"LA GRANDE GIGUE SIMPLE" AND THE "RED RIVER JIG": A Comparative Study of Two Regional Styles of a Traditional Fiddle Tune[1]

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According to the Métis fiddler, there are differences in styles between "La grande gigue simple" in Québec and its variant "Red River Jig" from Western Canada. The former was brought to the Northwest by les voyageurs, by French Canadians searching for work, and by French-Canadian homesteaders. Over the years, this traditional step-dance melody was altered and transformed into "Red River Jig": a Métis expression typifying the "welding together of European and Indian cultures."[2]

The purpose of my study is to identify some musical characteristics of "La grande gigue simple" and "Red River Jig" through an examination of five stylistic variables: meter, phrase structure, transition patterns, opening formulae, and closing formulae. In addition, I suggest three events which have contributed to the development of the two styles. My conclusions are based on my analysis of ten versions of each of "La grande gigue simple" and "Red River Jig" which I transcribed from commercial recordings and field tapes.

The study of traditional fiddling styles in Canada, commonly identified as old-time music[3], and their associated cultural activities has received minimal investigation by the academic community. Although dedicated collectors have made significant contributions to the field through their recording of traditional melodies, few studies have ventured beyond the songbook phase. This is due, in part, to the diversity of regional styles which confronts researchers in this area and the lack of an appropriate methodology of its investigation. This study provides some insights into the French-Canadian style versus the Métis style of a traditional fiddle tune and makes some hypotheses in regard to factors of variation in the old-time fiddling style.

There are many fiddle tunes in the old time repertoire which are appropriate for an examination of regional fiddling styles and their various substyles. For my research, I have chosen "La grande gigue simple" and its variant "Red River Jig" for two reasons: 1) an adequate number of recorded examples were at my disposal and 2) the styles have many similarities in the musical form and in their socio-cultural context. Here are some examples of the latter:

— the melody is played in D major

— the melody is played on the violin tuned in an upward a/d/a^1/d^1 *scordatura*

— the melody is used to accompany a step dance

— the tune is played by two distinct cultural groups, the Métis and the French-Canadian

— the melody has survived in both regions through an oral folk tradition. However, in recent times, fiddlers imitate commercial recordings in an attempt to continue and develop their styles.

Numerous examples could be added to this list.

The twenty recordings used in this study were selected from my field tapes of Métis fiddlers whom I recorded during the summers of 1978 and 1979 in various regions of Saskatchewan and Alberta, from the audio archives of the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, National Museum of Man, and from commercial releases. The ten recordings of "La grande gigue simple" include seven commercial releases and three field recordings. Most are by québécois violoneux who were born before 1935 and are generally from the Québec City area. The nine field tapes and the one commercial recording of "Red River Jig" are by Métis fiddlers who were born before 1930. Although these fiddlers do not hail from any particular region of Western Canada, most have learned the tune from a descendant of the half-breed population or have imitated a commercial recording of "Red River Jig."

Before discussing the two styles, it might be well to review the formal structure of the melody and to consider some performance conventions of the genre. "La grande gigue simple" and "Red River Jig" are composed of two strains of unequal lengths which are repeated in binary form (ab a^1b^1 a^2b^2 etc). Part A is the section played primarily on the upper two strings and Part B is the section played primarily on the lower two strings. When accompanying a step-dance, the melody is repeated until the dance is completed while in a non-dance context, the performance is usually predetermined by the musician. The latter is generally one to four minutes long and involves two to six repetitions of the two parts.

Métis and québécois fiddlers generally perform seated with the violin held in the normal under-the-chin manner. In both regions, the fiddlers often clog a variety of steps to their music. This practice is more widespread in Québec. If instrumental accompaniment is provided, it is usually of a rudimentary chordal variety and is supplied by a piano player or a guitarist.

