

Amanda Elaine Daly Berman

Boston University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of Musicology and Ethnomusicology

Repression to Reification: Remembering and Revitalizing the Cape Breton Musical Diaspora in the Celtic
Commonwealth

INTRODUCTION

Cape Breton Island, the northeast island of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, has long had a strong connection with New England, and the Boston area in particular, due to its maritime location and relative geographic proximity. At its peak in the mid-20th century, the Boston Cape Breton community is estimated to have numbered close to 100,000 members. However, as Sean Smith writes in the June 3, 2010 issue of the *Boston Irish Reporter*,

Greater Boston's Cape Breton community is undergoing a transition, with the graying of the generation that played such a major role during the 1950s and 1960s in establishing this area as a legendary outpost for music and dance of the Canadian Maritimes. Subsequent generations of Cape Bretoners have simply not come down to the so-called "Boston states" on the same scale, according to the elders; what's more, they add, the overall commitment to traditional music and dance hasn't been as strong as in past generations.¹

Further, he notes that it is "non-Cape Bretoners [e.g., members of other Maritime communities, non-Cape Breton Bostonians] who seem to make up more of the attendance at these monthly dances" held at the Canadian-American Club (also known as the Cape Breton Gaelic Club) in Watertown, Massachusetts. The club serves as a gathering site for area members of the Cape Breton and the greater Maritime diaspora, offering a monthly Cape Breton Gaelic Club Ceilidh and weekly Maritime open mic sessions. It is also home to twice-monthly gatherings of the Reynolds-Hanafin-Cooley branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóiri Éireann, which promotes the teaching and performance of Irish music, dance, and culture,² and weekly Irish step

¹ Much of the local reporting on Cape Breton and its music is published in the *Boston Irish Reporter*.

² Comhaltas Ceoltóiri Éireann, <http://www.cceboston.org/> (accessed October 16, 2013).

dancing lessons.³ Individual Irish, country-western, and Cape Breton artists also play dances and concerts on occasion.

In this dissertation, I will examine the current state of the music of the Cape Breton diaspora in the Boston area. I will investigate how Cape Breton culture is performed and practiced: what the Cape Breton diasporic identity is; whether diasporic music continues to portray the hegemonic Scottish Cape Breton culture, or takes on a distinct Cape Breton identity; and how technological developments have aided the development and maintenance of a digital Cape Breton diaspora, both in transmission of performance and culture and in musical lessons given online. Further, it considers how the concept of culture-specific medical ethnomusicology can be used with members of an aging diasporic community for emotional sustenance and palliative care.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The term diaspora has become so frequently used that Brubaker contests that a “‘diaspora’ diaspora” (2005) exists: the term itself has dispersed and become part of many a discipline and/or conceptual framing. Overwrought though many feel the term may be, diaspora is a useful tool for critically examining a group of people away from its place of origin because of globalization, immigration, and the continued ease of exposure to other cultures as facilitated by technology and improvements in transit. I will be applying the term to those from Cape Breton who have come to the Boston area, and will refer to the characteristics of a diaspora as outlined by William Safran (1991; 2005) and further developed by Robin Cohen (1995; 2008), given that many of the characteristics they suggest can be applied to the Cape Breton community. Among the most salient of these are leaving the homeland to go to two or more locations in search of work, the collective memory of the homeland, and their

wish to survive as a distinct community—in most instances as a minority—by maintaining and transmitting a cultural and/or religious heritage derived from the ancestral home and the symbols based on it. In so doing, they adapt to hostland conditions and experiences to become themselves centers of cultural creation and elaboration. (Safran 2005, 37).

³ Mary MacGillivray, Canadian-American Club of Massachusetts, <http://www.canadianamericanclub.com/Dance-Lessons-at-the-club.html> (accessed October 16, 2013).

To many, diaspora still holds the connotation of involuntary movement, even though the definition has expanded to include groups who have elected to leave their homeland, usually for employment purposes, as well as those who make a second move to a third location, as seen with Cape Bretoners who moved to the United States, Australia, or other parts of Canada.⁴ These moves made for musical imprints on the geographic sites and the peoples – a phenomenon I am calling culture-in-motion. I will use this coined term in conjunction with Roberta Knowles' (2009) idea of "cultural memory as...performative"⁵ to examine the Cape Breton musical community. The concepts will serve as lenses for analyzing how music's progression serves as a means for studying the results of influences, intermixtures, and other interactions between the diaspora and the hostland, as well as how the music has provided cultural continuity through two separate diasporic moves, that is, from other nations to Cape Breton, and then again from Cape Breton to Boston.

