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Precarious Labor: Performance as Livelihood in Scotland's Traditional Music Scene

By

Rebecca Anne Lomnicky

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Benjamin Brinner, Chair

Professor Jocelyne Guilbault

Professor Peter Glazer

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Precarious Labor: Performance as Livelihood in Scotland's Traditional Music Scene

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by

Rebecca Anne Lomnicky

Abstract

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Benjamin Brinner, Chair

This dissertation engages the concept of precarity to explore the labor practices of professional performers in Scotland's traditional music scene. Through developing a critical understanding of precarity as both an ontological and socio-economic condition, this study asks, what can we learn from people who perpetually function in the margins with minimal funding and support? And how do musicians' labor practices aid in their ability not only to survive, but also to thrive in this environment? By considering the many facets of Scottish musicians' lives and livelihoods, I show the diverse practices that musicians have used over time to cope with precarity and the creative tactics they have developed to achieve success.

The first half of this dissertation focuses on the labor that musicians perform behind the scenes to build and maintain their careers. I examine how musicians operate within the traditional music economy and the factors that they consider when choosing to take on a gig. Through interdisciplinary analysis, I investigate how British social expectations of self-deprecation have manifested within the traditional music scene and have shaped how musicians manage their relationships and networking practices. Here, I consider both a Glasgow-centric approach used widely by young musicians, and contrasting examples of established musicians from outside that center. Technology emerges as a key theme throughout this project, as I explain how musicians adapted their labor and performance practices to the virtual realm during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, I analyze Scottish musicians' self-presentation through social media to explore how the pandemic leveled the playing field such that musicians of varying fame started gigging using virtual tip jars, and also how it caused musicians to develop enhanced networking practices using tactics such as collaboration videos.

The second half of this dissertation moves onto the performance stage, where I describe the shifting sonic aesthetics of traditional music, and the use of spectacle and theatricality in contemporary live performance. This section draws heavily on my ethnographic research at venues ranging from small folk clubs to large festivals, such as Celtic Connections, to explore the ironies and juxtapositions of the self-deprecation mentality with virtuosic music making, flashy stage performance, self-presentation, and audience interaction. As masters of performance, Scottish musicians offer unique insight into how self-presentational skills facilitate

audience engagement both on and off the stage. For the final chapter, I turn to the institutionalization of traditional music and the rise of credentialing opportunities through competitions and higher education programs such as the traditional music degree at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. I also detail the infrastructures – with case studies of Creative Scotland and Help Musicians – which have been built to support the creative industries and provide safety nets for health and welfare in Scotland. Throughout this project, I argue that in order to build and maintain their careers, musicians must simultaneously act as individuals with an entrepreneurial ethic and rely on the infrastructures of support available to them within the scene.

Dedication

*For the musicians who do it all
and work harder than most will ever know.*

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Introduction

Setting the Scene and Tracing the Tradition

Musicians always have to plan for “what if.” In the first of many virtual interviews that I would conduct after Scotland entered lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I spoke with Glasgow-based fiddle player Adam Sutherland over Skype, who said:

“I think us musicians have to all have spent some time thinking about what may or may not happen and have something in place. In the immediate term it is the fact that all those gigs are gone this summer, so what are you going to do? And if the gigs return and normality returns, fine. But what if it doesn’t? What if this is actually it? You just have to look at what could happen, and try and be prepared for what could happen.”¹

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated and augmented the precarity of musicians everywhere in 2020. As I complete this project three years later, the struggle is still ongoing. Yet Adam Sutherland’s quote above, from just days into the pandemic lockdown, hits the nail on the head. Musicians have always had to cope with precarity and they will always have to be prepared for “what if.” They always have to think about contingency plans. They always have to look at every possible scenario, think through what could go wrong, anticipate it and be ready to adapt.

Introducing Precarity

When I started formulating this project in 2018, precarity seemed like an important topic. As a professional musician myself, with performance industry experience, I had witnessed precarity first hand. But I had no idea what was in store for 2020. In the last three years and more than ever before, this word “precarity” has been thrown around by news and media outlets and been used by the general populace in everyday conversations. But what exactly does it mean, and how has it been used in relation to music studies?

Precarity is primarily cast as a negative condition in a growing body of cross-disciplinary literatures from anthropology to sociology to economics. Prolific and highly respected scholar of gender, ethics, and philosophy, Judith Butler has written that “lives are by definition precarious” and that “precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (Butler 2009, 25). Scottish musicians rarely face injury, violence, or death as a result of their precarity, however they do encounter extreme challenges in relation to their ability to work. My interlocutors have spoken to me about overwhelming unemployment, issues with physical and mental health, political barriers, inaccessible funding and more, which I detail throughout the following chapters. This study is about the hardships that Scottish musicians face every day, but also about understanding these musicians’ capacity for resilience.

Rather than considering precarity as a conclusive formation, my project investigates how precarity is produced and the means through which it becomes a productive power, that is, with both negative and potentially positive impact (Foucault 1980). Through this formulation, I then

¹ Adam Sutherland, Interview with the author, March 20, 2020.

assert that precarity presents both a challenge to musicians' livelihoods, and also an opportunity to create new sources of employment and develop creative outlets.

Few studies in the field of music have addressed the concept of precarity, and all of them consider it to be a negative condition. These works examine social marginalization through emotional investment and strain (Zendel 2014; Long 2015), through class (Martin-Iverson 2012, Umney and Lefteris 2015), and through politics (Van Veen 2010). Adam Zendel (2014) argues that employers exploit the affective and emotive nature of live music in order to reduce wages and extract surplus from backstage workers. Sean Martin-Iverson (2012) explores the contradictions in how unemployed Indonesian youth are attracted to the autonomous ethic of the underground music scene, yet ultimately end up participating in self-exploitation, and the neoliberal capitalism and commercialization that they eschew. In his study of orchestral workers, Brian Long (2015) describes how even the musicians with the highest levels of job security experience precarity in the form of physical or mental health risks, stress caused by performance pressure, the requirement to sacrifice much of their artistic autonomy, and structural elements of the system (including low remuneration rates).

Within other disciplines, precarity has primarily been theorized through political and economic discourses related to Fordism, post-Fordism, and Neoliberalism (Nielson and Rossiter 2008; De Peuter 2011). Anthropologists have described the historical conditions and structural violence of precarity (O'Neill 2014), as well as the ethical obligations and care necessary to surviving these situations (Al-Mohammad 2012; Han 2011). Focusing on creative laborers (from software developers to fashion designers), scholars have described how engagement in immaterial labor often coincides with political exploitation and social marginalization (Butler 2004; Negri and Hardt 2009; Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006). One of the major challenges of finding a solution to these issues in the culture industry is that the "typical musician," or even more broadly, the "typical precarious worker" does not exist. In Chapter One, I explore the discursive history of the term "precarity" and describe the different schools of thought which primarily characterize precarity as either an ontological experience (Butler 2004) or a socio-economic condition (Bourdieu 1998, Standing 2011). By examining conversations with practitioners of traditional music in Scotland, my project considers both the struggle of living and working with precarity, and its potential for positive outcomes.

Research Questions and Main Objectives

Like many artists of all genres, Scottish musicians have long functioned in a perpetual state of precarity. The 2020-2021 government-instigated COVID-19 lockdowns across Scotland and the UK exacerbated the ongoing struggle for my interlocutors. In conducting the background research and ethnography for this project, my primary research questions crystalized as: What can we learn from people who perpetually function in the margins with minimal funding and support? How do musicians' labor practices aid in their ability not only to survive, but also to thrive in this environment? How do techniques of self-presentation and performance inform musicians' approach to building their careers? What infrastructures of support are available to musicians in Scotland, and how are they integral to maintaining the traditional music scene?

This project takes a comprehensive look at the lives of musicians. I consider their training and non-musical work behind the scenes, examine their physical work on stage and their self-presentation, and analyze how and where they seek support. By considering the many facets of my interlocutors' lives and livelihoods, I show the diverse practices that musicians have used over time to cope with precarity and the tactics they have developed to achieve success. By examining the plethora of struggles and barriers in the scene, I show that musicians are resilient and innovative in their ability to constantly reevaluate and forge new paths. Musicians must be highly motivated and self-driven to make a livable career. As performers who are used to working the stage, musicians also take this knowledge and apply it to their work behind the scenes. As masters of presentation, my interlocutors apply their abilities in self-presentation to public relations, marketing, media management, and more. Yet, most musicians cannot do it all themselves. This study also outlines a massive support system of educational opportunities and granting-agencies which aid musicians with their creativity and their basic necessities. Without this support system, I suggest that the careers of many musicians would not be possible.

Scottish Traditional Music: Defining the Scene

Scottish traditional music is colloquially referred to as “traditional music” or “trad music.” As a genre name, “traditional music” can reference any music with a distinct set of stylistic elements – from an anonymous 300-year-old tune to a song with a known composer written yesterday. Accordion player and dance band leader, Matthew Maclennan explains:

“Traditional music is the umbrella for all Scottish folk music, dance band music, piping, Gaelic song. That’s the umbrella term for it. Whether it’s new or old it doesn’t really make any difference.”²

Scottish traditional music has been woven into the fabric of everyday life for centuries. Fiddlers and bagpipers have long played for dances, ceremonial rituals, weddings and funeral processions (Campbell 2007, Cooke 1986, Alburger 1983). The pipes have been used as instruments of war and as a celebratory symbol of a nation (Cannon 1988, Dickson 2006). Vocal songs from both the Gaelic and Scots repertoires have been used to tell fantastical stories, recount lived histories, and pass the time while working (Collinson 1966; Shaw 1955; Bennett 2007; Hall 1987; Munro 1977). This rich legacy informs those historical performance contexts which continue today, and the shifting sounds and new performance practices of the present.

This research project is focused on the contemporary urban traditional music scene in Scotland, particularly the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. While I do include the voices of some musicians who live in the rural North-East, highland, and island regions, many of these practitioners have connections to the urban centers through their educational history or current performance activities.

The 1950s mark a clear beginning to what I define as the contemporary music scene. In 1951, Hamish Henderson held the first Edinburgh People’s Festival Ceilidh out of his desire to both preserve traditional music and promote artists from more rural parts of Scotland (Sparling

² Matthew Maclennan, Interview with the author, January 14, 2020.

2009, 83). While Henderson aimed to represent a variety of styles of traditional Scottish music, this first concert primarily focused on North-East Scots song, Gaelic song, and bagpiping (Sparling 2009, 84). Although it only lasted until 1954, this festival marks the beginning of Scotland's folk music revival which has been characterized by scholars, most notably ethnomusicologists Simon McKerrell (2011a) and Lisa Jenkins (2004), as a reaction against the mass commercialization of Scottishness.

During the eighteenth century, European artists and writers initiated a widespread movement which romanticized Scottish highland culture. American ethnomusicologist Lisa Jenkins foregrounds this romanticization in her dissertation which traces the evolution of the term "Celtic." She describes how during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the term was first used by archaeologists and then more widely across disciplines to describe commonalities found in Welsh, Breton, Scottish and Irish Gaelic languages (Jenkins 2004, 50). Scottish writer and poet James MacPherson's fabrication of the "Celtic bard" Ossian in the 1760s serves as a pivotal moment in the rise of "Celticism" as it prompted a more widespread circulation of romantic notions of highland Scotland in the lowlands and beyond (Gelbart 2007; McKerrell 2015; and West 2012). MacPherson's poetry as well as other literature by authors such as Alfred Lord-Tennyson and Sir Walter Scott further disseminated the word Celtic and cemented a romantic image of highland Scotland which circulated widely on the European continent (Jenkins 2004, 60). During this time, several invented traditions sprang up throughout the country including the modern conception of the kilt and tartan now distinctly tied to commercial images of Scotland (Jenkins 2004, 61; see also Trevor-Roper 1983). Hugh Trevor-Roper explains how the wearing of kilts was manufactured by a few individuals not native to the region and perpetrated as being "authentic" and tied to a long history in Scotland (Trevor-Roper 1983, 20-23). This was further cemented by Sir Walter Scott's orchestration of King George IV's visit to Scotland in 1822, during which the king wore a kilt (Jenkins 2004, 61). Joshua Dickson notes that this trip was filled with "caricatured pageantry" paralleling the then current fascination with the noble savage, of which the kilted highlander was a primary example (Dickson 2006, 183).

While Scottish festivals such as the Highland Games – particularly in the diaspora – were created and perpetuated within the context of this commercialized image, the Edinburgh People's Festival Ceilidh and the folk music revival were a reaction against this. Driven by a renewed sense of nationalism following World War II, the folk song revival of the 1950s-1960s laid the groundwork for what would later include the folk instrumental music revival in the 1970s (McKerrell 2011a, 3). Both Hamish Henderson's drive to find musicians who had never performed on stage and his audience's support of artists with a rougher, less polished musical aesthetic, suggest a desire for authenticity tied to historical conceptions of the romanticized Other. In this iteration, viewing these musicians as Other may have been a way to consider them as preserved in time, fixed in place, and unaltered by twentieth-century modernization. Some of the early folk bands to come out of this revival period in the 1960s were The Corries, The McCalmans, and Boys of the Lough (Jenkins 2004, 137).³ Groups such as The Corries were known for performing a combination of traditional Scottish folk songs and newly composed songs, often based on strongly nationalistic themes (Jenkins 2004, 138). In the late 1960s and 1970s, bands such as the Tannahill Weavers (1968-present), the Battlefield Band (1969-present),

³ Boys of the Lough started in Ireland, but later added Scottish artists Aly Bain and Dick Gaughan to the lineup (Jenkins 2004, 137).

Silly Wizard (1972-1988), and Ossian (1976-1986) emerged as successful international touring artists. Their sound echoed that of popular Irish groups of the time including The Chieftains and The Bothy Band, but they were playing Scottish tunes – a move which would inspire more Scottish musicians to examine their own musical heritage in the coming years (Jenkins 2004, 139).⁴

As revival audiences began to grow, so did the number of folk clubs and other intimate venues (McKerrell 2011a, 3). With increased opportunity to perform, young traditional music players realized that they could make a living from their music, and began to put groups together and tour constantly, playing at these different venues (McKerrell 2011a, 2). McKerrell argues that this initiated a shift in the mindset of musicians. While previously, musicians toured based on a strong socialist-nationalist ideology, increasingly they became more financially and aesthetically driven. McKerrell explains that some aesthetic and “musical innovations of the 1970s and 1980s were in part driven by financial motives and a need to present the music as Celtic- or Scottish-Other within a more globalizing and European context” (McKerrell 2011a, 1).

The folk music revival served as an antidote to both 1950s popular music and “tartanalia,” a term used to describe the images, symbols, and practices that romanticize and sentimentalize the Scots and continue to be fetishes associated with the highland games (Jenkins 2004, 15). Jenkins argues that the revival paved the way for the Celtic movement or, as she terms it, the “Celtic vogue,” which she contends succeeded the revival in the 1980s (Jenkins 2004, 109). Where the folk revival rejected commodification and focused on unpolished singers and intimate performance spaces, the Celtic movement fused traditional music and cultural ideas with rock, pop, and other world musics – in essence, creating new hybrid-Celtic music with contemporary mass appeal. Due to the music industry labeling in the 1980s, “Celtic” is now widely applied as an umbrella term for musical and cultural practices that come from the “Celtic Nations,” a term used to signify Scotland, Ireland, England, Wales, Brittany, Galicia, Cornwall, and the Isle of Man (Jenkins 2004, 384).

In the 1990s, Edinburgh became the hot spot for traditional music.⁵ Musicians from all over Scotland would gather there to play in sessions and ultimately form bands out of these collaborative spaces. In the last two decades (at the time of this writing), the hot spot has shifted to Glasgow, Scotland’s largest urban center. While there are still many traditional music sessions and performance opportunities today in Edinburgh, many of the new young bands are forming in Glasgow. Living in Glasgow affords musicians more networking, credentialing⁶, and performance opportunities. It also provides easy access to concerts and sessions at local venues, including the largest traditional music festival in Scotland: Celtic Connections. It is a place where long established bands have continued to thrive, and new bands are constantly being created.

⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I include the voices of musicians who are past and present members of the Battlefield Band and the Tannahill Weavers.

⁵ Aaron Jones, Interview with the author, May 21, 2016.

⁶ I use the term “credentialing” to cover the various awards and/or educational degrees that musicians can win or earn to boost their resume or portfolio.

An Anatomy of Terms: Tradition, Folk, Authenticity, Celtic

The majority of musicians and participants in the scene today use “traditional music” as the umbrella term, just as MacLennan described. However, others have chosen to use the term “folk” based on their perceptions of the historical and cultural identity markers associated with each term. While genre boundaries are blurry, and have only become more so with increasing globalization, the use of the word “traditional” often conflates the genre with popular expectations and associations of authenticity. In order to explain the impact of these ambiguous boundaries, I will briefly show how Scottish musicians and scholars have dealt with the terms “tradition” and “folk,” and defined them in relation to other labels such as “authenticity,” “celtic,” and “national” which are tied to Scottish music’s social history.

Audience members and musicians alike often conflate “folk” and “traditional” today, however this was not always the case. In his seminal book on the distinction between “folk music” and “art music,” American musicologist Matthew Gelbart notes how the word “traditional” was historically used in a derogatory manner as it was tied to conceptions of oral transmission (Gelbart 2007, 154). This was in opposition to the written word, which was valued by the church as the word of God; any other means of transmission was considered inferior (Gelbart 2007, 154). In the 1760s when discourses on nationalism and other notions of the “exotic” began to circulate widely, James MacPherson published the works of fictional bard Ossian (Gelbart 2007, 62). While previously, the notion of “exotic” primarily referenced people, places, and things outside of Western Europe, MacPherson’s publication pinned the noble savage and primitive Other to a stratum of European social class (Gelbart 2007, 228). The publication of Ossian appeared to show the potential of non-literate societies as it rendered the oral tradition a viable means of transmission. In addition, readers began to link non-literate societies with notions of “authenticity” and to value quests for origins.

Scottish musician and scholar, Simon McKerrell, distinguishes “folk” versus “traditional” by their contemporary popular usage in relation to “authenticity.” He argues that “traditional” indicates a genre which claims some form of stylistic authenticity and that is tied to the oral tradition. He suggests that “folk” vaguely signifies acoustic music, whereas “tradition” is about belonging to a community of musicians. In order to further clarify how “authenticity” is tied to the idea of “tradition” he argues that “authenticity” implies there are true or sincere ways of belonging (McKerrell 2015, 4, 123-125).

Bagpiper and scholar Gary West argues that change is a crucial component in defining the term “tradition” (West 2012, 12).⁷ The traditional music program at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) also promotes this idea of change and individualism. The department states in their informational brochure that “Our curriculum recognises that the innovative nature of Scottish traditional music today must be embraced, and that the creative development of the individual is the most important way to ensure traditional music flourishes from one generation

⁷ This construction allows Gary West to argue that Hamish Henderson’s notion of the “Carrying Stream” through its constant movement and adaptation is a good metaphor for “tradition” because it symbolizes change and progress (West 2012, 12).

to another.”⁸ As I will detail more explicitly in Chapter Four, this individualism is both appreciated and questioned by the students who have gone through the program in the last decade.

In discussing what it means to move the tradition forward, while keeping the core of the tradition alive, bagpiper Ali Hutton says:

“You’re still using scales and familiar things to what you learn as traditional music when you’re growing up—like the feel of a strathspey or a march – all these familiar things that have always carried through. It’s how you embellish it, and how you can have these threads remain without it feeling like one thing is glued on to another... It’s like you’re using these things to create the sounds of where you’re from... The feelings when you go to the hills and see the hills or you feel the cold air, or you look at the landscape... I think there is a strong identity in the music whether it is the strathspey or the modality of pipe tunes... It’s great to have strength in the identity of where your music is from.”⁹

Like many of the Scottish musicians working today in the traditional music scene, Ali Hutton is an avid composer of his own tunes. As I will discuss more in Chapter Three, he also uses effects pedals, samples, and other computer-based technologies to add new layers of electronic sounds to his music making. However, as he explains in the quote above, Hutton always seeks to keep his work rooted in the tradition through both concrete elements such as scales and modes, and more abstract identity-based markers. References to the environment – particularly the Scottish landscape – have historically served as key identity markers for traditional music (Lomnicky 2019). Today, the land continues to influence compositional processes, tune names, album names, and even the grant opportunities that are available to Scottish musicians.¹⁰ Another way that musicians keep their music rooted in the tradition is by drawing on and reimagining the rich archive of tunes passed down through the oral tradition and manuscript collections. However, the way that knowledge is sourced has also become, for some participants in the scene, an element which helps distinguish “folk” versus “traditional.”

In the 1980s, Scottish musicians rejected the term “folk” due to its associations with the socialist-nationalist identity of the 1950s and 60s revival (McKerrell 2011a, 9). Ultimately, they chose to shift their labeling from “folk music(ians)” to “traditional music(ians)” (McKerrell 2011a, 9). While this shift may have predominated post-revival, today some musicians still use these terms to define distinct subsets of the scene.

Edinburgh-based singer-songwriter George Duff grew up and started playing music during the revival in the 1960-70s. For him, the distinction between “folk” and “traditional” is somewhat ambiguous, however it remains an important element of how he views and defines the contemporary scene:

⁸ “BMus Traditional Music,” Undergraduate Programmes, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/courses/bmus-traditional-music/>.

⁹ Ali Hutton, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹⁰ In Chapter Four, I detail how funding agency Creative Scotland specifically asks musicians to consider the environmental impact of their project in their grant application. This category is broad which allows applicants to address it from varying angles. For example, they may use the environment/nature as a theme in their artistic content or choose to produce their project using environmentally-conscious packaging/materials.

“It’s a hard one, it’s a grey area... Folk music tends to be more commercial... Traditional players especially in the highlands, are people whose parents, grandparents, were musicians. And it’s part of normal life, not something distinct and separate. It’s part of the life... For example the traveling community who were conduits for most of the stuff we’re doing now, it was and is a living part of their life – songs and tunes, but mostly songs for the travelers... Whereas, folk music...it’s not really part of your life, it’s something you take up as a hobby, something you’re interested in...”¹¹

For Duff, the distinction is not in how the music sounds, but rather in how it is learned and entwined in the fabric of everyday life:

“We [folk musicians] play the same tunes that traditional players are playing, but we’ve sourced them differently. We’ve probably sourced them from CDs, whereas traditional players in the highlands have probably learned them from their parents or neighbors... It’s more a show biz thing for folkies.”¹²

The “Folk and Traditional Music” program at Newcastle University makes a distinction between these two terms simply by including both in their program title. It also implies its distinction from Western Art music and popular music. Simultaneously, however, this title also promotes inclusivity since putting these two words together works to encompass all forms and eras of traditional music.

Echoing George Duff’s quote above, Scott Reiss (2003) suggests that one could make the distinction between “Celtic music” as a commercial category and “traditional music” as a participatory category. However, McKerrell points out that if we consider bands such as Runrig or the Battlefield Band to be performers of “traditional” music, then:

“we need to extend our understanding of traditional music beyond participatory music, or ‘community as music’ (McCann 2001, 97), and understand that the ‘traditional’ in *traditional music* does not simply refer to notions of authentic repertoire, nationalism, shared participation in pub sessions, or the amateur, but now incorporates global markets, royalties, press packs, othered musical products and complex issues of intellectual property and copyright” (McKerrell 2011a, 9).

He acknowledges that this interpretation blurs traditional music’s once clear distinctions with popular and art music, and argues that it undermines the essentialist readings of “authenticity” so often tied to notions of “tradition.” McKerrell concludes that this pushes Scottish traditional music toward an aesthetic construction rather than a geographically bounded one, placing more responsibility on the listener to simultaneously determine boundaries and be open to pluralist conceptions of “tradition” (McKerrell 2011a, 9).

Voicing the frustration shared by many scholars, musicians, critics, and other listeners with the ambiguity and problematics of these terms, Lisa Jenkins suggests we avoid using them altogether. Instead, she proposes using Theodor Adorno and Veit Erlmann’s conception of

¹¹ George Duff, Interview with the author, March 13, 2020.

¹² George Duff, Interview with the author, March 13, 2020.

“pastiche” in order to describe how the sounds of a fully commodified present become tied to values of some other time and place (Jenkins 2004, 394). The issues that Jenkins describes and the overall blurry boundaries between all of these terms have led some scholars, such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, to add an additional qualifier to create the label “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012). In her dissertation about bagpipe bands in North America, Erin Walker (2015) argues that “invented traditions” are material objects, such as the kilt, and distinguishes this from the more intangible “believed authenticity” (Walker 2015, 22). She contends that this “believed authenticity” is what draws in newcomers to the tradition, yet implies that their perception of authenticity, no matter how commodified, makes no difference in their ability to build a communal identity (Walker 2015, 181, 212).

Pamela Swing’s 1991 dissertation “Fiddle Teaching in the Shetland Isles Schools, 1973-1985” pushes the notion of “invention” one step further calling it the “re-invention” or “reinterpretation” of tradition. She describes how the fiddle revival in Shetland was driven by fiddler Tom Anderson who had to re-invent the Shetland fiddle style in order to teach it within the institutional school setting (Swing 1991, 223). For example, she demonstrates a shift in performance practice from a “situational” to “presentational” context; Where Shetland fiddle music was once primarily used for dances, Anderson transformed it into a performance-based practice which was ideal for the stage, radio broadcasts, TV programs, and recordings. This contributed to a shift in repertoire and musical aesthetics where the value of a tune was no longer based in its “danceableness” (Swing 1991, 186). Swing argues that “invention” connotes outsider influence, while “reinterpretation” fits her purposes in that those reinterpreting the musical style were people from the local area who had some conception of earlier musical forms from before the revival (Swing 1991, 4). Using the term “reinterpretation” allows Swing to highlight that reinterpretation of a tradition is legitimate and unavoidable – a claim which aligns with the notion that tradition is always changing.

The range of terms and associated interpretations that I have outlined above are still used widely today. Often they are used in a binary relationship with another label, “popular music.” This further promotes Gelbart’s argument that these labels develop and depend upon each other to delineate borders within an ever-changing social context. As my analysis has shown, defining and using “authenticity,” “folk,” or “traditional” as qualifying terms is a challenging endeavor when the goal is to be definitive or to delineate boundaries. However, documenting the varying opinions and definitions of these terms by musicians and scholars of Scottish music provides important historical background and context for the perspectives of my interlocutors.

