieson of Cullivoe, sounded very different: they held their instruments under their chins, used mainly the upper half of their bows, playing somewhat over the end of the fingerboards, and made frequent use of what is called the *draa* (long down bow) on the 'back' (lowest) string, to provide an intermittent drone accompaniment on the note *a* (the pitch of the open string when the fiddle is tuned in what in Shetland is called the 'high bass' tuning, *a-d'-a'-e"*). These two players preferred the high bass tuning for about half their repertory, whereas in other communities it is used rarely. The difference between their style and that of Andrew Poleson can be heard by comparing the examples quoted above with Side 1, Band 1 of the same disc.

The filmed excerpts of dancing from these two communities also highlighted stylistic differences. A younger group in North Yell performed a more stereotyped 'back-step' in contrast to the varied and energetic shuffling movements of the older Whalsay men. These excerpts illustrate also how the simple binary structure of the music of the reel matches the structure of the dance with its alternation between travelling—'reeling'—in a tight figure of eight and step-dancing on the spot. It is not known when the 3-couple Shetland reel came into Shetland, but it may have been an adaptation of a Scots reel. In contrast, the older Muckle reels or Auld Reels consisted either of circle dances or of continuous figure of eight movement. The music for these older reels contains irregular phrasing and is generally more rhythmic and harmonic than melodic—as if the fiddler is playing an accompaniment to dance songs which are now forgotten, a possible result of the language change from a type of Norse to Anglo-Scots. Nevertheless, even in the three-couple Shetland reels, one occasionally finds unusual phrasing and syncopations—particularly in the Whalsay repertory, which is a rich mixture of indigenous reels and Scottish ones. This occurs usually only in the first half (the reeling section) whereas the second half is in stricter tempo and more straightforward rhythmically (Figs. 1 and 2). Could these syncopations and assymetrical phrases be a legacy from an older repertory of dance tunes?

Other aspects of musical rhythm are also puzzling. There are a number of

apparently indigenous tunes in 6/8 and 9/8 'jig' time. Some of the surviving bridal marches are of this kind and are played rather slowly: Figure 3 is a wedding tune from Papa Stour, similar metrically to the Scottish bridal song *Woo'd and married and aa.* It is no longer played for dancing. Other 6/8 tunes are today played in quick jig tempo for two-steps and other non-indigenous dances such as Quadrilles. Yet one wonders how clear the distinction between simple and compound time once was. The tune known as *Da Boanie Isle of Whalsay* is a case in point: the earliest manuscript record of this tune (early nineteenth century; printed in Johnston 1912 : 80) gives it in 6/8 time (Fig. 4a) but all present versions are played as reels in simple duple time. Figure 4b is an early instance of this.



FIGS. 1 and 2 Transcriptions of two 'nameless' reels from Whalsay, played by Andrew Poleson.
(: note shorter than its partner.)

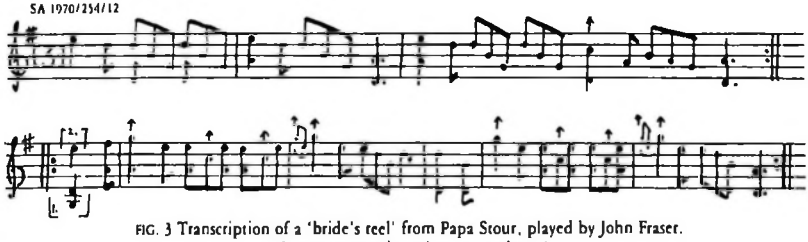


FIG. 3 Transcription of a 'bride's reel' from Papa Stour, played by John Fraser.
(↑ : note approximately ¼ tone sharp.)

