

# The Fiddlers of James Bay: Transatlantic Flows and Musical Indigenization among the James Bay Cree

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*Abstract: Fiddle music and dancing have formed a major component of the social lives of the Algonquian First Nations Cree population living in the James Bay region of Ontario and Québec since the instrument and its associated repertoire were introduced to the region by British (and most notably Scottish) employees of the Hudson's Bay Company who travelled across the Atlantic on ships from the late 17th to the 20th century. Based on archival research and ongoing fieldwork in the region since 2011, this article aims to explore this transatlantic musical migration from the British Isles to James Bay and the reshaping of Scottish fiddle music and dance through indigenization and incorporation into the Cree cultural milieu. By examining this area of cultural flow, the article seeks to engage with current themes in ethnomusicology on the subject and add to the growing body of knowledge surrounding them.*

*Résumé : La danse et le violon ont constitué une composante majeure de la vie sociale de la population algonquienne de la Première nation cri vivant dans la région de la baie James, en Ontario et au Québec, puisque cet instrument et le répertoire qui lui était associé furent introduits dans la région par les employés britanniques (et plus particulièrement écossais) de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, qui ont traversé l'Atlantique à partir de la fin du 17e siècle jusqu'au 20e siècle. Cet article, qui se fonde sur une recherche en archives et un travail de terrain continu dans la région depuis 2011, cherche à explorer cette migration musicale transatlantique depuis les îles britanniques jusqu'à la baie James, ainsi que le remodelage et la reconstitution de la musique au violon et de la danse écossaise par le biais de leur indigénisation dans le milieu culturel cri. En examinant ce domaine de flux culturel, cet article vise à s'engager dans les thèmes actuels de l'ethnomusicologie à ce sujet et à contribuer au corps de connaissance grandissant qui les entoure.*

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Fiddle music and dance have formed a major component of the social lives of the Algonquian First Nations Cree population living in the James Bay region of Ontario and Québec (see Fig. 1) since the instrument and its associated repertoire were introduced by British employees of the Hudson's Bay Company in the 18th century.<sup>1</sup> As a musician and scholar of Scottish music and dance traditions based at the University of Aberdeen, I have been greatly interested in this area of music performance as it builds on previous research I conducted into Scotland's Northern Isles fiddle traditions and the role of fiddle music among sailors in the Arctic whaling industry (Wilkins 2010). Of particular interest to me is how early instances of globalization of Scottish traditional music through face-to-face contact can be used as a means of framing more contemporary media industry-generated dissemination, which has been a dominant force internationally since the mid-20th century; this process is discussed with regards to the James Bay repertoire later in this article.

In 2011, I embarked on two months' fieldwork in the James Bay region and returned to continue my research in 2012 and 2013. Out of perhaps forty fiddlers active in the James Bay region, I met and interviewed eight of them and a number of other community members involved in fiddle-related activity such as step dancing and playing melodeon, guitar or bass. Much of the information presented in this article is taken from those interviews, and from more informal personal communication and observations during fieldwork, as well as from historical accounts and ethnographic publications.<sup>2</sup>

In this article, my aim is to explore how the fiddle and its associated music and dances were re-formed through indigenization and incorporated into Cree performative traditions. In doing so, I will be exploring the idea of agency in the context of cultural performance, particularly the processes by which Cree musicians have interpreted, reshaped, and added to European-derived fiddle music to form a distinct James Bay fiddle repertoire and performance style. When approaching this subject, it is impossible not to touch on the power relationships between the Scottish fur traders and the Cree, and how they were influenced by gender, race and class attitudes of the time. While the historical sources I have used are helpful in building a picture of the process by which Scottish music and dance was introduced to the region, it is important to note that many of these observations, in their context, are rooted in colonial prejudice and are unlikely to be wholly accurate. These, coupled with more recent Cree sources, will inevitably show a juxtaposition between native and non-native historical viewpoints. The challenges of representing the relationships and alliances formed between European and indigenous groups have been the subject of rapidly emerging scholarship by academics of both

indigenous and non-indigenous descent in recent years, including Jodi Byrd, in *The Transit of Empire* (2011); Lynne Davis, in *Alliances* (2010); and, perhaps most relevant to the subject of this article, Ted Binnema and Susan Neylan's *New Histories for Old* (2007), which examines the perceptions of Canadian Aboriginal history and their impact on the people in question.

The topic of transatlantic music flow and its resultant inter-cultural processes within performance practice has caught the attention of a number of ethnomusicologists in recent years. In 2008, the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention chose the theme of "crossing over" for its conference at Memorial University in Newfoundland; the subsequent book publication featured papers examining the conveyance of fiddle music and dance across the North Atlantic between Europe and America (Russell and Guigné 2010). The theme

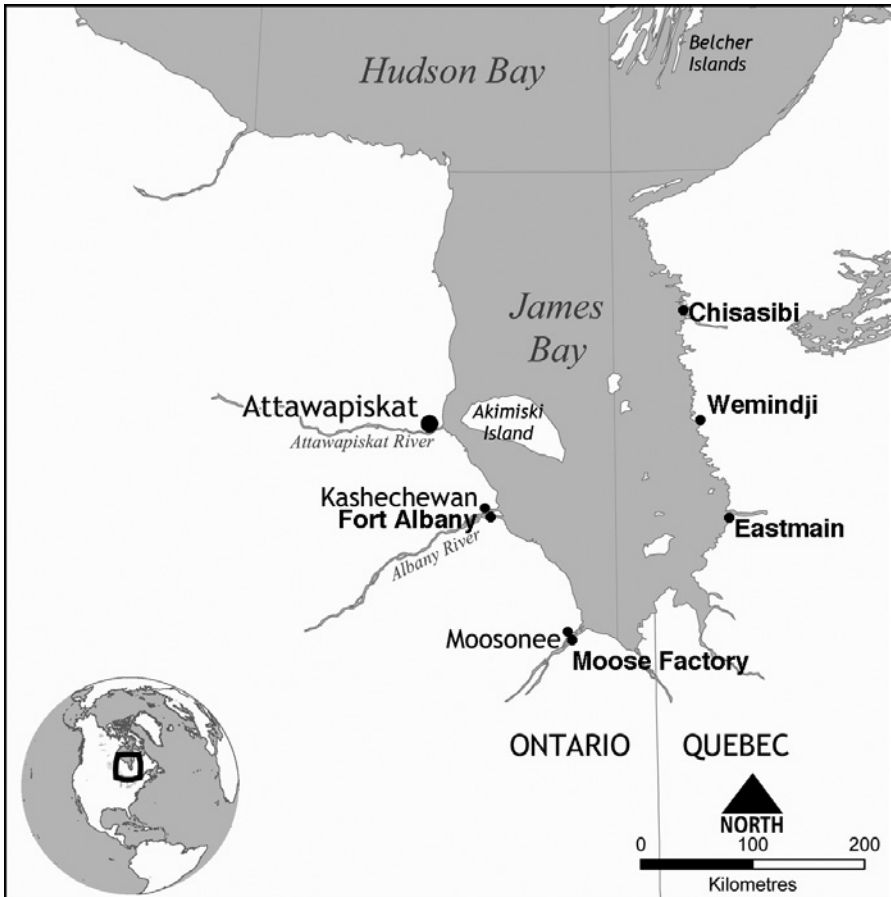


Figure 1. Map of the James Bay region. (Wikipedia Commons.)

of musical migration has also been the subject of recent journal publications including *the world of music (new series)* [sic], which had transatlantic music flows in the lusophone world as the subject of its latest issue (Alge and Abels 2013), and this special issue of *MUSICultures*, which emerges from one of the themes of the 2011 International Council for Traditional Music's biennial conference in St. John's, Newfoundland. A number of recent book publications likewise reflect the theme of musical migrations and transcultural musical practices, including Toynebee and Dueck's *Migrating Music* and Madrid-González's *Transnational Encounters*, both published in 2011. By examining transatlantic musical flow and indigenization of Scottish music in James Bay Cree music performance, this article adds to a growing body of knowledge in this recent ethnomusicological endeavour.

### The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in Canada

HBC ships passed through Stromness on their journey from London to the Hudson and James Bays, and consequently most HBC employees were hired in the Orkney Islands. Fur trading posts were established and operated by the HBC across the Arctic and Subarctic, including in the James Bay region, from the 17th to the 20th century. It is somewhat surprising to note that the violin has been played in James Bay for at least as long as in the Shetland Islands, and, like the Shetlanders, the James Bay Cree readily adopted the instrument into their musical milieu.<sup>3</sup> However, while in Shetland there was a predecessor to the violin, the *gue*, there is no suggestion of any string instrument being played by the James Bay Cree prior to European contact (Cooke 1986: 4). Lynn Whidden, in her monograph *Essential Song: Three Decades of Northern Cree Music*, describes fiddle music as a "language of exchange" between Cree hunters and Scottish traders in the early days of the fur trade (Whidden 2007: 40). Through a process of indigenization, the James Bay Cree reshaped the Scottish music and dance forms they heard to establish a unique repertoire and performance style. There are parallels, particularly in terms of performance, with other First Nations and Métis fiddle traditions, most notably those in Manitoba, which were established as a result of similar cultural encounters.<sup>4</sup> Whidden elaborates on the James Bay fiddle tradition:

The music transcended the boundaries of spoken language and culture; indeed, it was a seamless fit, requiring little or no change in the beliefs and language that underpinned the Natives' subsistence lifestyle.... Cree fiddling is unique, and I believe that

their variety of styles, and the freedom they express in altering the tunes, is truly the wellspring of music creation. The Cree introduced so much innovation to fiddling and fiddling tunes that one could say they created a new genre of music.... The fiddle, like the Christian hymnary, was among the few ideational objects of European origin to be immediately adopted by the Cree. Fiddling was congruent with existing ways of cultural learning, and the portable instrument could be carried easily to the hunting camps. (2007: 40-41)

Cree song traditions have been researched in depth by Lynn Whidden (2007) and Richard Preston (2002). However, while there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence suggesting a rich fiddle and dance tradition in the region (including a 1980 documentary that follows two James Bay fiddlers to the Orkney Islands to explore their shared musical connections [Rogers 1980]), there has been little in-depth academic enquiry into James Bay fiddle music and dances or their relationship to the Orcadian traditions from which they are assumed to have derived. This shortfall stands in stark contrast to scholarship on other comparable Scottish and North American fiddle traditions, including those of the Shetland Islands, Cape Breton, Manitoba and Alaska.<sup>5</sup> The James Bay tradition is fragile in the sense that it has benefited less from collection, promotion and transmission than comparable traditions such as Shetland and Athapascan fiddling, and, like the Cree language it is experiencing decline as a result of outside influences, aging performers and indifference among younger generations.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, making moves to safeguard the music has become increasingly high on the agendas of music practitioners, including the Cheechoo family from Moose Factory, in recent years. In 1998, James Cheechoo, resident of Moose Factory (and formerly from Eastmain) released the first recording of traditional fiddle tunes from the James Bay region with drum and spoons accompaniment, entitled *Shay Chee Man* (see Fig. 2). In 2012, the Wemindji Cultural Department invited me to establish a fiddle music library in the community in a bid to make the music available for future consultation.