Throughout the course of this dissertation, I employ “Scottish traditional music” in line with how the majority of performers of this music use the term today: a broad category for old and contemporary music which follows certain idiomatic structures yet is continually changing. Although there are many subgenres, styles, and interpretations within “Scottish traditional music,” practitioners generally refer to “the tradition” as an overarching term to indicate the way in which this music is learned and shared. Roo Geddes, a violinist and recent graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, states:

“A tradition is stuff that we do again because we think it’s relevant or worth doing again... It’s who we are, that we’re rhythmic creatures. We work in rhythm and repetition and cycles. I think culture is this incredibly complicated thing, but you can kind of pin it down and show it in art,

and so the traditions and art generally are to perpetuate that narrative, to go ‘here’s who we are’ because we think this is important.”¹³

In Scotland, “the tradition” includes a core repertoire of music composed primarily within the country over the last four centuries that is taught and performed in an array of venues including pubs, dance halls, houses, festivals, and theaters. It also includes a new repertoire of tunes and songs being composed right now by performers in the scene. Additionally, the music is linked to a common set of instruments including the voice, fiddle, bagpipes, harp, whistle, drums, guitar, accordion, and piano. While this description of “the tradition” is broad, to add more parameters risks excluding crucial participants and methods of transmission and performance in an ever-changing musical scene.

Positionality, The Pandemic, and Research Methodology

I am a white cis- woman of Mexican-American descent, born and raised in an educated middle-income family in the largely white town of Corvallis, Oregon. I started playing classical violin at the age of five, and grew up involved in a plethora of musical activities: I studied classical piano for over a decade, and participated in outstanding student groups including the Corvallis Camerata Orchestra and the Heart of the Valley Children’s Choir. At the age of eight, I heard Natalie MacMaster perform Cape Breton fiddle music, and from that moment, I was inspired to follow in her footsteps. After starting fiddle lessons and learning more about the differences between Scottish, Irish, and Cape Breton music, I quickly realized that what I loved more than anything was Scottish traditional music.

For almost twenty years I have been an avid performer of Scottish fiddle music at venues throughout the United States and Scotland. I identify as an American Scottish fiddler, a performer, a teacher, and participant in the Scottish folk music scene. I have also been a competitor in some of the most elite Scottish fiddle competitions in the world – in 2005 I won the Junior division of the US National Scottish Fiddle Championship and in 2009 I won the Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship, an invitation-only international competition held at Blair Castle in Scotland. As both a participant and performer, I have experienced the stage from both sides, and have been privy to conversations that take place behind the scenes and away from outside observers.

In many ways, I have been thinking about this dissertation topic for as long as I have been a professional performer. However, from an academic perspective, I began researching and structuring this project in the Spring of 2018. Although I conducted preliminary fieldwork in 2016 and 2018, the majority of the research for this dissertation comes from the ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted from October 2019-October 2020. During that year, I lived in a small flat in Merchant City – the city center of Glasgow, Scotland.

For the first five months of my research year in Scotland, I experienced the Glasgow music scene in all its splendor. I engaged in active participant-observation at a range of live shows, festivals, community gatherings, public talks, and workshops. I attended and

¹³ Roo Geddes, Interview with the author, December 3, 2019.

photographed dozens of concerts all over the city in venues ranging from small pubs to the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. I participated in the session scene at several different pubs throughout Glasgow and Edinburgh, and had many late nights at some of Scotland's finest traditional music festivals. I worked as a volunteer for the Edinburgh Scots Fiddle Festival, and for approximately three weeks straight, I attended multiple concerts and events every day at Glasgow's largest traditional music festival: Celtic Connections. The majority of the photographs and videos that appear throughout this dissertation are my own work that were taken while attending these events. The sources for all other media have been cited.

While in Scotland, I conducted individual and group interviews in a wide range of locations including cafés, pubs, and home visits. I primarily spoke with professional musicians, teachers, festival organizers, promoters, and funding support specialists. During these interviews I focused on each person's biographical journey (Guilbault and Cape 2014) by exploring their personal backstory, artistic approach, work ethic, career choices, and growth within the traditional music scene. It is important to note that nearly all of my interlocutors were white¹⁴, between the ages of 18 and 80, and identified as male or female.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March of 2020, Scotland went into a full lockdown. I switched to conducting all my interviews through Skype, Zoom, and WhatsApp. I was able to speak to many musicians who were stuck at home and who might have otherwise been too busy touring to meet with me. I also got to know the city of Glasgow in a way I never expected. I took advantage of the UK's daily exercise allowance to explore every neighborhood that I could in the city. I developed a distinct embodied knowledge of the city streets, architecture, design, and layout which gave me insight into how my interlocutors operate within their surroundings. I was also able to spend time exploring the mountainous regions of Scotland and took in the landscapes that are entwined with many traditional musicians' creative processes.

During the lockdown, I also engaged in virtual ethnography. I listened to lectures, attended meetings, and watched concerts in a range of set ups, from solo performers busking informally in their living rooms to professionally filmed events. I studied my interlocutors' self-presentation on social media, personal websites, and other online forums – particularly Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Bandcamp, Patreon, and Spotify. Through these analyses, I gained an understanding of how my interlocutors framed their public identity, how they pursued virtual audiences, and how they sought to manage their social and political identity within the virtual realm.

This project focuses on the music scene in Scotland and only briefly touches on the widespread diaspora. Therefore, while my experience as a performer is an important resource for this project, I have chosen to forgo autoethnography in favor of focusing on my interlocutors' stories. Throughout this dissertation I have included lengthy quotes from my interlocutors and

¹⁴ The results of the 2011 Scottish census indicate that 96% of the population in Scotland identify as white. 91.8% specifically indicate "White: Scottish or White: Other British." In Glasgow – the city with the most non-white ethnically diverse population – 88.4% identify as white. For more detailed statistics, see the Scottish government census: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/census-results/at-a-glance/ethnicity/>.

Several of my younger interlocutors touched on the need for increasing diversity and representation in the traditional music scene. However, despite a few notable exceptions, the current reality is that, in line with the census, the majority of performers and participants in the scene are white (some also identify as descendants of traveling folk).

put their voices in conversation with each other. It is my hope that showcasing so many different voices gives my readers a direct window into the Scottish traditional music scene.

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter One, “Working Behind the Scenes: Precarity, Entrepreneurship, and Economic Strategies,” I analyze the concept of precarity, exploring its discursive history and the three primary interpretations of the term. I argue that defining precarity as both an ontological experience (Butler 2004) and a socio-economic condition (Bourdieu 1998, Standing 2011) is vital to understanding how it functions in the traditional Scottish music scene. I also lay the groundwork for considering how Scottish musicians must act as independent entrepreneurs while simultaneously relying on services and resources provided by the state government. Throughout this project, I return to these theoretical and political lenses to describe the infrastructures that are critical to supporting this scene, and the ways in which musicians navigate them. Chapter One focuses on “behind-the-scenes” work – the daily grind that does not include performing music. I describe Scottish musicians’ work mentalities and explore the factors that they consider when choosing to take on a gig. I also consider how behind-the-scenes work has changed in recent history, and the tactics that some musicians have developed to maintain and stabilize their careers.

Chapter Two, “Raising Your Status: Networking for Mobility and Mobilizing your Network,” stays behind the scenes to consider the ways that musicians manage their networks and relationships. I discuss the rampant use of self-deprecation by the British public, and the ways that this has become embedded in musicians’ psyches and interactions both on and off the stage. Drawing on examples from my interlocutors’ life histories, I examine how, where, and when Scottish musicians make connections that they consider beneficial for their careers. Tactics such as moving to Glasgow and continually showing up at live events in the scene are two strategic moves that young traditional musicians make when looking to build their network and professional dossier. This chapter explores both in-person networking, and the shift to a new virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. I discuss how musicians have had to find new ways to manage their self-promotion, alter their performance technique, and maintain their network connections.

In Chapter Three, “Sounding Understated and Creating Spectacle: Stage Performance, Audience Interaction, and Virtuosity,” I move my discussion of labor and precarity onto the performance stage. Here, I delve into the spectacle and theatricality of traditional Scottish music performance today. I explore the ironies and juxtapositions of the British self-deprecation mentality with music making, flashy stage performance, self-presentation, audience interaction, and virtuosity. This chapter showcases a variety of vignettes from the concerts and festivals I attended while conducting my fieldwork. By pairing observations from these live events with the perspectives of my interlocutors, I explore how Scottish musicians engage the audience by giving them partial ownership over the performance, and allowing them to assert their agency and fully participate in the moment. My attention to stage craft leads to a discussion of virtuosity, in which I demonstrate how what musicians say versus what they do in practice leads to a more nuanced understanding of this term. I conclude this chapter by analyzing the sound of the

traditional music scene in Glasgow today, where musicians are increasingly drawing on technology to emulate a popular music aesthetic and maintain relevancy with other contemporary styles of music.

After three chapters about the tactics that musicians employ to build their careers, both on and off the stage, Chapter Four, “Institutionalization, Credentialing, and Infrastructures of Support for Scottish Music and Musicians,” moves to detailing the creative support and safety nets that are available to aid practitioners of traditional music in Scotland. I begin by considering how the ethos of Scotland’s folk music revival impacted the institutionalization of traditional music and contributed to the rise of credentialing opportunities through degree programs and award competitions. I then move to discussing grant-making institutions, and provide a case study of Creative Scotland – a granting agency that has become an essential resource for artists in the scene. Finally, I address some of the services available to musicians when their health fails or when devastation strikes. This chapter details only some of the many institutions offering support to musicians in Scotland. However, they are the resources and services that my interlocutors have found to be most useful. It is my hope that this chapter can provide a starting point for other Scottish musicians who may be seeking or in need of support. This final chapter builds on discussions of behind-the-scenes work, self-promotion, and self-presentation that are central throughout my writing. I conclude that in order to achieve stability and success in the contemporary traditional music scene, Scottish musicians must simultaneously act as entrepreneurs and take advantage of the infrastructures of support available to bolster their careers.

Chapter 1

Working Behind the Scenes: Precarity, Entrepreneurship, and Economic Strategies

It's 2:00pm on a Monday in the middle of May 2020. The Scottish Government has temporarily lifted COVID-19 lockdown restrictions just enough that construction work has started up again and the jackhammer down the street is shaking my flat. I grab my notepad and sit on the floor in my hallway, as far away from the windows as possible. After two months of silent streets, I am keenly aware of every sound that could be a distraction during my next scheduled interview. I use WhatsApp to start a video call with Aileen Reid – a Glasgow-based fiddler and the lead spokesperson for her band, Kinnaris Quintet. She answers the phone from her living room couch with a smile to rival that of Julia Roberts and I am instantly at ease. She is currently dealing with her own whirlwind of distractions including providing childcare as a single parent while making plans for Kinnaris Quintet that she knows will likely be canceled. We chat for a while about the band and her work as their primary agent. Every time she laughs her platinum-blonde curls dance around her face. We are about halfway through our conversation when she makes a statement perfectly summarizing the irony of being a professional musician in traditional music:

“The more success you have, the less you play music.”¹⁵



Figure 1.1: Aileen Reid performs with Kinnaris Quintet at the 2020 Celtic Connections Festival Club. January 31, 2020. Photo by the author.

¹⁵ Aileen Reid, Interview with the author, May 18, 2020.

Aileen Reid's sentiments voiced here were echoed by other traditional musicians throughout my fieldwork. It is no secret that being a musician requires a strong work ethic and dedication to developing a range of skills. However, my interlocutors have made it clear that even when the work of practicing and perfecting skills is recognized, it is often in relation to playing music, rather than the plethora of other skills they have had to develop along the way to manage their careers behind the scenes.

This chapter explores the broader social conditions of precarity that are integral to working as a professional musician. I describe how the labor of being a traditional musician is intertwined with defining what precarity means, and how it functions in a cyclical relationship with behind-the-scenes work. In the Introduction I gave a brief overview of how precarity is often characterized in humanistic fields of study. In particular, I noted how recent music scholars have employed the term as a negative condition revolving around social marginalization through emotional investment and strain (Zendel 2014; Long 2015), class (Martin-Iverson 2012, Umney and Lefteris 2015), and politics (Van Veen 2010). These studies offer valuable insight into understanding how musicians and music industry workers have navigated challenges to their careers in a variety of genres. In this chapter, I dig deeper into the concept of precarity and examine how the numerous definitions and connotations of the terms "precarity" and "precariousness" are all important in characterizing the multifaceted form of precarity that is found and produced in the Scottish music scene.

Building a Foundation on Precarity

The term "precarity" is in vogue at the moment in academia. How could it not be after a global pandemic? But even before the pandemic, this term had acquired an increasing significance in recent decades. In the early 2000s, the idea of precarity became the central political organizing platform for social struggles across Europe (Neilson and Rossiter 2008).¹⁶ At the roots of the movement was "an attempt to identify or imagine precarious, contingent or flexible workers as a new kind of political subject, replete with their own forms of collective organization and modes of expression" (Neilson and Rossiter 2008, 52). While the movement itself was relatively short lived, ending around 2006, it sparked political debates and scholarship "concerned with whether precarity can serve as the grounds for mobilization, whether it gives rise to new forms of politics and if so, what this politics looks like" (Millar 2017, 2).

The literature on precarity across academia is vast and continuing to grow. However, many of these publications reference three primary works: a talk on precarity given by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu titled "Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market" (1998), labor economist Guy Standing's (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, and gender theorist Judith Butler's (2004) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. These three publications are significant because they all consider precarity to be a pressing contemporary issue, and yet they represent three distinct meanings of the term: precarity as a labor condition, a class category, and an ontological experience, respectively (Millar 2017).

¹⁶ For an analysis of the rise and fall of European social movements, particularly the EuroMayDay protests, which adopted precarity as an organizing platform, see Neilson and Rossiter (2008).

Pierre Bourdieu's writing about precarity began with his 1963 work on unemployed and underemployed workers in Algeria (Bourdieu 1963). In 1998, he referenced his earlier work when speaking about the rise in unemployment and temporary, part-time, and flexible employment relations in France (Bourdieu 1998). Bourdieu's theorizations have sparked a body of work (see Castel 2003; Kalleberg 2009, Ross 2009) that defines precarity as a labor condition "characterized by job insecurity, temp or part-time employment, a lack of social benefits, and low wages" (Millar 2017). Media and Communications scholars Amanda Nell Edgar and Holly Willson Holladay write "At its most basic, precarity indicates an increased insecurity in working conditions for a majority of workers" (Edgar and Holladay 2019, 3). Sociologist Arne Kalleberg defines precarious work as "employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker" (Kalleberg 2009, 2). Studies that focus on precarity as a labor condition describe it as a new form of work linked to the 1970s shift to post-Fordism and the rise of "flexible accumulation" (Harvey 1989). Referencing a direct reaction against the rigidity of Fordism, Kathleen Millar summarizes this new environment as "a systematic dismantling of the expectation of full employment along with state benefits and protections for workers" (Millar 2017).

Guy Standing's interpretation of precarity is similar in that it also centers on labor. However, it focuses less on work and more on the worker. He considers the precariat to be a "dangerous class-in-the-making" because of their anger, anxiety, and alienation (Standing 2011). Standing's work has sparked a diverse conversation, including many critiques of his class-based approach (see Neilson and Rossiter 2008, Waite 2009, Munck 2013). The most common critique is that in grouping together all precarious workers, he does not account for the diversity of backgrounds and subject positions found within this all-encompassing class (Neilson and Rossiter 2008, Waite 2009).

Discussions of labor-based precarity often stem from the political motivation of critiquing global capitalism, or providing a historical reference point for continuing workplace struggles. These projects are vital to understanding the current moment, yet their dark tone rarely offers a satisfying suggestion for a path forward. Judith Butler's approach to precarity signals a way through the darkness toward the light.

In contrast to both Bourdieu and Standing who focus on labor, Judith Butler describes precarity as "a common human vulnerability, one that emerges with life itself" (Butler 2004, 31). She sees everyone as vulnerable in some capacity because, for her, precariousness is a part of human sociality and key to interdependence. While studies of precarious labor set out to critique global capitalism, Butler seeks to find a contemporary approach to ethical action (Butler 2004). She "suggests that staying with our precariousness allows us to recognize the precariousness of others and that it is in this recognition that an ethical encounter becomes possible" (Millar 2017). The idea of "ontological precarity" or "precarious life" has spurred a set of writings on the idea of precarity as interchangeable with vulnerability or insecurity. For example, anthropologist Anna Tsing has defined precarity as "life without the promise of stability" (Tsing 2015, 2).

In order to further parse this broad usage of precarity, some theorists have set out to specify a difference between "precarity" and "precariousness." Butler herself in 2011, clarified that precariousness constitutes "the unavoidable vulnerability that is a condition of our sociality"

while precarity is “the specific ways that socio-economic and political institutions distribute the conditions of life unequally” (Butler 2011, 12-13). Anthropologist Melinda Hinkson (2017) also draws a distinction in terminology. She defines precariousness as a state or “meeting place of relationships with transformative potentialities” (Hinkson 2017, 51). In contrast, she uses precarity to indicate the distinctive circumstances of the present: the material consequences of post-Fordism and subsequent political-economic shift characterized by dissolving assurances (Berlant 2011, 3), anxieties, and insecurities (Hinkson 2017, 51). In essence, precariousness can be found in basic human relations while precarity is historically specific.

My project draws on all of these lines of thinking. In the Scottish music scene, I see precarity as both an ontological experience and a socio-economic condition. I argue that musicians both function in an ontological state of precarity and engage in the labor regimes and political-economic structures which foster precarious labor. Therefore, throughout this project I use precarity and precariousness interchangeably. In the musical world of this project, one cannot exist without the other. If I am referring to the specific academic turn toward precarity, I make that distinction clear.

As I have indicated through the voices of many scholars above, the historical shift toward precarious labor has been triggered by neoliberal developments in the global economy (Threadgold 2018) and supported by capitalistic enterprises. I have also established that being a musician is precarious. Yet I argue that traditional musicians from Scotland occupy a distinct position in society in that they must navigate a path between working as entrepreneurs in a capitalist system while simultaneously relying on services and resources provided by the state. On one hand, working as a musician today is primarily a capitalist endeavor – every musician for themselves. At the same time, they must take advantage of systems of support – I elaborate more on these in Chapter Four – that are maintained under socialist-based ideals. The idea of musicians relying on external support is not new; musicians have long been the recipients of patronage; however, many of the support agencies available to musicians today are not patron-sponsored. In contrast, these agencies embody the ideals of a social safety net often associated with socialist ethics. Examining how musicians operate within these two contrasting environments is critical to understanding the traditional music scene, and how precarity can function as both a negative and positive condition for musical labor.

Shifting Mentalities Toward the Trad Music Economy

Musicians in the contemporary Scottish scene ride a constant line between “doing what they love” and making money from it. In discussing “labors of love,” anthropologists Lewis Langness and Gelya Frank (1981) and ethnomusicologist Jocelyne Guilbault (2014, 2017), have all described how life histories influence moral and artistic values which impact how people go about their work. Timothy Taylor (2012) has shown how moral values inform both aesthetic production and industrial production, two avenues which he argues must be considered together. As Guilbault (2017) states, “it would be naïve to think that the artistic values that musicians cultivate are entirely divorced from market considerations” (Guilbault 2017, 358). In the Scottish music scene, my interlocutors often speak about trying to strike a balance between the different opportunities involved in taking on musical work.



Figure 1.2: Laura Wilkie performs with Kinnaris Quintet at the 2020 Celtic Connections Festival Club. January 31, 2020. Photo by the author.

Glasgow-based fiddler Laura Wilkie has performed with renowned Scottish band Shooglenifty in the past and described their process for accepting gigs. During her time working with the band, Wilkie says they operated using “The Three Cs:”

“The Shoogles used to say ‘three Cs of a gig’ – it’s like a triangle and you’ve got to have two out of the three Cs to take a gig on. So it’s either Cash, *Craic*¹⁷, or Career. Two of those have to be present otherwise you don’t do it.”¹⁸

¹⁷ *Craic* (pronounced “crack”) is a term widely used throughout the British Isles and Ireland which roughly means “to have a good time.” It is often used to reference positive social situations such as a fun party, a good conversation, or a great night out. In this context, people say “It was good *craic*” or “the *craic* was mighty.” The term can also reference news or gossip when used in a construction such as: “What’s the *craic*?”

¹⁸ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

The Three Cs of a Gig: Cash, Craic, or Career
<p>Cash: How good is the gig fee? Is it worth it, considering all the other expenses of doing this gig? Is there the potential for good merchandise sales on top of the gig fee? Is the gig fee so good that all the other circumstances do not matter?</p>
<p>Craic: How likely are the musicians to enjoy doing this gig? Will it be fun? Even if the performance itself is not fun, what are the other circumstances involved in doing the gig that might be fun?</p>
<p>Career: Will this gig help build their career? Or, is it important to their career that they take it? Will it damage their career if they don't take it?</p>

Figure 1.3: The Three Cs of a Gig as explained by Laura Wilkie.

This breakdown is a distillation of the many factors that musicians face not only when choosing to take on a gig, but also when pursuing a career in traditional music. In addition, it demonstrates the balancing act that musicians are constantly addressing between the vocational¹⁹ aspect of work, and the necessity of making enough money to survive.

In their study on precarity and self-employed musicians in St. John's, Canada, David Chafe and Lisa Kaida find that artists often deemphasize economic gain in favor of altruistic motives (Chafe and Kaida 2020, 409). Together, the authors show how many independent musicians come to work in their field through following a calling or pursuing a vocation or a hobby. This approach to their work can lead some musicians to prioritize a passion for work over livable income. This way of being is also propagated by communities who do not see the difference between musical work as a hobby versus musical work as employment. The pressures of this kind of social environment can make it challenging to attain a livable income, but as Wilkie demonstrates, many Scottish musicians operating in the contemporary scene today are very aware of the “cash” component of the equation.

Roo Geddes states that “traditional music is currently very money driven, very individualistic.” He suggests that this approach to traditional music is rooted in the start of the folk revival:

“The folk revival created a market for it [this money driven approach to trad], [and] returned public attention to folk music, which meant people were able to make a living out of it, and that kinda grows and grows...”²⁰

This opinion has been well documented by Scottish bagpiper and scholar Simon McKerrell in his 2011 article “Modern Scottish Bands (1970-1990): Cash as Authenticity.” Here he reveals how

¹⁹ I use the term “vocational” here in line with how Chafe and Kaida (2020) use the term: to indicate a strong calling or suitability toward a career that is regarded as particularly worthy and requiring great dedication.

²⁰ Roo Geddes, Interview with the author, December 3, 2019.

the folk revival fostered a rich performance environment filled with new venues and public interest. Simultaneously, it also led to an ideological shift as traditional musicians' desire to tour became less rooted in socialist-nationalist ideology, and more financially and aesthetically driven (McKerrell 2011a, 1).

While touring bands have shifted to thinking more about the cash component of the equation, Laura Wilkie also points out that even the most popular Scottish traditional musicians are barely making a living. Due to musicians' carefully curated social media profiles, young aspiring artists and many audience members do not realize the challenges of performing as a professional musician. She suggests that people can be fooled into thinking that:

“your career is going to go this way, and it's relatively easy to get there as long as you seem to be doing the right gig or having the right person doing your music video...But it's definitely not an easy or a glamorous lifestyle and people definitely don't do it for the money.”²¹

Small gig fees and precarious employment are not new (Chafe and Kaida 2020). However, elements of the scene have changed over time which impact musicians' experiences for better or worse.

Two of my interlocutors, fiddler Eilidh Steel and guitarist Mark Neal, describe how the financial and ideological aspects of being a traditional musician are often at odds when working in traditional music's precarious employment environment. To give a concrete explanation, they cite how the mentality around hosting sessions has changed. This example demonstrates the conflict between playing music as a hobby, making it a viable career, the need to make money, and the constant overarching pressure to uphold the tradition.

A “session” in traditional music from the British Isles and Ireland, typically refers to a gathering of multiple musicians who are playing music together for fun. While rules and etiquette vary between sessions, it is generally an informal, communal activity in which musicians play common repertoire together, learn tunes by ear, and listen to each other play. In Scotland, sessions are most frequently held in pubs where a session leader is hired to be the host and keep the music going for a certain amount of time – typically three hours. Other musicians who show up to play for fun do not expect to be paid, but may benefit from free drinks at the bar.²²

Steel and Neal theorize that session host fees have caused a depreciation of performance-based gig fees, particularly in Edinburgh. At the time of my research in 2019-2020, a typical session in Edinburgh or Glasgow would pay a total of £40-60 GBP for three hours of music. This usually gets distributed between two or three primary musicians who have the responsibility to show up on time and lead the tunes all night. Neal has witnessed firsthand how some pub owners take this payment scheme too literally:

²¹ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

²² For more about sessions, see Miller (2022) and Williams (2020).

“The pub just has the attitude that ‘oh we just paid a couple musicians to play music in the corner, we’re not expecting more people.’ So even if five extra people turn up to play, they’re like, ‘oh you’re getting in the way of customers.’”²³



Figure 1.4: A session at The Ivory Hotel bar in Glasgow led by Joe Armstrong (Irish flute), Padraig O’Neill (button accordion), and Alistair Cassidy (guitar). November 1, 2019. Photo by the author.

Steel elaborates on how this mentality impacts other paid gigs:

“I think it also means that the pubs then think they can get musicians for that rate so they then think that’s what you pay musicians to come in and do a concert, so it kind of has a knock off effect onto other gigs as well.”²⁴

Giving a well-rounded picture, Neal also describes how this impacts the way that musicians think about sessions and how such a view has challenged some musicians’ mentality towards supporting the tradition. Where in the past, hosting a session might have been a way to encourage others and create a space to promote the tradition, for some it now becomes transactional:

²³ Mark Neal, Interview with the author, January 15, 2020.

²⁴ Eilidh Steel, Interview with the author, January 15, 2020.

“I think because of that unpaid/low-paid [session] gig attitude, there’s a lot of people just taking that on. And they see it as a cheap, quick way to earn some money. Not as a way to encourage people and create a brilliant atmosphere.”²⁵

Every session leader and pub owner fosters a different atmosphere. I have personally experienced session leaders and pub workers who engage with a range of attitudes towards musicians and customers. At The Captain’s Bar in Edinburgh, the owner Pamela Macgregor has always been keenly aware of the importance of live music. For years, she has prioritized hiring musicians with a range of performance styles – from balladeers to bagpipers – to play solo or host sessions on nearly every night of the week. People are always welcomed to sing along or bring their instruments and join in. Like many of the pubs in Scotland, The Captain’s Bar is a very small and narrow venue with close quarters. Yet after many nights of attending sessions there, not once did I see anyone, customer or musician, turned away.