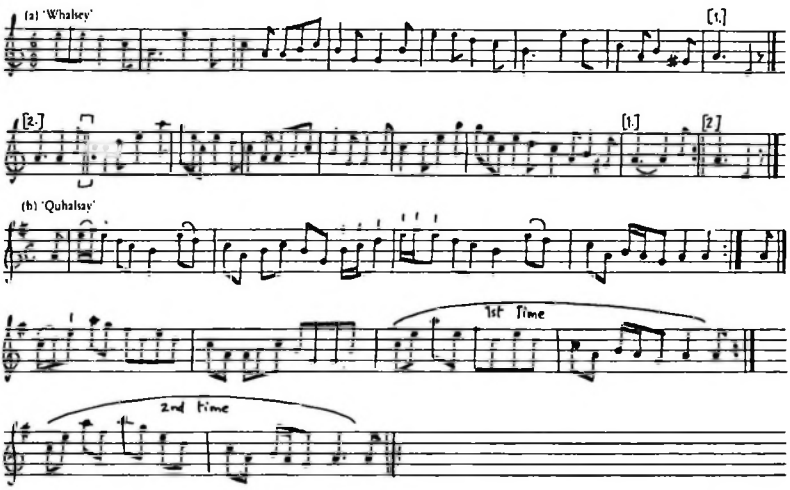


FIG. 4 Two early notations of 'Da Boanie Isle of Whalsay': (a) 'Whalsey', from an early 19th c. MS. printed in Johnston 1912 : 80; (b) 'Quhalsay', from J. Hoseason's MS. 1862.

The tune known as *The Shaalds of Foula,* popular apparently since the early nineteenth century, exists today in both compound and simple duple (reel) time, one or the other version being played in different islands for the country dance known as the *Foula Reel.* Two early notated versions give it in a type of 12/8 time (one in key A in the less common tuning ***a-e'-a'-e"*** (Fig. 5), the others in key G). The favoured version of the 'Forty Fiddlers' of Lerwick corresponds with the second version (LED 2057, Side 1, Band 4). In Herra, Mid-Yell, Lell Robertson plays a version in reel time (simple duple time) which he learned from his father, Laurie Davy (TNGM 117, Side 1, Band 6). However, when one compares the performances of both father and son it is noticeable that the father plays with more unequal note values than his son. Indeed, if one were to slow down his recorded performance to half-speed and then transcribe it, one would be tempted to write it in compound time (12/16) rather than

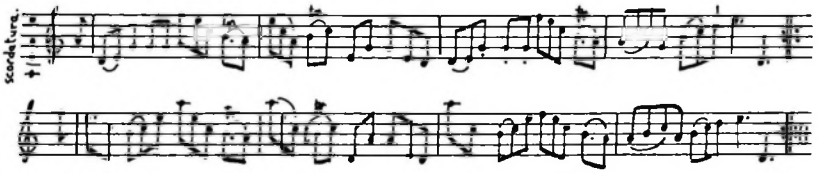


FIG. 5 'Da Shaalds o' Foula,' from J. Hoseason's MS., 1862. (The key signature is not given: presumably F's and C's should be sharp. 'tr' is editorial: Hoseason's sign is ⋔ which could mean trill, mordent, 'shiver' or some other embellishment.)

simple time (2/4), so that one can use the figure ♪♬ in preference to ♬♪ . When one examines in detail the rhythm of reels played by older players one is struck by the 'unequalness' of time values of pairs of notes which are traditionally notated equally and, incidentally, by their generally slower tempi. Playing in the older style is much appreciated for its rhythm, and the finest compliment is to say that a fiddler gives a 'fine lilt' to a tune, or has a 'fine lift' (or 'lilt') to his bow. One notices that younger players, who generally play at a faster tempo, tend to even out these rhythms, particularly if they have learned to read music. Perhaps there has been a gradual change during the past 150 years from slower jig style music in compound time, such as is still played for some English morris dancing, to a faster tempo required for Scottish reels, but older players still retain traces of the compound-time rhythm (particularly the ♪♬ pattern).

Sixteen millimetres film has proved useful in analysing fiddle style and as a quick way of producing usable style transcriptions. Sound recordings alone are not enough. Figures 6 and 7 were transcribed from film. Here, as in most Shetland styles (that of Whalsay being an exception), the general pattern is of longer down-bow than up-bow notes, which, together with the fact that more bow is used on accented notes, accounts for the need at appropriate points to take three notes in one up-bow to bring the middle of the bow over the strings again. If this did not happen the players might run out of bow. Notice, however, that the second note of each 3-note slur falls on a strong beat, but the rhythmical accent is not weakened. The final step in analysis is to

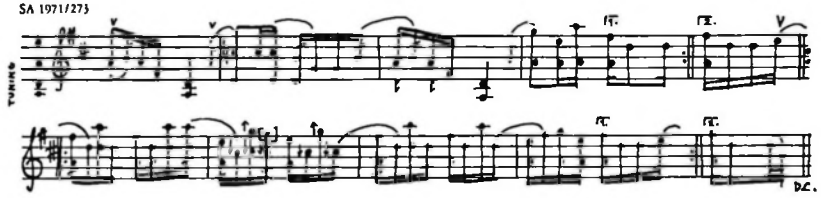


FIG. 6 Transcription of the reel 'Ahunt da daecks o' Voe', played by W. B. Henderson, Gloup, N. Yell.
(♪: note shorter than its partner; ↓ : note approximately ¼ tone flatter, or ↑ : sharper.)