The timing of this article is significant as 2013 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Orcadian explorer John Rae, who spent twelve years living and working on Moose Factory Island. The Orkney Folk Festival, in May 2013, commemorated this anniversary by hosting, among other events, a John Rae Memorial Concert which celebrated his life and achievements. James Cheechoo travelled to mainland Scotland and Orkney with his wife Daisy and daughters Rita and Treena to represent the James Bay fiddle tradition by taking

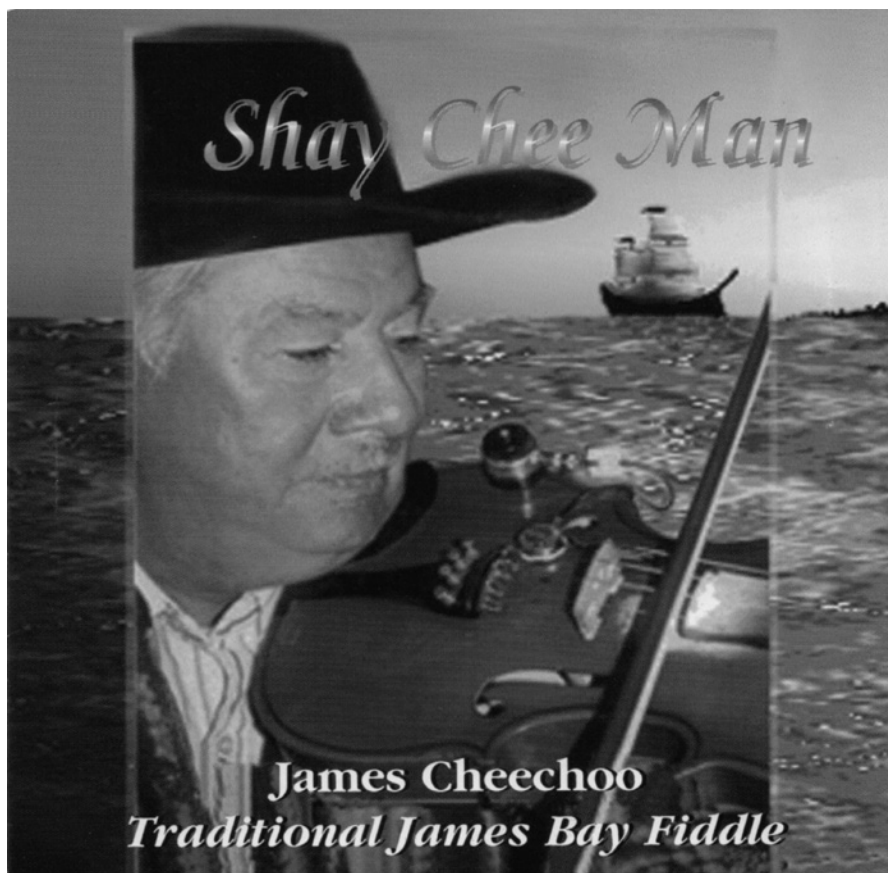


Figure 2. *Shay Chee Man* CD Cover (1998).

part in this and other concerts and workshops, thus bringing their music back across the Atlantic and in a sense historically reconnecting it.

The inauguration of the HBC in London on May 2, 1670 (Karamanski 1983: 7), signified the commencement of almost four centuries of cultural and economic exchanges between Scottish and First Nations groups across northern Canada. By the 1690s, French-British military conflicts were hampering ships' efforts to navigate the English channel, and were also causing a shortage of manpower in England. In 1693 the HBC began looking to Scotland to recruit men, and by 1700 the HBC ships were annually sailing north to the Orkney Islands en route to Hudson and James Bay, stopping at Stromness for last-minute supplies and to hire workers before continuing their journey west across the North Atlantic (Brown 1988: 4). They remained in Stromness for

two to three weeks in early June, during which time they recruited up to one hundred men to work five-year contracts at the posts (Clouston 1937: 41). These men were of great importance to the Company as their labour was cheaper and they were considered “hardier and more fit for the discomforts and isolation of Hudson’s Bay life” than their English counterparts (Morantz 1983: 45). By the end of the 18th century, 416 of the 530 employees (nearly 80 per cent) were from the Orkney Islands (Pottinger 1994a: 34; Brown 1988: 4; Astley 2003), and ships passed through Stromness twice a year, returning each November with the men who had chosen to return home (see the map in Fig. 3) (Clouston 1937: 41).

HBC workers were dispersed to fur trading posts across the Arctic and Subarctic, and some of the earliest of these settlements were situated in James Bay. From the early 1700s until 1904, one of the posts, Moose Fort (later Moose Factory), had HBC ships sailing straight to its location and anchoring close by in the Moose River to unload their cargoes (Anderson 1960: 10). Moose Factory Island was traditionally a meeting place for Cree in the summer months before it was established as a trading post in 1673 by Charles Bayley, the first governor of the HBC, who may also have been the first person to introduce a bowed stringed instrument to the region. An entry in the Company’s journal reports a “violl and shell and strings” being dispatched to Bayley from London in 1678, “presumably,” writes E. Arthur from his colonial European perspective in 1949, “to relieve the monotony of what a later writer called the ‘Cold Days and Long Winter Nights’ in a ‘Disconsolate part of the world’” (Arthur, Chapman and Massey 1949: 5).

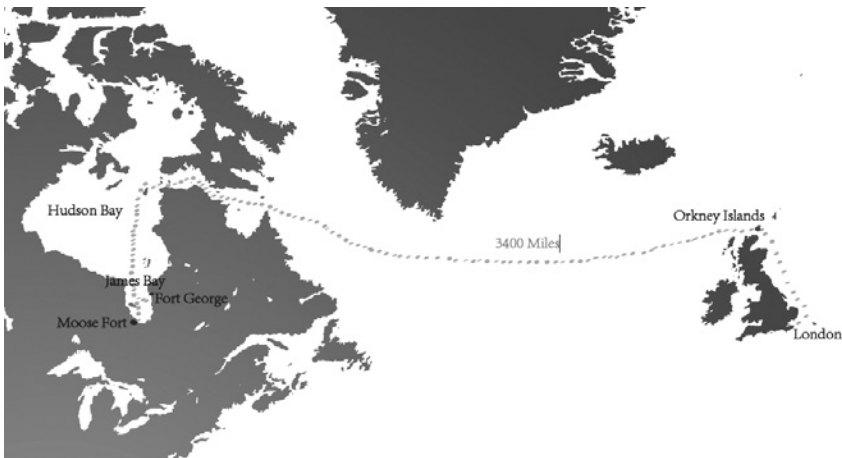


Figure 3. The Passage of HBC ships between the British Isles and James Bay. (<http://vectorworldmap.com/>)

James Bay Cree supported the trading posts by exchanging furs and game for goods, including flour, tea and oatmeal (Barnell 1973: 24). As the posts became further established, Cree people congregated at them more often and thus became deeply exposed to the lifestyles of the HBC workers. While the HBC prohibited employees from marrying Aboriginal women until the early 19th century, the practice was tolerated among those living at the posts from the early days of the HBC's operations in the region (Judd 1983: 25-26; Burley 1997: 5; McCormack 2011: 70). Today there are many James Bay Cree with Scots ancestry from these marriages, and a number of them retain Scots or Orcadian surnames including McLeod, Louttit, Linklater and Spence.<sup>7</sup> One result of these unions was the introduction of fiddles, melodeons (from the late 19th century) and dance traditions which are still visible among First Nations groups across the Arctic and Subarctic today. Fiddle music was one of the few British traditions to be passed down to children of mixed marriages. As the instrument and its associated repertoire became established within settlement life from the 18th century, children of mixed marriages tended to be the ones to continue the tradition by providing musical accompaniment to the many popular local dances, passing the music on to their own children, and at the same time "maintaining ties to their European heritage" and providing a "cross-cultural bridge" between the fur traders and Cree hunters (Cheechoo 1998). This performance tradition is predominately a hereditary process which is still evident today, as I will explain. During fieldwork in the communities of Wemindji, Moose Factory and Chisasibi, I met specific families of musicians including the Ratts, Kakabats and Georgekishes (Wemindji), the Cheechoos and Jollys (Moose Factory) and members of the House family in Chisasibi.

### Indigenous Music in James Bay

As mentioned, there has been no evidence to suggest that bowed stringed instruments were played in James Bay prior to European contact. However, there is suggestion of a rich song tradition incorporating prayers, worksongs, lullabies and most significantly the *niitoooh-nikamon* (hunting songs).<sup>8</sup> Historically, the *niitoooh-nikamon* were communicated orally and often learned from an ancestor. They were considered powerful, were treated with respect and were closely connected to the spirit world (Whidden 2007: 50). Many of the song topics address the natural environment and commonly refer to animals including the porcupine, otter, beaver, trout, geese and ducks. Accompaniment consists of the drum (*taawahekan*) and rattle (*she she gon*) (Whidden 2007: 1-17). Whidden describes the intrinsic role of the hunting



songs in Cree society: “Their joyful hunting songs sowed the ordered, vital connection between man and animal and all of nature—and depicted the Cree cosmos” (Whidden 2007: 5). The *niitoooh-nikamon* were an essential aspect of hunting practice. Their singing was among the many skills a hunter learned, and had functional roles such as bringing on the south wind so that geese would fly overhead. The *taawahekan* and *she she gon* were not considered instruments but rather, tools integral to hunting, facilitating communication with the world of unseen living beings (Whidden 2007: 18-19). Hunting songs have survived European contact, but many of their original functions changed during the 20th century as a result of the large-scale movement away from a land-based hunting lifestyle and toward a wage labour economy. Today it is rare to hear the hunting songs outside the ethno-historical context of archives and academic enquiry. I had no exposure to this form of music while in James Bay, although I was told of activities such as the Goose Dance, Shaking Tent ceremonies, and Sun Dances where more traditional Cree singing and drumming took place. Due to the strong “back to roots” movement that has been taking place in recent years, these activities appear to be increasing in popularity within the communities surrounding James Bay.