During the slow process of reopening eateries and other gathering spaces in late 2020, there was a time when the Scottish government only allowed pubs to be open in a “silent” capacity – people could talk, but no other sounds were acceptable.²⁶ Government officials stated “no live music, no background music or volume from TVs because of the increased risk of transmission from aerosol and droplets when people raise their voices” (Marlborough 2020). In response to these restrictions, Macgregor advocated for bringing back live music in a safe capacity:

“I totally understand the reasons for not playing music, it’s just gone a little too daft... People are really, really missing it – missing the company, the chance to talk and laugh and listen to music. Without music, we are nothing. I think the rules are too tough, they need to just say we can play music if you do it safely – with a screen or at a distance. If we are going to get through this, we need the pleasures of life to keep us going.”²⁷

The session scene is a prime example for demonstrating the balancing act that professional musicians face between participating in a musical tradition that they love and still earning a living. As Neal references just above, sessions have long been about encouraging people to participate in the tradition, no matter their skill level. They are often described as fun, informal gathering spaces. Professional musicians regularly participate in sessions to play music for fun, and beginners join sessions to learn new tunes and mingle with others who have similar interests. Sessions are therefore a rare performance space where skill level may not be apparent to an outsider looking in, and musicians may or may not be getting paid to participate. Some pub owners, such as Pamela Macgregor, recognize that live music is important for bringing in customers and fostering community. For musicians who do get paid to run sessions, they have the opportunity to take on a role where the work is based more in playing music, rather than managing all the behind-the-scenes elements. In the next section, I expand on the behind-the-scenes elements that are critical to managing the precarity involved in working as a professional musician.

²⁵ Mark Neal, Interview with the author, January 15, 2020.

²⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown went through many stages of severity in Scotland. In May 2020 – October 2020 the government temporarily lightened their restrictions and many business reopened in a limited capacity.

²⁷ Pamela Macgregor, Interview with the *Edinburgh News*, October 13, 2020.

Behind-the-Scenes Work: Combating Precarity and Maintaining a Music Career

“The easiest part of Kinnaris [Quintet] is making music together...” – Aileen Reid²⁸

As a professional musician, “90% of your day is not playing music.” – Ali Hutton²⁹

So, what do musicians do all day? What kind of behind-the-scenes work do Scottish musicians undertake to mitigate precarity and further their careers?

In Scottish traditional music, many musicians do the behind-the-scenes work themselves. This includes, but is not limited to, booking gigs, promoting tours and albums, organizing tour logistics, driving to gigs, managing finances, creating and updating personal websites and social media, contacting radio stations, writing press releases, designing posters, creating videos, recording and releasing new music, and creating and managing merchandise.

It's early March 2020 – just days before the Western world is about to shut down due to COVID-19 – and I'm sitting in a busy café near the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.³⁰ It is approximately 6:00pm and the dinner rush is in full force. A tall figure with dark brown hair walks in and I immediately recognize him – Craig Baxter,³¹ the bodhran³² player from the band Gnoss. After a quick greeting, he suggests we head upstairs since it might be quieter. The upstairs seating area has a cozy warmth. It holds only a small number of tables and overlooks the main floor below. It is in fact a bit quieter and as we begin the interview, the downstairs rush also starts to subside. I ask Craig to tell me a bit about his own background and as he launches into his personal musical history, I am struck by his unusual journey as a drummer who transitioned from the bagpipe band scene into the folk band scene. As we start to talk about his band Gnoss and folk bands more broadly, he offers measured and insightful comments as someone who has gone from being an outsider to an insider in this scene.

I ask how Gnoss manages all their work behind the scenes, and Baxter describes to me how they operate using a blended approach. The bandmembers hire an agent to help book some of their gigs, particularly larger events like festivals, but do everything else themselves. Baxter explains that Gnoss initially took on an agent to help get them into festivals where they did not have a previous contact or established audience:

“It was mostly for festivals that we were hoping it would make a difference... because if [festivals] haven't heard you before, they won't always take you on... A lot of the time there's

²⁸ Aileen Reid, Interview with the author, May 18, 2020.

²⁹ Ali Hutton, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

³⁰ During my fieldwork in 2019-2020, Café Hula in Glasgow was a favorite spot for Royal Conservatoire of Scotland students and faculty looking to grab a quick meal between classes. I conducted a few of my interviews here since many of my interlocutors could easily stop in for a conversation and felt comfortable in this space. Much to the dismay of many locals, Café Hula eventually closed during the summer of 2020 in the middle of the pandemic.

³¹ At the time of our interview (March 11, 2020), Craig Baxter was finishing his last year of study at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He gave his final recital via video recording from his bedroom and graduated during the summer of 2020.

³² Bodhran or *bodhrán* (pronounced “bow-ron”) is a frame-drum which originated in Irish traditional music. It is used throughout the world today by musicians playing all styles of “Celtic” (see Introduction) music. See Figure 1.5 for an image of Craig Baxter playing the bodhran.

not much point in going to a place in England, if you haven't played a festival nearby just because people wouldn't know you."³³

Using England as an example, Baxter demonstrates how it can be difficult to get into festivals, and also how performing at festivals can introduce the band to a new audience of listeners who will come out to a gig the next time that the band plays in the area.



Figure 1.5: Craig Baxter performs with Gness at the 2019 Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh. November 16, 2019. Photo by the author.

Highland fiddler Lauren MacColl is an experienced folk band performer. She spent nine years in the Glasgow music scene during which time she earned her degree in traditional music, started performing with several different bands, and earned accolades for her performance technique, compositions, and albums. MacColl is acutely aware of the amount of work and sacrifice it takes build a career in traditional music.

Several of my interlocutors including MacColl have noted how doing the mundane work yourself, such as the many tasks listed at the beginning of this section, helps to save money. MacColl also comments that “It can be time consuming, but I think it makes you care more when you’re so invested in every little micro bit of your own business.”³⁴ In her bands, they operate such that various roles are taken on by each band member. This helps to split up the workload

³³ Craig Baxter, Interview with the author, March 11, 2020.

³⁴ Lauren MacColl, Interview with the author, February 6, 2020.

and allows musicians to choose tasks which play to their strengths and skills. But she also contends that having an agent solely for booking gigs is extremely useful:

“I feel very fortunate that the projects that I do the most work for have an agent because I find it quite hard to talk to people about money. And, I’m quite a straight talker in a way, and I don’t mind if somebody says to me ‘your band’s not right for our venue, or this can’t work.’ I really don’t mind that. But most promoters do not want to have to tell that to a musician’s face, or they don’t want to have that conversation directly. Therefore it’s just so much easier to have somebody doing those conversations for you, I think. And it’s nice to know that somebody’s working away on your behalf. I think it’s a thankless task, phoning people up and booking tours for the small percentage that they’re getting. The amount of emails that are sent and ignored. I think it would be my biggest gripe with the whole thing. Within our scene, on that side of the gig work...the amount of emails that just don’t get answered. So I’m forever thankful for those who do those jobs... I think when you’re a cooperative in a band, it’s good to have somebody external doing that, so that the onus isn’t on a band member...it’s a little bit less pressure.”³⁵

She also notes the importance of having a good relationship with her agent. She specifically comments on how crucial it is for the agent to know about all the behind-the-scenes work that musicians are doing. With a skeptical laugh, MacColl says:

“It’s always kind of said, ‘oh it’s good that somebody’s doing [the booking] so that you can just get on with doing the concerts,’ but that’s obviously not quite the way it is... The main thing is having a relationship with [an agent] and that they understand. They understand that we’re doing all these little things every day, so it does matter if they get that little bit more of a fee to compensate for what we’re doing.”³⁶

³⁵ Lauren MacColl, Interview with the author, February 6, 2020.

³⁶ Lauren MacColl, Interview with the author, February 6, 2020.



Figure 1.6: Lauren MacColl performs at the 2020 Celtic Connections Festival. January 26, 2020. Photo by the author.

A Shift in Practice: Social Media Promotion

All the behind-the-scenes work that has become a fixture on Scottish musicians “to-do lists” has changed in the last twenty years with the rise of social media and the constant demand for new content. Several of my interlocutors cite a massive shift not only in the relationship between artists and venue owners, but also in who handles promotion. Lauren MacColl says:

“[Media and promotion] has changed massively in terms of how much we have to do... The first gigs that I would have done [at the beginning of my career] were booked by email or maybe a phone call. The venues used to make the posters. Once [the gigs] were booked, you were given the date and the time and that was the end of it. Now, there’s this constant pressure to publicize and to tell everybody about your gigs all the time because that’s how we get people to come out to gigs. It’s a lot more work. It’s an awful lot more work all together. A lot more man hours spent at a computer... It makes everyone feel very, very busy. Doing stuff that, twenty years ago, you simply couldn’t do.”³⁷

Guitarist Luc McNally describes the rise in social media promotion by both the venue owners and artists, and how it has become integrated with his daily life:

³⁷ Lauren MacColl, Interview with the author, February 6, 2020.

“There’s a lot more social media involved now... The general demographic is changing quite a lot. Like all the festivals have an Instagram now and that wasn’t the case before. A lot of the background stuff I have been doing is social media, which I always forget about because it’s like a reflex now.”³⁸



Figure 1.7: Luc McNally performs at the 2019 Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh. November 16, 2019. Photo by the author.

One of the primary ways that fiddler and mandolin player Graham Rorie sees promotion changing is through the importance of live videos:

“A lot of folks say that your best bio is a live video from a gig that’s going well. Rather than a produced music video, if someone’s got an iPhone at a gig in a big tent where people look like they’re enjoying themselves, 30 seconds of that can say much more than 300 words of a bio... A lot of folks say it’s worth having someone there filming your set, just to keep putting things up to show that you’re playing live.”³⁹

Capturing, editing, and posting live videos has become an important part of the push towards social media promotion. These videos can be geared towards building hype within a fan base, and can also function to show venue owners, festival organizers, and promoters what a band is capable of when performing live. Two of the recent directors of the Scots Fiddle Festival told me that they prefer to see an act live before booking the group for their festival. However, high-quality live videos are the next best option.

³⁸ Luc McNally, Interview with the author, May 13, 2020.

³⁹ Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.

The need to produce live videos and post on social media all point toward the artist constantly having to work to promote themselves. While artists have always had to self-advocate and promote, my interlocutors suggest that it has become harder in recent years and indicative of a more precarious labor environment. Lauren MacColl describes the changing environment thus:

“I think there’s also been a big shift in the perception of what a venue and promoter does versus what a musician does. To the point where now, because now there’s so much less funding for venues, it’s almost like you’re dry hiring a space, rather than them booking you.⁴⁰ Even the likes of all the print and the posters and everything is a massive cost that then comes out of your fee at the end of the day. Whereas twenty years ago, you would have expected the venues to do that and to do their own marketing. So there’s definitely much more of a perception on ‘the artist will provide.’”⁴¹

Guitarist Mark Neal also suggests that what has changed over time is less about the venues, and more about the people running them:

“Less than venues, it’s promoters. That is the rarer and harder thing to find: good promoters...the people who run the gigs, who have venues and put stuff on...In terms of being a traveling musician, you’re so reliant on the local venue. There’s a lot of trust there.”⁴²

Craig Baxter supports Neal’s claim by explaining the reputation that is critical for promoters: “There is a lot of really good folk clubs and individual promoters, which if they’re well known enough and have put on consistently good gigs, they’ll have a [built in] audience.”⁴³ Eilidh Steel elaborates on Baxter’s point by describing how good local promoters will have built mailing lists and know all the important spots to advertise. She also suggests that performing in rural locations can be to musicians’ advantage, especially if they are working with a good local promoter:

“It’s so much easier to connect with people rurally, than in the big city. If it goes in the paper, everybody will see it. Or if you put a poster in the co-op, the town’s seen it because they all go there. So it’s a lot easier to find where to put posters up.”⁴⁴

Both Steel and Neal spoke excitedly to me about local promoters they had worked with in the past who always worked hard to bring in a crowd. Their sheer relief and delight at knowing in advance that at least one show on their tour would be covered was palpable.

⁴⁰ “Dry hiring a space” indicates renting a venue. This usually involves the artist fronting the expense of the venue and personnel that they and/or the venue require to run the event. This type of rental also means that the renter/artist handles all the promotion and the venue is not expected to do anything. Lauren MacColl (2020) contrasts this type of venue rental to “them booking you.” In this second scenario, often referred to as a “co-production,” the venue promoter fronts all the expenses. In a co-production, once all the gross income has been calculated for the show, the expenses are typically subtracted from the gross and then the artist and venue/promoter split the remaining net profits by a predetermined percentage.

⁴¹ Lauren MacColl, Interview with the author, February 6, 2020.

⁴² Mark Neal, Interview with the author, January 15, 2020.

⁴³ Craig Baxter, Interview with the author, March 11, 2020.

⁴⁴ Eilidh Steel, Interview with the author, January 15, 2020.



Figure 1.8: Eilidh Steel and Mark Neal perform together at the 2019 Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh. November 17, 2019. Photos by the author.

As my interlocutors have indicated in their statements above, the way that promotion works has changed with the rise of social media. Sociologist Alessandro Gandini (2016) has shown that in a context that reifies entrepreneurialism, social networking as a form of brand-building is considered a necessary but largely uncompensated part of the job.⁴⁵ When it comes to social media, it is not only that artists have to do more work, but rather that everyone has to do more work. The difference is that for artists such work is commonly unpaid.⁴⁶ Venues, festivals, and promoters all have their own social media profiles, however these platforms are managed by employees. Many venues and promotion agencies have created paid positions for marketing managers who operate their employers' social media as part of their daily set of tasks. If a venue owner does not have the funds or staff to manage promotion, then the promotion falls to whomever will do it; often, this is the artist.

Some venue owners and promoters create contracts with musicians that explicitly state what each party will provide. Contracts are usually clear about the length and time of performance, financial details, and liabilities. While contracts range in their level of detail and coverage of topics, advertising and promotion are often left out or discussed at a minimal level. I suggest this may be part of the issue for the shift in promotional responsibility put forward by my interlocutors. Even if a contract is explicit about who handles promotion, this is difficult to track

⁴⁵ See also Haynes & Marshall (2017), and Duffy & Pruchniewska (2017).

⁴⁶ It could be argued that if a musician works hard on promotion, then more people will attend the show and therefore the musician will make more money at the end of the night. However, there is no guarantee that their efforts will pay off. People with paid marketing/promotion positions, by contrast, will usually earn their fee no matter the outcome of the attendance.

and all parties involved rarely hold each other accountable. The question therefore becomes, how much motivation does each party have to promote the show?

Fiddle legend John Martin of the Tannahill Weavers started his musical career in the 1960s and only recently retired from touring life. He acknowledges that while expectations may have changed regarding who does what work, there has also been a shift in what musicians are willing to put up with. Sitting in the front corner of the Waverley Bar in Edinburgh before his usual Sunday afternoon session with other local legends George Duff, Mike Katz, Allan MacDonald and Kevin Macleod, Martin describes both changes in the scene and in musicians' expectations:

“I think it’s harder now. I think the expectations are higher now than when we were younger. We thought nothing of sleeping in the van, or on somebody’s floor. It wasn’t a big deal. When you’re younger—we didn’t care. It was a good laugh. But now I think younger musicians when they come out of the conservatoire or something like that, they expect more. They expect a hotel and to be treated better than we were.”⁴⁷

Bringing in enough income on a gig to support expenses like food, travel, and lodging places even more pressure on musicians and promoters to advertise sufficiently and bring in a crowd. As Martin points out, the level of comfort and safety that a musician is willing to sacrifice indicates how high a gig fee is necessary. All of these expenses become precarious elements of a tour. Is the band willing to sleep in the tour van, on someone’s floor, at an unknown homestay, or a hotel? How safe is the town that the band is staying in, and therefore what quality of hotel is required? Will everyone go out to eat at a restaurant, or pick up snacks from a grocery store? How expensive is gas at the current moment? Does the band need to hire a van to transport everyone to the gig? Will band members travel by bus, train, car, or airplane? How many of these factors can be calculated in advance to make the tour as successful as possible?

⁴⁷ John Martin, Interview with the author, March 15, 2020.



Figure 1.9: John Martin (center) plays fiddle in the Sunday session at the Waverley Bar in Edinburgh with Kevin Macleod (left) and George Duff (right). March 15, 2020. Photo by the author.

Cutting out Variables to Ensure Stability

So how do Scottish musicians manage to make a living?

After touring internationally with the Tannahill Weavers for thirty years, John Martin says:

“The way to make a living at it is to work constantly. And it’s hard work. You’re traveling every day, sometimes five to six hours of driving, then your soundcheck, then the concert. And very often, no time to eat. It’s midnight by the time you get into your bed, and then you do the same thing the next day. You do that for a month. It’s okay when you’re 20 or 30, but when you’re in your 60s it’s not as easy.”⁴⁸

Performing every night for a month straight is what fiddler Graham Rorie refers to as “touring in blocks.” Rorie describes in more detail how this helps his band:

“For the Gness [tours], we do all of it in blocks now. So we’ll set aside three weeks in June, two weeks in November, three weeks in March. And then that way, it kind of keeps your promotion costs down because you’re promoting a tour that’s got a bit of buzz and attention about it.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ John Martin, Interview with the author, March 15, 2020.

⁴⁹ Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.

Touring in blocks concentrates a band's efforts into a short amount of time. This applies to the physically demanding work of being on the road characterized by John Martin above, logistics expenses, and the promotional efforts by the musicians. Promoting an entire tour all at once, rather than individual shows off and on, allows them to spend less on advertising while still marketing to their target audiences. Promoting a tour means that they can send newsletters to their entire list serve, and post announcements on their social media which apply to more of their fan base. This means that more people will engage with their announcements and social media content. If they are promoting one-off gigs, there will be fewer fans who find each announcement applicable, due to their geographic location.

Rorie describes how touring in blocks helps him manage a precarious livelihood:

“Most of my booking now is done 8-12 months in advance... which is quite reassuring. That way you know you have a month you can have a holiday and maybe work on a recording project, and you know that you're not going to be waiting to see if a gig's coming in at that stage. And if a ceilidh⁵⁰ comes in at the last minute and they need cover, you can go and do that.”⁵¹

Although he may have gigs booked several months in advance, Rorie points out that bringing in a chunk of income only every few months means knowing how to distribute and manage one's personal budget. And as all musicians experienced in March 2020, tours can dissolve at the drop of a hat due to circumstances outside their control.

When Gnos does go out on tour during one of these blocks, as the primary manager for the band, Rorie does everything in his power to plan ahead and foresee any possible scenarios that might derail a performance:

“When we go on the tour, [it helps] having everything scheduled out. You've got a page saying where you're staying, when you need to sound check, what your fee is for the night, contract, and all the bureaucracy of booking gigs, so that when you arrive... I almost see it as cutting out variables. Once you've got the gig booked, making sure you know exactly what's going on... then that just goes out as a schedule [to the band].”⁵²

While not every musician is as organized as Graham Rorie, thinking ahead at this level of detail is often required for a successful performance or tour. In today's performance landscape, putting in the work behind the scenes, cutting out variables, and planning for a range of outcomes are all critical to maintaining a successful career.

⁵⁰ A ceilidh or *cèilidh* (pronounced “kay-lee”) is a Scottish social gathering or party where there is commonly music and dancing. Some ceilidhs are more performance-based: attendees will take turns sharing a tune, poem, or song in front of others. In this quote, Graham Rorie is referring to a ceilidh dance. These gatherings typically take place in a large hall where a dance band is hired to play music for two to three hours and attendees engage in set dancing (sometimes facilitated by a caller). For more about ceilidh dancing and other forms of social dance in Scotland, see Catherine Shoupe (2001) and Patricia Ballantyne (2019).

⁵¹ Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.

⁵² Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.



Figure 1.10: Graham Rorie performs with Gness at the 2019 Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh. November 16, 2019. Photo by the author.

Conclusion

Working as a professional musician has long been a precarious career choice. However, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, my interlocutors feel that the traditional music scene has become even more precarious than it used to be. A large part of this feeling centers on how the responsibility for creating and managing a successful career is now almost entirely placed on the artist. In the past, promoters and venue owners provided more assurances to musicians, or shared in the burden of managing a precarious labor environment. Now, the political-economic performance infrastructures and rise of social media are causing musicians to assume more of the pressure and risk. When viewing the Scottish music scene solely from this perspective, the precarity of working as a traditional musician resonates with Bourdieu's characterizations of precarity as equivalent to insecurity or a negative condition. However, when precarity is accepted as an ontological condition of the life and work of being a traditional musician, it also has the potential to showcase positivity and resourcefulness. Tactics such as hiring a reliable agent, filming live videos, touring in blocks, and creating detailed schedule sheets for gigs are all entrepreneurial strategies that musicians have developed to promote themselves and save time or money. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, musicians have also become skilled workers in a variety of fields such as logistics, finance, and media management. Further, the recognition of a career in traditional music as precarious labor by large entities such as the Scottish government has led to the organization of institutional structures which provide training and funding specifically for Scottish musicians. I elaborate more on these infrastructures of support in Chapter Four. While musicians primarily rely on strong self-motivation to accomplish the daily grind of tasks which help further their careers, they must also

depend on the support of others, such as their wider network of colleagues, agents, promoters, patrons. In the next chapter I elaborate on the ways that musicians take advantage of those network connections.

Chapter 2

Building Your Career: Networking for Mobility and Mobilizing your Network

This chapter explores the social expectations of the Glasgow traditional music network, and investigates how musicians operationalize their connections in the service of professional status and mobility. Statistical sociological studies indicate that maintaining and drawing on social network connections is becoming a marketable soft skill that is more important to achieving professional success and social mobility in the United Kingdom than other forms of educational credentialing.⁵³ Building on Chapter One, here I consider how musicians mobilize their wide variety of skills to expand their professional networks. I examine how, where, and when Scottish musicians make connections that they consider beneficial for their careers. I also inquire about the benefits of undertaking a music degree program in the contemporary Scottish traditional music scene and the affordances these programs offer that may go beyond an education.

This chapter also examines the complexities of the social scene in Glasgow, to show not only the benefits and the challenges it presents to musicians, but also the social expectations that inform both their self-representation and performance. To highlight the contingencies and opportunities which inform musicians of different generations, I offer contrasting ethnographic examples of young musicians who view their music making as a career versus the old guard who played music as a hobby and “fell into” this way of life. The final section of this chapter turns toward addressing the impact that social media has had on self-promotion. I explore how the COVID-19 pandemic led to new forms of social media use which propagated enhanced forms of virtual networking and revealed technological inequalities amongst musicians.

Social Expectations of Self-Deprecation

Years of fieldwork experience in the UK have led me to conclude that in Britain, it is customary to downplay one’s various skills and speak with humility in general conversation. The musicians with whom I spoke in Glasgow were generally quite humble when speaking about their musical skill and complimentary when speaking about their colleagues. While humility is often lauded as a virtue, in the Glasgow music scene, this form of self-presentation often gets paired with more negatively connotated self-deprecation. The use of self-deprecation is rampant in casual conversations of all kinds, and has made its way into on-stage performance and various forms of self-promotion. In the words of Abigail Chandler for Metro News, “We Brits are the masters of self-deprecation.”⁵⁴

Self-deprecation or “negative self-evaluation” (Owens, 1994) has been studied primarily in the field of psychology. These studies tend to describe self-deprecation as a cognitive state or

⁵³ See Goldthorpe (2013) and Iannelli & Paterson (2007).

⁵⁴ Abigail Chandler, “Self-deprecation is damaging and unhealthy – let’s break the habit,” *Metro News*, January 28, 2017, <https://metro.co.uk/2017/01/28/self-deprecation-is-damaging-and-unhealthy-lets-break-the-habit-6402441/>.

personality dimension, which includes low self-esteem or negative self-regard.⁵⁵ While many psychologists have linked the tendency to disparage oneself to depression and anxiety, I suggest that the studies which discuss the “presentation management” aspect of self-deprecation are most relevant in the context of this dissertation.⁵⁶

Discourses of presentation management take the perspective that individuals use self-deprecation as a performative method to achieve a desired reaction or result. Some scholars have argued that people use self-deprecation to convey modesty⁵⁷ or produce “optimal audience reactions” (Schlenker & Leary, 1982: 102). Evolutionary psychologists Gil Greengross and Geoffrey Miller (2008) have even suggested that high status individuals use it to fake inferior personality traits in order to appear agreeable and win support.⁵⁸

In more popular news sources, Abigail Chandler (2017) and Katie O’Malley (2017) argue that self-deprecation is “the cornerstone of British humour” and that its use is increasing particularly in the realm of social media (Parkinson, 2016). Writing for *Elle UK*, Northern English editor Katie O’Malley says “In social situations, we often use self-deprecation as a handy tool to defuse tension, seem humble or add humour. It shows vulnerability and authenticity, weakens hierarchies, lowers expectations in case of failure, reflects a mirthful disposition, deflects attention for the shy and, when used insincerely, reassures and inflates the ego of the conceited” (O’Malley 2017). I demonstrate how this plays out in Scottish musicians’ social media posts later in this chapter.

British psychologist Susan Speer (2019) aims to bridge the divide between arguments about cognitive state and presentation management. She suggests that self-deprecation should be thought of as an interactional, communication practice. For her study, she analyzed a sequence of British conversations and interactions to determine that self-deprecation can often function like disclaimers in conversation. Disclaimers such as “I don’t mean to be rude, but....” make it possible to make risky statements or leave oneself vulnerable to criticism. However, Speer (2019) points out that disclaimers have become such a common practice that they are often called out as a strategic conversation move.

Self-deprecation and disclaimers both work to “inoculate the speaker against negative identity attributions” (Speer 2019, 823). However, while disclaimers *deny* negative identity attributes, self-deprecation statements *claim* these attributes (Speer 2019, 823). Speer provides an excellent example of a sports award acceptance speech in which after delivering somewhat of a long speech, the speaker ends by saying “...I’m gonna shut up now, because I’m just mumbling on...” In this statement, the speaker draws attention to his shortcomings (he gave a long speech at an awards ceremony), defuses tension, and maintains a good relationship with his audience (Speer 2019, 817). This is exactly the kind of statement a

⁵⁵ For more about self-deprecation as a cognitive state or personality dimension see: Owens (1993, 1994); Rhodewalt & Agustsdottir (1986); Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg (1995); Sciangula & Morry (2009).