Variations in rhythm, tempo, melody, embellishment, and duration are found in each performance of "La grande gigue simple" and "Red River Jig." In two renditions of the former by Jean Carignan and two versions of the latter by Jimmy Pelletier, the formal structure, the melodic contours, and the rhythmical organization of the tune remain constant.[4] In addition to each musical occasion, an individual performance will contain variations

in the repeated verses. Some of these can be considered as mistakes in articulation, particularly those found in the opening verses. Such variations are often due to nervousness on the part of the amateur musicians who were taped in an unfamiliar recording situation. Musical variations, on the other hand, are developed by a fiddler over a number of years of playing the melody. Graham Townsend, for example, is one of the few old-time fiddlers who manages to make a living from the revenue from his concert appearances and the sale of his records. He plays for a listening audience rather than for the traditional dance audience. In his performance of "Red River Jig," we find an interesting rendition containing variations in rhythm and melody with a *quasi cadenza* in the final verse (see Example 1).

In all old-time performances surveyed,[5] the middle verses are more stable in terms of intonation, rhythm, tempo, and articulation than the opening verses and the concluding verses. My analysis of the two styles is based on an examination of the more stable second verses. No reference has been made to performance practice, an important segment of stylistic analysis which will have to be dealt with in another paper.

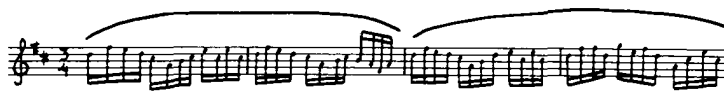
Meter

In the examples of "La grande gigue simple," the meter is triple time, while recent performances of "Red River Jig" are in duple time. Five musicians in the western sample play their Part A sections in triple meter. In this group, Genton, Laderoute, Dejarlis, and Barron were born before 1915 and learned the melody through an oral folk tradition. Berland, the fifth fiddler in the group, appears to have imitated the commercial recording of Andy Dejarlis.[6] Pelletier, a Métis fiddler who learned to fiddle through an oral folk tradition, performs his two renditions in duple time. His case will be discussed at more length later. The remaining three versions are played by younger musicians who learned much of their repertoire from commercial recordings.

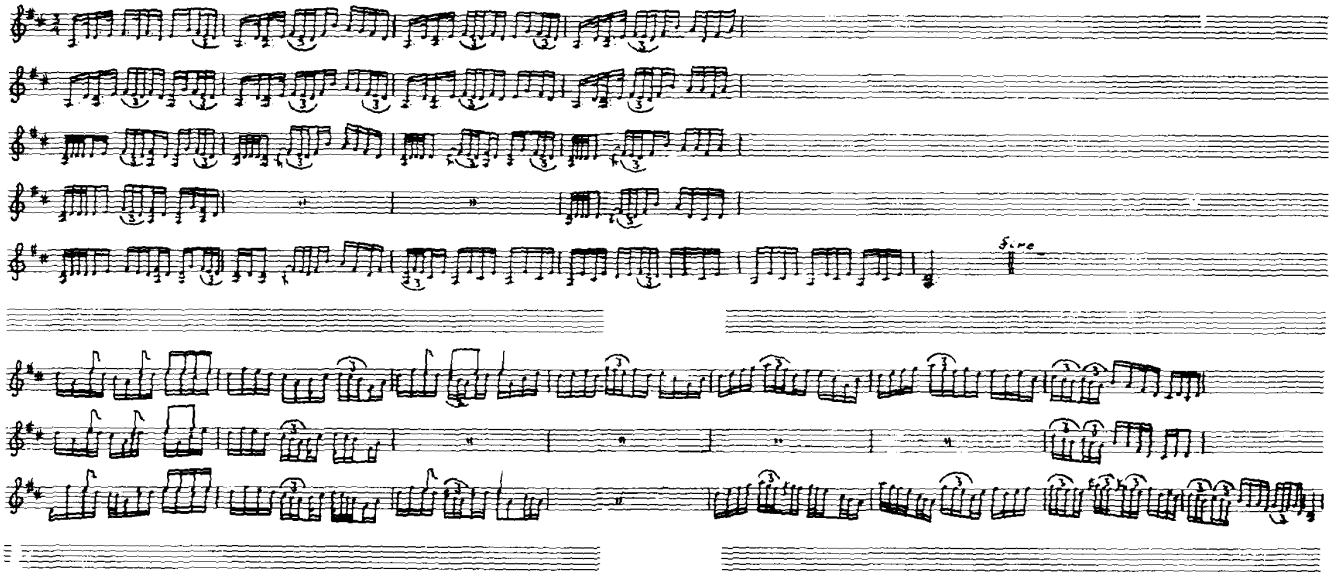
Phrase Structure

Phrases in "La grande gigue simple" are generally organized in two measures while phrases in "Red River Jig" are often asymmetric, as shown in Examples 2 and 3.