The drum that James and Daisy Cheechoo use today in performances, and which was traditionally used to accompany fiddle music, is known only by the generic term, *taawahekan*, and is a Cree reconstruction of the type of drum that was brought to James Bay in the past by Scottish HBC workers. James Cheechoo’s father, Noah Cheechoo, had worked on Charlton Island for the HBC in the early 20th century and described to him the arrival of the Scots each year. Before unloading the post supplies onto the island, the Scots held a ritual where they disembarked in the form of a pipe band wearing kilts, and paraded along the quayside for some time before returning to their ships, changing their attire, and starting the job of unloading the supplies with the help of the local Cree (a task that took fourteen days and nights). James Cheechoo explained that the drum used to accompany the bagpipers when they arrived on Charlton Island was the drum on which the Cree modelled the *taawahekan* used for fiddle accompaniment (personal communication, May 27, 2013). The Cheechoos’ *taawahekan* is double-sided, with one side constructed of bear skin and the other of beaver skin (see Fig. 4). The drum is played while sitting, is placed on the lap and is struck with two beaters on one side of the drum (unlike the Scottish bass drum from which it is derived, which is strapped onto the shoulders and played in a standing position, with one beater for each side). In the early 1900s, the fiddle drum was made out of seal skin (*upstaachikiyann taawahekan*) supplied by Inuit living among the Cree but which is now obsolete. Generally the Cree on the East Coast of James Bay favoured



Figure 4. Daisy Cheechoo demonstrating the *taawahekan* (two-sided drum), Moose Factory, November 2011. (Photo by author.)

the caribou hide drum (*ahdookheann taawahekun*). James Cheechoo clearly specified that the taawahekun was not related to the traditional Cree hunter's one sided drum and was only used on secular occasions within the context of fiddle dance music (Cheechoo and Cheechoo, personal communication, February 26, 2013; Cheechoo, personal communication, May 27, 2013).<sup>9</sup>

## Fiddle Music and Dancing in the Orkney Islands

While very little has been written about the history of Orkney's indigenous music, more detailed research has been conducted into the archipelago's dance tradition previous to an influx of outside influences in the late 19th century. Dances customarily took place at weddings, harvest homes (*inhames*), the annual Volunteers' Balls, and at the New Year. While it was unusual for Orcadians to attend these events more than three or four times a year, the presence of HBC ships in Stromness called for a number of additional dance nights to take place, and there are several written anecdotes relating to the parties which occurred over the two to three week window when the ships were in port (see Pottinger 1994b for a recollection of such events). Flett and Flett record that pre-1890, Orcadian dancing outside the main urban centres consisted almost entirely of reels. Three different types of reel were danced along with a farewell dance called Babbity Bowster (the Kissing Dance), which is discussed in more detail below. These three reel types were the Foursome Reel (identical to the mainland Scotch Foursome Reel), the Sixsome Reel, and the Eightsome Reel, the latter two being peculiar to Orkney (Flett and Flett 1964: 50-57).<sup>10</sup> Flett and Flett describe the latter two dances:

They are danced by three and four couples respectively, and in both of them the setting steps are performed with the dancers placed in two parallel lines, the men in one line with their partners opposite to them in the other. In the traveling figures in both dances, each couple moves in a single unit, with the lady leading and the man following immediately behind her; in the Sixsome Reel the track followed by the dancers is a simple figure 8, and in the Eightsome Reel it is a figure 8 with an additional loop. Both dances also display the change in musical rhythm which is a common feature in Reels, for each is danced to a combination of strathspeys and reels.<sup>11</sup> (Flett and Flett 1964: 50)

The Scotch Reel typically involved two couples, and in the context of a wedding it was called the Bride's Reel. The Bride's Reel was danced by the bride and groom as soon as they were married, together with the best man and maid of honour while the rest of the wedding party watched (Ethel Findlater, interview with Alan J. Bruford, June 25, 1969). The Bride's Reel was danced to a strathspey-reel tune combination commencing with the strathspey known as *Wha Widna Shak a Leg wi Bonnie Nellie Gordon*?<sup>12</sup> The strathspey also had accompanying words which were sometimes sung to the tune.<sup>13</sup> However, for the Scotch Reel, the gender of the dancers was immaterial and it was quite acceptable to have men dance it, on which occasions it was known as the Ram Reel (Emmerson 1972: 167). The dance may have been more successfully transported across the Atlantic as a result because its success was not dependent on the presence of female dancers.

The finale of the night was the *Babbity Bowster*, a dance known across Scotland prior to the 20th century by this and other names including *Dannsa am Poc* (the Kissing Dance) and the *Bonny Lad*. This dance is believed to date back to an earlier form popular in the court circles in England in the 17th century under the name *Joan Sanderson* or the *Cushion Dance* (Flett and Flett 1964: 4). Below is a recollection of its taking place in the village of Toab on the Orkney mainland:

They had dances roond here, you know, in the barns. They'd just caa it a regular barn dance. And every dance ended up wi a dance at they called *Bobbity Bowster*. Dat wis the name of it. And the way it would start, there wis a lady would start and she walked roond the room at they wis dancing in, and she had a hanky in her hand, and she'd throw it to some man person, and he was her partner. And then they'd start and walk around the room, and he'd throw in some other lady's lap, you see, and she got up and she threw it to another gentleman and so on. Then the whole lot was up. And generally the partners at they ended up wi, they were supposed to see them home that night, you see. (Peter Pratt, interview with Elizabeth Neilson, July 23, 1961)

The main instrument played for dances in Orkney until the early 20th century, as in Shetland and mainland Scotland, was the fiddle; two fiddles were commonly played together at these events without instrumental accompaniment (Peter Pratt, interview with Elizabeth Neilson, July 23, 1961). The repertoire of both dancers and fiddlers did not include polkas, schottisches or quadrilles until the late 19th century when dances from

the south, including country dances, square dances and circle dances, were introduced to the islands and soon displaced the native Orkney reels (Flett and Flett 1964: 47-52).

While there are rich sources of information on dancing in Orkney, very few details exist about the accompanying tunes. There is, however, some information about the way in which the fiddle was played. One custom was for the fiddler to mark the conclusion of a dance by what was described at the time, presumably by someone unfamiliar with the intricacies of the tradition, as a “prolonged screeching” sound generated by drawing the bow rapidly across the strings behind the bridge. This was a signal for every man dancing to “seize his partner and give her a ‘resounding smack’” (kiss) as *mooter*, or payment, for the pleasure of the dance. The custom of signalling the conclusion with “screeching” fell into disuse in Orkney just before the end of the 19th century, although the fiddler continued to occasionally use the instrument to produce this sound effect until the First World War (Flett and Flett 1964: 51). Flett also mentions an important element of Orcadian dance fiddling in the early 20th century known as the *dird* (Flett and Flett 1964: 47-48). The *dird* is “the accent given to the notes, that extra something that makes the onlookers’ feet tap and gives the life and lift to the dancers” (Stewart 2011: 9). It appears to refer to a change in tempo or bowing (such as the addition of slurs) within a tune which links closely to the patterns of a dance (Stewart 2011: 9-18).

## Fiddle Music and Dancing in Canada and James Bay

The earliest known written record of violins in Canada was via a report in volume 27 of *The Jesuit Relations* which includes a description of two violins played at a wedding in Québec on November 15, 1645 (Thwaites 1898: 12). Evidence suggests that fiddling, perhaps the premier instrumental folk tradition in Canada, dates back to at least the 17th century (Lederman 2010). During the 18th and 19th centuries, many tunes were introduced to Canada by Scots, Irish, English, French and Americans and passed down via oral tradition over the following centuries (Lederman 2010; Johnson 2006; Johnson 2012). In James Bay, however, which was inaccessible to most immigrants and French fur-traders, the overriding outside cultural and musical influences were from men working for the HBC. By the late 1800s the James Bay Cree, along with other Aboriginal and Métis groups in northwestern Canada, northern Ontario and northern Québec, had developed an identifiable “Aboriginal/Métis” fiddle tradition. This has remained distinctive until the present day as one of seven main stylistic areas of fiddle music in Canada, as defined by Anne Lederman.<sup>14</sup>

Fiddle music and dance were firmly established in James Bay by 1749, when the HBC records in Moose Factory remark that “having three Fiddlers [*sic*] in the Factory, viz. Geo. Millar, Willm. Murray and James Short, our people celebrated the Evening with Dancing and Singing, and all were very merry” (Lederman 2010). In the early years of the HBC in James Bay, social interaction between the Cree and the HBC employees was kept to a minimum with one of the exceptions being the dancing that took place when Cree congregated at the posts, especially at Christmas and New Year and in the summer months when weddings were commonplace (Anderson 1960: 23; Louttit 2007). All those present at the post were invited, and the dances were accompanied by fiddle music. Dance events were part of the social fabric of trading posts and provided opportunities for Europeans and the James Bay Cree to interact (Morantz 2002: 58-59).