Though Cohen tips his hat to Safran for providing parameters that prevented diasporic definitions from going haywire, Mark Slobin (2012) notes that the boundaries of the term diaspora, much as with the borders of diasporic communities, are impossible to neatly corral; yet, Slobin reminds us that world changes must be considered and worked with when locating a group in question "under the increasingly broader circumference of the diasporic umbrella" (2008, 5).⁶ Diagrammatic approaches, in as seen in Kay Kaufman Shelemay's work on the Ethiopian diaspora (2011), are particularly useful given this etymology of diaspora as indicating multidirectional movement.⁷

Slobin notes that migration and movement are not new phenomena by any means, but the way and the amount to which groups of people interact, be it in person or virtually, allows for "everyday multi-

⁴ See McCabe, Harlaftis, and Minoglou 2005 for case studies of numerous entrepreneurial diaspora networks and Akenson 2010 for a critical re-evaluation of the Irish diaspora, including the acknowledgement that being a member of a diaspora, particularly in the first generation, does not universally indicate abject poverty.

⁵ The Irish pub phenomenon is but one example of this. The Irish faced discrimination during their early years in Boston ("No Irish need apply" remains a famous phrase in the city's history), yet today, semiotic shamrockery (Vallely 2003) is prevalent, with "authentic" Irish restaurants, music sessions, and step dancing schools proliferating throughout the greater Boston area. Several of the city's professional sports leagues even feature green/Irish-themed versions of their apparel, in what has become a region-wide display of performative identity. Truly, the diaspora's role in the region has been redefined over time.

⁶ Bohlman writes of "Irish and/or Celtic diasporas" (2007, 187).

⁷ A Venn diagram would effectively show locations and overlap.

sitedness” (2012, 99), and his call for intra-diasporic music (102) is a useful contemporary lens for focusing on the everyday musical interactions that occur among diasporic cultures and their shared homelands. This mimics Tina K. Ramnarine’s 2007 concept that “diasporic music-making can be understood in the ordinariness of creative production, as musicians working as individual agents in their everyday environments, making musical choices that suit them and their audiences” (2007, 7). Slobin’s declaration that music and food are the two most powerful provokers of memory is indeed true – music’s ineffable quality allows it to trigger remembrances of one’s past, imagined or actual. Music is particularly useful for showcasing this motion in action as sound waves themselves, much the same as wafting scents of food, travel through the air to reach a different destination, one’s aural or olfactory senses, respectively. However, Martin Stokes (2004) acknowledges, as does Slobin, that music indeed “plays an active role in creating and shaping global spaces that otherwise would not have ‘happened’” (67) and that music has an unparalleled ability to speak to collective experiences. Shelemay, in her 2011 discussion of musical communities, declares that, much as with culture-in-motion, “community is a term that needs to be approached ‘in action’” (364). I will work off Turino’s (2004) statement that “...diasporas depend on expressive cultural practices for their very existence” (4). Appropriately, the rise in homeland tourism (Powers 2011) seems to signal the next theoretical direction – cultures are now not only studied in their new homeland, but also are discussed in regards to how they can be drawn back to their original location, however many generations removed that may be.

Lastly, the writings of the diasporic group may also be affected by the changes in publication outlets, i.e., the decline of the printed text. However, for those who are technologically literate, chat rooms, Facebook pages, and message boards can provide a means of connection. Paul Basu’s (2009) work on the Scottish diaspora recognizes that such boards allow a platform for e-gniting (igniting emotions via the web) glorification of the homeland. Further, the imagined homeland can find a new borderless, spaceless home online. Jennifer Brinkerhoff’s (2009) argument states that

migrant integration can be eased when diasporans (members of diasporas) have opportunities to express their hybrid identities (a sense of self that is neither wholly of the homeland nor exclusively reflective of the hostland) collectively (2).

This lens is helpful for considering the phenomenology of the musicodigital experience of Cape Breton for diasporic individuals and communities who want to connect to and perhaps learn from the homeland. These individuals may be one or three generations removed from the homeland of Cape Breton.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this dissertation, I will examine various facets of the Cape Breton musical diaspora. I will address performance practice by looking at how events at the Canadian-American Club and other venues serve as a liminal zone for experiencing Cape Breton culture and maintaining a marked Canadian identity rather than assimilating into mainstream American culture. While the New England diasporas of the different Maritime provinces interact socially and musically, the fiddle music and distinct performance techniques, the emphasis on dancing in conjunction with live music, and the unique style of piano playing help distinguish Cape Breton diasporic music. However, the idea of whether a Celtic identity, particularly Irish, or the idea of Boston Irishness as a whole, has subsumed the contemporary Cape Breton diasporic musical identity, has proven ripe for study; while the Cape Breton diaspora has decreased in size and increased in age, Boston has developed an Irish sense of self in the mid- to late-20th century. At the same time, the demographics of South Boston, the city's historically Irish neighborhood, are rapidly changing. Irish orientalism (Lennon 2008), shamrockery (Vallely 2003), and the idea of "Gaelic" as a performed cultural concept rather than a language all play parts in the performance of the Celtic identity in the region.