⁵⁶ For more about the link between self-deprecation and depression or anxiety see: Kopala-Sibley, Klein, Perlman, & Kotov (2017); Luyten et al. (2007); Owens (1994).

⁵⁷ See Blickle, Diekmann, Schneider, Kalthöfer, & Summers (2012); Robinson, Johnson, & Shields (1995).

⁵⁸ See Patrick Stewart (2011) for how this applies to high ranking individuals including political officials.

musician might make on stage after delivering a long story and before launching into the next musical number.

Susan Speer makes several strong points throughout her article, however her conclusion that self-deprecation may be “a powerful interactional tool precisely so as to appear *non-strategic*” resonates most deeply with my fieldwork (2019, 824). As I will discuss throughout this chapter, to make a career in this scene, musicians must simultaneously sell their artistry while appearing humble and non-strategic. In the words of 2019 Scots Trad Music Awards Musician of the Year, Jenn Butterworth:

“There’s the deemed level of the lack of self-confidence battling with a massive ego. It’s really hard to work out exactly what the *craic* is with those two things. I think in order to strive to be very good at your instrument you have to be good at your craft. You have to have an ego, because you have to know that you’re good. But then, you have to battle –you feel guilty for having an ego. Or, you’re trying to mask having an ego because it’s not cool to have an ego because you have to be self-deprecating and there’s so many people on a massive sliding scale of what that is. And you’ll go through different phases with it. So there’ll be times where I’ll be like: ‘oh that doesn’t sound quite right’ and it’s like, well, are you just looking for praise or do you feel that it doesn’t sound quite right. Because if you feel it doesn’t sound quite right, would you not just go back to your bedroom and re-write that so it sounds good?! The whole thing is so interesting. And there’s this element of being Scottish and being self-deprecating because you’re in this culture that’s like that. ...And if you take the self-deprecation out of it...are you an arsehole? When is the point that you’re allowed to have that kind of confidence?... I think there are certain circles where it is more prevalent, like the students, I find. If you get too high above your station or whatever, you can be quite picked on. But you can [also] be picked on for striving to do a good job. You have [to appear] to be very good at something without trying.”⁵⁹

Butterworth hits on several key issues with managing self-deprecation in this statement. She describes the discord between the cognitive states of low self-esteem and self-confidence, and how these must be mastered to be good at your craft. She touches on the issue of using self-deprecation as a means to fish for compliments, a statement adjacent to points made by Stewart (2011) and O’Malley (2017) about appearing agreeable or winning support and inflating the ego. Butterworth also makes the keen observation that self-deprecation is part of Scottish culture. She therefore draws our attention to the issue at stake: do musicians make these statements to fit in with societal expectations? Are there larger issues of cognitive discord at stake? Or, are these statements strategic moves, intended to appear – as Butterworth points out in her final sentence – non-strategic?

Self-deprecation is deeply ingrained in Scottish culture and therefore, social interaction, as Butterworth states. The use of self-deprecation has therefore become intertwined with networking and mobility practices, and with the ways that Scottish musicians present themselves to the public. I will discuss those topics now, before addressing how they all combine.

⁵⁹ Jenn Butterworth, Interview with the author, March 12, 2020.

The Glasgow Network

The recent institutionalization of Scottish traditional music is changing the performance landscape. Over the last twenty years, the heart of the city-based traditional music scene in Scotland has shifted from Edinburgh to Glasgow.⁶⁰ This has coincided with the development of programs such as the traditional music degree at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (previously, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama), and festivals such as Celtic Connections. The Scottish government fully funds four years of a university education for all citizens. This includes free tuition and varying levels of additional bursaries and/or loan offers based on family income and qualifications.⁶¹ Many of my interlocutors noted that students use this opportunity as a way to move to the city of their choice. Sociologists Cristina Iannelli and Lindsay Paterson (2007) have stated that Scotland has a more comprehensive educational system than the rest of the UK, and that educational participation is generally higher there. They also suggest that interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence are more important than education, and that the importance of education credentials on the labor market has been reduced due to credentialing inflation. Writing about the UK more broadly, John Goldthorpe (2013) says that while educational policy in Britain is seen across the political spectrum as the crucial instrument for increasing mobility, he suggests that education is actually limited in its abilities to do so. He argues the peer-group socialization and further networking are the keys to mobility – something that my interlocutors described to me on multiple occasions. While Goldthorpe is speaking most specifically about mobility in relation to social class, his conclusions translate directly to musical fame and status level in Scotland. Student musicians come from all over Scotland to obtain a degree from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS). While students are technically in the city to attend university, many have indicated to me that they really come for the opportunity to live in Glasgow and build their network of connections in the scene. As ethnomusicologist Benjamin Brinner has demonstrated, examining a musician’s networking practices offers a framework to consider their individual agency in relation to the larger forces and structures of the musical scene (Brinner 2009). On their website, the RCS promotes the city of Glasgow as one of the reasons to attend their university.⁶² Many students use this educational opportunity as a means to spend four years living on government support at the center of the city while they work on building their career.

Graham Rorie, a fiddler from Orkney, moved to Glasgow to attend RCS. He contends that while a RCS degree is useful and a good qualification to have, the Glasgow music scene operates more on the basis of “who you know.”⁶³ Reflecting on their RCS experience in hindsight, several of the current and former RCS students with whom I spoke indicated that they did not feel completely fulfilled by their educational training. Some described a desire for more technique-based musicianship training, while others felt that RCS did not fully prepare them for the realities of working in the music industry world.⁶⁴ However, they also indicated an appreciation for their instructors and the connections afforded to them by their enrollment in the

⁶⁰ Aaron Jones, Interview with the author, May 21, 2016.

⁶¹ For more about the Scottish education system including a detailed breakdown of tuition assistance, fees, bursaries, and other financial assistance, see: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/universities/student-financial-support/>

⁶² “Glasgow,” Why RCS?, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, accessed February 20, 2023, <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/why-rcs/aboutglasgow/>.

⁶³ Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.

⁶⁴ For deeper discussion of traditional music degree programs, including RCS, see Chapter Four.

program. For many students, RCS and other Glasgow-based educational programs have been a valuable stepping stone. Yet they suggest that the opportunities to learn and grow in the Glasgow music scene supersede the formal educational experience.

Graham Rorie's bandmate Aidan Moodie, an Orcadian singer-songwriter and guitarist, says that "Glasgow has facilitated my career."⁶⁵ Rorie and Moodie created a duo which turned into a four-piece band called "Gnoss" during their time at RCS and actively worked to build their own careers in the Glasgow music scene. At the time of my fieldwork, the band had recently developed a wide-ranging level of recognition in Scotland, having performed as headliners at the Scots Fiddle Festival and been given their own full-length concert at Celtic Connections. In 2019, Moodie was also invited to join well-known Scottish highland rock band, Mànran.

Calum McIlroy, a guitarist from Aberdeenshire, took the opposite approach. He drew on the Glasgow network from the outside in order to help facilitate his move to the city. As a musician coming from outside the urban centers, McIlroy felt he had to be strategic about working with Glasgow musicians in anticipation of his audition to RCS. He took a lesson with Innes Watson, an instructor at RCS, and asked Glasgow-based musician, Laura Wilkie, to play with him for the audition itself. McIlroy specifically told me, "It's about who you know and what contacts you make."⁶⁶ Since moving to Glasgow to attend RCS, McIlroy has gone on to create a wide network of contacts in the scene and won a position as a finalist in the 2020 BBC Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition. During the 2023 Celtic Connections festival, he was also invited to be part of a concert featuring well known guitarists in the scene: Anna Massie, Tim Edey, and Ian Carr.

Ali Hutton, a bagpiper from Perthshire who grew up working with well-known piper Gordon Duncan, also felt the draw to move to Glasgow. Hutton was inspired by all the young people he saw playing traditional music and ultimately applied to the RSAMD (now RCS) piping degree. Despite officially moving to Glasgow to attend university, he says that the biggest part of the degree was "meeting everyone and understanding the bigger picture" of the scene.⁶⁷ For Hutton, the opportunities in the scene started to grow once he moved to Glasgow and started participating in sessions. He built his network and performance career through connections in the session scene and through working on various creative projects with friends. Hutton now has an active performance and producing career, and is an affiliated faculty member at RCS where he often sits on juries for student recitals.

In 2008, the city of Glasgow was granted the designation as the UK's first-ever UNESCO City of Music.⁶⁸ With hundreds of traditional musicians now living in Glasgow, the scene has grown and continues to attract more musicians and music industry workers. Ciarán Ryan, a banjo player and fiddler living in Edinburgh, commented to me that more and more traditional musicians continue to move to Glasgow because it is easier to form bands there and be available

⁶⁵ Aidan Moodie, Interview with the author, March 16, 2020.

⁶⁶ Calum McIlroy, Interview with the author, May 7, 2020.

⁶⁷ Ali Hutton, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

⁶⁸ "Glasgow," Creative Cities, UNESCO Creative Cities Network, accessed February 28, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/glasgow>.

for gigs.⁶⁹ In the examples above, my interlocutors all describe how they moved to Glasgow to attend RCS.⁷⁰ In every case this has been a successful choice for building their career. However, they demonstrate that the benefits of undertaking these educational programs reside less in improving musical skill, than in the opportunities of linking into an established network and residing in a place (Glasgow) where networking opportunities abound.

Show Up and Be Seen

“You get gigs by showing up to things and being seen.”⁷¹

It's 7:00pm on a Sunday night in the dark of winter as I make my way down Argyle Street toward Finnieston in Glasgow. I can already see it—The Ben Nevis Bar stands unassuming on the corner with its dark teal painted exterior and faded gold lettering inviting visitors to escape the frigid temperatures. When I step inside, I can see that it's already starting to fill up with patrons. There is a long table towards the back of the narrow room where musicians have crammed themselves onto a long bench and claimed several small stools. Pints of beer and glasses of whisky glint in the warm light, reflecting the impressive selection of bottles behind the bar. There are a limited number of available seats at this session. If you don't get a seat, you don't play music. I watch as a few musicians get up and leave their instruments on the table while they step outside for a smoke break. But no one swoops in to take their seats. Seats are only forfeited when a musician packs up their case and announces their departure or specifically allows a friend to take their place for a few tunes. The tunes are intricate and the fast tempo uncompromising—contemporary reels and hard driving jigs punctuated occasionally by an anthemic march. As the night wears on, the bar becomes a gathering place – filling almost entirely with musicians from the scene. Some have brought along their instruments just in case, while others have arrived empty handed and are simply there to socialize or be seen.

In early January of 2020, I attended a day of discussions hosted by the BIT Collective in Glasgow. The BIT Collective is an organization run primarily by women which aims to discuss and address gender and equality issues in Scottish traditional arts. Their mission statement articulates that they “plan to achieve this by gathering and analysing data, facilitating discussion and learning, providing support, and inspiring progressive action.”⁷² The organization runs monthly online workshops and discussions on inclusivity, as well as panel discussions at festivals such as Celtic Connections and the Scots Fiddle Festival. They also host occasional concerts and open mic nights featuring female and non-binary performers.

⁶⁹ Ciarán Ryan, Interview with the author, May 6, 2020.

⁷⁰ A degree from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is not required to be accepted into the Glasgow network. As Ciarán Ryan alludes to, there are many musicians who have moved to the city to access the networking opportunities, without pursuing a degree in music. In Glasgow, there is also a strong overlapping network of musicians who operate within the dance band community. Many of these musicians play exclusively for ceilidh dances and have fewer ties to RCS.

⁷¹ Statement by an anonymous member of the BIT Collective. The number of times that I heard a statement roughly resembling this idea is significant. Similar sentiments were expressed by Aileen Reid, Laura Wilkie, Jeri Foreman, and other members of the BIT Collective.

⁷² “About us,” The BIT Collective, accessed February 27, 2023, <https://www.thebitcollective.co.uk/about>.

During the BIT Collective discussions that I attended, key topics included how to manage a performance career while caring for children or elderly at home, and the lack of visible diversity in the traditional music scene. Throughout these discussions, the idea of “being seen” both literally and metaphorically was a recurring topic. Many of the musicians in attendance commented about how making connections in the Glasgow music scene demands that you attend other musicians’ gigs, play sessions, and hang around festivals. As I described in the opening vignette of this section, showing up to a session is not necessarily about playing music, but rather can simply involve socializing and having a pint with others in the scene. So what does going to various events achieve? Musicians that I interviewed commented how showing up and being seen helps you stay on people’s radar, and therefore get asked to do gigs.

Glasgow musicians have set up a strong network of “depping.” “Depping,” an informal way of describing deputizing someone, is essentially “subbing” or filling in for another musician who is unable to make their gig. Jeri Foreman is a fiddler from Australia who has explored many different music scenes around the world. She first visited Scotland in 2017 and decided to move to Glasgow shortly thereafter. She started her career in the city through playing sessions and picking up depping gigs. While she now has her own bands, she still earns a significant part of her living through depping in various genres of music. Graham Rorie also notes how going to sessions often leads to depping, and performing well while depping leads to more gigs and opportunities. Fiddler and classical violinist Roo Geddes and accordionist Neil Sutcliffe cite similar situations in their own experience. Glasgow fiddler Laura Wilkie specifically notes that “if you’re out and about playing a lot, then people think of you more.”⁷³ She even goes so far as to say that:

“I maybe got asked to do certain things over other people, not because I was better than them, but maybe because I was around... I think another important thing is... the basic thing of being on time, or having a good reputation for learning the stuff...if you’ve learned it to the best that you can for your dep gig, that goes such a long way...if you’re reliable, then you get asked to do a lot more stuff... I realized, you have to be a positive force, or have a positive attitude, that kind of demeanor.”⁷⁴

The converse of this phenomenon is also true. Glasgow fiddler and mother, Aileen Reid, has personally experienced that “when people don’t physically see you, you’re not asked to do things.”⁷⁵ She and others in the BIT Collective believe this to be part of the issue with women often getting overlooked for gigs. As primary care givers for children or elderly relatives, women often stay home in the evenings and are unable to go to gigs or sessions. Showing up to gigs, sessions, and events can be expensive and impossible for some musicians. Some people cannot afford to have a drink in hand at an event. Others choose not to drink and want to avoid the pub environment altogether. Still others live at the outskirts of the city and find that transportation home late at night from the city center might be non-existent or feel unsafe. Aileen Reid posed an important question to the BIT Collective that remains unanswered: “How do you stay visible and help others stay visible?”

⁷³ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

⁷⁴ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

⁷⁵ Aileen Reid, Interview with the author, May 18, 2020.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, perceptions about what it means to “be seen” also changed. At the height of lockdown in Scotland, people were only allowed out of their houses for one hour of exercise per day. In addition, the government prohibited outdoor socializing of any kind, and so the only way for musicians to “jam” or play music together was to collaborate virtually. Laura Wilkie describes a new sort of anxiety that started to come from online videos. She wondered, “if you don’t put out videos, will people forget about you? Will you get gigs when Covid is over?”⁷⁶ As I will discuss further towards the end of this chapter, keeping up with social media and the virtual performance environment during the pandemic caused stress and anxiety amongst many of my interlocutors. However, the restrictions of only being able to perform, “be seen,” and interact online also led to an enhanced form of virtual networking.

Everyone is “Friends”

You have to be seen to get gigs. And if you are seen, musicians in the Glasgow music scene tend to be friendly and welcoming. I suggest that this friendly mentality stems from larger societal expectations surrounding praise and encouragement. As I noted above, self-deprecation and downplaying one’s abilities are deeply ingrained in Scottish society and the music scene. This sets up a need for the converse: encouragement is everywhere. Small acts such as doing the grocery shopping or repotting a plant often get praised with “well done.” In the Glasgow music scene, these societal expectations come together to create a friendly, welcoming scene, where everyone is constantly complimenting each other’s music making. Calum McIlroy points to the issues with this mentality. He says there is this expectation that:

“Glasgow is such a friendly scene and so inclusive...and to an extent it is... but, because of that and this kind of thing of ‘we’re all pals’ sort of idea... you kind of feel as though you can’t really criticize anybody or you can’t really have an opinion on somebody or what they do unless it’s positive.”⁷⁷

In the quote above, McIlroy suggests that because there is the expectation in the scene that everyone should be friends, no one is honest with each other about what is good or what they like. Laura-Beth Salter is an avid instructor and mandolin player with the powerhouse band Kinnaris Quintet. She explains the rationale behind this friendly mentality: “If there’s a scene that’s niche, you have to be supportive of others.”⁷⁸ Fellow Kinnaris Quintet band member, Laura Wilkie, also feels that in the Glasgow music scene, everyone tends to help each other and be supportive. A prime example of this is how musicians will promote each other’s work on social media. When someone releases a new single or album, other local musicians will share posts about that release on their social media, particularly on their Instagram story. In the same vein, just like in live performance and in the practice of depping, there is a great amount of cross collaboration on musical recordings. By including a range of fellow musicians from the local scene, a primary artist increases their opportunity for promotion when the album or song is released. Musicians who have played on a recording are more likely to promote it than those who are just friends with the artist. Also, it offers the opportunity for more cross-collaborations at live

⁷⁶ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

⁷⁷ Calum McIlroy, Interview with the author, May 7, 2020.

⁷⁸ Laura-Beth Salter, Interview with the author, May 12, 2020.

shows and functions as a form of networking. As ethnomusicologist Benjamin Brinner has noted, artists have both aesthetic and pragmatic motivations for their interactions (Brinner 2009).⁷⁹ If a primary artist asks a diverse group of musicians to provide accompaniment on their album, they are able to facilitate introductions with musicians they may have never met or build stronger bonds with preestablished connections. In addition, the primary artist will have more choices of band members to join them for future performances of the album material.

When taken together, the statements above by McIlroy, Salter, and Wilkie point to the complexities of interactions in Glasgow's music scene. Musicians are often self-deprecating, however they also need to promote themselves and their own work. Simultaneously, they rarely speak ill of their "friends" but rather will offer praise and support. I contend that this friendly mentality stems from both the cultural expectation of praising people for small accomplishments, and also the desire for maintaining good connections and enough work to survive.

Jenn Butterworth demonstrates the cyclical nature of self-deprecation and praise by offering a suggestion for how to break away from artistic self-deprecation. She suggests that musicians work with other artists who are like-minded, with whom they feel safe, and who will help support each other, and pull each other up out of that self-deprecating mode. With those people, Butterworth feels that an artist can show their ego, or at least be extremely self-confident. If a musician has created something they feel confident is good, they can then ask their trusted collaborators for their honest opinion, feedback, or criticism. Butterworth says you can tell a collaborator who is being self-deprecating to:

"sort yourself out. That was fine. Don't disrespect me by being self-deprecating if I'm telling you something is good. Because that's you saying that you don't trust my judgement. There's a kind of line there where you all slowly start pulling yourselves up out of that a little bit... But it takes a while to get to that point. And have you worked enough to have enough evidence behind you to know that you're doing a good job so that the self-deprecation becomes less as well, which requires that level of work. And how do you get to that point?"⁸⁰

This kind of trust and comradery can be challenging to find, especially when musicians are new to the scene or working in depping environments. While veterans of the music scene may have developed more self-confidence and access to trusted collaborators, young musicians looking to make new connections and build their reputation in the scene have fewer opportunities and little motivation to share their opinions openly.

Upon arrival in Glasgow, I was under the impression that many musicians play multiple kinds of music to get more gigs, but according to Jeri Foreman, there are enough gigs in

⁷⁹ In chapters 7 and 8 of *Playing Across a Divide: Israeli-Palestinian Musical Encounters* (2009), Benjamin Brinner develops a qualitative theory of networking in relation to music studies. Through his case study of oud and violin player Yair Dalal, Brinner demonstrates how one musician's extensive network of collaborators can lead to a range of performance opportunities with diverse musical lineups. He also reveals how, despite working with many collaborators, Dalal intentionally curated his own name-recognition as a form of branding which contributed to elevating his career.

⁸⁰ Jenn Butterworth, Interview with the author, March 12, 2020.

traditional music (and enough money) that you can make a living from playing one genre.⁸¹ However, staying within one genre does limit the number of gigs available and may lead to a sense of urgency or need to take advantage of every possible gig opportunity. This further supports the need for musicians to maintain all network connections and be friendly to everyone. Sociologist Mark Granovetter points out that employment opportunities often come through the weakest connections, and that they are an “important resource in making possible mobility opportunity” (Granovetter 1973, 1373). He found that people are more likely to hear about a job recommendation from someone who they see occasionally (only a few times a year), than from someone who they see often. Since the time of Granovetter’s research, both the internet and social media have become pervasive. According to my interlocutors, it now works both ways in traditional music. As I have demonstrated above, musicians need to be seen by other musicians to get gigs. In some cases, this leads to strong ties, deep friendships, and trusted collaborators. In other cases, frequent interactions may only include surface level interactions in person or on social media, and not lead to strong ties. Regardless, the more opportunities musicians create for “being in the right place at the right time” or making new weak connections, the more work and career-building opportunities might arise.

The young musicians that I spoke with in Glasgow are generally very active about pursuing and building their careers. As I have indicated previously, this coincides with a rise in social media and the establishment of educational degrees in traditional music, such as the RCS program, which extol this type of active entrepreneurial spirit. Yet this career-focused approach is not lauded by some musicians in the scene. Tom Oakes, a guitarist living in Edinburgh, says that “not enough people, actively, are looking after the tradition at the moment, they’re looking after being professional musicians.”⁸² This comment carries a fair amount of weight as Oakes plays in a duo with Ross Couper, arguably one of the most well-known and showy contemporary Shetland fiddlers in Glasgow. Many of the older guard of musicians feel similarly to Oakes and are finding themselves having to reckon with how their careers happened versus how young musicians are handling their careers today. In the following section, I present two contrasting examples of well-known musicians who built their careers in a different manner than the Glasgow-centric model I have just described.

When the Career Happens to You

According to my interlocutors, Edinburgh was the musical center of Scotland in the 1990s – a time when it had the same buzz that Glasgow has today. Many performers who were active in the foundational touring bands of Scottish traditional music, such as the Tannahill Weavers and the Battlefield Band, have made Edinburgh their home and retired there. While there are still plenty of active musicians who live in Edinburgh – including, for example, Tom Oakes and Ciarán Ryan – the city’s music scene now has a more relaxed feel to it. In general, the sessions are paced at a slower tempo and are more accessible to musicians of all levels. It is easier to find a session featuring old, traditional tunes in Edinburgh than it is in Glasgow, where

⁸¹ Many genres of music coexist in Glasgow. However, at the time of my research, the few practitioners of traditional music who participated in other genres of music primarily worked in Bluegrass/Americana, Jazz, and Western Art music.

⁸² Tom Oakes, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

the sessions are filled with contemporary compositions. The experiences and views of two legendary musicians who have long operated from outside the borders of Glasgow offer a contrast to the contemporary situation discussed above.

John Martin: An International Touring Career

John Martin is a well-known Edinburgh-based fiddler who toured with the Tannahill Weavers for thirty years. He described to me how his career blossomed unexpectedly in the 1960s. He was mostly playing Irish music in pubs and playing in a band with the two brothers William and George Jackson, when their group called Contraband was offered a recording contract. At 18 years old he moved to London because of this contract which promised to pay for all their basic necessities. After the contract expired and the record company decided they only wanted to keep supporting the lead singer, the rest of the group attempted to continue living in London. Martin recalls the difficulty of making a living in London, noting that in order to survive, they got physical labor jobs during the day and performed any kind of music – from jazz, to rock, to country – that people wanted to hear at night. After five years struggling to make it in London, he returned to Scotland and founded two of the early influential traditional music bands, Ossian and Jock Tamson's Bairns. Despite the fame that groups like Ossian eventually garnered, Martin notes that he was still working odd jobs during the day for years before music became his primary occupation.

According to Kevin Macleod, there is a difference in perspective in how people view music making across the generations. In the past, playing traditional music was about having fun with your pals, not about making a career. Macleod remarks:

“A big difference between then and now is that [now] we all know hundreds of excellent musicians...who see music as an occupation. Whereas we, certainly I, never considered I'd make a penny playing, and if I did it was a rare occurrence.”⁸³

Legendary bagpiper Mike Katz of the Battlefield Band has similar feelings. Originally from California but long based in Edinburgh, Katz claims that he's never made a conscious decision about taking steps to advance his career because “I've never thought of my career as a career.”⁸⁴ Katz says he just wants to play the music and wants to make the best musical decisions for the Battlefield Band. This mentality is also evident in how Martin approached his music early on. Yes, he got a recording contract and took advantage of that opportunity to move outside Scotland and pay some bills; however, even with that contract, he still considered music making to be a hobby in stark contrast to the many younger traditional musicians who now see music as a viable career.

⁸³ Kevin Macleod, Interview with the author, March 13, 2020.

⁸⁴ Mike Katz, Interview with the author, May 21, 2020.



Figure 2.1: Kevin Macleod, John Martin, George Duff, and Mike Katz (left to right) lead the Sunday afternoon session at The Waverley Bar in Edinburgh. December 8, 2019. Photo by the author.

Despite the apparent wealth of opportunities to embark on a musical career today, John Martin believes that it is harder to make a living now in traditional music than it used to be. In the 1980s, Martin toured to the USA with his band “Ossian” for several months at a time because they found this to be more lucrative than touring in Scotland. At that time, they would buy an airplane voucher all access ticket for £300 GBP, which would allow them to hop on and off flights and fly anywhere they wanted throughout the USA. In addition, they were never hassled about bringing their instruments on board. According to Martin and Macleod, the 1970s-1990s was the heyday for travel and touring in the USA. This freedom of movement that they describe coincides with the Scottish folk music revival which blossomed during that period. This combination of low touring expenses and audience appetite for folk music jumpstarted the idea of traditional music as a career for many artists in Scotland. According to Martin, the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City in 2001 changed everything. After that, movement was restricted and it became much harder to tour the USA. This cut out a significant source of income for bands which had often spent months touring abroad.⁸⁵

Paul Anderson: Local and Accessible

In contrast to John Martin, who garnered his fame through performing with international touring bands, Paul Anderson’s career offers an example of someone who also fell into a

⁸⁵ John Martin, Interview with the author, March 15, 2020.

traditional music career, yet has been successful with a more localized approach. Anderson's content creation and live performances revolve around celebrating his local area, yet he simultaneously makes it accessible internationally through virtual platforms.