It appears likely that the James Bay Cree participated in this music by adding rhythmic accompaniment on the *taawahekan* as the following passage, a recollection by HBC employee J. W. Anderson of a dance in Moose Factory in 1911, suggests:

To the tune of two fiddles and one Indian drum, dancing was commenced at eight in the evening and carried on to the small hours of the morning. The district manager was there and, although somewhat beyond the dancing age, he nevertheless graced the proceedings with his presence until midnight. As was to be expected of the day and age, the *piece de resistance* at the dance was the good old Red River jig, and for the rest, the Indian rabbit and duck dances, besides quadrilles and square dances. There were tremendous copper kettles of hot tea and hundreds of currant buns in the room off the main Bachelors’ Hall where guests refreshed themselves, buffet style, from time to time. Being young and foolish, and taking no thought for the morrow, I danced to my heart’s content with matrons and maidens, young and old, and irrespective of the shade of their complexions—white, dusky or otherwise. At three in the morning the party broke up. (Anderson 1960: 31)

When the fiddle was adopted by the James Bay Cree, they emulated the tunes they heard being played at the trading posts. The instruments were expensive but could be bought in the HBC stores at the posts, and since fiddles were portable they were easily transported to family hunting camps for entertainment (Whidden 2007: 42). The fiddle was sometimes used instead

of the drum to accompany hunting songs, which were the purview of men only, and this may be why people in Moose Factory still speak of the fiddle, its music and dancing, as having spiritual connections (Louttit 2007; Barbara Cheechoo, interview with author, December 7, 2011). Whidden notes that the ways in which the fiddle music has been shaped by Cree men conforms to the musical ideals of the hunters' song culture, and tunes were adapted to the rhythms of the hunting songs (Whidden 2007: 3, 40-43). This connection between Aboriginal singing and fiddle music is also noted by Lederman in reference to western Manitoba (Lederman 1988: 216).

Fiddle tunes and dances were typically passed on from father to son among the James Bay Cree along with hunting skills, and were traditionally part of the male domain (Louttit 2007).<sup>15</sup> While some women, including James Cheechoo's older sister Florrie, were known to play the fiddle (Cheechoo, interview with Franziska von Rosen, 2006), anecdotal evidence suggests that women preferred to play the melodeon or concertina, and a number of people I met in Wemindji and Moose Factory recalled memories of older female relatives who played fiddle tunes and hymns on free reed instruments. This lack of female players appears to have been generic to fiddle playing in this part of Canada, as Sherry Johnson discusses in her paper "If You Want to Win, You've Got to Play it Like a Man," which explores the attitudes toward female musicians in Ontario fiddle contests (Johnson 2006). However, while female fiddle players have become more numerous in Ontario as a whole, this has not been the case in the James Bay region where fiddle playing remains a predominantly male pastime.

Dances at the trading posts involved a combination of square dancing, step dancing, breakdowns and dances which appear to be specific to the James Bay Cree. Specific dances mentioned in written documents in the early and mid-20th century include the Red River Jig, the Rabbit and Duck dances, square dances, straight dances, eightsome reels, thrashing dances and round-up; some of these dances are discussed in more detail later in this article (Hudson's Bay Company Archives 2013; Anderson 1960: 31.)<sup>16</sup> According to Whidden, they were "an amalgam of Native and non-Native" dances, combining British square dance patterns with traditional Native step dancing (Whidden 2007: 43).<sup>17</sup> This amalgamation continues to characterize Cree dances, and step dancing is fully integrated within set dances, in contrast to contemporary Scottish social dancing today. Some Cree men have become known as particularly good dancers, recognized by fiddle players for their skilled "steps" according to the tune's melody, phrasing and rhythm (Louttit 2007). Some elders have recalled a structure to the evening in the form of a fiddle dance "set" which starts with any fiddle tune followed by four square

dances and then a Breakdown. Soon after this there would be another set of four square dances, and one Breakdown danced to two or three fiddlers taking turns. This could last for two to three hours before a rest for around half an hour and another dance set (Louttit 2007).

The taawahekan was clearly audible and provided a sonorous accompaniment to the music. According to the numerous recollections of dances at each of the trading posts in the 19th and early 20th centuries, they appear to have taken place regularly—perhaps two to three times per week, and were held from around eight o'clock in the evening until perhaps five o'clock the following morning (Louttit 2007). Fiddle players provided music with taawahekan accompaniment, and various musicians took turns playing throughout the night (Cheechoo 1998; Cheeco, interview with Franziska von Rosen, 2006). By the early 1900s, people in Moose Factory were regularly hosting fiddle dances in their homes, and these took place on a weekly basis in the carpenter's shed on the island (Flannery 1995: 63-64).

There were still recollections of taawahekan accompanying fiddles until the mid-20th century, but the introduction and popularity of guitar as an accompaniment instrument from the 1950s brought an end to this combination (Whidden 2007: 10-16; Bobby Georgekish, interview, November 3, 2011; James Cheechoo, personal communication, May 27, 2013). The introduction of electronic drum machines in the 1980s as alternative forms of fiddle accompaniment has taken over the function of percussive accompaniment, and while there have been moves to revive traditional drumming in James Bay in recent years, the fiddle and taawahekan combination is currently almost obsolete in the region.<sup>18</sup> In addition, while fiddling is still a strong tradition in James Bay among older generations, its popularity among younger members of Cree communities in the region has waned largely because of a “back to roots” movement away from European-derived musical traditions and toward a reclamation of Aboriginal traditions, most notably through the increased popularity of powwow singing in the region.<sup>19</sup>

While the decline of the fiddle and taawahekan combination is considered to have resulted from the introduction of guitars in the 1950s, it may have partly resulted from the negative connotations of drumming which were impressed upon the Cree by local missionaries in preceding years. One English Anglican minister, Reverend W. G. Walton, played a key role in abolishing traditional Cree drumming in northeast James Bay. He was also strongly opposed to fiddle music and regarded dancing as a sinful pursuit, once writing in a letter: “we almost dread the coming of summer,” explaining that this was because people would be drinking tea and dancing to fiddle music and that “every one [*sic*] knows the evil results of this dancing but they want



to persist in it because they say it is not a sin to dance and that they have known even ministers to do it” (Morantz 2002: 86). Walton was stationed in the parish of Fort George from 1892-1924, learned the Cree language, and was influential in his provision of aid to Cree people living in the region. However, his stance on traditional Cree religious practice was unyielding and he strongly discouraged its associated use of drumming and singing (Whidden 2007: 38-39). Even today, his actions are remembered, and Wemindji resident Dorothy Stewart recalled stories she had heard of him convincing people to throw their drums on bonfires (personal communication, November 9, 2011).<sup>20</sup> These attitudes appear to have spilled over to the fiddle-taawahekan combination which was common practice at the time. While in other areas of Canada such as in Cape Breton (see McDavid 2008: 115-36) there are stories of people clandestinely continuing forbidden musical practices, it appears that the effect on spiritual musical practices and the fiddle-drum combination was detrimental in James Bay.

## James Bay Repertoire and Dance

From field experience and for the sake of this study, I have tentatively divided the repertoire and dances found in James Bay today into three categories:

- 1) The traditional James Bay repertoire (mostly from pre-20th century)
- 2) Original James Bay compositions (from the 20th and 21st century)
- 3) Repertoire from elsewhere in Canada and the United States (mostly from 20th and 21st century)

The first and third categories are illustrative of the two instances of globalization of music highlighted in the introduction to this article, and as a result are noticeably different from each other in terms of repertoire, performance style, and association with dances. The traditional James Bay repertoire in the first category emerged as a result of early globalization where tunes were learned through face-to-face contact with HBC employees. I would argue that this category is particularly distinctive in terms of regional style as the Cree reconstructed and improvised the music and dances which they heard “live” at the posts and which were not readily accessible at the time through radio transmission and recorded media. The third category, in contrast, consists of tunes which were learned through contemporary media, most notably the radio and commercial recordings. Learning from sustained listening to commercial fiddle music

had a profound effect on the tunes performed (which are now closer to the wider Canadian and North American repertoire), performance style and instrumentation.

## The Traditional James Bay Repertoire

The traditional James Bay fiddle repertoire appears to have emerged previous to the 20th century, specifically as a result of cultural contact with HBC employees. While a number of tunes are likely to have been learned initially from the traders, they were renamed and reshaped over time with regards to titles, melodic structures and corresponding dances, to reflect Cree cultural influence. It refers to the synthesis of Scottish melodies and dances into James Bay Cree performance practice, resulting in a repertoire that resonates strongly with both cultures. Tunes are played individually (rather than in medleys, as is typical in Scotland), and each one tends to be associated with and named after a specific dance or dance formation, including Waap Shuu Daow (the Rabbit Dance), Mo Kujakash Kohegan (the Red Sucker Dance), In Chuuk Hegan (the Otter Dance) and Oojetsumuuegun (the Kissing Dance).<sup>21</sup> The frequency of animal names in the dance/tune titles may be reflective of the Cree's close observations of the natural world (the animal kingdom also forms the basis of subject matter within the hunting song repertoire), or it could signify a borrowing from the Scottish dance tradition in which dances, particularly in the West Highlands, also carried animal names.<sup>22</sup> While there are Aboriginal dances, as described by Jason Coonish in an interview in 2006, that imitate animal movements, this is also prevalent within fiddle dances including Waap Shuu Daow and In Chuuk Hegan (Coonishish, interview with Louttit, 2006). During fieldwork in Moose Factory in 2011 and 2013, I spoke at length to James Cheechoo (Fig. 5) about imitation of animal movements as a key feature of these dances, and I have incorporated his points in some of the dance descriptions below.