I will examine how the tartanization of Cape Breton presents itself in the diaspora in the Boston area and the relevance of authentic Cape Breton tradition and practice in the New England region. The presence of Scottish Gaelic, both as a spoken language, and as a linguistic informant of diasporic music, will be addressed, with consideration of the role of cultural revival in this process. I will also investigate how the local and the tourist politically and lyrically utilize Maritime diasporic longing and identification to their advantage; the annual dedication of the Boston Common Christmas tree by a Nova Scotian family and

the ensuing celebration, and the lyrics of both Maritime standards and contemporary pop songs alike as prime examples.

I will utilize my coined term of culture-in-motion to address how music produced in the diaspora informed the performance and development of Cape Breton music on the island itself. In addition, I will discuss the role radioscaping has played in Cape Breton music, both in providing country-western influences to the island, and as a source in the diaspora for Maritime, Celtic, and specifically Cape Breton music, e.g., the weekly Downeast Ceilidh program on WUMB 90.9 FM. Also, given the increased role of technology in maintaining diasporic relations by articulating, showcasing, celebrating, and reinforcing family and cultural ties, I will analyze the role the Celtic digital diaspora has in the preservation of the Boston segment of the Cape Breton diaspora, including the presence and role of online musical and linguistic study with tradition-bearers in the genre.

Lastly, given the aforementioned aging of the first-generation subgroup of the Cape Breton diaspora, I will investigate how culture-specific music medicine may be utilized with the community; that is, what effects discussing, experiencing, and performing Cape Breton cultural and musical traditions could have in palliative care.

SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION

While a number of scholars have written on the subject, there are still a number of gaps in the ethnomusicological literature on Cape Breton music, both in Canada and in the diaspora. Edith Fowke (1972) and Helen Creighton (1972) blazed a path with their fieldwork and recordings of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton folk songs, and Allister MacGillivray (1981) provided an essential resource on the biographies of many of the main fiddlers around the island. Glenn Graham (2006) uses surveys to gain the perspective of Cape Breton fiddlers, but he only gathers data from nineteen people, and they are all concentrated in the Inverness area; thus, while the data is extremely rich and useful, it does not give a true sense of the various approaches, styles, and beliefs present across the island.

Paul M. MacDonald's chapter in A.A. MacKenzie (1999) on Irish music in Cape Breton is one of the only such sources available. Jasmine McMorran (2013) provides a much-needed history of piano accompaniment in the tradition. Barry Shears (2008), in his writing on the bagpipes' role in Nova Scotia, springboards off of the work of Roderick Cannon (2002) and John G. Gibson (2002). Heather Sparling (1999a; 1999b; 2008) writes on the potential for creating a theory of Cape Breton music, *puirt-a-beul*, and disaster songs.⁸ Thomas Pease (2006) writes on recent developments in Gaelic music, but the article is limited in size and scope, as it only covers the years 1991 to 2006.

Folklorist Burt Feintuch (2010) provides one of the most rich and recent reflections on Cape Breton via interviews with more than a dozen of the main players in the island's cultural development, including Celtic Colours co-creator Joella Foulds, Kimberley Fraser, Jerry Holland, Buddy MacMaster, and Alistair MacLeod.⁹ Notably, of these authors, only Graham, MacDonald, MacGillivray, and Shears are actually from Cape Breton in the "born and raised" definition, and only Graham presents his work via an ethnomusicologically-trained lens.¹⁰

A few books have been written about Canadian music as a whole (Diamond and Witmer 1994, Morey 1997, Wells 1978) but they do not address Cape Breton in depth. Further, writing on Scottish studies seems to have grown even in the past five years, as noted by the dates of the items in this paper's bibliography. A good amount has been written about Cape Breton being home to Scottish diasporans. However, very little info exists about Canadian diasporas.¹¹ Burrell (1982), Beattie (1992), Feintuch (2002), Gedutis (2005), Lavengood (2008), and Woods (2011) all discuss the Cape Breton diaspora in its main sites of Boston; Detroit; Windsor, Ontario; and Toronto, Ontario, but only in passing. The Boston Irish diaspora has been discussed in passing by many and in detail by Thomas O'Connor (1994; 1997). However, music

⁹ Surprisingly, this book is published in China; many of the other texts list Canadian layout designers and publishing sites.

¹⁰ Sheldon MacInnes (1997) and Richard MacKinnon (2009), both Cape Bretoners, write about music and folklore, respectively; however, MacInnes's account reads more as an autobiography that reflects on his role in the industry, and MacKinnon discusses solely protest music's history on the island. Charles Dunn (2003) provides documentation of many of the Gaelic poems that may soon be lost giving the oral tradition.