Paul Anderson is a traditional Scottish fiddler from Tarland, who plays, promotes, teaches, and performs music of the North-East fiddle tradition. Anderson took an interest in the fiddle at age five when he found one under the spare bed in his house; his grandmother had bought it in the pub for ten shillings. He began studying fiddle in primary school, and then joined the Banchory Strathspey and Reel Society because he wanted to learn Scottish music. As he grew, he began studying with Angus Shaw and then the acclaimed tradition bearer Douglas Lawrence. His early performance experience came from primary school concerts, gigs with the Strathspey and Reel Society, and eventually solo fiddle competitions. He says that winning fiddle competitions helped him to build his confidence as a player. After winning the Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship in 1995 he competed for two more years, and then at age 27 he chose to give up his family's dairy farm work and dedicate his career to music full time. Today he is an avid proponent of the North-East fiddle style and one of the go-to sources for fiddlers seeking in-depth knowledge about that regional style. For his services to the Scottish fiddle tradition and charity, in 2021 Anderson was awarded the distinction of Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) honors by Queen Elizabeth II, and an honorary doctorate from Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen.

Anderson says that early on in his career he sought guidance from mentors and friends about the business side of the music industry. However, those that he contacted were "very protective of their knowledge" and not very helpful. Anderson does not actively seek gigs and tours. Instead, he primarily performs when he gets invited to play at an event. He contends that he would not know how to put a tour together.⁸⁶

While he paints a rather inactive picture of his business work behind the scenes, he is excellent at self-promotion on social media, and – in contrast to his mentors – an open book when it comes to discussing traditional music. Anderson posts multiple times per day on his Facebook page with varied content. Sometimes his posts contain information about music he is practicing, sometimes he writes about the history of a local landmark, sometimes he shares the sheet music to a new tune he has written, and other times he shares photos of outdoor walks with his family. He posts videos of himself playing fiddle and speaking about various tunes. His YouTube channel is filled with videos of himself playing all the classic North-East fiddle tunes, making it an excellent resource for fiddlers across the world who might be seeking examples of common tunes, ornamentation, bowing, or other stylistic elements. During the pandemic, he also started doing a weekly "workshop" through Facebook live, where he would post sheet music and talk through/teach a fiddle tune once per week. In addition, Anderson says he is always happy to speak with anyone interested in Scottish music. Everyone I have spoken to who has ever written to Anderson with a question about Scottish music says that he writes back quickly with lots of information.

While many musicians filter more closely what they post or share, I suggest that the free online trove of content that Anderson has provided to the public has contributed to his success.

⁸⁶ Paul Anderson, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

His content production has raised his public profile which has elevated his status as an artist. Whether or not he ever intended to, Anderson has made himself the authoritative voice on North-East fiddle music. This reputation has brought people to him thereby linking him into several networks. Anderson feels a strong desire to pass on the tradition and so he keeps a busy roster of private pupils and occasionally runs group workshops. He performs at local venues and events around Aberdeenshire and regularly gets commissions to write new tunes. Anderson says that what he has actively sought out are musical ideas. He comes up with an artistic vision for a project and then pitches it to someone else who manages the organizational components. In this manner, Anderson mobilizes his network to help him realize his artistic visions and relies heavily on these connections to maintain his career.



Figure 2.2: Paul Anderson performs a recital on historic instruments belonging to revered Scottish fiddle composers at the 2020 Celtic Connections Festival. January 28, 2020. Photo by the author.

Contemplating Contemporary Marketing Strategy

“Social media has changed everything.” – Laura Wilkie⁸⁷

As more young musicians move toward traditional music as a career path, they are approaching it less as a hobby (as was the case with their predecessors) and more as a product that requires marketing and promotion. In today’s market, that means using social media. In 2012 there was a major uptick in social media use and consumption by the general population. That was the year that Facebook bought Instagram and the term “selfie” entered the popular

⁸⁷ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

lexicon.⁸⁸ Writing for the *New York Times*, Opinion-Editor Michelle Goldberg describes how social media “precipitated a revolution in consciousness, in which people are constantly packaging themselves for public consumption and seeing their popularity and the popularity of others quantified.”⁸⁹ For musicians, this has meant packaging both their music as an appealing product, and also their image as an artist. While music and artist marketing is nothing new, social media demands a personal approach: the artist appears to openly curate their own image. As I discussed in Chapter One, in the past, venues and faceless labels or production companies managed more elements of concert promotion. Today, independent musicians feel that they have to do more of this work themselves. Social media supports and enables this personal packaging and promotion, while simultaneously drawing attention to the person doing it.

Mike Katz finds himself somewhat concerned with how younger generations are handling their self-promotion. In relating his take on the career-oriented world of traditional music today, he describes contemporary marketing strategy as follows:

“In this modern world you have to have videos of yourself on YouTube playing your stuff, and telling everyone how great it is, or better it is, than the old stuff. And that’s fine. But that’s not my scene... If you want to work, you have to make up some kind of bullshit about yourself... Whether it’s ‘the tunes that I write are totally brilliant’ or... ‘I am the greatest interpreter of these things.’ The main thing is ‘I am.’ ‘Me.’ And I think that’s a totally different mentality [from how the older generation approached their music]. [Today] people are attracted to the cult of personality... People aren’t banging down my door asking me to talk or play music, because I’m not standing there telling them how great I am. And I don’t intend to.”⁹⁰

Katz’s statement alludes to two important points. First, social media marketing is changing how musicians present themselves to the public – a way of being that can appear fake and self-centered. Second, this type of self-promotion that Katz describes falls in direct conflict with Scotland’s entrenched expectations about self-deprecation. This begs the question, how do Scottish musicians navigate promotion in this contradictory environment? In order to make self-promotion palatable to the British public, they must simultaneously say “look at me” while framing it in a manner which aligns with social norms. The following two examples feature different ways that Scottish musicians achieve these types of multilayered posts on social media.

⁸⁸ Katy Steinmetz, “Selfie,” Top 10 Buzzwords of 2012, *TIME*, <https://newsfeed.time.com/2012/12/04/top-10-news-lists/slide/selfie/>.

⁸⁹ Michelle Goldberg, “Don’t Let Politics Cloud Your View of What’s Going On With Teens and Depression,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/24/opinion/social-media-and-teen-depression.html>.

⁹⁰ Mike Katz, Interview with the author, May 21, 2020.



Figure 2.3: Instagram post by Adam Sutherland. September 6, 2019. Screenshot captured by the author.

In Figure 2.3, fiddler Adam Sutherland advertises to his followers that he has composed a new tune. Sutherland is a well-known composer in the Scottish music scene, having released a collection of his own tunes as well as won “Composer of the Year” at the Scots Trad Music Awards in 2017. Notably, his tune “The Road to Errogie” has become popular in pan-Celtic diasporas all around the world and been recorded by numerous artists. In Figure 2.3, he posts a video where he is playing his new composition, presumably so that others can learn it or at least listen to it. He then jokes about seeking professional help to rectify the issue that he keeps composing tunes in D minor. The subtext of this post reminds his followers that Sutherland is an avid composer who is constantly producing new material. However his self-deprecating joke gives the post a comedic element, making him appear approachable and less focused on his own achievement.

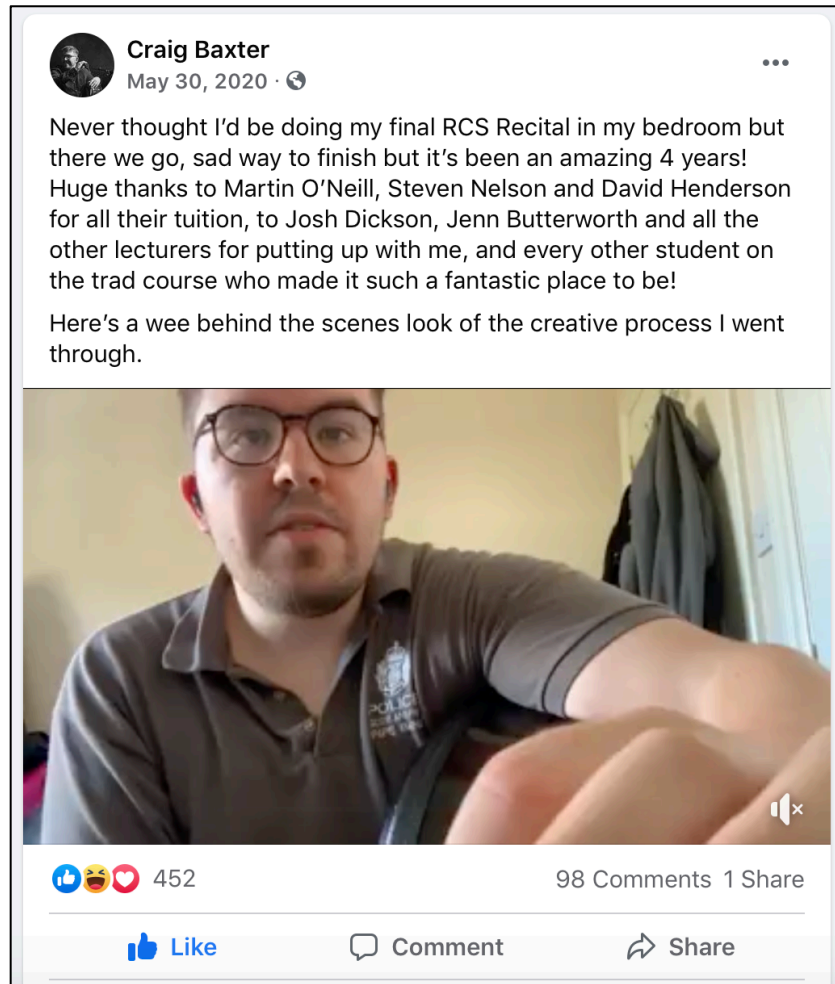


Figure 2.4: Facebook post by Craig Baxter. May 30, 2020. Screenshot captured by the author.

In Figure 2.4, Craig Baxter shares a post on Facebook about his final recital before his graduation from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. These recitals are typically open to the public, and therefore to have recorded his recital from his bedroom is, as he puts it, “a sad way to finish.” In general, the language in this post is very positive. However, he hints at a self-deprecating tone when he thanks the instructors for “putting up with me.” The centerpiece of this example is the video itself which is a masterpiece in comedic self-deprecation. It consists of a 40 second blooper reel featuring several false starts, Baxter struggling to introduce his performance numbers, and multiple attempts to start and re-start the recording. Baxter could have posted a video featuring a segment of the polished recital recording, however his decision to create and post this blooper reel had a far greater impact. This post touches on the struggles and insecurities that Scottish musicians (and many non-musicians) dealt with during the pandemic as they were forced to incorporate technology into their daily lives and creative processes. In Figure 2.4, Baxter simultaneously promotes his musical career and celebrates his achievement of graduating from RCS, all while deriding himself and what it has meant to operate as a musician during the pandemic.

These musicians' multilayered posts work to promote their music, while keeping the mood light by making a joke which often involves making fun of themselves.⁹¹ It is important to note that not all posts follow this pattern. Many of the other posts that Scottish musicians put on social media feature entirely positive comments about their music, a gig, or a collaboration. When they do add a layer of self-deprecation, it is primarily for comic relief and never done in a way that is harmful to their musical or artistic reputation. An American friend living in London theorized to me that this tactic not only adheres to social expectations, but also encourages more people to respond with positive comments.⁹² Psychologists Barry Schlenker and Mark Leary's (1982) research in self-presentation found that claims of mediocrity or an "average performance were the safest means of creating a favorable impression prior to the performance" and also offered "flexibility without the risk of major costs" for performing above or below average (1982, 96-97).⁹³ In the UK, if an artist were to constantly describe their achievements in a completely positive light without ever making use of this self-deprecating tone, it might encourage a negative sentiment. Katz demonstrates this above in voicing his opinion of how self-promotion today feels self-centered. To give another example, if a musician says their album is excellent, their audience might listen to it and think it is good, but not necessarily excellent. If a musician says their album is just okay, more people are likely to respond by telling them that it is excellent. After saying that it is excellent, those listeners might even start to believe it. These self-deprecating posts therefore work to encourage positive comments, furthering the cycle of self-deprecation and praise that I described earlier in this chapter.

Social media is based on the idea of "look at me and everything I'm doing." In many ways, the very act of live performance is the same in that it asks that the audience look and listen to everything that the artist is doing on stage. However, with the rise of social media, the way that musicians promote their own work and achievements has changed. Katz and McLeod's characterizations of the old and new styles of self-promotion point to differences in how careers in traditional music functioned in earlier times versus today. To say "look at me" goes against everything that musicians of Scotland's folk music revival experienced in their own careers, and also how they have been socialized. When the early traditional music bands were starting out, they were the only ones on the market. They were doing something new just by playing traditional tunes. Today in Glasgow, there are many more musicians vying to make a name for themselves in the scene. They are also working in a world and an industry that values a "look at me" perspective. While there is more visibility surrounding traditional music today, more infrastructure built up to support it, and perhaps even more of a market for it, there is also more competition. For Scottish musicians, the challenge has become striking a delicate balance between promoting their career in a positive light and packaging that promotion in a way that is socially acceptable to their audience.

⁹¹ My discussion of multilayered social media post language supports Katie O'Malley's (2017) general framing of British self-deprecation in social media that I quote at the start of this chapter.

⁹² Special thanks to Anne-Sophie Eliopoulos for our many informal phone conversations discussing British versus American cultural norms.

⁹³ See also Schneider & McGuire (1969).

COVID-19 as an Equalizer amongst Musicians

“All musicians are now buskers with tip jars on their mobile phones.”⁹⁴

Sean Paul Newman said this to me when I interviewed him in June 2020, three months into the COVID-19 pandemic. In Scotland, everything shut down the week of March 16th 2020. St. Patrick’s Day (March 17th) and in turn the month of March, which is typically one of the busiest months of the year for Celtic musicians, was cancelled. Suddenly all performance work was gone, no matter a musician’s level of fame or what kind of tour they had planned.

Some of the musicians I interviewed felt that this leveled the playing field across the genre. Laura Wilkie felt that this was especially noticeable in terms of how musicians were able to procure gigs. Suddenly everyone was facing the same technical difficulties, and until festivals figured out a way to operate in this new online environment, there were simply no regular or high paying gigs available to even the most well-known artists. Sean Paul Newman’s pithy statement points out that no matter a musician’s level of fame, everyone had to start playing through a screen for tips, if they wanted to make any income from performance.

A couple weeks into the pandemic lockdown, Paul Anderson and his wife, Shona Donaldson, an award-winning Bothy ballad singer, started their own weekly livestream. Each Friday night, they would put on “Live from the Lounge,” an hour-long livestream through Facebook Live from their living room. For Anderson and Donaldson, this became such a successful event that they kept it up consistently for over two years, and still at the time of this writing, occasionally put on one of these shows. During the livestream, Anderson plays various fiddle tunes and Donaldson mainly sings traditional songs. She often throws in a pop song at the end just for fun. While the music is a critical part of this livestream, their chat and interaction are crucial to its success. They tell stories and history about the music, they talk about their week, they laugh about nonsense, and occasionally throw in a self-deprecating joke. They create an atmosphere which makes the viewer feel like everyone is having a chat in the Anderson’s living room. Anderson and Donaldson have also developed two gimmicky elements which run throughout their performance. They composed a theme song to accompany a game called “What’s in the Box” where they make people guess what they are hiding in a box during the show. The contents of the box get revealed at the end of the livestream.⁹⁵ They also invite people to guess what whisky or beer they are drinking that night. Occasionally they choose a theme for their concert, such as major holidays or elements of Scottish folklore. Over the course of the livestream, they mention their Paypal.me donation link where people can give a donation of any size. They are very humble about requesting tips, in line with social expectations. When I interviewed Anderson, he told me that people have been very generous and that the tips really make it worth continuing to put on the livestream. This sort of show and delivery of music and other content is an extension of how Anderson has continued to put himself and his music out into the world.

⁹⁴ Sean Paul Newman, Interview with the author, June 2, 2020.

⁹⁵ The contents of Anderson and Donaldson’s “What’s in the Box” game often featured trinkets such as figurines, whisky-related products, or music supplies such as rosin for a violin bow.



Figure 2.5: Paul Anderson and Shona Donaldson perform their weekly show “Live from the Lounge” from their home in Tarland, Aberdeenshire on Facebook Live. May 22, 2020. Screenshot captured by the author.

Alec Dalglish and Tim Edey are two other musicians in Scotland who actively maintained a weekly livestream show for over a year during the pandemic. Dalglish is the lead singer of popular Scottish rock band Skerryvore, and one of its main front men. Dalglish would take requests leading up to his “Friday Night Lockdown Live” stream. Unlike Anderson and Donaldson who have generally kept their performances quite traditional, Dalglish performed pop, rock, and country covers as well as some of his own material. He had a whole elaborate set up each week with high quality external microphones, which he connected to Facebook Live. Dalglish focused less on chat and more on the music, pausing between songs to check and respond to some of the audience’s comments on the livestream.

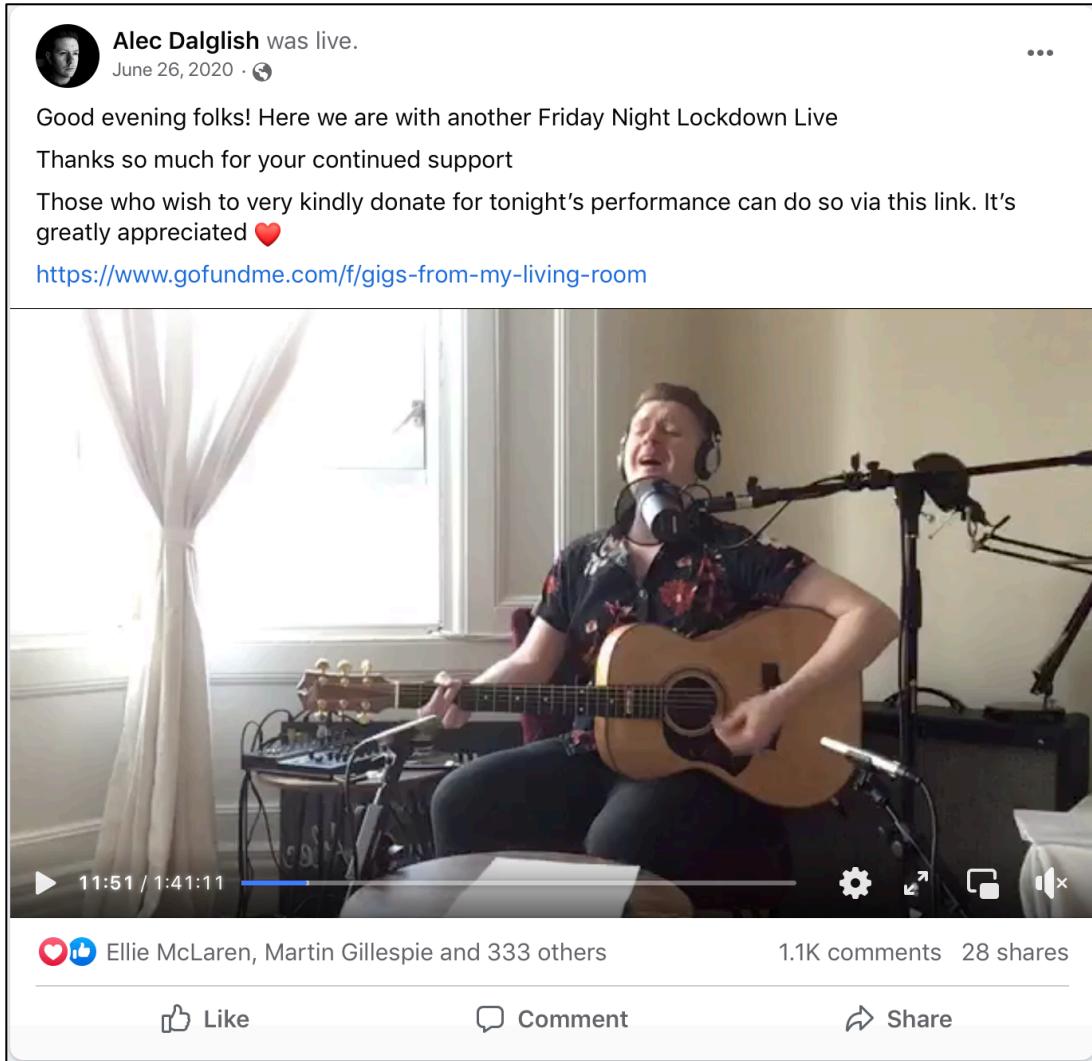


Figure 2.6: Alec Dalglish performs his show “Friday Night Lockdown Live” from his living room in Glasgow on Facebook Live. Note his elaborate tech set up, including one vocal and two instrument microphones, a small mixing board, amplifier, and headphones. June 26, 2020. Screenshot captured by the author.

Tim Edey, guitarist and melodeon player, maintained a simpler approach by sitting in front of his phone on Saturday nights, sometimes for over three hours, playing a variety of different types of Scottish and Irish tunes. Most commonly he performed tunes on guitar, although he would occasionally set up a looping pedal and accompany himself, layering lush chords with melodies on melodeon. Edey is a comedian on stage, and in this virtual platform he would chat about whatever came to mind, keeping the audience entertained between numbers.



Figure 2.7: Tim Edey performs his Saturday night show “Sleeping Tunes” from his home in Perthshire on Facebook Live. March 14, 2020. Screenshot captured by the author.

The examples and corresponding figures above present musicians with a diverse set of musical backgrounds, networks, and fame in Scotland’s traditional music scene. Each maintained a different level of formality for their show and audience approach; some were more chatty, while others focused more on the musical numbers. However, they all presented a similar sentiment toward asking for tips. Note the humility in the posts by Dalglish and Edey, which matched the sentiments expressed orally by Anderson and Donaldson during their show.

Another similarity between these three examples is a trend that was pervasive amongst livestreams early on in the pandemic: reverse-image screens. This happens when a presenter has their recording device, such as a laptop or phone, set up so they can see themselves on screen. On a phone or iPad this is considered “selfie mode.” For anyone using a laptop camera to record their livestream, there was little they could do to alter this flipped image on Facebook Live due to platform restrictions. For others using their phones, the ability to see themselves on the screen helped them to stay in frame for the audience. While viewing this mirror image from the audience perspective makes little difference when someone is talking or singing into a livestream, the backwards image of instrumental performance is jarring. As is the case in the

screenshots above, right-handed fiddlers and guitar players suddenly look left-handed. Even audience members who are not musicians noticed the backwards imaging. While many audience members got used to it during the pandemic, others regularly voiced their irritation and frustration in livestream comments.

Collaboration Videos and Virtual Networking

In a virtual environment, the playing field may have initially felt more equal to some musicians and audience members. No one had live gigs. And everyone was struggling with the newfound normality of playing into a camera for what felt like no audience whatsoever. Technically, anyone with a Facebook account could watch any of the livestream performances from the musicians discussed above. However, in this virtual environment where the number of viewers is displayed on the screen, a musician's network and audience reach suddenly moved front and center. A musician with a greater audience reach before the pandemic had a greater number of viewers during their livestreams and/or video premiers, and vice versa. For example, during the first few months of the pandemic, Dalglish averaged a viewership of 300 people at any one time on Facebook Live, while Anderson and Donaldson averaged 100.

Besides an audience network, musicians also have a performer network. Much of the Scottish music scene in Glasgow revolves around performers playing together informally in pubs. This collaboration was greatly missed during the lockdown and became one of the first forms of widespread virtual pandemic video content. In contrast to the livestreams which were more often soloists or family members living under one roof, Scottish musicians used "collaboration videos" as a way to "play together" despite being apart.

Musical collaboration videos are primarily a product of the pandemic. They have been used sparingly in the past as a short feature in music videos or on social media platforms like Instagram which have a feature where you can go live with two different accounts collaborating via split screen. However, in the musical realm, collaboration videos became pervasive in March-May 2020. Typically, one musician would record their video first and then the second musician, usually the accompanist, would record their part separately over the top of the first recording. Amongst Glasgow musicians, apps such as "Acapella" became easy and popular ways to accomplish this.⁹⁶ Many musicians started by working within their established network. They created videos with friends or fellow band members. Then they started to realize the possibilities for expanding their network.

The Scottish music scene (along with many others) has long relied on the practice of meeting people in person, and seeing each other perform or play. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, musicians must be seen to get gigs. But suddenly, the necessity of staying in place, and the realization that the only way to connect was through online platforms, actually made it possible to mobilize their pre-existing networks in a new way. This would lead to a greatly enhanced and highly valuable network with more connections. Working virtually opened up the possibility for working across time zones and geographic barriers. Musicians sought

⁹⁶ Elena Cresci, "The Internet is Obsessed with this New Acapella App," *The Guardian*, November 27, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/nov/27/the-internet-is-obsessed-with-this-new-acapella-app>.

collaboration across genres, and began inquiring about recording videos with artists that they only vaguely knew or had never previously performed with in person (see Figure 2.8). Some bands made an effort to involve the public by inviting home video submissions which they combined into epic video collaborations. Levels of fame and audience reach also mattered in this instance for viewer numbers. Collaboration videos exposed artists to each other's fanbase and pre-existing musical contacts. Inviting the public to be a part of a band's video led to more sharing of that video upon its release and therefore higher viewer numbers and more streams. Collaboration videos helped musicians to be seen, to build their audience, and to make connections with other artists which might be fruitful post-pandemic.