James Cheechoo recalls that in the 1940s, when he was learning the fiddle, these traditional tunes named above were still the only ones that people played. They were still accompanied by the taawahekan, and specific square dances, step dances or jiggling forms were associated with each tune (Cheechoo 1998). By the 1950s, gramophone records had influenced many local fiddlers and, like others around him, James Cheechoo stopped playing the old tunes that he had learned from his father and instead took up the new tunes that he was hearing on recordings and the radio. For many years afterward, and following his move to Moose Factory, he played only modern tunes. It was



Figure 5. James Cheechoo, Moose Factory, November 2011. (Photo by author.)

only much later that he switched back to the older tunes that today form the core of his repertoire. He knows approximately sixty tunes in total, and describes the first pieces he learned as “history tunes, very old songs—nobody plays them now” (Cheechoo 1998). A few years later, he spoke about the tunes in an interview with Franziska von Rosen:

I feel I am going back in my memory. I feel like I am living in the old days as I play the old songs.... I like the old songs more because the new songs mix it up with the other songs when you play the new songs. The old songs are pure; that is just the way it is. You do not mix up anything. I like it better that way. In the new ones they play two or three different kinds of music in there. They mix it up. (Cheechoo, interview with Franziska von Rosen, 2006)

Oojetsumuuegun (or the Kissing Dance), performed as the final, and usually the longest, dance of the night, is a prime example of a Scottish custom adopted from fur traders (Cheechoo 1998). Also known in Scotland as Babbity Bowster, or the Bonny Lad, and described earlier in this article, the dance as it is found in James Bay corresponds in many ways to the dance form previously found in northern Scotland and the Orkney Islands (Flett and Flett 1964: 52).<sup>23</sup> While it has been obsolete in Scotland for almost a century (Orkney was one of the last areas where it remained until ca. 1925), it is still occasionally performed in Moose Factory and was a feature of formal dance events in the region until the 1990s. Its corresponding tune, likewise entitled the Kissing Dance, appears to be unique to the James Bay region and continues to be performed by James Cheechoo who recorded it on his album *Shay Chee Man* in 1998 (Flett and Flett 1964: 43). Stan Louttit describes the version of the dance performed in the James Bay region:

The Kissing Dance would start with a woman or man who would use a handkerchief to look for a partner to dance with. The woman or man would single out a person and put the handkerchief around the person's neck and kiss their cheek. The handkerchief was left on the person's neck, as this person would begin to dance with the person who put it there. After dancing for a short while, the person who now had the handkerchief would repeat the process and look for a new partner. This process continued until there were many dancers on the floor. To end the dance, a woman would go into the centre of the circle of dancers and kiss a man after which she would return to her seat. The man who was kissed would go to the centre, dance for a short while, find a woman in the circle to kiss and then sit down. This process continued until only one dancer remained. The last person left with the handkerchief would go to the fiddler and put it on his neck. The fiddler would go to the centre of the floor while still fiddling and eventually end the tune at his liking. (Louttit 2007)

## The Kissing Dance

Traditional

As played by James and Daisy Cheechoo

$\text{♩} = 120$

Bearskin Drum

Violin

5

S. D.

Vln.

9

S. D.

Vln.

13

S. D.

Vln.

17

S. D.

Vln.

21

S. D.

Vln.

24

S. D.

Vln.

Figure 6. The Kissing Dance tune, as played by James Cheechoo. This transcription shows the chordal/rhythmic introduction to the piece, the first time through the melody, and the way in which the piece is concluded. The transcription includes the bearskin drum, played by James Cheechoo. The recording also includes Daisy Cheechoo on wooden spoons. The spoons closely match the drum line. (Transcription by author.)

In the case of the Bonny Lad in the Highlands of Scotland, the dance was performed to the accompaniment of a piper playing the tune the White Cockade, repeating the tune as many times as needed for the dance's duration (Flett and Flett 1964: 51-52). The White Cockade tune is also integral to the James Bay fiddle repertoire, but instead of functioning as the accompanying tune to the Kissing Dance, it is known in Moose Factory as the New Year Tune, and until the late 20th century was played by fiddlers visiting neighbours door-to-door to welcome in the New Year.<sup>24</sup> Known as first-footing in Scotland, this tradition was adopted from HBC traders not only by the James Bay Cree, but by other First Nations and Métis groups across Canada. The Inuit *nalajuk* tradition in Labrador, for example, which has similarities to *mumming*, takes place on the night of January 6 (Epiphany) and involves door-to-door visitors wearing disguises and singing carols or hymns at each house (Diamond 2010: 13).

The New Year visiting tradition was upheld in Moose Factory by the fiddler Robert McLeod, who continued to visit door-to-door playing the White Cockade until his death in the 1980s. The Kissing Dance tune, as performed by James Cheechoo (see Fig. 6), does not obviously correspond, either in its melody line or structure, to a Scottish equivalent and may have been composed in James Bay rather than Scotland. I have transcribed the tune, which appears to have two parts, using a 2/2 time signature to reflect the “one-beat per bar” feel and structure of the piece. The Kissing Dance tune involves a key change from D major to G major between the first and second parts. As Anne Lederman pointed out to me, this is unusual in older tunes and increases the likelihood of its being a more recent composition (email communication, December 31, 2012). For listeners familiar with Anglo-Celtic tunes in which the sections each have eight bars (sixteen beats), the A section of this tune will appear to include an extra bar, making seventeen bars in total, while the B section will appear to have only thirteen bars in total, three less than the expected number. This structure is unusual in Scottish music but similar to prairie Métis music, and suggests possible Cree or Métis origins.

*Kwisiekan* is a Cree name referring to at least two different tunes that James Cheechoo recorded on *Shay Chee Man*. The name translates as “dancing with your partner” or “straight dance,” and according to Cheechoo it refers to a dance with two groups of four couples. As with the Scottish ceilidh dance Strip the Willow, the couples stand in lines of four, men on one side facing the women, and in parallel to the other set of four couples. The women are on the outside and the men on the inside of this formation (see Fig. 7). The couples will step dance to each other for a certain amount of time before the two

lines of women swap places by proceeding clockwise in a large circle to meet their new male partners. They will then step dance again together for a while until the line of women moves around again. This was a dance I witnessed as the first dance of the night at wedding receptions in Wemindji in 2011 and 2012. There were three “rounds” in total, and the dance involved members of the immediate wedding party with the bride and groom as head couple (the leaders of the procession). More research would need to be undertaken to determine whether this dance is unique to James Bay or has corresponding versions elsewhere in North America. While clearly a different dance, the idea of step dancing to one’s partner and changing dance partners throughout can be found in the Scotch Four, which is the Cape Breton version of Scotland’s Reel of Four. This suggests that Kwiskiegan may well incorporate elements of Scottish dance (Heather Sparling, personal communication, May 1, 2013).<sup>25</sup>

*Sigabonhiekan* is another tune with a Cree name. The word *sigabon* refers

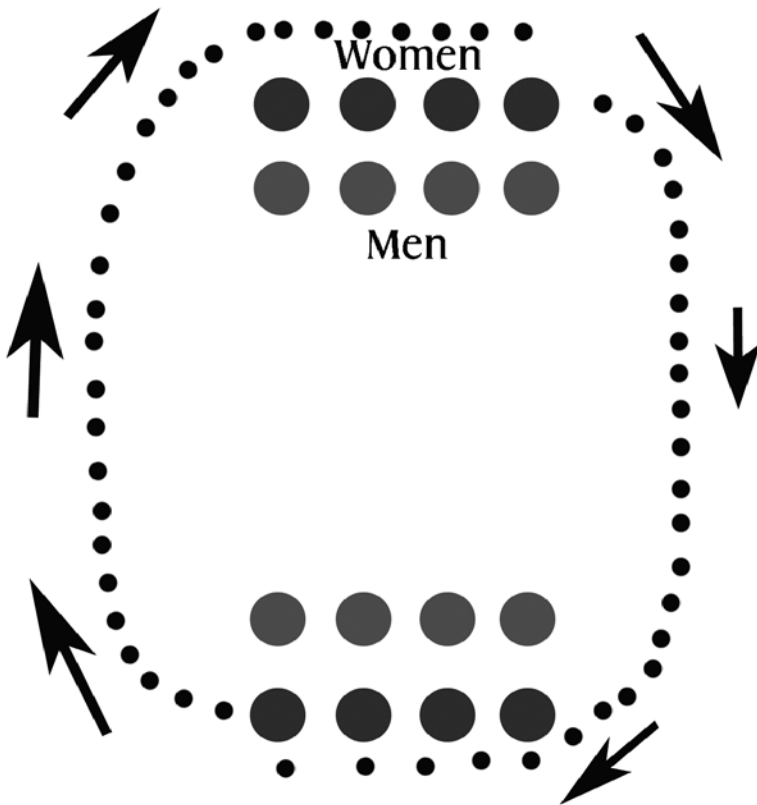


Figure 7. Kwiskiegan dance formation.

to the way in which the James Bay Cree cook Canada geese by hanging them with string from a rack in a *mitchuap* (teepee), and spinning them around at the edge of the fire. The tune is played for couples to swing their partners, imitating the way in which the goose is spun around in circles as it cooks next to an open fire (see “Cheechoo Family ‘LIVE’ at Fiddle Tunes 2010 Wheeler Theater Part 1” on *MUSICultures*’s YouTube channel).

*In chuuk hegan* translates as the Otter Dance, which has movements designed to give the impression that the dancer is floating above the ground. Two partners face each other and slide sideways with their feet hardly lifting from the floor. The idea is to slide along as quietly and lightly as possible, before retracing movements back to the original position, and the fiddle is played without accompaniment (Small, interview with von Rosen and Louttit, 2006). I have found no evidence of a corresponding dance in Scotland,<sup>26</sup> and it is possible that this was an indigenous dance that was later accompanied by fiddle music. The otter has been an important subject within James Bay Cree culture, and within the hunting song repertoire there is reference to an Otter Song (Preston 2002: 198). The otter is a common animal in the narratives of the Midē’wiwin practice of the closely related Ojibwe (Hoffman 2006 [1891]). Further research would need to be conducted to determine whether there are related otter dances among the Ojibwe and other First Nations groups.

Another dance that has a corresponding fiddle tune is Waap Shuu Daow, the Rabbit Dance. Different forms of the Rabbit Dance exist in most parts of Native America including the Northwest Territories.<sup>27</sup> In the James Bay context, the dance involves two lines facing each other, one of men and another of women. The woman is cast as the “game” and the man in the first couple chases his partner around these lines, as if he is chasing a rabbit, until he has caught her. This type of dance is not peculiar to James Bay and can also be found within Innu culture in Québec and Labrador (Diamond 1989: 63). Often “the chase” will take some time, and involves running through the spectators. Once the woman has been caught, each subsequent couple follows in turn until the dance is finished (Whidden 2007: 43; Gnarowski 2002: 20). Another dance, also found in other areas and with possible links to the Gaelic *Dannsa na Tunnag* (the Duck Dance), is *Ka Shiip Hood aa nah Nuuts* (also the Duck Dance), which incorporates duck-like movements into its formations (Louttit 2007). Lederman suggests that this James Bay dance may in some way connect to Scotland’s Sixsome Reel, as described by Flett and Flett (1964: 187-90), and is noticeably different from the Aboriginal Duck dances found in other First Nations communities in Canada (email communication, December 31, 2012). Other tune-dances from this traditional repertoire include the Scratching Dance, which according to Cheechoo refers to one element within



a circle dance formation in which six or eight couples stand in a circle with their hands on the shoulder of the person next to them and move counter-clockwise (Cheechoo and Cheechoo, personal communication, February 26, 2013), Elbow Swing (with similar movements to the Scottish ceilidh dance Strip-the-Willow), and Mo Kujakash Kohegan, the Red Sucker Dance, which is named after the red sucker fish common to the James Bay area. Further research into a broader geographic and cultural context of these dances would be greatly beneficial in further establishing their natures and origins within indigenous performance practice.