¹¹ As Canada itself is still considered a commonwealth of the United Kingdom, and thus tied to the colonial legacy, the work of Hesse, Hall, Clifford, and Gilroy, all of whom are Afro-Caribbean British postcolonialists, could prove fruitful for theoretical discussions of diasporas residing in Canada.

receives little attention in O'Connor's research. What remains undiscussed in the literature is the diasporas of the countries that are the main destinations of many diasporic members, namely, the United States and Canada. Instead, those who leave these two countries are often thought of as expatriates, a term that implies a voluntary and permanent departure and also breaks down to read as formerly from the country; thus, their diasporas remain underexamined, perhaps because Canada is seen by some as a "diasporized nation-state" (Brazier and Mannur 2003, 18), that is, a country composed of different diasporic groups. Nina Varsava (2007) writes of Canada as lacking a unified identity, and the country prides itself on its policy of multiculturalism -- it is touted as the most multicultural country in the world.¹² Many both in the homeland and in the diaspora think of themselves as Cape Bretoners first and Canadians second.

CONTEXT

The island of Cape Breton, originally settled by Mi'kmaq First Nations peoples, was the arrival point for many Scottish people following the Highland Clearances in the mid-1800s. While the island has been home to a myriad of cultures due to its coal and steel mining industries attracting workers from Barbados to Ukraine and the immigration of Acadian, Irish, and aforementioned Scottish peoples, efforts in the 1950's to paint the island Scottish gave agency to the tartanization of the island. This image has remained to the present day, even though, according to MacKenzie (1999), only 60% of the island is of Scottish descent. Cape Breton and Nova Scotia both have their own tartans, and the tartan features prominently in the Tourism Nova Scotia logo.

Connected to the Scottish image, a particularly significant factor in Cape Breton culture is the reification of Gaelic language due to its status as the last remaining North American *Gàidhealtachd*, or Gaelic-speaking location. Musicians that excel in Cape Breton fiddling are often described as "having the Gaelic," meaning that their playing mimics the rhythms and intonations of the Gaelic language. Many Cape

¹² The Fall 2013 issue of *Ethnomusicology* features a review essay on music and diaspora (Witzleben), an article about the chop in North Atlantic fiddling (Risk), and also mentions a low amount of writing in the journal on Canada (Witzleben). Canada often gets lumped in with United States organizations, including Society for Ethnomusicology. Even Canada's beloved sport, hockey, is played at the professional level with the American-based National Hockey League.

Breton events and happenings are advertised with both English and Gaelic slogans. The island's most prominent event, Celtic Colours Festival, has added a slogan in Scottish Gaelic for the 2013 gathering: "Mealaibh ar dualchas" ("Experience it all"). While many countries and cultures use their heritage as a marker for tourist purposes, Cape Breton has gone one step further with its steadfast goal of reviving the Gaelic language. The island created an Office of Gaelic Affairs in 2006 to aid in these efforts (Feintuch 2010), and several grammar and secondary schools offer Gaelic language study or even Gaelic immersion programs.¹³ Children whose ancestors were beat for speaking Gaelic are now encouraged to speak and sing in the lilting language. Notably, "Gaelic" as a performative idea is commonly seen in the Boston area, but the presence of the language itself within the area is not well documented.

The completion of the Canso Causeway in 1955 made travel to mainland Nova Scotia and to (and from) "the Boston States" much more feasible. Prior to it, Cape Breton was only accessible via boat, train, or airplane; even today, the long, snowy winters of the region can impede travel. Young, single women often came to Boston in the early-to-mid-20th century for domestic jobs, similar to Irish women. Construction work provided young men with an income that farming or fishing often could not. Whole families also moved to the Boston area to make a better life for themselves, though older relatives or those with young families of their own sometimes chose to stay in Cape Breton.

The cultural coupling of music and dance served as a popular way for new arrivals to meet other Cape Bretoners now living in the Boston area, see the people that they knew from "down home," and to enjoy the culture so familiar to them. Cape Breton dances often shared space with or occurred in close geographic proximity to Irish dances. These events, detailed vividly by Susan Gedutis (2004), peaked between the 1940s and the 1960s, with musicians playing to packed houses several nights a week at halls in

¹³ The government of Canada recently created a Department of African Nova Scotia Affairs. Intriguingly, Halifax (the capital of the province of Nova Scotia, which encompasses Cape Breton) formed the African Nova Scotia Affairs Integration Office in 2012. The use of the loaded term "integration" indicates a separated status of Africans as not "full" members of the Nova Scotian community. However, the Office of Gaelic Affairs seeks to promote the Gaelic language and culture, regardless of the heritage of those studying it. Notably, both an African Heritage Month and Gaelic Awareness Month are celebrated each year in Nova Scotia. Celtic Colours International Festival, *Irish Music Magazine*, last modified May 29, 2013, <http://www.irishmusicmagazine.com/2013/05/29/celtic-colours-international-festival-11/>

the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. Some of the finest Cape Breton fiddlers and pianists, including Holland, Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald, Angus Chisholm, Bill Lamey, and Lila Hashem, cut their teeth or displayed their virtuosity at these events, and many permanently moved to the Boston area during these decades. They also held kitchen parties, as showcased in the recording *Full Circle: From Cape Breton to Boston and Back: Classic House Sessions of Traditional Cape Breton Music 1956-1977* (Rounder 2000). In an audiologically ironic twist, Massachusetts-based Rounder Records also made some of the first commercially available recordings of Cape Breton artists, albums that were listened to in the homeland and diaspora alike.