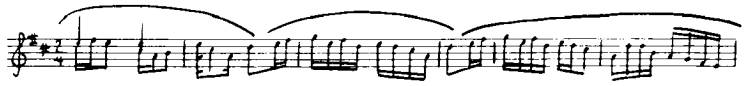
EXAMPLE 2: BEAUDOIN: from "La grande gigue simple," Philo 2022, 1976.



EXAMPLE 1: RED RIVER JIG, Townsend, Springwater S6, 1976.



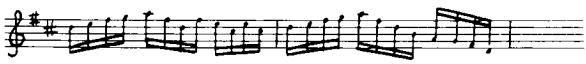
EXAMPLE 3: PELLETIER: from "Red River Jig," Johnston collection, 1959.



Transition Pattern

The transition pattern joining Part A to Part B has been examined. In the Québec examples, there is a step-wise movement from the D to the A as indicated in the following example:

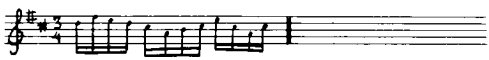
EXAMPLE 4: JOYAL: from "La grande gigue simple," Trans-World TWW-5519, n.d.
This step-wise D to A pattern was not found in any "Red River Jig" version surveyed. For the most part, their transition patterns are more diverse than in the eastern versions.[7]



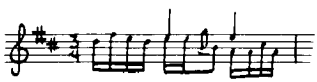
Opening Formulae

The opening formulae for Part A of "La grande gigue simple" and "Red River Jig" renditions learned through an oral folk tradition are similar. The pattern is played predominantly on the upper two strings (A and E) and has the range of a major 6th. In more recent versions of "Red River Jig," the A major triad figure (third beat of the measure) is absent. This can be seen in the following three examples:

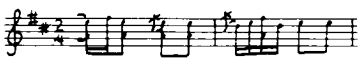
EXAMPLE 5: SOUCY: opening formulae of "La grande gigue simple," Starr 15330, n.d.



EXAMPLE 6: GENTON: opening formulae of "Red River Jig." This version was learned through an oral folk tradition. Margaret McLeod recording, 1940.

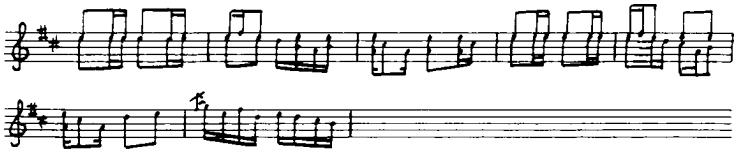


EXAMPLE 7: ANDERSON: opening formulae of "Red River Jig." Gibbons collection, 1979.

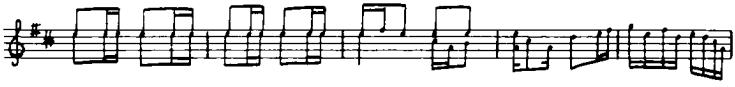


As mentioned earlier, the Pelletier renditions of "Red River Jig" were learned in an oral folk tradition but are played in duple meter. In the opening of his two renditions we find the familiar A triad pattern as illustrated below. In Example 8 the pattern is repeated in order to suit the general flow of the tune. In Example 9, the A triad is played in a duple time phrase.

EXAMPLE 8: PELLETIER: opening formulae of "Red River Jig." Johnston collection, 1959.



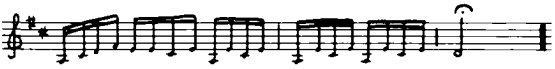
EXAMPLE 9: PELLETIER: opening formulae of "Red River Jig." Gibbons collection, 1979.



Closing Formulae

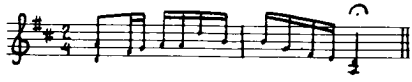
My final observations concern the closing formulae of the performances. The ending of "La grande gigue simple" (nine of the ten examples) is composed of an A major triad figure moving to the tonic D in a hemiola pattern such as the one found in the following example:

EXAMPLE 10: CARIGNAN: closing formulae of "La grande gigue simple." London M4B, n.d.