My own experience of dances during fieldwork included the Duck Dance, the Kissing Dance and the Otter Dance, and the latter two were demonstrated in Moose Factory especially for my benefit. In addition, there were a small number of square dances in Wemindji which I was told did not have specific names, but which I saw repeatedly danced throughout the night. The first night of dancing I attended in Wemindji was on the occasion of a wedding celebration in October 2011. Weddings are the primary reason for holding dances in the community, and the event took place in the community hall from around 10:30pm, following the wedding meal. The dancing part of the evening was open to all members of the community, as per custom, and many people of all ages—from very young children to elders—attended. Most of the people present took the role of spectators, and sat on chairs surrounding the dance floor while the bride and groom with bridesmaids and male counterparts (mostly adults) took to the floor and danced for most of the night. The wedding party repeated the first dance, Kwisiekan, three times while onlookers took photographs and made video recordings with their mobile phones. It was accompanied by the tune Soldier's Joy on all three iterations, and played by a band on stage. The amplified band consisted of one fiddle, one acoustic guitar, one bass and one electronic drum machine. Following Kwisiekan, the wedding party and other members of the bride and groom's families took to the floor and danced a number of square dances. A Master of Ceremonies acted as director of the event, and encouraged people onto the dance floor. Later in the night, the MC introduced the Snowball, where dancers on the floor chose people from the audience to dance with them. The dancing continued until the early hours of the following morning, and when I left the event at around two o'clock there was no sign of the dancers stopping.

Today, James Cheechoo is one of the few fiddlers who continues to perform the traditional James Bay repertoire, and this is mostly for listening audiences, although he will occasionally play to accompany his tunes' corresponding dances. Most other fiddlers choose to perform a repertoire

## The Wemindji Bridge Reel

Bobby Georgekish

$\text{♩} = 300$

Violin

8

Vln.

16

Vln.

24

Vln.

32

Vln.

40

Vln.

48

Vln.

55

Vln.

Conclusion

As played by Bobby Georgekish, Wemindji Cree Fiddler (1994)

Figure 8. The Wemindji Bridge Reel, as played by Bobby Georgekish on his 1994 album, *Wemindji Cree Fiddler*. (Transcription by author.)

of tunes that were introduced to the region over the last century through radio and recorded media alongside a handful of original compositions. While the most popular instrumental combination is the fiddle alongside guitar, bass and the electronic drum machine, Cheechoo prefers to use a more traditional combination of fiddle accompanied by percussion—usually the wooden spoons or *taawahekan*—played by his wife, Daisy. While fiddlers in the region usually play to a very fast tempo set by the drum machine (often in the region of 140-150 beats per minute) for dances, Cheechoo will play the traditional James Bay repertoire at a noticeably slower pace (around 120 beats per minute). It is also common for Cheechoo to include variations to the melodies in terms of phrasing and structure.

### Original Compositions by James Bay Fiddlers

In a 2006 interview with Franziska von Rosen, James Cheechoo is quoted as saying that the James Bay Cree did not compose their own tunes, but only songs. However, this is clearly not the case and there are in fact a number of original melodies that have emerged from the region, including at least one (the Moose River Jig) written by James Cheechoo himself, and a number of compositions by his brother Sinclair Cheechoo. However, most of the original tunes I heard during fieldwork in the region were composed in the late 20th century. The names of composers appear only to have been documented when fiddlers started recording music for commercial sale, and it is quite possible that Cheechoo was referring to an earlier time period when he mentioned this. It may well be true that the Cree did not write new tunes before the 20th century, but as there are a number of pieces in the James Bay repertoire that appear to be specific to the region, I would argue that it is very likely that fiddlers in earlier times composed and performed original pieces alongside those learned from HBC workers. From discussions with James Cheechoo, I found that he had given his own titles to particular tunes as a means of remembering them, and these include Daisy's Favourite and Robert McLeod's Reel. The former tune refers to his wife, Daisy, and the latter tune he only knows through its performance by the Moose Factory fiddler Robert McLeod. He is unsure of whether the tune has an alternative title or whether indeed it was composed by Robert McLeod.

Fiddle players of recent years, including James and Sinclair Cheechoo (Moose Factory), James Stewart (Chisasibi) and Bobby Georgekish (Wemindji), have all added to a growing body of tunes composed in the region, many of which refer to the places in which they were composed. For example, the

Wemindji Bridge Reel (Fig. 8), written by Bobby Georgekish, offers a musical interpretation of the process of driving toward, and traversing, the Wemindji bridge, which is on the outskirts of the community. In the tune, Georgekish describes the first half as conveying the slowing down of the vehicle as it descends the hill on the approach to the bridge, while the second half musically describes the juddering effect on the car as it drives across the bridge (interview, November 3, 2011). As can be seen in the transcription in Fig. 8 of Georgekish's performance of the tune on his 1994 album, *Wemindji Cree Fiddler*, this piece—like the Kissing Dance and other traditional James Bay repertoire—is asymmetrically constructed in each of the two sections. If we compare the tune to the typical eight-bar sections in Scottish music, the first section will appear to be short by a bar (two beats) while the second section will appear to have six extra beats, within which are repeated phrases but not an overall repetition as in the first part. This “crooked tune” format, like that of the Kissing Dance, is reflective of tune constructions common to Aboriginal fiddle music across Canada.<sup>28</sup> Other tunes include James Bay Doings and Migrating Canadian Geese, both written by Sinclair Cheechoo (brother of James Cheechoo), Moose River Jig by James Cheechoo, Log Cabin by James Stewart, and a very popular tune specific to the region and of unknown origin, the Civil Service Breakdown.

### Tunes/Dances Added to the Repertoire from Elsewhere in Canada and the U.S.

In the early 20th century, the advent of music recordings and radio had a profound effect on music performance across Canada and, as Lederman writes, inspired imitation among fiddlers (Lederman 2010). High-powered radio transmitters were installed in northern Canada in the 1930s, and this, along with the availability of commercial recordings, greatly influenced James Bay Cree fiddlers, who, like their contemporaries across Canada and Scotland, gravitated toward the new repertoires they heard being played by commercial fiddlers such as Don Messer and Ned Landry (Whidden 2007: 44; this was also evident during my fieldwork). Something similar occurred in the Shetland Islands, where, from the 1930s, fiddlers were abandoning their traditional Shetland repertoire in favour of Scottish country dance music and the music of James Scott Skinner, which they were hearing on recordings and radio broadcasts.

In James Bay, tunes such as Whiskey Before Breakfast, Seven Mile Chase, Ragtime Annie, the Chicken Reel, Mississippi Sawyer, and Boil 'em

Cabbage Down became firmly established in the repertoire, and even today are the core tunes that most fiddlers in the area play. The introduction of these tunes heralds a shift in the link between music and dance. The association between specific tunes and dances was dropped and tunes played for dances today no longer have distinct formations associated with them. In addition, the number of tunes in the performance repertoire of a James Bay fiddler has reduced substantially. When talking to guitarist and fiddle player Roy Ratt in Wemindji in September 2012, I was informed that there are only around six tunes (those named above) played for dancing by fiddlers today (personal communication, September 20, 2012). Within the context of a dance, these tunes tend to be performed at a very fast tempo to the accompaniment of an electronic drum machine (introduced to the area in the 1980s), a guitar and a bass. Structurally they tend to be more regimented than the older James Bay fiddle style, following a more typically Anglo-Celtic binary form of two repeated sections (AABB) with each section consisting of four or eight “bars.” The fiddlers also tend to employ less variation in terms of phrase lengths and repetitions, and this may be related to the fact that they are performing with other instrumentalists (most notably guitar and bass). Drum machines are sometimes used by fiddlers in the home, but from my experiences of hearing fiddlers in this informal context, they tended to play without electronic drum machines and at a more leisurely tempo.

In terms of dances, one of the obvious additions from the wider North American dance repertoire has been the Snowball, a common practice at the weddings and public dances I attended in Wemindji, and a term widely used in Canada and the United States to refer a certain type of “grab a partner” dance (Byron Dueck, email correspondence, February 17, 2013). On these occasions the compère for the evening encourages participants to select new partners from among the audience to take onto the floor for the subsequent dance. The Eeyou Breakdown tune is played for the Breakdown, a dance name common in other parts of Canada.<sup>29</sup> Unlike in Manitoba, where the breakdown is the third part in a three-part quadrille set (after the first change and second change), in James Bay this name appears to refer to the last part in a five-part dance set, and signifies to the fiddler that the dancers will soon take a rest and allow another group of dancers onto the floor (Lederman 2010; James Cheechoo, personal communication, May 27, 2013).