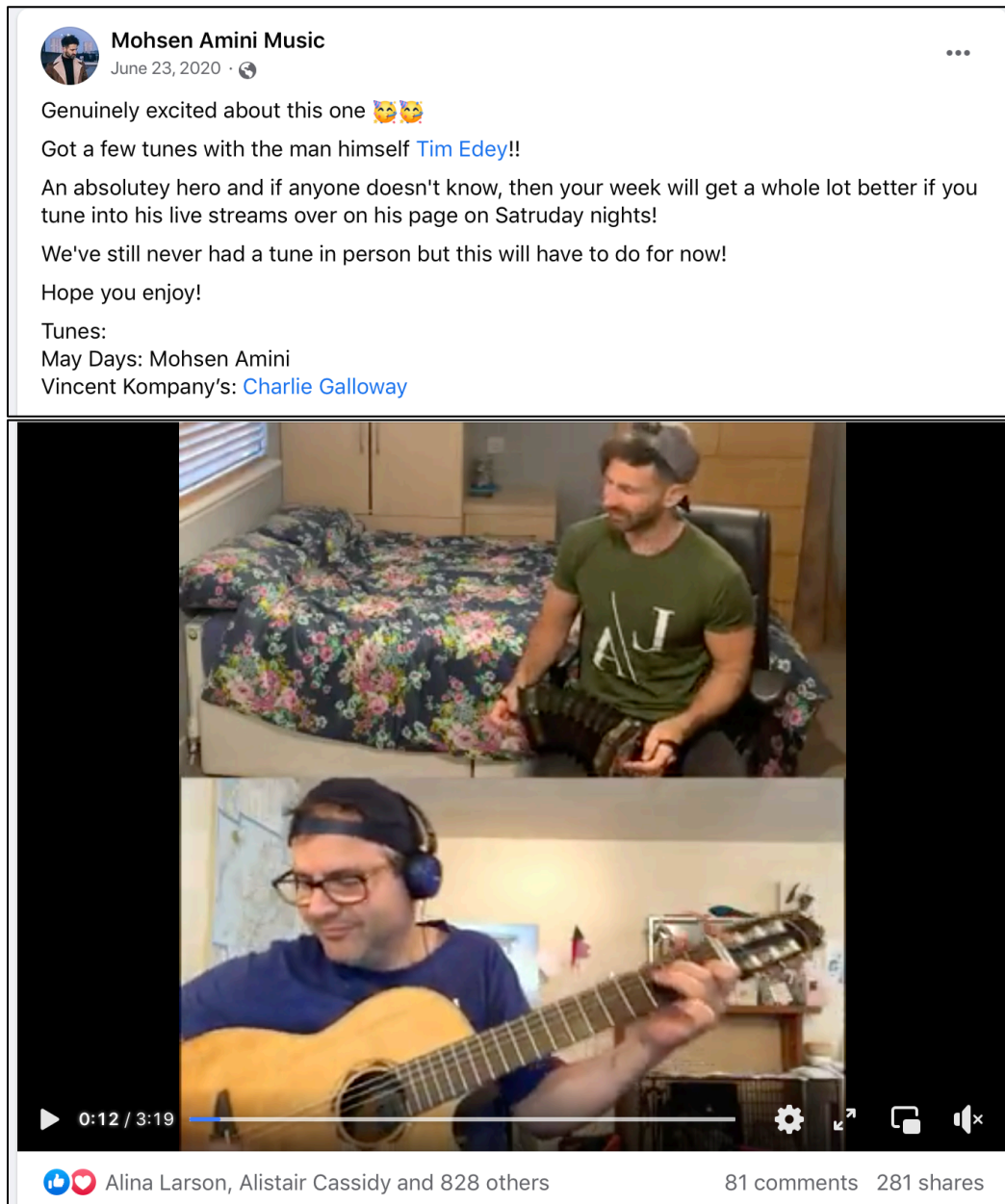


Figure 2.8: Mohsen Amini and Tim Edey collaboration video. Note how Amini indicates in the post that they have never played together in person. June 23, 2020. Screenshot captured by the author.

Working online, across time zones, through livestreams and prerecorded video has allowed for new connections that otherwise might not have happened. Musicians who might never have appeared in the same concert together previously, started sharing the bill for online concerts and festivals in 2020. During the pandemic, a virtual concert lineup might include several high-profile artists. Normally, a festival might only be able to afford one big name artist due to expense and/or the artist's busy touring schedule. In this new environment, nearly everyone was home. In addition, since in-person performance opportunities completely dropped off to nothing, more high-profile musicians were available for small-time online-based gigs. In this new world of online performance, gig fees also evened out. Where in the past, a more famous musician could demand a higher fee, in the early pandemic environment, many festivals switched to splitting donations evenly among all the performers at a given event. For example, the "Stay at Home Festival" organized at the start of the pandemic, took donations all weekend while musicians performed over Instagram Live in a wide range of time zones. At the end of the weekend, the organizers split the donations evenly among all the performers, regardless of their viewership numbers.

The Ministry of Folk is another organization that was established in May 2020 to bring opportunities to musicians struggling during the pandemic. The founders are folk musicians who are all based on the East Coast of the United States. They have worked to facilitate creative gig opportunities for broadly-Celtic and Americana musicians who live across the USA, UK, and Europe. Some of their projects have included organizing "serenadagrams" for Valentine's Day, live-streamed sessions, and virtual festivals. During their "Winter Weekend" event in December 2020, they capitalized on the virtual collaboration idea and randomly combined participating artists into workshop groups. Three to four artists hosted each workshop together, in which they spoke about and demonstrated examples on a given topic. In preparing these workshops, artists met on Zoom or over email with their group, giving many musicians a chance to network with colleagues in the music scene whom they might not have met previously.

In a scene which relies heavily on networking in person, some musicians find that going out to shows and chatting with colleagues is overwhelming, exhausting, or simply not feasible. The virtual world of the pandemic opened up new possibilities for making connections – all from the comfort of one's own home. Some musicians jumped on this new virtual networking opportunity by creating collaboration videos. Others chose to rely on organizations like Ministry of Folk which have helped facilitate networking by providing initial introductions. In whichever way they chose to participate, musicians who have taken advantage of these virtual networking opportunities have broadened their preexisting network by making additional and often, geographically far-reaching connections.

Technological Inequality

When the pandemic hit and video streaming became the primary way to share music, everyone started learning how to record themselves. Musicians with the simplest technology and a decent internet connection could participate. Since the audience also engaged with their own technology, the expectation for quality was somewhat diminished. *Is your internet slow or is it*

theirs? Does it matter if you have a nice microphone? Most of the audience is listening through their phone or computer speakers, anyway. Such considerations were common, and encouraging for musicians with less technical gear and experience. However, in a virtual world, access to technology and good internet connections become the currency. Some musicians started investing in quality equipment to self-record at home, going beyond the basic video streaming that anyone with a smart phone or laptop could accomplish. This equipment was used both for video streaming (see Figure 2.6: Alec Dalglish) and for higher quality “what would have been” studio recordings.

For those who were less technologically inclined, or who could not afford to purchase top quality equipment, this set up an immediate distinction between artists. For an everyday livestream – such as an informal Facebook Live session by one musician – this difference in technology was less apparent. But as the pandemic dragged on, the possibility of making a self-recorded album or of sounding better in virtual concert settings, amplified the distinction between artists who adapted (and had the means to adapt) to the new technological and virtual performance environment and those who did not. Musicians who set up their own at-home studios were able to make new albums to sell during the pandemic or to have ready for release as soon as touring started up again. Having something new to sell was one of the ways that artists created their own income stream and capitalized on their time spent at home.

Bagpiper and producer Ali Hutton told me that he developed a new pet peeve during the pandemic: musicians putting up bad quality videos, just to post new material. A new lower standard of video became acceptable to post on social media early on as many people took to livestreaming from their living rooms. In addition, early collaboration videos were terrible in quality. Many of these videos featured out of sync elements, most commonly between either the collaborators’ audio, or the video and audio alignment. Other videos featured poor audio quality or grainy visuals. Before the pandemic, musicians were more particular about the content and quality of videos that they put up on social media. But as Hutton stated, once everyone was stuck at home during the lockdown, it felt like musicians were “posting just to post.”⁹⁷ This constant barrage of content caused many musicians to have the same questions that Laura Wilkie succinctly stated above – if people don’t see me in some (even grainy) capacity, will they forget about me? Three months into the pandemic, Jack Badcock told me over Skype that booking gigs is “all about perception” and that until people see you gig, they form an opinion about you as an artist based on videos, images, and words.⁹⁸ In the virtual environment of the pandemic where no one had gigs, sharing video became the best way to “appear busy” and stay at the forefront of peoples’ minds.

After about six months of the pandemic, fewer “home videos” started to emerge, and the organizational support industry in Scotland caught up. Large festivals, such as Celtic Connections, realized they would have to turn virtual if they wanted to host a festival at all. While many Scottish festivals in the USA continued to ask artists to send in home videos for free, large festivals in Scotland started offering paid opportunities during the pandemic. Musicians received invitations to come to a space and do socially-distanced high-quality filming provided by the festival. The term “livestream concert” became widely used to indicate a concert

⁹⁷ Ali Hutton, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

⁹⁸ Jack Badcock, Interview with the author, May 5, 2020.

that would be streamed live at a certain time. However, festivals such as Celtic Connections, and also artists who filmed their own videos at home, realized that the quality would be much higher if filmed in advance. “Premiering” a video at the advertised “livestream” time therefore became the new standard for many events and led audiences to appreciate and expect higher quality videos and online performances. Celtic Connections ended up putting on nineteen nights of concerts over January 2021, all filmed during the Fall of 2020. They charged £30 GBP for a season pass (admission to all concerts) which is roughly the regular ticket price for one high profile artist concert at the festival in person. However, they boasted viewer numbers from 60 countries and over 27,000 tickets and passes sold, likely turning a profit due to the sheer number of sales.⁹⁹ In Chapter Four, I further expand on the organizations and structures of support that are available to musicians in Scotland, and the role that these organizations played during the pandemic.

Conclusion

This chapter describes how the social expectations of self-deprecation, networking, and mobility, are all interconnected in the Glasgow Scottish music performance scene. Self-deprecation is an important part of social interaction in the United Kingdom, and therefore presents a conundrum for the career performer who must constantly characterize their own abilities and market themselves. I have described how this causes some musicians to reject self-promotion all together, while others navigate these slippery expectations by using self-deprecating language as a tool for comic effect. I have argued that self-deprecation also promotes a culture of praise where “everyone is friendly” and complimentary, despite any misgivings or personal opinions to the contrary.

As the world adapted to a new virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, musicians had to find new ways to manage their self-promotion, alter their performance technique, and maintain their network. In this chapter, I characterized the shift that took place in networking and marketing strategies during the early pandemic, and described some of the tactics that Glasgow musicians used such as collaboration videos and online streaming. While the pandemic severely reduced gigging and traditional earning opportunities, it also opened up new avenues for networking and performing. In some cases, the newfound form of virtual networking appealed to musicians. For lesser-known musicians or for musicians who might normally have stayed home, virtual performance leveled the playing field for gig opportunities and provided new ways of participating in the scene and “being seen.” At the same time, the virtual performance environment revealed technological inequalities in recording equipment and video production, and reinforced how important networks and reputations are for musicians who wish to keep their followers and continue to build their careers.

The pandemic lockdown also caused many musicians to evaluate where they find joy in their careers. For the first time in years – decades for some – they were not traveling from one hotel to another, with airplanes, buses, trains, and taxis in between. They were able to be home with their families for months on end, and teach students over Zoom or Skype without ever

⁹⁹ “Celtic Connections Online a Huge Success!,” News, Celtic Connections, posted February 3, 2021, <https://www.celticconnections.com>.

stepping out of their front door. When I interviewed Laura Wilkie in May 2020 after three months of the pandemic lockdown, she stated, “This whole lockdown situation has really helped me to reconnect with what’s more important to me personally as a musician, and just as a person.”¹⁰⁰ When it became apparent that touring was going to be on hold for a while, some musicians took the opportunity to grow their families. For others, once international touring did start to return, they chose to reprioritize and spend more time with their families by focusing on projects closer to home. However, despite the newfound attachment to being in place, many musicians severely missed live performance. On May 20th 2021, fifteen months after the start of the pandemic, Aidan Moodie posted the following on Instagram:



Figure 2.9: Instagram post by Aidan Moodie.¹⁰¹ May 20, 2021. Screenshot captured by the author.

Moodie’s post summarizes the sentiments that many of my interlocutors expressed to me about their experiences during the lockdown and extended pandemic era. His words in this post are raw

¹⁰⁰ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Moodie uses the term “peedie” in his post. “Peedie” is an Orcadian term for “little” which is often used in an endearing manner.

and pointed, yet balanced out by a final self-deprecating joke to lighten the otherwise heavy sentiments. For many musicians, the joy of live stage performance is the reward for all of the work that they typically do at home and behind the scenes. As I have shown throughout this chapter, when gigging is not an option, Scottish musicians find ways to work within society's constraints to maintain their careers. However, they are performing artists at heart and, for most, live stage performance is the reason they chose to pursue this career path in the first place. Therefore, in the next chapter I turn my attention to live performance on the stages of Scotland's traditional music scene. Specifically, I explore the musical and stage performance tactics that musicians have used to build their reputations and garner a following.

Chapter 3

Sounding Understated and Creating Spectacle: Stage Performance, Audience Interaction, and Virtuosity

Scottish traditional music is performed in a range of venues today, from small folk clubs to large theaters and huge festival stages. This chapter focuses on the spectacle and theatricality of Scottish music performance across that range. I have already outlined in Chapter Two how self-deprecation plays a prominent role in social interaction and self-promotion. In this chapter, I explore the juxtaposition of that mentality with music making, flashy stage performance, self-presentation, audience interaction, and virtuosity. To showcase the high level of grandeur and spectacle today, I begin by drawing special attention to the large venues and festival stages. I inquire about how musicians participate in these spaces, add elements of spectacle to their own performances, and engage the audience. As this chapter unfolds I also include examples from smaller folk clubs to consider both the differences and similarities in how artists navigate those venues. Through rich ethnographic analysis, I describe the shifting sonic aesthetics of traditional music today, and demonstrate how Scottish musicians offer new ways to characterize virtuosic performance.

The Spectacle of Stage Performance

From Roman gladiatorial contests to P.T. Barnum's nineteenth-century circus, presenting a spectacle in a wide variety of forms has long been a means of creating drama, drawing large crowds, and building performers' reputations to stardom (Lewis 2003; Köhne et al. 2000; Warwick 2015). In the Scottish music scene, the spectacle aesthetic has manifested in complex lighting designs and a pop-culture based presentation of traditional music performance. Celtic Connections and the MG Alba Scots Trad Music Awards¹⁰² are two of the major performance events in Scotland today which demonstrate the current fascination with presenting a spectacle. For the organizations who manage these events, high production values cater to the modern audience and work to exhibit and garner prestige. For Scottish musicians operating in a precarious employment environment, performing at these events is beneficial to their financial stability and advantageous for building their careers. The optics of performing on Scotland's biggest stages adds credibility to their reputations as artists which can lead to new career opportunities both at home and abroad.

Celtic Connections is an annual festival in Glasgow which boasts of being "the UK's premier celebration of Celtic music."¹⁰³ Over the course of approximately twenty days each January-February, the festival hosts over 300 events including concerts, ceilidhs, talks, art exhibitions, and workshops. The festival features a variety of folk and roots music performances and often brings together one-off line-ups for special collaborative shows.¹⁰⁴ Organizers make

¹⁰² MG Alba is the operating name for the Gaelic Media Service (in Scottish Gaelic: *Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig*) which delivers the BBC ALBA platforms (including radio and television) in partnership with the BBC. Their aim is to make sure that a wide and diverse range of high quality Gaelic programs are made available to the people of Scotland. For more about BBC Alba, see: <https://www.bbc.com/alba>.

¹⁰³ "Home," Celtic Connections, <https://www.celticconnections.com/>.

¹⁰⁴ "About," Celtic Connections, <https://www.celticconnections.com/about-celtic-connections/>.

use of a gamut of different venues in Glasgow including churches, museums, pubs, clubs, small conference rooms, theaters, a renovated warehouse, and the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. Musical groups typically perform at least two times in different venues across the festival, and must adapt their performance to fit these disparate spaces.

Each performance space offers different production opportunities, however the organizers have clearly prioritized the appearance of a spectacle with high production value. The main stages – set in clubs, theaters, churches and concert halls – include sound and lighting technicians, with elaborate backdrops and light design. Barriers between the audience and stage create space for festival photographers and videographers to shoot close ups from only a few feet away. The festival creates the appearance of a popular music performance, an enticing visual affair which is striking in this music scene because it starkly contrasts with the small folk club spaces where Scottish music gained popularity and has long been performed.¹⁰⁵ While some of the concerts at Celtic Connections do feature more intimate environments, the organizers have brought lighting rigs or full sound systems into these spaces. This adds an extra layer of grandeur to what would otherwise be a relatively simple stage setup, and creates an aesthetic continuity across the festival.



Figure 3.1: Capercaillie performs at Celtic Connections 2020 in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. January 18, 2020. Photo by the author.

¹⁰⁵ For more about early performance spaces, including how folk bands developed in these spaces, see McKerrell (2011a) and Lomnický (2019).

The MG Alba Scots Trad Music Awards (in Gaelic: *Na Trads*) sponsored by Hands Up for Trad¹⁰⁶, offer another example of a performance production that is crafted with spectacle in mind. This event is filmed for live television and featured on BBC Alba, the Gaelic language channel. Each year, this one-night event takes place in a different city. When I attended in 2019, it was held at the Aberdeen Music Hall in North-East Scotland. Formerly the city's Assembly Rooms, this recently renovated venue now has a 1300-seat capacity with a main floor and balcony.

For the Trad Awards¹⁰⁷ in 2019, the venue was set up with seated round-tables for the nominees on the main floor, a full lighting rig, multiple sound technicians and video crew. Screens were placed on each side of the stage, so that audience members seated farther back could watch what was being sent to those viewing at home on BBC Alba. Videographers were filming from a range of angles including a large robotic crane which took sweeping shots across the top of the audience from the balcony. The Trad Awards mirror large awards ceremonies such as the Golden Globes and GRAMMYs in the USA. Flashy and dramatic performances are interspersed with speeches, audience breaks for commercials, and presentations by hosts speaking Gaelic, Scots Doric, and English.



Figure 3.2 - SIAN performs at the 2019 Scots Trad Music Awards at Aberdeen Music Hall. December 7, 2019. Photo by the author.

¹⁰⁶ For more about the Hands Up for Trad organization, see Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁷ Musicians and other industry players in the scene typically refer to the MG Alba Scots Trad Music Awards as the “Trad Awards” or “Trad Music Awards.”



Figure 3.3: Intermission at the 2019 Scots Trad Music Awards. View of the videographer’s robotic crane and camera, TV screens, seated tables, and balcony. December 7, 2019. Photo by the author.

Stage Sparkles

At both Celtic Connections and the Trad Music Awards, performers choose to wear outfits which match the grandness of the event’s visual spectacle. Many performers turn to sequined sparkly outfits, while others ditch the typical jeans and t-shirts for suit jackets and slacks. Kinnaris Quintet, a Glasgow-based group of five female performers featuring three fiddles, guitar, and mandolin, are known for performing in sparkly outfits and have worn them in their band promotional photos. I spoke with two of the fiddle players, Laura Wilkie and Aileen Reid, about their choice to feature sparkles as part of their stage attire.

According to Reid, at the beginning of getting the band together, they all started wearing sparkles at a gig by chance. After that, they “decided to go with it.”¹⁰⁸ Wilkie acknowledges that the sparkles have become part of their band brand now. After winning the Belhaven Bursary – a £25,000 GBP award for innovation in traditional music announced at the Trad Awards – both fiddlers have felt the pressure to maintain a brand and continue the band’s success.

¹⁰⁸ Aileen Reid, Interview with the author, May 18, 2020.

In speaking with Reid and Wilkie, I heard them both voice deep care and concern regarding the blending of branding, spectacle, and traditional music. As the first all-female band to receive the Belhaven Bursary, and one of the few all-female bands garnering heavy attention in the Glasgow scene, Wilkie feels a responsibility to empower women performers in the scene. She would like the band to do more outreach and use the power that they now have to aid women performers. She notes that in interviews, the band often projects an air of humility and downplays how much work and effort goes into their career – a choice which fits neatly into the culture of self-deprecation that I outlined in Chapter Two. This frustrates her as they all put in a lot of work behind the scenes to build their business and craft music that people enjoy. In some ways, she feels that the “culture of career” and the need to maintain a brand holds them back from speaking out and doing more outreach.¹⁰⁹ Reid says that “people have expectations now” and that there is more pressure to maintain a professional website and be professional. She admits to struggling with the questions of “do I look like I’m trying too hard with the image?”¹¹⁰ Both Reid and Wilkie suggest that folk music is about the music, not about the image, yet they acknowledge that the image is what sells.

As I noted above, Kinnaris Quintet is not alone in their sparkly image. Many female performers have started wearing sequins on stage at large performances. While Wilkie questions whether this image truly maps onto female empowerment, I suggest that it is a way for women to stand out amongst their fellow performers. During my months of fieldwork and dozens of concerts attended, I only went to one concert where the performers specifically spoke on stage about the uneven proportion of male and female performers in the scene. It is important to note that this particular event was an Uilleann Piping concert specifically advocating for female pipers, so it is expected that this topic would be discussed.

Several women that I spoke to who attended the BIT Collective¹¹¹ gathering, mentioned that they feel actively repressed by the male-dominated scene. One participant commented that as a vocalist, she feels female musicians are only allowed to be pretty in the “traditional, faceless way.” She indicated that comments made to her by both audience members and male musicians make her feel like she is supposed to look pretty, but not draw attention to herself, and act as only a vessel for the traditional songs that she sings – essentially, removing all her agency from the music-making process and performance. There is an inherent contradiction in this expectation: A faceless singer implies that she cannot assert her own agency or draw uniqueness to her performance. Yet, she must also have a “pretty face” therefore she must have some element of recognizability – a recognition that she also needs to shape her professional brand and build a personalized connection with her audience. I suggest that this forced facelessness and invisibility is partially tied to expectations surrounding self-deprecation. While there are other factors at play to create this environment including a long history of female oppression, my research suggests that the culture of self-deprecation amongst the spectrum of different gender-

¹⁰⁹ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Aileen Reid, Interview with the author, May 18, 2020.

¹¹¹ The BIT Collective is a community of people based in Glasgow who are interested in discussing and addressing issues of equality in Scottish folk and traditional music. They hold meetings and workshops, write blog posts, and offer resources for women and marginalized people working in the traditional music scene. See my discussion of the BIT Collective in Chapter Two.

identifying performers in Scotland further suppresses women's desire to draw attention to their achievements or politically sensitive topics.

I therefore argue that while women performers may feel unable to speak about certain topics on stage or in interviews for the sake of their career, branding, or band presentation, performing in sparkly costumes is a way to make a visual statement, stand out, and project confidence. These sparkly costumes also match the level of stage spectacle that is presented at events such as Celtic Connections and the Trad Music Awards. By wearing these costumes – no matter how large the stage or band – performers are adding an element of spectacle to their own performance and asserting their own agency, all while supporting the image of the overall event. In a precarious employment environment, creating a brand that simultaneously stands out, garners attention, and matches the image of the event helps musicians to secure repeated invitations to perform year after year.



Figure 3.4: Laura Wilkie (left) and Aileen Reid (right) of Kinnaris Quintet dazzle in sparkles at the 2020 Celtic Connections Festival Club. January 31, 2020. Photo by the author.

Audience Interaction

The performance and creation of spectacle that I illustrate above would not be possible without the many attendees who come together to form the audience. Numerous scholars of anthropology and sociology have examined the relationships between creative production and consumption (e.g., Merriam 1964, Geertz 1976, Becker 1982, Negus 1999, Toyne 2000)

demonstrating the importance of the audience. Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino has shown how audience participation at live performances constitutes community (Turino 2008). Other music studies scholars have argued that audiences themselves can become a part of the concert aesthetic (or in this case, the spectacle) through their presence and their interaction with performers (Packman 2007, 2010; Bennett 2008). The traditional musicians of Scotland are well aware of the value that their audiences bring to a performance. I asked every musician I interviewed to state their favorite thing about performing. Without hesitation, nearly every person responded with something about the audience. The most common answers were “audience response,” “audience interaction,” and “audience reaction.” While audience interaction may be crucial to musicians’ enjoyment of a performance, they also understand that part of their job as performers is to foster that connection and create an experience that attendees enjoy and remember. Aileen Reid says it is important to make the audience feel like they are part of the show because “when you feel a part of something, you’re more passionate about it.”¹¹² RCS student Calum McIlroy speaks about audience engagement strategies in terms of “stage craft.” He makes the bold statement that “stage craft is more important or equally important than the music itself.”¹¹³ Guitarist Innes White supports McIlroy’s perspective in saying that audience engagement is “at least as important as the music itself” for fostering a successful performance.¹¹⁴ In this section I discuss how a musician’s quest for audience support impacts their choices on stage.

Stage chat, body movement and gesture, and sing-along components all demonstrate different elements of stage craft which heighten audience engagement. Stage chat can function as a means to build rapport with an audience by welcoming them into the tradition as insiders, or building hype and excitement. Body movement and gesture provide signals to the audience. These can be observable movements such as crouching on stage as a means to build tension, or they can be intentional signals for participation such as a musician inviting the audience to sing or clap in time to the music. Additionally, singalong moments, whether a vocal song chorus or instrumental descant, give the audience a chance to become an active agent; they grant the audience partial ownership over the music and tradition and a chance to impact the outcome of a performance. In what follows, I introduce two live performances I attended as well as the varying experience of my interlocutors to address how each of these three types of stage craft play a critical role in cultivating audience interaction.

Siobhan Miller

Siobhan Miller is a well-known Glasgow-based singer who has won the “Scots Singer of the Year” award three times at the Trad Music Awards. Both her original compositions and her interpretations of traditional songs are quite well known. I attended one of her performances at the Blue Arrow Jazz Club in Glasgow.

As I entered the Blue Arrow on November 26, 2019, it was bustling with middle aged and elderly locals looking for seats. A few young musicians from the scene were standing in the back and

¹¹² Aileen Reid, Interview with the author, May 18, 2020.

¹¹³ Calum McIlroy, Interview with the author, May 7, 2020.

¹¹⁴ Innes White, Interview with the author, March 24, 2020.

chatting at the bar. This was only the second night I had ever been in the Blue Arrow, a small folk club with an adaptable space toward the stage for a seated or standing audience, and standing room at the bar in the back. Tonight the front space abutting the stage was packed with chairs. The room was buzzing with excitement as Siobhan was set to perform all the songs from her 2017 album “Strata” – a sequence of repertoire that primarily features traditional and well-known Scottish songs.

Siobhan took the stage with her backup band, a collective of six well-known male performers from the scene playing fiddle, acoustic bass, guitar, bouzouki, keyboard and drum kit. From the moment Siobhan began to sing, the audience was engaged and an active participant in the performance. They immediately started singing along with her. Many of them knew every word. I found myself slightly surprised that they jumped right in without waiting for a signal or even the first verse to pass.