The endings of "Red River Jig" show little similarity to "La grande gigue simple" in their disposition. Here is a typical example of a Métis version:

EXAMPLE 11: DEJARLIS: closing formulae of "Red River Jig." London EB44, n.d.



In the preceding discussion, we have noticed differences between "La grande gigue simple" and "Red River Jig." Now I will

suggest three events which I feel have contributed to the development of the two styles: the introduction and adoption of new forms of popular musical genres; the loss of the oral transmission of the melody as a result of the dispersion of the Métis people after the Battle of Batoche in 1885; and the imitation of commercial recordings by Métis fiddlers.

The composer of "La grande gigue simple," as with many old-time melodies, is anonymous. According to québécois and Métis fiddlers,[7] the melody was composed by a French-Canadian fiddler during the late 18th or early 19th century. Wells suggests that its form is somewhat like the "triple-time hornpipe which was once common in England."[8] Although the origin of the tune is suspect, it is currently believed that "La grande gigue simple" first arrived in the Hudson's Bay Territories during the 19th century with les voyageurs.

By 1870, the half-breed population in the Northwest numbered around 10,000 people.[9] Their economy centered on the fur-trade. Their culture was based on Western European traditions and on the ways of the indigenous groups. Step-dancing[10] was a popular form of entertainment and the "Red River Jig" melody was a favourite accompaniment to this genre. Over the years, the "Red River Jig" melody and step-dancing became synonymous.

After the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company were transferred to the Dominion in 1870, immigrants from the United States and from Western Europe began homesteading the vast prairie land. The immigrants introduced popular forms of music and dance to the half-breed and Indian population. From the instrumental dance songbooks of the period, we get a good indication of the popularity of common-time pieces and the 6/8 time jigs. However, little reference is given to triple-time melodies, to their usage, or to their currency. It is possible that many of the melodies diminished in popularity and were simply replaced by new duple-time melodies.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the popular dance music included the following forms: the common-time reel, the common-time hornpipe, the 6/8 time jig, the polka, and the old-time waltz. By the 1930s, two-steps, fox-trots, and the modern waltz were in vogue. In recent times, younger generations show little interest in the traditional genre. Their preference is for country and western songs, rock 'n' roll music, and the disco beat. Today, "Red River Jig" is performed by a few semi-professional dance groups and in small gatherings of friends and family.

In the years following 1870, we noticed an increase in popularity for duple-time melodies for dance such as those mentioned above. This trend has influenced the Métis fiddlers in their preference for duple time in playing "Red River Jig." For example, in my sample the oldest musicians from Western Canada perform the melody predominantly in triple meter with sections organized in

duple time. Pelletier, a younger Métis fiddler, plays in duple time with clear melodic evidence of the older style. In recent times, "Red River Jig" has generally been played in duple meter.

The dispersion of the Métis people to northern parts of the Prairies is the second event contributing to the development of "Red River Jig." After the Battle of Batoche in 1885, many Métis moved northward in an attempt to maintain their traditional ways of life; others undoubtedly disappeared into mainstream white society. During the 1930s, members of the former group began an internal organization in an attempt to improve their social and economic conditions through political association. This movement united many Métis (descendants of the French-speaking half-breeds), English half-breeds, and a number of non-status Indians. Over the years, many Métis have moved to urban centres in search of employment, for better education opportunities, or for social assistance. In the process, many of the traditional ways disappeared. Today, many Métis people search for their heritage and culture through published material. In an attempt to maintain and preserve their musical traditions, fiddlers and dancers frequently turn to commercial recordings for source materials. It is evident that the "pure" folk tradition is rapidly disappearing.