With the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, there came great demographic changes to the neighborhoods, and the dances faded away. The Hibernian Hall, one of the most recognized sites for Cape Breton and Irish dances, recently celebrated its hundredth anniversary with “an evening that included the presentation of awards to members of Roxbury’s arts community and performances by Irish step dancers, an Irish string quartet, a steel drum band, and a James Brown impersonator,”¹⁴ a reflection of the different communities present then and now in the area. The Cape Breton and Irish diasporas have now largely moved to the South Shore and MetroWest suburbs, with a sizable Irish community remaining in the Dorchester and South Boston neighborhoods of Boston. There are numerous festivals and dozens of pubs in the greater Boston area devoted to Irish music and culture, and sixth-generation Irish-Americans are signed up for step-dancing lessons as toddlers simply because they are Irish and it is what is done. Irish immigrants continue to arrive in Boston, but the Cape Breton diasporic population has taken a downward curve. Cape Breton artists are featured performers at Irish, Scottish, and pan- Celtic festivals, but are rarely featured on their own; rather, they are often grouped under the Celtic umbrella.

At its peak, Cape Breton provided coal for 40% of Canada (Morgan 1999), but due to changes in fuel production and consumption combined with mismanaged companies, the last coal mine closed in the mid-1990s. Even during the height of production, the wages paid to coal miners was moderate at best. The

¹⁴ Jasper Craven and Jeremy C. Fox, “Time Capsule Found in Hibernian Hall,” *Boston Globe*, October 11, 2013, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/10/10/time-capsule-found-wall-hibernian-hall-just-time-for-centennial-celebration/ojdKLzksAvtfoUdBgHtlaO/story.html> (accessed October 11, 2013).

island's formerly strong steel industry has also collapsed due to issues with the economy and management; paradoxically, the island touted by publications the world over for its pristine and pure beauty also faced structural blight and environmental waste as a result of the closed mills and mines.

In addition to Boston, many of those who left Cape Breton went to larger cities, such as Halifax, Nova Scotia; Windsor, Ontario; and its border city, Detroit, Michigan, which is itself facing economic peril.¹⁵ Today, islanders who leave Cape Breton for work are increasingly heading west to Calgary and Fort McMurray, Alberta; the latter provides a steady income in the oil industry and flights leave regularly from Sydney's (the capital of Cape Breton) small airport. David Wray's article "Daddy Lives at the Airport: The Consequences of Economically Driven Separation on Family Life in the Post-Industrial Mining Communities of Cape Breton" (2012) is a reflection of this liminal zone in which many a Cape Bretoner today resides.

The titles of fiddle tunes have served for years, unintentionally or not, to help locate the geographical and emotional journeys and associations of composers: "Sandy MacIntyre's Trip to Boston," "In Memory of Herbie MacLeod," "Brenda Stubbert's Reel," and many others. This is seen not only in contemporary compositions, but with the 18th century Scottish collections, e.g., "Niel Gow's Lament for the Death of his Second Wife," a tune played today by such artists as the Barra MacNeils. In addition, the work by Paul Cranford, Kate Dunlay, David Greenberg, and others from "away" to document the island's fiddle music in descriptive and prescriptive formats allow for printed versions of a hybrid oral-written tradition.

While the island's physically isolated geographical location and lack of affordable travel options to it can make visiting the island difficult, technology has served an invaluable role in promoting the island's music, performers, and the Gaelic language. Prominent fiddlers such as Kimberley Fraser and Andrea Beaton, from the famed Beaton line of musicians, offer Skype lessons, and the celebrated Celtic Colours festival features livestream broadcasts for several nights of performances, allowing members of the diaspora, as well as traditional music enthusiasts, virtual access to the festival. Though Cape Breton is

¹⁵ Even less is written about the Cape Breton communities in Detroit/Windsor and Toronto than Boston, but there are still Cape Breton clubs in both areas.

small in physical size, technology is allowing its cultural reach to span the world, and the emerging discourse on digital diaspora (Brinkerhoff 2009; Everett 2009; Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010) provides an especially useful lens for discussing musical transmissions and interactions in cyberspace. A number of Maritime-based online Scottish Gaelic programs are also available. Yet, the Gaelic language is far less prominent in the Boston area. Its presence is most seen in Irish orientalism (Lennon 2008), shamrockery (Vallely 2003), and the use of the term “Gaelic” as a Celtic, or specifically Irish, qualifier; the most extreme example of this is Gaelic Nail Spa on Broadway in South Boston. Untranslated Gaelic songs can be heard on WROL 980 AM’s weekly Irish Hit Parade program, and in-person Irish Gaelic courses are offered in a number of locations. However, Scottish Gaelic is only available for a two-semester, and irregularly offered, course of study at Harvard University; and at monthly gatherings at the Canadian-American Club.