In this particular moment, the audience needed no assistance, no teaching, no permission to join in on the performance. They became part of the performance from the moment that Siobhan opened her mouth. Siobhan and the band were amplified, but it was more like they were leading a singalong than presenting something for the audience to enjoy.

As she sang, Siobhan would often hold the microphone stand with her left hand, while her right hand freely traced small gestures in front of her, following the contour of the melody line. She often closed her eyes while singing, keeping the performance intimate and focused. Occasionally, Siobhan would raise her hands, palms facing up, indicating that the audience should join her for the chorus. For those who were not already singing along, this was their moment to shine.

Between songs, she told stories and anecdotes related to her performance material. She introduced each of her bandmembers by telling a story from their past experiences together, or by describing the part that they played in recording on her album. She talked about family; her sister taught her to sing and her mother was always singing around the house. In doing so, she signaled her own authenticity to the audience by describing herself as someone who grew up within the song tradition and who continues to carry out that legacy.

At the end of the night, Siobhan sent her band off the stage and she stepped out in front of the microphones. She performed a contemporary comedic song, “Cholesterol,” which details the composer’s desire for unhealthy cholesterol-filled foods, which he would rather eat and die than give up. Singing acapella and without amplification, Siobhan demonstrated the power of her voice and physical presence. Standing in the liminal space between the stage and the audience, she used gesture after gesture to act out the song. She placed her hands on her hips, wagged her pointer finger back and forth to indicate ‘no’, and used facial expressions to emphasize the narrator’s emotions. Her voice was powerful and could be heard well throughout the club despite the lack of amplification. The audience knowingly cackled at every twist in the verse such as:

*“Well semi-skimmed milk may diminish my bulk
But I’ll take double cream till I die.”¹¹⁵*

Nearly everyone in the room joined in boisterously for the refrain of “I love my cholesterol” and cheered loudly after she finished for the night.



Figure 3.5: Siobhan Miller steps off the mic to perform “Cholesterol” (by Adam McNaughtan) a capella at the Blue Arrow Jazz Club in Glasgow and gestures to the audience to sing along. November 27, 2019. Photo by the author.

Rosie Munro and HEISK

Rosie Munro is the former director of the Scots Fiddle Festival and a Glasgow-based fiddler who performs with the band HEISK. She describes her experience of working the crowd at Festival Interceltique de Lorient (known colloquially as “Lorient”), one of the largest Celtic music festivals in France:

“When we got to Lorient we realized that people were really up for a party, and we were playing quite late slots, so we thought we’re in a different country, let’s just try some things out and see

¹¹⁵ “Cholesterol” is a contemporary song written by Glasgow native, Adam McNaughtan. He first recorded the song in 1990 on his album Glasgow Horizons. Siobhan Miller’s interpretation of the song and accompanying lyrics can be found here: <https://siobhanmiller.bandcamp.com/track/cholesterol>

what happens. We did things like... getting a walk-on track,¹¹⁶ kind of like disco music building the tension, and then we all walked on and went straight into a [tune]. And then...in certain builds of the music we would crouch down...and then when the build releases, jump up, and get the crowd to go down with us. That was really effective. They really loved that...

For HEISK, I think shouting out [to the audience] like “Here we go, Lorient, are you ready”... people were like ‘wooo!’ and they love that stuff. And a bit of crouching and stuff, they love... I think it’s just [about] being super confident... I think audiences feel much more comfortable with someone who comes on stage with confidence.”¹¹⁷



Figure 3.6: HEISK crouches low during a performance at the Blue Arrow Jazz Club in Glasgow. Rosie Munro is far right. November 30, 2019. Photo by the author.

Stage “Chat” Talk

Stage talk or “chat” as they call it in Scotland, is a spoken genre which is an essential component of any traditional music performance. “Often depicted as the filling of idle time on stage, stage talk draws attention to the textual past, to salient features of the music, to the immediate environment, to other performances, or to the performers' own disposition towards the

¹¹⁶ In this instance, a “walk-on track” refers to a pre-recorded track that the sound engineer plays while the band walks onto the stage. HEISK specifically chose disco music to “build tension” and set the mood for their performance.

¹¹⁷ Rosie Munro, Interview with the author, March 24, 2020.

music or the audience” (Bealle 1993, 64). Beyond this basic definition, Old-Time/American music scholar John Bealle suggests that stage talk can be used to “link the performance to a particular perceived past” and also that performers “exploit these utilitarian features of conversational speech to make sincere claims regarding the framing of expressive or aesthetic performance” (Bealle 1993, 64). In writing about Open Mic performances, sociologist Marcus Aldredge argues that stage talk encourages greater focus and more attentive listening by the audience (Aldredge 2016). Performers also use stage talk to help maintain the social bonds between audiences and performers, foster solidarity, and localize or historicize traditions (Aldredge 2016; Baym 2018; Tulk 2008). In addition to filling time between musical numbers and allowing musicians to briefly catch their breath or take a drink of water, it is the primary non-musical-verbal way that Scottish musicians connect with their audiences. The majority of Scottish music bands present both vocal and instrumental numbers during their performances, however some groups are all instrumental or only sing in Gaelic which many audiences members do not understand. For these bands, stage talk plays an especially crucial role. While in other genres, such as Western Classical music, it is common practice to provide programs and for the musicians not to say a word throughout the entire performance, in Scottish traditional music – and in many staged performances of “folk” or “traditional” music from other parts of the world – the performer is the program. In a festival or concert setting where musicians are valued based on their ability to be engaging throughout their performance, they become more than musicians – they become comedians and entertainers. Musicians must provide introductions to tunes, explain plot lines for songs in Gaelic, tell stories about life on tour, or jokes about anything they can think of that is somewhat relevant to the performance. Stage talk becomes more than simply the filler material between musical numbers—it can make or break a performance. It serves to make the audience members feel more like insiders, broadening their understandings of musical culture and strengthening their connection to the band (Lomnicky 2019).

During Siobhan Miller’s performance, she used stage talk as a way to move her program along, introduce the bandmembers, establish her legitimacy, and build rapport with her audience. In a small venue like the Blue Arrow, she was able to have what felt like a more intimate conversation with her audience, with many fans audibly voicing reactions to her comments on stage.¹¹⁸ Miller treated her audience like personal friends, acknowledging their familiarity with her album by making remarks such as “well, you probably know what’s next” before introducing her next song. By recognizing her audience’s knowledge of her personal history, her music, and the Scots song tradition, she made those in the know feel special while welcoming others toward insider status.¹¹⁹

In contrast, Rosie Munro describes how HEISK has used stage talk as a means to hype the audience up. At a large festival like Lorient where the audience is ready to party, a long drawn-out story or anecdote will not have the same effect as it does in a folk club. It may even be detrimental to the performance. Instead, short bursts of announcements filled with energy that keep the excitement level high and move the performance along are reciprocated with cheering.

¹¹⁸ This is similar to what Marcus Aldredge (2016) refers to as “back-talk.” While many Scottish audiences, especially in Glasgow, are known for talking back to performers or heckling performers, in this instance the audience was making reactive sounds to her stage talk, rather than straight back-talk.

¹¹⁹ For a deeper discussion of insider/outsider status and the debate surrounding these terms, see articles by Marcia Herndon (1993) and Kenneth L. Pike (1990).

Munro explains how in this instance, HEISK chose to play a “walk-on” track to build the energy. During many traditional music performances, the musicians will walk on stage and then immediately greet the audience with some sort of welcoming spiel. Sometimes, musicians will walk on stage and play a song before following that with opening remarks. Either way, there is almost never walk-on music. In this instance, HEISK recognized that their audience was not present to hear them talk, but rather there to listen and dance to the music. They therefore substituted talking with a pre-recorded track – something to grab the audience’s attention and build tension while simultaneously serving as a contrast to their live music. This choice was indicative of the space, the setting, and their willingness to experiment with alternative ways to build connection with the audience.

Aileen Reid is well aware of the importance of stage talk for building rapport with her audience, but admits she really dislikes it. She says “I would rather be eaten by a dragon than chat on stage.”¹²⁰ Even though she does not enjoy it, she does it due to its importance and she is good at it. Reid’s Kinnaris Quintet bandmate, Laura Wilkie, described to me how she feels that Reid always does an excellent job of drawing in the audience:

“Aileen is really good at getting the audience on [our] side. I think because she ‘calls a spade a spade’ a lot of the time. And a lot of performers I’ve noticed that I enjoy watching do that as well. They’re a bit honest, or are good at telling anecdotes. And not that that’s what you need to have a good performance, but I think that’s something that’s characteristic of the Scottish traditional music scene. I don’t know anyone that goes to see Phil Cunningham and Aly Bain that doesn’t half go for the stories. Phil is so funny at telling stories and Aly is so funny at telling stories. Anna Massie is just like a stand-up comedian basically that is also ridiculous [amazing] at a lot of instruments. I think if you get any kind of local interaction with the audience, even if they’re laughing a little at something you said or did, or something that happens in the music while they’re watching. If they ‘euch!’ or whatever, that’s good!”¹²¹

“Euch” is the common Scottish written transcription of a “yelp, hoop, or holler” vocalization during a musical performance. In the Scottish music scene, these vocalizations are commonly performed by audience members as a response to recognizing a musical transition or a particularly impressive or enjoyable moment in a performance. “Euchs” are also performed by musicians on stage, sometimes as a means to support or encourage each other. Wilkie demonstrates here that most forms of audience interaction provide a positive environment. If an audience feels able to slightly heckle the performer, vocalize a “euch,” or laugh at a story, then that is a good indication that they feel comfortable and are enjoying themselves. In her statement above, Wilkie points out how crucial stage talk or “chat” is to Scottish music performance. She implies that while stage talk is performed to differing degrees depending on the performer, it is vital to engaging the audience.

Gesture and Body Movement on Stage

Singing or playing an instrument is a physical act that involves both conscious and subconscious uses of bodily gesture. On stage, gesture is a means by which performers interact

¹²⁰ Aileen Reid, Interview with the author, May 18, 2020.

¹²¹ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

with the audience; it also fosters audience engagement in the performance. Gesture has been well documented across a range of disciplines, and theorized in music studies by Mary Ann Smart (2004), Matthew Rahaim (2012), Gina Fatone et al. (2011), and many others.

Ethnomusicologists have also written about such engagement as participation, or the audience's own form of performance (Clayton 2007; Rahaim 2012), while others have described how gestures help create a spectacle for the audience (Davidson 2006). Building on such work, I am interested here in analyzing how musicians view this as another tool in their arsenal that they can use to build audience interaction and engagement, and how it impacts the relationship between performer and audience. In Siobhan Miller's vignette, above, I describe how she performed both intentional and subconscious gestures. Matthew Rahaim (2012) has written a detailed account of how seemingly subconscious hand gestures are tied to melodic lines. Since my discussion here centers on the idea of using gestures as a tool to build audience engagement, I focus on intentional gestures that go beyond the necessary movements involved in making music – the gestures that musicians choose to add to their performance, even if they do not always consider them as influential for audience engagement.

Throughout her performance at the Blue Arrow, Siobhan Miller used a variety of intentional gestures. Some were clear directives to engage the audience, while others served to reinforce the story of the song being performed. One of the most common gestures that singers in the Scottish music scene perform is the act of raising one's hand, palm facing up (see Figure 3.5). This movement is most commonly performed at the start of a chorus, and is an active call to audiences which encourages them to sing along. Other intentional gestures include tapping one's foot along to the beat, making a clapping motion to encourage the audience to clap along, and leaning in toward or making eye contact with fellow performers to connect over a particular passage or transition. Miller took it a step further in her Blue Arrow performance when she used motions and facial expressions to act out the story of the song, "Cholesterol." Since "Cholesterol" is a comedic song, Miller's movements served to exaggerate the story. Her caricature-like movements and overly dramatic facial expressions added to the comedic value, making the audience watch carefully, eager to see what she would do next. During this performance, Miller also stepped off the microphone, placing herself out in front of the barrier of amplification equipment in the liminal zone between the stage and audience. In breaking this special barrier by physically placing her body there (this itself a gesture), Miller reached a new level of intimacy with her audience – both by physical proximity and in exposing her raw voice, unmediated by technology. This intentional choice for the final number was both a display of virtuosity and a claiming of authenticity. In this moment she demonstrated the power of her voice by showing that she did not need amplification to be heard. She also stepped downstage, out of the brightest stage lights, thereby pulling the audience's focus to a darker, more intimate plane away from the spectacle. By performing acapella she signaled her connection to a line of tradition bearer performers and showed that she could give a compelling performance without the aid of technology or instrumental accompaniment. In this instance, Miller's extra gestures served as a natural form of amplification; she emphasized the storytelling component of the song and clarified the narrative for her audience.

In her explanation of HEISK's performance at Lorient, Rosie Munro describes one way that performers will interact with each other on stage as a means to excite the audience. The "crouching" movement that Munro describes is prevalent amongst other performers in the scene,

particularly instrumentalists. The frontline musicians of a band will often gather together close at the front edge of the stage (downstage), crouching lower and lower until there is a release in the music and they jump up. As Munro indicates, sometimes performers encourage the audience to join them in this movement. This lowering action builds heat and tension in the body at the same time that tension builds in the music. Jumping up and releasing the tension after a climactic moment brings excitement and energy to a performance. The audience is either witness to this movement or physically participating; either way it makes them feel like they are a part of the performance.

While some intentional gestures are performed specifically to engage the audience, others are not. Movements such as a musician tapping their foot to the beat or making eye contact with fellow performers on stage are not necessarily intended for the audience. However these gestures, which often signal collaborative moments or a shared pleasure in the music making, provide visual intrigue and may still encourage engagement. Musicians often mention an “energy” or “vibe” that is created by a good audience connection. Wilkie describes this “energy that people speak of” as being a combination of many of the factors I have described, including audiences clapping along, moving/bobbing around to the beat, and letting out “euch” yelps in response to the music.¹²² For my interlocutors, this engagement fuels them to give their best at a performance.

Audience Singing

The traditional music scene in Scotland has long been a participatory tradition. Many attendees are performers themselves or are well-versed in traditional repertoire. Performers know this about their audience and will often encourage their participation through a common set of techniques. As I noted above, singers might raise their arms at a performance, signaling the audience to sing along or join in on the chorus. Sometimes singers will teach the audience the chorus before they even start performing the song. This usually involves the singer using a “repeat after me” technique where they sing a short phrase of the chorus and then have the audience sing it back to them. This process is performed quickly so that the audience has a rough grasp of the chorus before the song starts, and can then finish the learning process as the song is being performed.

At times, if it is a traditional or well-known contemporary song, the audience will start singing along without the performer’s encouragement. This is what happened during Siobhan Miller’s performance at the Blue Arrow.¹²³ It is important to note that Miller was not bothered by the audience members jumping in to sing. When I interviewed her a few months later, she said she enjoyed having the audience participate:

“They’re waiting for it. They’ve lived with those songs longer than I have. A lot of them from the older generation, certainly, have heard those songs in so many different ways that...they know

¹²² Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹²³ Jeff Packman has described similar, though more extreme, experiences in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil where audience members sing, clap, and dance along with the music in a manner which he came to understand as “something that informs how music is made rather than merely a result of it” (Packman 2010, 242).

those songs already...some of them will be like ‘I sing this song at a session’ or whatever. And it’s also just part of the tradition that if a chorus comes up and you know it, people sing along... But it’s something I love and I think it’s what got me into it, especially with the traditional material... I like it. When that happens, talking about breaking down that barrier, that’s a moment for me where I’m connecting [to the audience]...and it feels like such a lovely, natural thing.”¹²⁴

Miller describes a sense of enjoyment and fulfillment when audiences join her and sing along on traditional songs. She identifies this moment as bridging the barrier between the stage and the audience and connecting with the audience. Miller feels differently about her original songs, admitting that it might be a bit strange if someone was singing along to every word of something she has written. That said, she often thinks about her live audience when composing. “If I had Known” is an original song from her *Flight of Time* album¹²⁵ where she specifically wrote a part for the audience to join in on. She says “the reason that bit [refrain] is in there is because I imagine people singing it with me. So I always teach that to people.” Here she goes the extra step that I describe above of teaching the audience the part of a phrase to sing along with her. In this way she melds her original material into the time-honored tradition of participatory song.

Encouraging audience participation through singalongs is by no means unique to Scotland. In theorizing his participatory field of music making, Thomas Turino (2008) surveys a range of different popular and traditional musics where performers encourage audience singalongs. Popular music scholar Keith Negus suggests that “singing along symbolically and quite tangibly affirms the relationship between artist and audience” (Negus 2007, 78). Drawing on his fieldwork in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, ethnomusicologist Jeff Packman writes that “Through the immediacy and physicality of shared participation, both the pleasure and the stakes for a song are increased as its sounds, words, and messages are embodied by a cross-section of singing subjects who are empowered as speakers of a text rather than simply the spoken to” (Packman 2010, 255).

In the past, a Scottish audience’s ability to participate in a performance by singing along marked a clear distinction between vocal and instrumental music – audiences have to listen to instrumental music, because most of the time they cannot sing along. People might diddle/hum tunes to each other, but this would rarely happen during a performance. Instead, they typically engage with instrumental music by clapping along, tapping their foot to the beat, moving their bodies, or vocalizing with “euchs” as I describe above. As one might expect, the majority of music studies literature on participatory singing focuses on vocal song. My research offers an example of how Scottish musicians are beginning to change that. In the last few years, contemporary Scottish instrumental bands have begun to expand the possibilities for singing along. Bands including Talisk, Ímar, Skerryvore, and Project Smok have started incorporating “singable bits” into their instrumental music as a way to encourage audience participation.

¹²⁴ Siobhan Miller, Interview with the author, May 16, 2020.

¹²⁵ Siobhan Miller told me that the message of this song is that “no matter what happens, you have to get up and carry on.” A rather apropos message considering this was one of the last interviews I did in person on March 16, 2020 before the UK went into pandemic lockdown.

Mohsen Amini and Ímar

During Celtic Connections in 2020, I attended the Festival Club and found that Ímar was playing a set. About halfway through their performance, concertina player Mohsen Amini jumped up on top of his chair and started conducting the audience while shouting out and encouraging them to sing along. His arm movements were large, keeping time with the music – out and in, out and in. He began singing a simple four note line into the microphone over the top of a fast reel that his band members were playing. His visible hand gestures and encouragement soon led to a boisterous chorus of jubilant voices. Everyone in the club started singing along and suddenly the whole crowd appeared to be bobbing up and down in time to the beat.



Figure 3.7: Mohsen Amini stands on a chair on stage and directs the audience to sing during Ímar's performance at the 2020 Celtic Connections Festival Club. January 31, 2020. Photo by the author.

Ali Levack and Project Smok

A similar vignette describes how Project Smok interacted with the audience during their 2020 Celtic Connections performance at the Old Fruitmarket. At the time of my fieldwork, the trio, featuring whistle, guitar, and bodhran, had recently started gaining fame in Scotland. Their whistle player, Ali Levack, is known for pushing the boundaries of typical whistle performance and ultimately won the BBC Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition during that same 2020 Celtic Connections Festival.

During Project Smok's first headline performance that evening at Celtic Connections, Ali Levack stopped playing during the middle of one of their tune sets and taught the audience to sing a syncopated four bar line. He had them sing it several times over the top of the guitar and bodhran. He then encouraged them to sing solo and the entire band dropped out. The audience responded with gusto, singing several repetitions of this melody at a high volume. Pablo Lafuente on guitar and Ewán Baird on bodhran layered back in and played along with the

audience as they continued to sing. Ali was last to join in, playing the line on whistle before taking off into a more elaborate melody. Some of the audience continued to sing while others went silent.



Figure 3.8: Ali Levack (center) of Project Smok directs the audience to sing during one of their instrumental sets at The Old Fruitmarket during Celtic Connections 2020. February 1, 2020. Photo and video¹²⁶ by the author.

The examples from performances by Ímar and Project Smok both demonstrate the power of audience engagement through participatory singing. These bands have taken a page out of the traditional singer's playbook by drawing on one of the most popular forms of audience engagement and interaction. Since Scottish audiences are used to singing along, asking them to sing, even on an instrumental number, feels comfortable and familiar. It also encourages other forms of interaction. During Project Smok's performance, Levack started vigorously conducting the audience, using gestures to build the hype and physically interact with the audience (see Figure 3.8 and accompanying video). During Ímar's performance, the physicality of everyone singing along incited more physical movement. Audience members started singing, then bobbing in time to the beat, and finally jumping up and down, igniting a kinetic frenzy. In both performances, the immense energy of the moment was only released when the bands transitioned into the next tune in their set. Ephemeral moments such as these, demonstrate the power that performers have in crafting a live musical experience. Using stage talk, singing, and gestures all together, these performers gave the audience partial ownership over the performance, allowing them to assert their agency and fully participate in the moment.

¹²⁶ For video footage of this vignette, see: <https://youtu.be/GANbL-Uddog>

Combining Tactics to Suit the Audience and Venue

Throughout this chapter, I have presented examples and vignettes from my fieldwork which feature performances in a variety of different venues. This chapter begins by citing performances in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall (Figure 3.1) and the Aberdeen Music Hall (Figure 3.2 and 3.3) – two large venues capable of seating hundreds of people. Project Smok’s concert at The Old Fruitmarket (Figure 3.8) also took place in a large room where over 1,000 audience members stood to enjoy the performance. In contrast, my vignette featuring Siobhan Miller (Figure 3.5) was set in the small space of the Blue Arrow Jazz Club, and the performances in the Celtic Connections Festival Club (see Figures 3.4 and 3.7) took place in a medium-sized basement space. My interlocutors have noted that the space of the venue is key to determining the type of gesture, movement, or stage craft that musicians choose to perform. It also impacts how the audience will respond and reciprocate. Laura Wilkie says that a venue “puts an audience in a mood, schema, paradigm” and it impacts how they are going to behave in that space at that show.¹²⁷ Scholarship on architecture and popular music demonstrates how the design of a space impacts audience experience and engagement, and how it can facilitate a “artist/audience/venue synergy” (Kronenburg 2019; see also Burland and Pitts 2016, and Byrne 2012). Venues can even take on broader symbolic meanings, capable of representing entire musical styles and eras, as Sara Cohen et al. (2010) have revealed in Liverpool. Sociologist and popular music scholar Simon Frith summarizes the variety of factors at stake in my argument by noting that “The changing spaces of musical performance contain their own technological, architectural and ideological accounts of what people have understood as a good sound, a good performance, a good listening experience, [and] a good night out” (Frith 2010, 3).

The venue is therefore another element which impacts audience engagement. A critical component to determining how the night will unfold depends on how the band or concert organizer decides to set up and use the venue space (Webster 2010). Scottish audiences have preconceived notions about how they will act at a given venue based on previous experiences at that venue or with the artist. They also react and adjust their expectations based on the way that the venue is set up as soon as they walk in the door. The Blue Arrow provides a prime example of a space that can be reconfigured in various ways to suit different types of events and forms of audience participation. I have already described how the venue is set up for seated folk-club style concerts. Siobhan Miller’s concert (Figure 3.5) utilized this set up: packed chairs in the section toward the stage, and open space in the back by the bar for standing at high tables. Seating the audience close together with little room for movement requires the performer to build an audience connection through more intimate stage talk, storytelling, and sing along choruses, rather than body movement.¹²⁸ While audience members may still clap along or tap their feet, the space is unlikely to become a dance party.

In contrast, The Blue Arrow can also be set up for a standing audience. When I attended a HEISK performance at this location (Figure 3.6), they had removed all chairs from the venue. Benches lined the walls for audience members who needed to be seated, however the majority of the notably young audience stood close to the stage. The back of the venue remained set up like a bar with high tables for socializing. At performances where the audience is standing (rather than

¹²⁷ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹²⁸ Innes White, Interview with the author, March 24, 2020.

seated), Wilkie feels there is a special give and take in the energy.¹²⁹ One of the similarities between the two vignettes featuring Ímar and Project Smok is that the audience members were standing at both performances. “Standing gigs” offer the possibility for energy to morph into collective movement since audiences can more easily sway or dance to the music. Given that a majority of the instrumental music in Scotland was originally associated with dancing in some capacity, it makes sense that audiences might feel the need to move in time with the tunes (Shoupe 2008). The tactics that HEISK, Project Smok, and Ímar used for “standing venue crowds” were similar, no matter the size of the venue. Both Mohsen Amini and Ali Levak, leading melody players in their respective bands, initiated a sing-along moment which sparked the audience to join in on the performance. In the case of Ímar’s performance, incorporating this vocal element to the concert also led to dancing. The audience was pulsating together to the beat as they sang. In this way, the collective participation in both physical movement and singing contributed to creating audience connection.

Why do Scottish musicians work so hard to engage the audience? As many interlocutors described to me, it brings them personal fulfillment and an enjoyable performance experience. For many, the joy found in live performance is the reason they have pursued a musical career. However, the precarity found in these live moments is never lost on musicians. As bagpiper Ali Hutton notes, the musical side leads to the business side. Audience engagement leads to audience enjoyment, and audience enjoyment leads to patron support. In the immediate sense, this could impact merchandise sales on the night of the show. Long term, an audience member’s enjoyment influences their attitude toward attending a future gig, and how likely they are to share information about the band with their friends or suggest to the organizers that they invite the band back. It is therefore in a musician’s best interest – both emotionally and financially – to use all their tools and techniques to foster audience engagement and create a memorable experience for concert attendees.

Virtuosity

The tactics of stage chat, gesture, and song are all techniques of stage craft that musicians use to heighten the audience’s experience and enjoyment of live music. I now turn to another element of stage craft: virtuosity. While the tactics discussed above offer clear-cut modes of engagement and tangible outcomes, virtuosity operates differently depending on who is defining the term and how it is expressed. I begin by reviewing the history of the term “virtuosity” and then describe what it means to musicians in the Scottish music scene. Examining the ways that Scottish musicians define virtuosity and characterize their fellow virtuoso performers illustrates what performers respect and, in some cases, consider as the “ideal” to strive for in their own music making. In breaking down the construction of virtuosity, I consider how it is the sum of many parts – including the tactics of stage craft discussed above – which come together to create something socially meaningful. Virtuosity is another means to engage the audience, however it also offers the possibility for elevating one’s status amongst peers and audience members in the scene. It therefore functions as another way to mitigate precarity.