## Traditional Performance Style

The fiddle is the only melody instrument that I saw being used in the context

of dancing in James Bay. Melodeons, concertinas and accordions (often collectively described as melodeons) were popular in the early 20th century, but appear to be played only privately today. The fiddle is a solo performance instrument, and practitioners will usually play alone or with accompaniment, but rarely with another fiddler, and this has fostered the development of individual interpretations and playing styles (Cheechoo, interview with von Rosen, 2006). A spiritual element to the fiddle music and dancing was suggested to me by practitioners in Moose Factory including the step dancer Barbara Cheechoo, who described dancing for the spirits of relatives who had passed away (interview, December 7, 2011). Traditional drummer and spoons player Daisy Cheechoo later described to me the traditional belief that sighting the northern lights (*waastuuskun*) was to witness the ancestor spirits dancing in heaven to the music of the fiddle (personal communication, February 26, 2013).<sup>30</sup>

Fiddle playing continues to be almost exclusively a male domain, and during fieldwork in 2011 and 2012 I saw no sign of female fiddle players in any communities I visited. The fiddle is performed almost entirely for dancing and it is rare to see James Bay fiddlers on the concert stage, although James Cheechoo is an exception to this. Fiddlers play exclusively reels for dancing, and continue to perform one tune only for each of the individual dances that take place over the course of an evening. One tune is often played repeatedly for twenty minutes or more in order to complete the dance, and as a fiddler's repertoire is often quite small it is common to hear the same tune being played for a number of dances during the course of an evening. While there are some variations in the performance of the tune, my experience in fieldwork is that in the context of a dance where the fiddler is accompanied by an electronic drum machine and guitarists and bass player, there is less variation than in a private context. This is similar to the observations which Byron Dueck made in his research into First Nations and Métis fiddling in the public and private spheres (Dueck 2007: 30-63).<sup>31</sup>

James Bay fiddling tends not to obey metrical divisions, but has a strong one-beat pulse, and guitarists I have spoken to, including Thomas Jolly in Moose Factory, mention difficulties in accompanying some fiddlers because of variations in phrasing and structure during performance (Louttit 2007; Thomas Jolly, personal communication, December 1, 2011). Whidden describes the James Bay Cree fiddlers' innovation as the creation of a new musical genre:

The fiddle tunes did require musical changes to fit the Cree sound ideal, with its steady rhythm phrased not by metres and silences

but endless word and syllable patterns.... Each fiddler has his own version of the tunes, which they change between and even during performance. The fiddle was a new voice but followed the same musical traditions as the hunters' songs: an individual performer who made small alterations in the tunes on each repetition (2007: 40).

As with Orcadians, who concluded tunes by drawing their bow rapidly across the strings behind the bridge, the James Bay Cree likewise add concluding notes to each tune, creating an "outro" that follows a standard pattern when played. In bowing, fiddlers often employ very short strokes using a separate bow stroke for every note played. Fiddler Victor Weapenicappo from Moose Factory described this bowing and rhythmical style, which enables fiddlers to play to a fast tempo, as "shuffle bowing" (interview, November 28, 2011).<sup>32</sup> This bowing and rhythmical style has similarities with other Aboriginal fiddle traditions such as that of the Ojibwe, a First Nations Algonquian group in western Manitoba closely linguistically related to the Cree. Lederman describes their music as reflecting "a kind of 'one beat' approach to rhythm, in which the music is felt as a continuous series of steady beats without setting up any expectations in terms of grouping the beats into longer units" (Lederman 1988: 216), and Dueck also observed this style of playing during his 2002 and 2003 fieldwork (Dueck 2007: 41). This may explain the propensity for metrical irregularity and variations in phrase lengths during performance.

In the documentary *The Fiddlers of James Bay*, which follows two musicians, Ray Spencer and Robert McLeod from James Bay, as they perform at concerts in the Orkney Islands, Orcadian fiddler and Strathspey and Reel Society member Len Wilson compares the Orkney and James Bay playing styles, commenting on the differences as follows:

Music here has become very much regimented now, and there's a set format for playing. You play three pieces and so forth. But your boys, they play completely ad-lib. Every time they play a tune they play it just a little bit different, and I like especially the way that they just stop when they feel like it no matter what part of the tune it's in. They can make an end for it and just finish it off. I think perhaps it used to be like that here. I'm sure it did; I'm sure it was. (Rogers 1980)

Len Wilson's observation of the differences between James Bay fiddling and that of the Strathspey and Reel Society members ties in closely with Dueck's

examination of private and public performance by indigenous fiddlers in Manitoba. Dueck draws a distinction between the older performance styles of individual musicians playing together in intimate rural settings and the performance styles of the Frontier Fiddlers, a group of school-age musicians who are taught in small groups at a number of schools and are brought together for public performances. While music in the former setting tends to be characterized by irregular phrase lengths and an absence of regular metre, where musicians “[perform] with a steady, driving pulse, but d[o] not group this pulse into recurring units of regular and symmetrical length,” the Frontier Fiddlers perform music with a very regular metrical structure which corresponds to typical Anglo-Celtic fiddle music with tunes of 32-bar AABB form (Dueck 2007: 41-2). This regularization of metric structure and phrasing can also be seen in public performances of James Bay Cree fiddlers where the introduction of instrumental accompaniment and electronic drum machine has led to a more regularized approach to music performance.

In terms of remittance for musicians when performing for dancing, there continues to be no suggestion of monetary payment to them, but appreciation for wedding dance music is shown today through the presentation to each musician of a ribbon or a moose-hide heart sewn together and displaying the name of the wedding couple on it. This is placed on the instrument as a blessing and symbol of longevity for the life of the instrument and of the musician who plays it, and the musicians will keep the heart or ribbon attached to their instrument until the next wedding dance (Treena Cheechoo, personal communication, May 25, 2013). While it is unclear where this tradition originated, during fieldwork in 2012 it was suggested to me that this may have begun during the fur trade era when ribbons were introduced by traders and used by the James Bay Cree for decoration on clothes and at churches and dance venues. Ribbons have also been known to be used as ceremonial items in western Canada (Byron Dueck, email correspondence, February 17, 2013).

The primary role of fiddlers today is to provide musical accompaniment for dances in their communities, and the most common occasion for dancing is following a wedding reception. The event will usually take place in the community hall on a weekend and is open to the public. Other events involving fiddlers that I heard about or attended during fieldwork were dance competitions (these no longer take place but were particularly popular in the 1980s and early 1990s), a children’s square dance group (led by Barbara Cheechoo in Moose Factory), Cree cultural and community events, and musical “jam” sessions in people’s homes. While providing dance accompaniment is the main role of most James Bay fiddling today, musical gatherings in the



home appear to be especially important in terms of sociability and learning, particularly among family members. Denise Georgekish, whose late husband Frederick Georgekish was a well-known fiddler and member of a musical family in the community of Wemindji, recalled the enjoyment she experienced during musical get-togethers at their family home (interview, November 2, 2011). I observed that having “jam sessions” with family members in the home was an important aspect of the lives of musicians, and this resonates strongly with Dueck’s observations of intimacy within traditional Aboriginal ensemble music in Manitoba where collaborators were often “relatives or long-time friends” (Dueck 2007: 44).

## Learning

James Bay Cree fiddlers are almost entirely self-taught or given direction by family members, often from fathers or siblings. There is a strong hereditary aspect to the music, and in each James Bay community there are families known for music-making, with members playing fiddles, guitars and/or basses. In the case of James Cheechoo, his father Noah Cheechoo was a fiddler who played at square dances in the community, and also in their home during the evenings, where he left his fiddle hanging on the wall when it was not in use. Noah Cheechoo worked for the HBC on Charlton Island, and had recalled to James the Scots and Irish arriving on the island in their ships, and playing music and holding dances on the island (interview, November 29, 2011). This may be where Noah Cheechoo learned some of his repertoire of tunes. James recalls listening to his father play:

I was sitting there watching him play fiddle. I began to think, I wish I could do that. Years after that, I tried his fiddle. He said: “That’s OK; you’re playing my fiddle as long as you don’t break it.” I said, “OK, I won’t break it. I will look after it myself.” I used to play his fiddle and hang it up again after I finished. That was what I used to do and then I began to make at least one tune. Once I made one tune, then I would make another one. Try that, another one, and so on. So I can play fiddle. That was when I was 11, 12 years old. By the time I was 14, I could play at the dances, square dances. (Cheechoo, interview with von Rosen, 2006)

Because of the expense of buying fiddles, family members in the past often shared one fiddle, as in the case of James Cheechoo, who remembers as a child

sitting in a circle with his siblings passing the fiddle round with each person playing it while the others commented and corrected them:

Yeah, everybody played ... and they used to sit down all around the room. Sit down, living room, sit down all around, and one guy played fiddle, and next one and next one. And one guy, he doesn't know all of it, and we teach him how to do it. (Interview, November 29, 2011)

This lack of instruments may explain why the music developed into such a strong solo tradition. Fiddler Harry House from Chisasibi was not formally taught to play but expressed to me the importance of watching and listening to fiddlers as a means of learning from them. This he did for many years before even picking up a fiddle (personal communication, September 17, 2012). In contrast to movements to teach fiddle in schools in Manitoba, most notably in the Frontier School Division (the most northerly school division in Manitoba) through the introduction of fiddle classes and ensembles including the Frontier Fiddlers (Dueck 2007: 33-37), there were no traditional music programs in place in schools in James Bay communities when I was conducting fieldwork, and children have little opportunity outside their homes to take up the instrument. While there are fears about the survival of the fiddle in James Bay communities, I would argue that home-based learning and playing has also helped preserve the traditional learning and performance practice of the region through hereditary musicianship and oral transmission of the music.

## Conclusion

The James Bay Cree have shaped their music as a response to cultural encounters first with fur traders, later through contact with missionaries, and more recently through exposure to the wider Canadian media. Transatlanticism—specifically with regards to the adoption and adaptation of Scottish music by the James Bay Cree—has been a key area of concern in the study of James Bay fiddle music and in recent years, there has been a shift of interest back across the Atlantic to the Orkney Islands. The 1980 film *Fiddlers of James Bay* generated interest in both Scotland and James Bay into the cross-cultural connections, and was the first time many Orcadians had been exposed to Cree fiddle music and performance. In 2013, the transatlantic musical flow has been further recognized and celebrated through the musical and cultural visit of James, Daisy, Treena and Rita Cheechoo to North-East Scotland and

the Orkney Islands.