Both Scottish and Irish culture have taken on a caricatured symbology in American culture. Many an Irish pub exists that is only Irish in name and through the presence of strategically deployed symbols, such as shamrock/Celtic patterns and Guinness and bangers and mash on the menu; Irish music, either pop or traditional, is seldom featured. At the other extreme, some pubs have been constructed in Ireland and shipped over to the United States as a marker of authenticity; the Kinsale in Boston’s Scollay Square is one example of this. Scottish culture largely lives in the public eye via the presence of Highland Games celebrations, including a large gathering at New Hampshire’s Loon Mountain, and Titled Kilt pubs, marketed as a bekilted equivalent of Hooters. In this mix of this, Cape Breton culture seems to serve almost as a Celtic floater, with musicians appearing both at Irish cultural festivals and Highland Games alike. Cape Breton artists, both from the island proper and from the diaspora, also perform regularly as part of broader Celtic music events. However, they rarely play to large crowds as solo performers; Natalie MacMaster is the most well-known exception to this rule, and she still often visits house parties after her performances in venues such as Sanders Theatre in Cambridge or Mechanics Hall in Worcester. While artists such as Celtic Woman, Celtic Thunder, John McDermott, and the Irish Tenors play concert halls and arenas, the most esteemed local Cape Breton artists often are found at the local diasporic halls or at kitchen parties. This is

seemingly a reflection of the performance practice of the Cape Breton tradition, which saw music staying community-based and less formally performed until the recent rise in tourism to the island and Celtic studies as a whole.

Connected to the growth in Celtic studies, while some in Scotland may eschew “the Cape Breton bandwagon,” as “for them, Scottishness is defined as what Scottish people do, not what they might have done in the past” (Dembling 2005, 186), Hunter states that “today, any reticence there may previously have been about Cape Breton Island’s Scottish connections has given way to a widespread desire to know more about them” (2005, 154). Dembling reflects on this, stating that “a small but influential segment of the traditional Scottish music and dance community is in effect arguing that Cape Breton’s traditions are more authentically Scottish than their own. It is an argument for the counterflow of cultural authenticity from the diaspora to the source” (2005, 180; Dembling is referring here to movement from Cape Breton to Scotland). Notably, the music of the Cape Breton diaspora also played a large role in the tradition’s maintenance and dispersal. As mentioned previously, Rounder Records, based in Massachusetts until recently, produced many of the first recordings of Cape Breton musicians (MacKinnon, 1989; Scully, 2008).

The question of just what constitutes Cape Breton music remains to be fully answered. Holland speaks to this: “I’d say Cape Breton music is in general a stew pot, in a sense—there’s no one music that stays exactly the same, as least that I’m aware of, as far as traditions go” (Feintuch 2010, 106). Further, he notes,

There’s [*sic*] so many Irish tunes that are in the Cape Breton repertoire here, that are not so much played with the Irish embellishments which defines the styling. I think if you were to take the Irish tunes out of the Cape Breton repertoire you’d have a pretty bare-looking skeleton. You’d be taking at least a minimum of 35 to 45 percent of the tunes away. You’d be taking the biggest part of the jigs away from here, and a lot of the reels. (105)

The types of fiddle tunes played —jigs, reels, strathspeys, airs, hornpipes, and waltzes—confirm both Scottish and Irish, and perhaps even English, influence. What is recognized as the hallmark of Cape Breton music is the “dirt,” or driven bow sound of the fiddle; the expression “driv’er” (Feintuch 2010, 264) is frequently used. The Gaelic language and the connection between Gaelic speech patterns and the rhythms

of the music (see Sparling 2008) are seen as essential to the tradition. In addition, Acadian culture has begun in the past few years to draw attention to itself from both an emic and etic perspective in scholarly discourse and in performance. Joe Cormier, a noted Cape Breton fiddler who is from Chéticamp and has lived in Waltham, Massachusetts for decades, showcases the Acadian influences in the genre.

Less discussed in scholarly discourse is the popular song in Cape Breton music, particularly its role in the diaspora. Song lyrics often reflect longing, as seen in such titles as the folk song “Farewell to Nova Scotia” and “If I Can’t Take the Island with Me,” a contemporary piece sung by coal-miner choir Men of the Deeps and written by Cape Bretoners Shauna Lee MacKillop and Aaron Lewis.¹⁶ “Song for the Mira,”¹⁷ which described the beauty of the island’s Mira River and the people of the area, is considered an unofficial anthem of Cape Breton. Its lyrics are geographically specific but it is covered the world over; one of the most famous versions of “Mira” is by Irish popular artist John McDermott. Many an artist in the country music and Celtic spheres has covered it, and “Mira” has been translated into several languages, including Japanese.¹⁸ It is striking that even those who are present on the island acknowledge the sense of loss so often present in Cape Breton culture. Placing the role and meaning of such song lyrics in the Boston community will be telling.