Today, most old-time musicians use commercial recordings to continue and develop their folk art. During my field trip, I found that the recording of "Red River Jig" by Andy Dejarlis[11] was widely used by Métis fiddlers as source material. In the Dejarlis version, Part A is in triple time, Part B in duple time. In the performance of the dance, Part B is important as its repetitions allow for an exhibition of the dancer's jigging talents. It appears that the popularity of duple meter for jigging has also contributed to the alteration in the rhythmical organization of "Red River Jig." For example, Morris Anaquod learned the tune from the Dejarlis recording,[12] but when I transcribed the Anaquod version, I discovered that his melody was organized in duple time. Other fiddlers interviewed stated that they had used the Dejarlis recording for their source material, particularly for the jigging part (Part B). Moreover, their skills were learned when duple-time fiddle music had widespread popularity and these renditions are strictly duple-time.

In Québec, fiddlers appear to follow the tradition of the original melody faithfully. Preliminary findings seem to indicate that this reflects the differences in the immigration patterns of the 19th and 20th centuries for the two regions, and the ability of the québécois people to withstand outside cultural influences. As with their western cousins, French-Canadian fiddlers use commercial recordings to learn their tunes. All releases of "La grande gigue simple" are in triple time.

To summarize, "La grand gigue simple" has the following characteristics: it is in triple meter; the phrases are symmetrical;

there is an A triad sequence in the first measure of Part A; the transition passage reaches an A; and the closing pattern is composed of an A major figure moving to the final D. On the other hand, "Red River Jig" generally has the following traits: it is in duple time, the phrases are often asymmetric, and the closing is abrupt. Versions of "Red River Jig" learned in an oral folk tradition are similar to the eastern version in meter, phrase structure, and opening pattern, but differ in the transition pattern and closing formulae. The differences in style are attributed to the immigration patterns of the two regions, to the various socio-cultural influences on each culture, and to the preferences for commercial fiddling artists.

FOOTNOTES

1 This paper is a revision of one read at the 1980 Annual Meeting of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada at Université du Québec à Montréal. My research into traditional fiddling music from Western Canada was made possible through research contracts with the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, National Museum of Man and the Canadian Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee, Multiculturalism Directorate.

2 Native Council of Canada, "The Métis and Multiculturalism." A paper presented at the Third Canadian Conference on Multiculturalism, October 27-29, 1978.

3 Old time music is loosely applied to the traditional instrumental dance music from Western Europe, primarily that of the British Isles, which was imported to North America with early immigration. The repertoire consists of a vast number of melodies in the form of reels, hornpipes, jigs, and waltzes which have survived through an oral folk tradition, in songbooks from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, and on commercial recordings. To this corpus of melodies, popular commercial fiddlers of recent times have added their own melodies in the traditional style.

4 These features were noted in the aural transcription of the Pelletier and Carnignan renditions. Sonograms were used to compare the tempo of common passages and a strobocon was used to verify pitch. I wish to thank Fred Granger of the National Museum of Man for preparing the sonograms and for his helpful comments on their interpretation.

5 Roy W. Gibbons, "200 Old Time Fiddle Melodies from British Columbia: A Final Report" (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, MS, 1979).

6 Andy Dejarlis, "Red River Jig" in *Andy Dejarlis and His Early Settlers* (London EB 44, n.d.).

7 Roy W. Gibbons, "Progress Report on Ethnomusicology of the Métis in Alberta and Saskatchewan" (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, 1980, typewritten MS.)

8 Paul F. Wells, liner notes in *La famille Beaudoin* (Philo 2022, 1976).

9 Canada, Sessional Papers 1876, Annual Report of the Dept. of the Interior for the Year Ended 30th June, 1875, Part III, p. 8.

10 Emmerson notes that "any step-dance . . . tended to be called a hornpipe even if it were performed to a jig." George S. Emmerson, *Rantin' Pipe and Tremblin' String* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1971), p. 116.

11 Andy Dejarlis, op. cit.

12 Morris Anaquod, Interview, Muscowpetung Indian Reserve, Sask., July 1979.

Résumé: *Roy W. Gibbons étudie "La grande gigue simple" interprétée sur violon au Québec, et sa variante de l'ouest, "The Red River Jig." Il analyse la mesure, la structure de la phrase, les dessins de transition, dix formules d'entrées et dix formules de finales. Il constate des différences variées dans le style lesquelles sont attribuables à des modèles dus à l'immigration, à des influences socio-culturelles et à des préférences pour violonistes à tendance commerciale.*