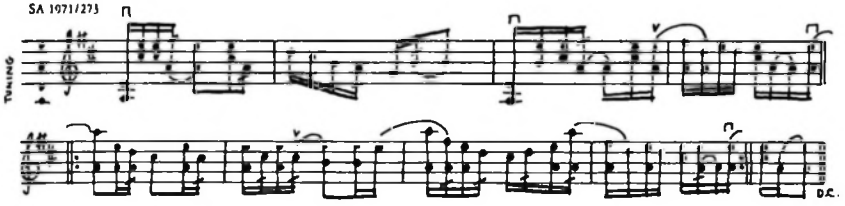


FIG. 7 Transcription of the reel 'Oot and in da harbour', played by W. B. Henderson, Gloup, Yell.
(♪: note shorter than its partner.)

play over such transcriptions oneself. This is a very satisfying thing to do, the bowing *feels* logical and natural and, above all (when one remembers the duration of dances) economical. The occasional down bow *draas,* or up-bow slurs, allow one briefly to relax left-hand fingers or the bow arm respectively. Yet standard notations never show 'notes inégales' (I use this term cautiously) nor the bowings. Hoseason was possibly an exception. His unpublished notations (J. Hoseason's MS, Mid Yell, Dec. 1862. S.R.O.) attempt to grapple with some of these unusual rhythms (Fig. 5). One cannot help wondering how much 'lilt' one should produce when playing from early dance music collections such as those of Praetorious, Susato, Playford, *etc.*; nor is one surprised that French musicians found it necessary to describe in detail the practice of 'notes inégales'. This rhythmic feature is not restricted to Shetland—the playing of some Scots fiddlers shows similar tendencies—but it is more obvious there, probably because of greater cultural stability—resistance to change—and the minimal use of notation.

Whereas this question of rhythm is bound up with the role of the fiddle as a dance instrument, two other interesting features are also related to the mechanics of playing. The first concerns melodic structures and the second intonation. Figure 8 shows a melody constructed entirely from combinations of open string pitches and those produced by fingers 1 and 3. Motifs based on the 1–3 finger patterns occur in a great many other reels. In terms of ergonomics, fingers 1 and 3 operate very well together, fingers 1 and 2 less well, and fingers 2 and 3 even less well—so it would seem to any but the trained violinist. When the second finger is used, it is often preceded or followed by open strings, and 1–3 patterns often alternate with 0–2–0 patterns (see Figs. 3, 6 and 7). While one never fails to be surprised by the nimble fingering of iron-fisted men who spend their days doing the toughest of manual work on land and sea, one must also ask if this apparent preference for certain 'convenient' finger patterns is not a function again of economy of effort. Is it surprising if these melodies arise more from a fusion of physical and mental activity than from the musical imagination alone, especially since the music being created is expected above all to be energetically rhythmic? Such patterns may also have had their origins in the harmonic possibilities of a two-string instrument.

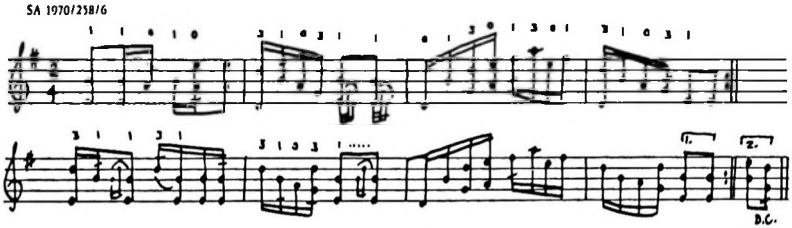


FIG. 8 Transcription of the reel 'Deltingside', played by John Fraser, Papa Stour. (♯ : note shorter than its partner.)