Further, country music has also long been played both on the radio and in conjunction with Cape Breton-style music, and the genre has influenced fiddling and vocal traditions today; country songs, both classic and contemporary, often pepper the kitchen party set list. The first iteration of Nashville Nor’East, a festival celebrating Nova Scotia’s connection to country music and featuring both Nova Scotia country artists and marquee names in country music, will occur in Sydney, Cape Breton’s capital, in May 2014.¹⁹

¹⁶ Tom Knapp, Review of Men of the Deeps, *Coal Fire in Winter* (Atlantica, 1996) http://www.rambles.net/mendeeps_coal.html (accessed October 31, 2013). Full disclosure: Lewis is a cousin of mine, though as of this writing we have not met in person.

¹⁷ Music and lyrics by Allister MacGillivray (1976).

¹⁸ Krista L. Roberts, 2012, “Song for the Mira,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/emc/song-for-the-mira> (accessed March 24, 2013).

¹⁹ Nashville Nor’East, <http://www.nashvillenoreast.com> (accessed October 18, 2013). Interestingly, the nominations for the top-billed artist are all American country singers (e.g., Luke Bryan, Toby Keith).

The country music connection is seen in the diaspora as well, with the quartet The Country Masters regularly performing at both the French Club and the Canadian-American Club.

Lastly, while little exists theoretically on medical ethnomusicology (Bakan 2007, Barz 2006, and Koen 2008 all provide site-specific theory for their case studies; and 2008 saw the release of *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology*), I will use Stige's 2002 concept of culture-centered music therapy, as well as lyrical analysis of songs of longing, as a means for exploring the phenomenology of diasporic remembrance and preservation.

METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological approach to diaspora will be both theoretically supported and feasible for this project;²⁰ that is, experiencing, documenting, and analyzing the day-to-day musical happenings and practices of the Cape Breton diaspora via interviews, performance practice, and examining the role of technology in musical engagement, rather than solely focusing on performance events. The ethnomusicological case studies of Irish music in America by Mick Moloney (1992) and Polish-American music in Detroit by Paula Savaglio (2004) will serve as templates, as the former provides an in-depth discussion of the performance and role of Celtic music in the United States, and the latter details the musical activities of a diasporic community in American city which happens to also be home to a large Cape Breton population. My Cape Breton "halfie" status (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984), as well as my presence as a vocalist and fiddle student in the Boston Celtic music community, has already provided me inroads into this research. I will serve as a participant-observer at gatherings at the Canadian-American Club in Watertown, Massachusetts and the French Club in Waltham, Massachusetts, which sometimes features Cape Breton music by Cormier and others. I will attend monthly meetings of the Boston Scottish Fiddle Club, which features Cape Breton fiddling and artists on occasion; I also plan to attend the Boston Harbor Scottish Fiddle School, a weeklong intensive program held on Thompson Island during the summer. When feasible, I will attend house sessions and kitchen parties in the Boston area.

²⁰ See Berger (2013) for a reflection on the role of phenomenology in ethnomusicology.

I will conduct interviews with both performers and those who are consumers of Cape Breton diasporic music. As many members of the diaspora are active supporters of the music and remain virtually connected to the homeland and visit the island, yet do not attend the club's gatherings, I will also conduct interviews with them to discuss the role the music and community play in their lives. Further, I will gather stories of the dances in the Boston area, and how the diaspora connects with Cape Breton. I will speak to younger members of the diaspora as well to gather their experiences with the music and the community, and test the theory that first generation members of a diaspora have a deep sense of memory coupled with a desire to assimilate, while subsequent generations actively seek out and internalize the culture. I have had conversations with most of the major Cape Breton studies scholars and will continue to conduct informal interviews with them.

I will make use of local archives to gather demographic and statistical data on the size of the community, program booklets, and so forth. When appropriate, I will gather quantitative data at events. In addition, I will continue my study of the Scottish Gaelic language and Cape Breton fiddle, both in person and online, both to gain further knowledge of the traditions and to understand how the distance learner may experience the culture. In addition, I am a member of the Boston University Arts Initiative Student Advisory Council and have applied to work with the Healing Arts at BU Program to gain experience with medical ethnomusicology;²¹ as a member of the music and healing community in the Boston area, I also have access to some of the world's best hospitals, which are also at the forefront of music medicine research.

FEASIBILITY & SCHEDULE

My insider status, both in heritage and as a performer, has afforded me a terrific foundation for this project. I took a semester of Irish fiddle lessons at Boston College with Seamus Connolly and Tina Lech. I also studied Cape Breton fiddle for several months with Doug Lamey, grandson of Bill Lamey, a famous

²¹ I am the former chair of the Celtic Music Special Interest Group (2011-2013) and the current Facebook Coordinator of the Medical Ethnomusicology Special Interest Group of the Society for Ethnomusicology. In addition, I have done coursework in medical anthropology theory.

member of the Boston Cape Breton musical diaspora (though Doug has since moved back to Cape Breton). I have been in contact with several members of the Canadian-American Club through Facebook and I have a family membership to the club which allows me to receive the newsletter. I have also joined several Facebook groups, including CCE - Boston, the Canadian-American Club, and Celtic Music in New England, and am in frequent contact with my family members both in the Boston area and in Cape Breton proper. In addition, I wrote a paper in 2012 on the Irish pubs of the South Shore, which was an excellent primer in field methods in the session community.