While there is substantial research yet to be conducted on the James Bay fiddle tradition, particularly the dance repertoire, I wrote this article to highlight some of the main aspects of the tradition, including the ways in which Scottish fiddle music and dances were synthesized with James Bay performance culture and the process of adoption of European traditions into the already strong indigenous performance tradition in the region. As this is the first study of its kind into this area of James Bay fiddle music performance (as opposed to Cree singing traditions, which ethnomusicologist Lynn Whidden has researched in depth), future enquiry is certainly necessary in order to fully substantiate the processes of Scots musical migration and Cree indigenization in this region. In terms of transatlantic musical flow, it is clear that the Cree adopted Scots fiddle music and dances into their tradition while retaining some features of Scots performance practice. This adoption of Scots customs can especially be seen in the contexts of performance and dance formations such as the Kissing Dance. At the same time, they stamped their own identity on the music, particularly through instrumentation (the use of the drum), playing technique (the use of “shuffle bowing,” for example) and compositional structures. While there are many recognizably Scottish features in James Bay Cree fiddling, it also has distinct regional features, including dance-tune combinations, tune structures and performance styles, and links to Cree cultural and spiritual beliefs. 🍁

## Notes

I would like to thank all those who helped me with my research in James Bay, Toronto, Montréal and Winnipeg in 2011 and 2012. I would especially like to thank the Cheechoo family, Byron Dueck, Beverley Diamond, Heather Sparling, Kati Szego and Anne Lederman for all their help and support with this project and article.

1. While there were some early tussles with French fur traders (for example Moose Fort was under French control for much of the time between 1686 and 1730), for the main part the James Bay Cree traded with the British Hudson’s Bay Company. Following May 1670, when the English king granted the HBC exclusive trading rights in the approximately 3,000,000 square miles of land draining into Hudson’s Bay, treaties were made with Aboriginal groups in an attempt to prevent trading with Québécois fur traders. While French fur traders still operated in the region, the British set up permanent residences in the trading posts and established more permanent ties with the James Bay Cree, and recollections from the region

about fiddle music and dancing relate to the British who were there. Today, many James Bay Cree living in Québec do not speak French, and schooling is in English and Cree. More information on French operations in James Bay can be found in Morantz and Francis (1985) and Arthur, Chapman and Massey (1949: 5-6).

2. Fieldwork in the region (in the communities of Wemindji, Chisasibi and Moose Factory) was made possible through the financial support of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Foundation for Canadian Studies in the U.K., the University of Aberdeen and the Wemindji Cultural Department.

3. According to Peter Cooke, the fiddle was first introduced to Shetland via Hanseatic traders and crew aboard Dutch herring fleets from ca. 1700. In Moose Factory, the fiddle was being played for dancing from at least 1749. Earlier records suggest that a viol was being played in Moose Factory in the late 1670s (see Arthur, Chapman and Massey 1949: 5).

4. The work of Byron Dueck (2007) is particularly relevant in terms of Aboriginal fiddling in Manitoba.

5. For ethnographic work on the Shetland Islands, Cape Breton, Manitoba and Alaska, see, respectively, Cooke (1986), Graham (2006), Lederman (1988) and Mishler (1993).

6. This was made clear to me during my time in James Bay between 2011 and 2013 through discussions with practitioners and observations during fieldwork.

7. In other areas of Canada, particularly in Manitoba, there is a very clear distinction between people who are First Nations and those with mixed First Nations and European ancestry who are identified as Métis. In James Bay, Cree with European ancestry do not commonly self-identify as Métis, but prefer to call themselves Cree. Therefore in this article I do not use the term “Métis” to refer to those from the region of mixed Cree/European descent.

8. The orthography used for Cree words in this article is from the Eastern Cree (also known as Eastern James Bay Cree) dialect of the Cree language which is spoken in Québec along the east coast of James Bay and in the southeast Hudson’s Bay region. This is the dialect that most of the fiddlers with whom I came into contact spoke, including James Cheechoo, who lives in Moose Factory but is originally from Eastmain on the Québec side of James Bay. Word spellings were taken from the East Cree web dictionary (MacKenzie et al. 2004-2010)

9. James and Daisy Cheechoo demonstrated to me the techniques of playing the taawahekan during fieldwork in November and December 2011, and in February 2013.

10. As far as I have found, there are no audio recordings of the music played for dances from this time period in Orcadian history.

11. Confusingly, a reel can refer to a kind of dance as well as to a kind of tune. A reel tune is generally marked by a fast tempo, duple metre and running sixteenth notes in stepwise motion. A strathspey, by contrast, while also in duple metre, is generally not as fast in tempo and has distinctively asymmetrical rhythms characterized especially by the “Scotch snap” rhythm (sixteenth-dotted eighth note combina-

tion), and by numerous small melodic leaps that give the strathspey its characteristic “jumpy” feel. Strathspeys normally precede reels.

12. The same strathspey is known on mainland Scotland as the Braes of Mar.

13. These words are as follows: Wha widna shak a leg, shak a leg, shak a leg, Wha widna shak a leg wi bonnie Nellie Gordon? Wha widna shak a leg, shak a leg, shak a leg, Wha widna shak a leg wi bonnie Nellie Gordon? Bonnie Nellie, pretty Nellie, bonnie Nellie, pretty Nellie, Bonnie Nellie, pretty Nellie, bonnie Nellie Gordon, Bonnie Nellie, pretty Nellie, bonnie Nellie, pretty Nellie, Bonnie Nellie, pretty Nellie, bonnie Nellie Gordon (Alan J. Bruford, interview with Ethel Findlater, June 25, 1969). Scottish tunes often have accompanying words to them. In the Western Highlands, these often consisted of nonsensical Gaelic lyrics (*puirt-a-beul*) and in the Northern Isles, the words were often repetitive and related to the tune title. For examples of this, see Campbell (2007).

14. The other styles are French-Canadian, Scottish, Anglo-Canadian, Newfoundland, Ukrainian/Eastern European and Irish (Lederman 2010).

15. This is still the case among many Cree fiddlers, and fiddle music tends to be performed by members of the same family. For example, the Ratt family in Wemindji, and the Jolly and Cheechoo family in Moose Factory. Lawrence Cheechoo is currently learning the older James Bay repertoire from his father, James Cheechoo.

16. Samuel Iserhoff was born in Rupert’s House (now Waskaganish) in 1866 and entered service in the HBC in 1881 (see Hudson’s Bay Company Archives 2013). J. W. Anderson was an apprentice and later post manager in Moose Factory, Mistissini and Rupert’s House in the early 20th century. The dances that he mentions are in reference to events that took place in 1911 in Moose Factory. I have been unable so far to find information on the straight, thrashing and round-up dances and did not witness these dances during fieldwork in 2011-2013.

17. According to James Cheechoo, however, step dancing only became popular among the James Bay Cree in the 1950s (James Cheechoo and Daisy Cheechoo, personal communication, February 26, 2013).

18. Today, Daisy Cheechoo and her son Lawrence Cheechoo are the only two known people to keep performing the drum accompaniment to the fiddle (normally in combination with James Cheechoo on the fiddle).

19. This is particularly so in communities along the west coast of James Bay. Powwow singing/drumming is particularly strong among younger Cree men in the community of Moose Factory, and is part of a nationwide growing “Native identity” movement aimed at reclaiming or strengthening Aboriginal traditions.

20. There are similar accounts from the Outer Hebrides of Scotland of ministers ordering their parishioners to burn fiddles and pipes during the height of Calvinism in the region in the 1800s. See Carmichael (1928: xxx) and Dickson (2006: 38-56) for recollections from the Western Isles. For a new world perspective (in Cape Breton), see McDavid (2008).

21. The Cree name and spelling for the Kissing Dance (Oojetsumuuhegun)

was given to me by James and Daisy Cheechoo (email correspondence, July 3, 2013).

22. Examples of these are Marbhadh na Beiste Duibhe (literally Killing of the Black Beast but translated as the Killing of the Otter), Ruidhle nan Coileach Dubha (Reel of the Black Cocks), and Dannsa na Tunnag (the Duck Dance). Descriptions of these can be found in Fletts and Flett's "Some Hebridean Dances" (1953) and *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (1964). Although these are Highland rather than Orcadian dances, the similarity in terms of animals is striking and suggests a possible connection.

23. The dance also has a history in Newfoundland. For more information on this see Maynard (2001).

24. There may well be a historical link between the Kissing Dance and the custom of house visiting at the New Year, and it is possible that fiddlers greeted others with a kiss at this time of year. Christmas and New Year was also the prime time for dances taking place at trading posts during the HBC era. This is an area that would benefit from further enquiry.

25. See, for example, Melin (2012: 41). For a video of the Cape Breton Scotch Four dance, see *MUSICultures's* YouTube channel.

26. The James Bay dance bears no apparent similarity to the Scottish Highland dance, Marbhadh na Beiste Duibh or the Killing of the Otter, mentioned earlier in this article (see Rhodes 1996:189; Flett and Flett 1953).

27. In Plains traditions, for example, the Rabbit Dance is one of the few dances in which men and women are allowed to dance together. This is a social dance in which women choose their partners and the couples hold hands crossed in front of them, dancing in a clockwise circle around the drum. In this context, dancers are accompanied by drum and singing rather than fiddle music. For more information, see the liner notes for *Music of the American Indian: Volume 1* (Various artists 1976).

28. Crooked tunes have been researched in depth in recent years by scholars including Joti Rockwell, Christina Smith and Jean Duval. For more information on "crooked tunes" see Rockwell (2011) and Smith (2007).

29. The Breakdown is described further on the website of the Canadian Old Tyme Square Dance Callers' Association (Praetzel and Smith 2013).

30. This is noticeably different from fiddling and Aboriginal practices in Manitoba, where fiddlers have spoken of a strict separation of the drum and the fiddle, describing to Anne Lederman how the fiddle was closely associated with "anti-spiritual" ideas such as the devil and drinking (email correspondence, December 31, 2012). This is in stark contrast to James Bay today, where there appears to have been a shift in the acceptability of fiddle playing, and some fiddlers are known to have taken up the instrument at the same time as giving up drinking alcohol. The fiddler Les Jolly from Moose Factory is one person who speaks of this shift from alcohol consumption to fiddle playing (interview, December 8, 2011).

31. I observed this in both Wemindji and Moose Factory in 2011 and 2012.

32. This term is also used in Acadian fiddle music, particularly by the fiddler

Louise Arsenault, to describe another regional bowing technique. Among Acadians, fiddlers deliberately don't sound particular notes to give the impression that the weak beat is accented and to create a syncopated, bowed rhythmic effect. For a more detailed analysis of this subject, see Meghan Forsyth's PhD thesis, "'*De par chez nous*:' Fiddling Traditions and Acadian Identity on Prince Edward Island" (2011: 155-60).

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