The other feature is somewhat related: it is one of intonation and, in particular, concerns the pitches produced by the second finger on the *a'* and *e''* strings. Figure 3 illustrated a common feature in the more traditional playing style where both the G and C are neither sharp nor natural. The late Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, who conducted fieldwork in Shetland during the 1940s, has already commented on the apparent use of neutral tones: they are particularly obvious in A mode tunes played on the upper strings. The *c''* (on the *a'* string) and the *g'* (on the *e''* string) are apparently neither a whole tone nor a semi-tone above the first finger notes *b'* and *f♯''*, but approximately three-quarters of a tone away from the pitches on either side of them. Shuldham-Shaw considered that the musicians were usually in no doubt themselves as to whether these notes should be sharp or natural and that they always indicated which pitch they preferred when he sounded them in turn on his (equal-tempered) accordion. He implied that there was a difference between intention and performance (1947 : 74). I am less sure about this: my initial impression is that the fiddlers are discriminating and in some tunes will play both neutral and unambiguous *c*'s within the same piece quite consistently. Furthermore, when one asks them to sing doubtful passages, their vocal intonation matches that of their fiddling. If indeed these neutral intervals were once a feature of older music in Shetland, then there are interesting parallels here with older Norwegian music styles noted by Reider Sevåg (1974) who has found sufficient data in the spacing of Langeleik frets as well as in certain singing styles to suggest that 'semitone-less' modal systems once existed in Norway, whose quality he describes as 'anhemitonic heptatonism'. Further research using frequency analysers is needed before one can attempt to say the same for Scotland.

Three recorded performances of the reel called *Da Boanie Isle o Whalsay* illustrate another aspect of this problem, namely that the situation is dynamic. The first (SA/1971/269) which was played by Andrew Poleson, made a distinctive use of these neutral intervals: his version, though clearly in the 'key' of *a* was equally clearly in neither *a* major nor *a* minor. The second (SA/1971/214) was played by another younger Whalsay fiddler, Gilbert Hutchison, and accompanied by his fourteen-year-old son, John, on a presumably equal-tempered guitar. At the time John admitted he had trouble finding appropriate harmonies and in his playing he side-stepped the problem of 'neutral' *c*'s by omitting them from the *a–c–e* triads altogether. The note *c* is of course crucial in deciding the major or minor feel of a tune in the key *a*— a *c* sharp gives a major feel to the melody, a *c* natural gives a minor feel to it. The third version was played by William Hunter of Lerwick who is regarded as one of Shetland's finest fiddlers and whose paternal home is only a few miles across the sound on the mainland opposite Whalsay (it can be heard on *The Music of Scotland*, published by the National Geographic Society, 1974). He had learned the tune from his father who had been exposed to much more Scottish and English music than the other two players. This last version was played and accompanied unambiguously in A

major, the way most other players outside Whalsay play their reel. Clearly the introduction of diatonic accompanying instruments has forced fiddlers and accompanists to make the tune conform to the prevailing western European intonation. In this case, the change has been made towards the 'lighter' major mode from the 'darkish' neutral mode. Carl-Allan Moberg (1950 : 5–49) has suggested that just such a move has been an important aspect of change in Swedish music during the past 200 years. In Shetland, however, occasionally the opposite may have happened and in *Da Mirrie Dancers*, a collection of fiddle tunes published by the Shetland Folk Society, there appear a small number of reels notated in the minor *a*-mode, which are played by older fiddlers with more ambiguous neutral intonation.

It could be argued that the neutral intonation heard in the two earlier examples is a feature solely of the fiddle repertory—that since it is so convenient to place the three left-hand fingers equidistantly on the fingerboard, a repertory has evolved which exploits this neutral flavour. Experience in other fields—in the intonation of some Hebridean singers and in the tuning of early Scottish bagpipe chanters—leads one to think that this is not solely restricted to the fiddle. Is it perhaps worth considering that non-diatonic, or neutral, modes may once have been widespread in northern Europe, and slowly displaced by the Mediterranean and Near-Eastern diatonic modal style now common throughout Europe? Notation, which evolved as a partner to diatonic music, would have aided in displacing such intonation. In culturally conservative areas like Shetland, however, where notation has played virtually no part in the transmission of a lively musical tradition, an older intonation system appears to have persisted into the 1970s.

REFERENCES

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