Regarding language, I am taking a year of Scottish Gaelic at Harvard University. I will also sit in on the monthly Gaelic language sessions at the Canadian-American Club and communicate with Gaelic speakers in the community. Further, I will take some Gaelic coursework online via the numerous distance learning programs available, such as Beul an Tobair at the Gaelic College in St. Ann's, Cape Breton, and the New Brunswick-based Atlantic Gaelic Academy.²² I will also make use of Boston University's newly-formed Institute for the Study of Irish Culture and Boston College's resources on Cape Breton music.

My proximity to my fieldwork in the diasporic community means that the work need not be confined to a specific amount of weeks or months. The Canadian-American Club's calendar largely parallels that of the academic year, so I will be doing research in Massachusetts mostly during the months of September to May, beginning in November 2013. Music is part of everyday life in Cape Breton proper and thus events could be observed year-round; however, the festivals and happenings which draw the diaspora back home occur mostly in the summer and early fall, so I will be traveling to the island in the summer of 2014, as well as potentially in the late spring for Nashville Nor'East, if I deem it appropriate by that point in my research.

²² Kyte MacKillop, a South Shore resident, is one of the instructors of the program, and we have corresponded on several occasions regarding my research.

TENTATIVE CHAPTER OUTLINE

Introduction

In the introduction, I will provide background on my topic and posit the research questions. I will also detail my methodology and my connection to the Cape Breton diaspora both as a Canadian-American “halfie” and a musician, in connection with the increasing presence of the native ethnographer within anthropological discourse (*Ibid.*; Bruner 1991) and ethnomusicological discourse (Wong 2004; Doherty 2010; Pierce 2008).

Chapter One

In this chapter, I will define my approach to the Cape Breton musical diaspora in Boston using the theories of Cohen (1997; 2008), Safran (1991; 2005), Shelemay (2011), and Slobin (2012), in addition to my coined term of culture-in-motion.

Chapter Two

This chapter discusses the phenomenology of the Cape Breton diaspora and the methodology used in the study. Demographics are detailed: how is Cape Breton culture practiced today? By whom? What ages/generations? Are parents bringing their children to these events, and are diasporic members studying Cape Breton dance in the same way as Irish-Americans study Irish stepdancing? The weekly and monthly events at the Canadian-American Club (alternately referred to as the Cape Breton Gaelic Club) in Watertown, Massachusetts will be documented; interviews with scholars in the field, members of the diaspora, and members of the greater Cape Breton and Celtic musical community will also be featured. In addition, the role of Scottish Gaelic within the community will be addressed, as will the presence of non-Celtic Cape Breton diasporans and their interactions within/reactions to Celtic Cape Breton culture.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three will be split into three sections. The first will delineate the Celtic Commonwealth and the role of Irish orientalism in Boston. The second section will distinguish Cape Breton musical style, with notation for such concepts as “dirt” and “driv’er” being devised as necessitated by fieldwork. Cape Breton songs’ sense of nostalgia, identity, and longing will also be discussed. The third section will

examine the role of the Boston sets in Cape Breton dance and analyze the creation of a new style in the diaspora.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four will analyze the role of the digital diaspora, both via social media and the internet, and the use of Skype and online classrooms in Cape Breton fiddle and Scottish/Canadian Gaelic lessons. I will detail the making of recordings in the Boston area that served as some of the first recordings of Cape Breton artists, including Holland and Cormier. As some of the pictures on these albums were actually of Scotland, and not of Cape Breton, authenticity in musical marketing will be discussed. In addition, the presence of Cape Breton music in local media will also be placed within the Celtic mediascape. In particular, I will discuss the weekly hour-long show called “Downeast Ceilidh” on WUMB 90.9 FM, and the weekly Irish Hit Parade on WROL 950 AM.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five will break down the Celtic hegemony present in Cape Breton music. I will discuss the non-Celtic styles and influences present within the Cape Breton tradition, and analyze if and how this is reflected in the music of the diaspora. I will also examine the role of gender in the practices of Cape Breton music as a whole.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six will consider medical ethnomusicology in a culture-specific context. How can diasporic music or music of the homeland be used as music medicine (Wong 2012)? As the diaspora is aging, and diminishing in size, how can the culture’s music be used in a palliative way? Music and remembrance will also be discussed.

CONCLUSION

The Boston segment of the Cape Breton diaspora has a musically rich tradition that remains underexplored. This dissertation will both situate the Cape Breton Boston diasporic community within the greater Boston Celtic music scene, and analyze the musical interactions, as well as potential hybrid forms,

that have developed in the Boston area. It will also consider potential future trajectories of the Cape Breton diaspora within the Boston area.

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