¹²⁹ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

Virtuosity is a term that has been used extensively in scholarly and popular literatures to define excellence, technical skill, and some element of performance or display. The terms “virtuoso” and “virtuosity,” were originally coined in Italy during the sixteenth century, where they described the presence and display of cultivated skill and knowledge in a particular craft, art, or science (Bernstein 1998, 11-12). In its original usage during the Renaissance period, the root “virtù” indicated a propensity toward actions of conventional moral good as well as general efficacy or power (Weiner 1973, 476-479). This broadly applicable definition describes the virtuoso as someone who “aimed at admirable ends and also possessed the necessary power and acumen—mental or physical—to accomplish the desired outcome” (VanderHamm 2017, 4). As such, a virtuoso could be in any line of work, even beyond the arts.

Broad definitions soon shifted more towards artists. In Sébastien de Brossard’s *Dictionnaire de Musique* of 1703 he notes that the title of virtuoso might extend to “painters” and “architects,” but that it was most often reserved for “excellent musicians” (de Brossard 1705). By the nineteenth century, figures such as Nicolò Paganini and Franz Liszt served to cement the notion of virtuosity as tied to musical performance and performers in eye of the public. Accounts of these performers and their new practices of display combined with the rise in “mass markets for instruments and printed music” helped make the virtuoso a “star” at the center of musical life (Stefaniek 2016, 2).¹³⁰ Writing about nineteenth-century virtuosity, Susan Bernstein notes that “the virtuoso performance can never be dissociated from the time and space of its occurrence; it takes place in a foundational relationship to its instrument and is constituted by the physical contact with the stage, the audience, the ambiance” (Bernstein 1998, 11). Bernstein’s inclusion of the audience in this statement is paramount. The audience places the performer on a stage – quite literally a pedestal – and in that space determines and validates their status as virtuoso. The audience therefore becomes part of the construction of virtuosity. For the Scottish music scene, I aim to explore the intricacies of what a performer and audience view as virtuosic, and what other factors (such as spectacle) play in crafting the notion of virtuosity. Quite simply, as musicologist David VanderHamm writes, “To understand the social construction of virtuosity, the question of who cares is central” (VanderHamm 2017, 22).

David VanderHamm’s dissertation on virtuosity has played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for my research. VanderHamm’s central argument is that virtuosity is a socially constructed phenomenon, which he defines as “skill made apparent and socially meaningful” (VanderHamm 2017, 16). It does not reside solely in the bodies of performers, nor in the opinions of listeners (whether lay listeners or professional critics) nor the works of composers. Instead, virtuosity occurs within the relationships that connect these various actors. Understanding virtuosity thus requires attending to these relationships as well as the values that shape the cultural and subcultural contexts in which they take place. VanderHamm argues that despite the highly mediated listening environments of the 21st century, many people continue to value music not as an independent “sonorous object,” but as a particular type of human labor that

¹³⁰ In this statement, Alexander Stefaniek is primarily addressing the general frenzy surrounding the virtuoso figure in the early nineteenth century. He additionally notes how virtuosos “captured audiences’ imaginations and prompted lively journalistic accounts” (Stefaniek 2016, 2). David VanderHamm provides some clarity on virtuosity’s connection to mass market availability. He writes that the “changes in virtuosity’s meaning during the nineteenth century were not so much a result of technological innovations in media as they were a growth of markets for and interest in certain forms of media” (VanderHamm 2017, 6).

performs a confluence of values through which they experience the world and develop a sense of self (VanderHamm 2017).

Thinking about virtuosity as socially constructed – residing within relationships and the larger network that those connections create – moves virtuosity back towards its original broad sixteenth-century definition which acknowledged the labor and network of interactions behind the term. While this implies, as VanderHamm notes, that there are many factors which make up the social construction, I suggest that examining the relationship between audience and performer is critical for understanding how virtuosity in traditional Scottish music is constructed.

The role that audiences have played in characterizing virtuosity has been two-sided. Historically, audiences have attributed value to virtuosos while simultaneously fearing and vilifying them. This has been well accounted for by music historians studying nineteenth-century performer-composer-improvisers such as Paganini and Liszt. Paganini’s career has served as the impetus for discussions of virtuosity as demonic or other-worldly (Barizza and Morabito 2010, Kawabata 2013). Writings on Liszt have explored audience reception (Deaville 1998) and the virtuoso as straddling the divide between art and commerce, superhuman and machine, authenticity and falsehood (Leppert 1999). Lawrence Kramer writes about Liszt to explore how the virtuoso became a figure “riddled with ambivalence” that was “identified equally well with the extremes of transcendental expressiveness and cheap, flashy display” (Kramer 2002).

Tales of the master musician as demonic or supernatural are abundant in Scottish folklore. Katherine Campbell and Peter Cooke describe the vast number of legends from the Shetland Islands north of mainland Scotland which tell stories about the “trows” or faerie folk (Campbell 2007; Cooke 1986). Common themes found in these stories reflect the supremacy of the fiddle in music and dance settings, as well as the way that fairies confer good or bad fortune, superior artistic powers in music, and have the ability to give or take away health (Campbell 2007, 105). While discounted by most people these days, legends involving the supernatural have historically served as warnings against breaking social mores. They also demonstrate the fascination that people have with uncanny ability. As I will show in the following section, this audience framing of virtuosity is complicated by how Scottish musicians define virtuosic performance for themselves. In addition, the differences in what musicians say versus what they do in practice suggests a more intricate and nuanced understanding of the term.

Virtuosity in the Scottish Music Scene

He sat at the head of the table on a small stool next to an oversized wooden chair. A thin figure with a wild mane of frizzy black hair and greying beard. All eyes were fixed on him as he led The Cairo Waltz – the final waltz of the evening. A gentle lift of his fiddle scroll, a head tilt, a swell in his own volume and the whole session followed suit. It was as if he was conducting. Yet, his demeanor was inward – he was simultaneously playing for himself yet conscious that he was leading the seven other musicians around the table. The tune oscillated between sections of quiet, gentle melody, and rambunctious grand swells. In these moments of climax his foot would tap, but it wasn’t just his foot – it was his entire leg moving up and down in a massive gesture.

He occasionally glanced around – a flash of child-like grin and sparkle in his eye. But every moment was fleeting. It was always about where the music was going next.

Angus R. Grant, known commonly as Angus Grant Jr., was and remains a pivotal figure in the rise of the contemporary traditional music scene in Scotland. Angus led the weekly session at The Reverie pub in Edinburgh for many years in the 2000s. I had the chance to attend this session regularly when I lived in Edinburgh in 2013. Many musicians still reminisce about this session and the magic that Angus created as a session leader. Kevin Macleod writes, “Angus's magnetism began to weave its subtle spell and over the forthcoming years, like The Original Pied Fiddler,¹³¹ many younger, talented and delightful musicians were drawn to Angus's fold... and the tunes flowed seamlessly out of Angus's bow, and a distinct Reverie repertoire and sound emerged and developed.”¹³² Part of that distinct repertoire was the “Cairo Waltz” by Norman Blake which Angus always played to end the session, as I recount in the vignette above.



Figure 3.9: Angus R. Grant performs with Shooglenifty in 2014. Laura-Beth Salter can be seen depping with the band in the background. Photo courtesy of the Shooglenifty website.¹³³

Angus Grant passed away in October 2016 at the age of 49 after a short battle with cancer. He grew up in the Scottish highlands and was initially set to follow in the footsteps of his father, the renowned Lochaber fiddler and teacher, Aonghas Grant (Gilchrist 2016). However,

¹³¹ “The Original Pied Fiddler” is a reference to both the legend of the Pied Piper and Angus Grant’s father Aonghas Grant who has taught many legendary fiddlers over the years.

¹³² Kevin Macleod, Facebook post, January 16, 2017.

¹³³ Photo credit: <https://www.shooglenifty.com/2016/10/angus/>

See website for additional photos of Angus R. Grant and a tribute written by his bandmates.

Angus was a free spirit and eschewed convention. After moving to Edinburgh in the 1980s, he jammed across the city, busked through Europe, and eventually formed the band “Shooglenifty.” The group blended highland tunes with more popular music club beats which ultimately became their signature sound known as “acid croft.” On stage, Angus was the front man, and perceived by some as a virtuoso. Standing at the center and rocking in time to the music, he led the band as they performed from Scotland to Australia, and from Tokyo to Rajasthan. In his obituary in *The Scotsman* newspaper, Jim Gilchrist wrote that Angus “remained as happy playing in a pub session in Genuig [Scotland] as he was in a rain forest festival in Borneo” (Gilchrist 2016). In a Facebook post from January 2017 advertising the upcoming “Night for Angus” tribute performance at Celtic Connections, Kevin Macleod wrote that he and several other stalwarts of The Reverie session would be performing there “to remember the winsome, will o’ the wisp eccentric wizard himself and those fab nights.”¹³⁴

Musicological literatures demonstrate that virtuosos have historically been characterized as superhuman, superficial, flashy, showy, and even fake. My interlocutors also acknowledge that, in their experience, common perceptions of virtuosity privilege flashy, technical skill. Kevin Macleod describes Angus as both a “wizard” and “Pied Fiddler” capable of “weaving a subtle spell.” Yet his words are reverent and sincere; he complicates the notion of virtuosity by suggesting authenticity not falsity. Through his carefully chosen words, Macleod demonstrates how musicians today in Scotland do not buy into these more common perceptions of virtuosity. As I outlined in the previous chapter, much of the United Kingdom operates within a society that privileges humility and self-deprecation. I described how self-deprecation factors into self-promotion and advertising. In this chapter, I focus on how it’s performed on stage. I suggest that this societal norm influences how Scottish musicians characterize virtuosity in the context of traditional music. In general, they describe virtuosity as authentic, not flashy. The normal is privileged, yet this simplistic beauty must be presented with confidence and control.

Authenticity

The authenticity discourse in traditional music scholarship is fraught with inconsistencies and confusion. “Authenticity” is often presented as synonymous with the idea of “tradition.” In the Introduction, I outlined the complexities and issues surrounding these terms.¹³⁵ Despite its inaccuracies, the idea of authenticity as being “a true or original form of a source” continues to be used in popular conversation today. In addition, in the UK, “authenticity” is tied to understatedness – a way of being which harks back to earlier discussions of self-deprecation. It is no surprise then that understatedness gets paired with how musicians view traditional music performance.

Laura Wilkie, for instance, suggests that as Scottish music becomes more commercialized, it is possible for musicians to become successful without knowing or respecting the history of the tradition. However, she maintains that there is something special when

¹³⁴ Kevin Macleod, Facebook post, January 16, 2017.

¹³⁵ For further analysis of the term “authenticity” and a review of its use across decades of Scottish music scholarship, see my MA thesis: “Performing Place in the Scottish Folk Music Festival Scene: A Circulating Tradition” (2019).

musicians have authenticity or a genuine connection to the tradition. She worries that careers in traditional music can lead to a loss of this authenticity. She offers Angus R. Grant as an example of someone who exuded that special authenticity in performance and everyday life:

“[Scottish music] is quite commercial now. You can make something really polished and really produced and really marketable and be successful financially, and be gigging all over the world... [but] I think the heart of it is that authenticity, or the respect or the feeling of knowing where you come from, or knowing or feeling the history... there’s this respect or an awareness of something bigger than you or bigger than a performance. It’s quite difficult to come by. You can still be “successful,” and not have that... There’s just like some kind of authenticity or this radiating feeling of generosity, maybe is the wrong word, but I feel like Angus [R. Grant] really gave that. Any situation, it just felt like he was genuine... He didn’t just do anything... He just lived on love really. And maybe you wouldn’t call that a professional attitude or a virtuosic fiddle player, but I feel like when people feel that thing, whatever it is, there’s nothing that can really permeate it. It’s really special. He didn’t seem to be bothered about a career... just playing... just play and survive and enjoy life.”¹³⁶

Wilkie’s description of Angus R. Grant explores the issue of balancing a career in music with a maintenance of authenticity. She suggests that authenticity involves having reverence for history and the tradition, and caring more about the music than about one’s career. In an industry that is moving more toward commercial interests where success is measured by financial stability, Wilkie believes that none of this could corrupt Angus’s way of being. For her, this is a big part of what made him “authentic.”

On the surface, and as Wilkie notes, authenticity might appear as the antithesis to the common perceptions of virtuosity that I describe above. However, in Scottish traditional music it is linked to self-presentation, particularly understatedness, which is key to musicians’ characterizations of virtuosic performance. As a challenging term to define, authenticity also carries a certain mystique. How does one attain that quality that Angus R. Grant exuded and that Wilkie seeks to describe? Is it becoming rarer? Is that rare, unattainable quality the underlying force beneath virtuosity that makes it special? In speaking with my interlocutors, the concept of authenticity was not stated outright in musicians’ definitions of virtuosity, however its connection to self-presentation caused it to emerge as an underlying theme.

So, what is virtuosity as defined by traditional Scottish musicians? According to Cameron Nixon, “it’s about the whole performance package – the performance, stage craft, and how you present yourself to the public.”¹³⁷ Catriona Hawksworth notes that “virtuosity in traditional music is not necessarily about playing flashy, but more about other aspects” such as the emotional connection between the player and the audience.¹³⁸ Over the course of my fieldwork, I asked each of my interlocutors to define what virtuosity in traditional music meant to them. It is important to note that none of my interlocutors brought up the term “virtuosity” before I asked about it, however they offered thoughtful and insightful definitions of this term during our interviews. While their answers were varied, the commonalities were also striking – a trend which I argue demonstrates the importance of broadening our understanding of this term.

¹³⁶ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹³⁷ Cameron Nixon, Interview with the author, May 13, 2020.

¹³⁸ Catriona Hawksworth, Interview with the author, May 12, 2020.

Amongst contemporary performers of Scottish traditional music, virtuosity can be defined as the sum performance of many parts which include bringing life to subtle simplicity, being in control, and emoting confidence.

Simplicity

Discussions surrounding virtuosity often have to do with technique, difficulty, and complexity. Traditional musicians in Scotland privilege a different approach. Edinburgh-based fiddle player, Julia Dignan, says “I don’t think traditional music needs for people to be so technically good... somebody being overly technical, for me, can sometimes take away from the musicality.”¹³⁹ Drummer Craig Baxter states that virtuosity is about “bringing life to something technically not difficult – making simplicity seem complex and perfect.”¹⁴⁰ While fiddler Paul Anderson notes that it is important to play with good technique, the emotion that a player puts into a performance is “so important” and is part of a virtuoso’s “inherent ability to bring the music to life.”¹⁴¹ Mandolin player Laura-Beth Salter also describes a virtuoso as someone who “takes a piece of music and brings it to life” and someone who inspires people or inspires a different approach to playing an instrument.¹⁴²

Angus R. Grant was a master at bringing simple tunes to life and inspiring audiences and fellow session players. When leading the “Cairo Waltz” at the end of The Reverie session, he would play it, sometimes a dozen times in a row, making each repetition different than the last. He brought the tune to life week after week, making it a legendary part of that session and ensuring its lasting legacy in the scene. It continues to be played by Edinburgh musicians today, often accompanied by stories about Angus and fond memories of The Reverie.¹⁴³ Synthesizing all of these descriptions suggest that “bringing music to life” depends on playing well, playing with emotion, and inspiring the audience, no matter how simple a piece is to play.

Confidence

Another striking commonality in my interlocutor’s descriptions of virtuosity was their inclusion of “confidence.” This is especially notable given the climate of self-deprecation and the discourse around building confidence in the UK. Bagpiper and multi-instrumentalist Ali Hutton says that in performance you have to have confidence yet be relaxed.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, vocalist Siobhan Miller and fiddler John Martin suggest that a performer has to look and be comfortable on stage. Martin says that a performer must be “comfortable with what you’re doing” which in turn gives the performer confidence.¹⁴⁵ Miller describes it more from the perception perspective, saying the virtuoso is “someone looking comfortable, not forced.”¹⁴⁶ Looking comfortable and

¹³⁹ Julia Dignan, Interview with the author, January 20, 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Craig Baxter, Interview with the author, March 11, 2020.

¹⁴¹ Paul Anderson, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

¹⁴² Laura-Beth Salter, Interview with the author, May 12, 2020.

¹⁴³ The Reverie closed in 2015 after being sold to new owners. The final session took place on August 25, 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Ali Hutton, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹⁴⁵ John Martin, Interview with the author, March 15, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Siobhan Miller, Interview with the author, March 16, 2020.

being comfortable are different, and one performer may oscillate between the two depending on the tune they are playing or the circumstances of the gig. While it is certainly ideal to feel comfortable, being able to present a confident performance regardless of the circumstances is what becomes visible to other musicians and the audience.

Laura Wilkie notes that Angus R. Grant “didn’t seem to be bothered about a career... just playing... just play and survive and enjoy life.”¹⁴⁷ Her description of Grant aligns with John Martin’s comment that musicians must be fully invested in their own music. It takes a high level of confidence not to worry about one’s career and just make music. Grant was known for never carrying a mobile phone or using any modern communication methods. He once told me that if I wanted to get in touch with him, I could leave a message for him at a local bar. He traveled where the music took him, often disappearing for stretches of time up in the highlands. Whether playing in a low-key session or on the biggest stage at Celtic Connections, his demeanor and musicianship inspired musicians and audiences everywhere.

MacColl says that it is very Scottish to “play down one’s ability” and that to be confident is not celebrated. While she says that this can be seen as a humble quality, she also contends that “it can be to our detriment when just to be confident in one’s ability is not necessarily a celebrated attribute.”¹⁴⁸ Musicians therefore have to ride the line between being confident in their musical ability and performance technique, all while presenting it with an understated, humble demeanor. Calum McIlroy notes that he is personally drawn to the music of people performing with an understated approach. “I’ve found a lot of the time that I respect and I’m more drawn to, and I’ve always been more enamored with the music of more understated people... people who are very individual and... people being creative.”¹⁴⁹ McIlroy’s comment is supported by some of my other interlocutors who have noted the slow or understated performances can be the most challenging because they require the most confidence to present to audiences that have become enamored by the spectacle of live performance.

Taken in combination, these quotes point to how performers must work within the constraints of society to present something understated, yet confident. Since confidence is not always celebrated, as MacColl points out, the ability to exude confidence on stage without appearing cocky becomes a virtuosic trait.

Control

So how do musicians exude confidence on stage? I suggest that they either have control or create the appearance of having control in their performance. As I noted during the discussion of stage talk, Rosie Munro asserts that “you must have confidence” because “audiences feel much more comfortable with someone who comes on stage with confidence.”¹⁵⁰ Fiddler Graham Rorie adds that “you have to present confidence to the audience” because feeling or acting in

¹⁴⁷ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹⁴⁸ Lauren MacColl, Interview with the author, February 6, 2020.

¹⁴⁹ Calum McIlroy, Interview with the author, May 7, 2020.

¹⁵⁰ Rosie Munro, Interview with the author, March 24, 2020.

control puts people at ease.¹⁵¹ Singer-songwriter Jack Badcock in turn remarks that “you must have an ego in a healthy way”¹⁵² – a point which harks back to Jenn Butterworth’s comments about a healthy ego in Chapter Two. Badcock feels that having this ego can help a musician to relax and build confidence over time, which results in the appearance of control on stage.

Many musicians stated to me that virtuosity means being in complete command of one’s instrument or voice. When pressed to give an example, several identified highland fiddler Duncan Chisholm as an exemplar. Adam Sutherland describes Chisholm as “a master of his own art.”¹⁵³ In the same vein, Innes White notes how Chisholm is “in control of his instrument.” For White, a virtuoso can make an “instrument sound exactly as you want it to.”¹⁵⁴ Rosie Munro considers virtuosos masters of their instrument with no barriers, such that the instrument becomes an extension of one’s self.¹⁵⁵

Again, Angus R. Grant provides an excellent example of what my interlocutors describe here. As Shooglenifty’s front man, he delivered poise and presence on stage. He was the center of attention – legs spread apart in a power stance as he bobbed in time to the music. Angus achieved maximum groove and energy with minimal motion, delivering a powerful performance that still came off as understated. Occasionally he would punctuate the performance by stopping to dance and then making a dramatic circular motion with his bow to draw attention to his next entrance. While many of these exaggerated moments were clearly an act of showmanship, he also projected the sense that he was just having a good time enjoying tunes with friends. Angus was known just as well for performing traditional slow airs as he was for his fast, fiery compositions. Every movement and note appeared to the audience as intentional, deliberate, and controlled.

The performance of being in control extends beyond the stage to musicians’ business practice. When Covid-19 hit the West and the UK went into lockdown, musicians immediately went into damage control mode. My interlocutors started posting on social media about how they were continuing to make music and how they were working on rescheduling gigs. They posted about other behind-the-scenes music-related work projects like redesigning websites, or doing online interviews. As I detailed in Chapter Two, musicians began posting videos of themselves playing tunes, either alone or virtually with friends, to Facebook and Instagram. They made themselves appear to be busy and working, even during the biggest work crisis in most of their lifetimes. Many of these virtual collaboration videos featured statements claiming that they missed jamming together so these videos were just them “jamming for fun.” The discourse suggested an off-the-cuff, quickly thrown-together performance. It showed their social media audience that they were still performing and still “doing what they wanted to be doing.” However, recording a short collaboration video is no small feat. Hours of time and effort went into making those videos. If it really was just for fun, would they spend all that extra time editing the video to share it? In the age of social media and selfies, perhaps they would. But it was also a marketing strategy. These posts kept their audiences thinking about them as performers. These

¹⁵¹ Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.

¹⁵² Jack Badcock, Interview with the author, May 5, 2020.

¹⁵³ Adam Sutherland, Interview with the author, March 20, 2020.

¹⁵⁴ Innes White, Interview with the author, March 24, 2020.

¹⁵⁵ Rosie Munro, Interview with the author, March 24, 2020.

posts made them appear to be busy and working, despite the shutdown of all venues and live performance. In other words, such posts gave them the appearance of being in control of an uncontrollable situation.

In an industry characterized by precarity, the appearance of control counteracts insecurity by asserting stability. When I asked Scottish musicians to define virtuosity, their responses centered more on the labor of presentation management rather than technical skill and musical expertise. In the Scottish music scene, musicians present themselves as being in control both on and off the stage. Simplicity and understated performance are important to musicians as they feel it aligns with musical authenticity. When this is presented with confidence and control, they describe it as virtuosity. Musicians' characterizations of virtuosity are a crucial component to the complex network of connections which make up the social construction of virtuosity. In the next section, I consider how this attitude toward musical performance presentation contrasts with the sounds of scene.

The Sound of the Scene: Virtuosity and Technology

Even though musicians speak about privileging understated performance and admiring fellow performers for their execution of the simple, many of the musical sounds and performances that have become commonplace in the scene tell a different story. At the 2019 Scots Fiddle Festival, Ross Couper and Tom Oakes performed as the main headliners at the Friday Night Concert with special guest Tim Edey. Couper and Oakes often perform as a duo in which Couper plays Shetland-Glasgow fiddle style with Oakes accompanying on rhythm guitar or Irish flute. With Edey joining on both guitar and melodeon, they were able to feature a variety of different instrument combinations throughout their set. The hour-long performance that evening featured reels played at lightning speed with breaks for improvisational riffing and, what might typically be considered virtuosic passages.



Figure 3.10: Tom Oakes, Ross Couper, and Tim Edey (left to right) perform at the 2019 Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh. November 15, 2019. Photo and video¹⁵⁶ by the author.

Ross Couper is playing a fast reel at approximately 150 bpm. As he launches into the repeat of the tune melody he starts riffing on a choppy chord pattern with double stops. This morphs into a jumping arpeggio with ricochet bowing as Couper demonstrates his technical ability and bowing skills. This flashy moment is underscored by Tom Oakes who keeps the beat steady with rhythmic guitar strumming and Tim Edey who plays a slow ascending melodeon line over the top. The sound is complex with multiple interweaving lines. Rhythms and patterns play together to create tension and release. A crescendo builds until finally Couper jumps back into the classic tune melody.

They perform seated, with their heads and shoulders in a slumped inward posture. Their brows are furrowed in concentration, but their feet are tapping along. Occasionally, each of them looks up to watch their musical partners intensely for a few seconds before returning to looking down and focusing on their instrument. A smile flashes across Edey's face as Couper's bowing grows increasingly intricate and wild. As the tune ends, the audience erupts in raucous applause. A break in the music heralds a few minutes of stage chat. They use self-deprecating language and make fun of each other on stage. Edey seems set on making lots of inside jokes which Couper and Oakes then carefully explain or interpret for the audience.

This vignette demonstrates two important points. First, what Scottish musicians describe as virtuosity is different than what often gets performed, musically. This concert by Couper, Oakes, and Edey was anything but subtle and certainly not simple. While they did include a

¹⁵⁶ For video footage of this vignette, see: <https://youtu.be/ZSsa79G492o>

range of tempos and tune types, the majority was technically complex and performed cleanly at speeds only achievable by top players. Second, the technical complexity and showiness of the music was offset by self-deprecating stage talk and inward-focused self-presentation. They joked about each other's shortcomings and various misadventures while touring. While they were playing, they mostly looked down or inward toward each other, rather than out at the audience (see Figure 3.10), implying deep concentration. Their tapping feet and occasional smiles suggested an enjoyment of each other's music making. Performing seated (rather than standing) made for a more understated look on stage and did not accommodate more overt gestures such as crouching. However, during musical breaks Couper and Oakes were careful to make the audience feel like insiders and active participants in the performance through their use of stage talk.

In this instance, the musicians appear confident and controlled in their performance and self-presentation, despite their verbal attention to self-deprecation. Do they appear confident because they are clearly technically adept? Is their self-deprecation and easy manner of talking on stage only comical because it contradicts their apparent musical mastery? There are contradictions in what musicians value as virtuosic amongst each other and what they perform on stage, musically. There are more contradictions between how they characterize their own musicianship, and what they perform. Ultimately, while self-presentation focuses on appearing understated and simple, layered musical sounds and, as I will discuss next, the rise in stage technology showcase complexity.

The Rise of Tech and Pedals

Since 2013, I have visited Scotland five times. Over that time, the rise in the use of technology on stage has been exponential. In 2013, a guitarist in the average traditional music band might have one or two pedals, but that was the extent of live incorporated technology. Today, nearly every musician on stage in Glasgow, no matter what instrument they play, has their own pedal board. When I asked my interlocutors to describe the current sound of the Glasgow scene, many responded with advancements in technology such as “stomp boxes”¹⁵⁷ and “octave pedals.”¹⁵⁸ Paul Anderson called it a “homogenized folk feel”¹⁵⁹ and Lauren MacColl described the sound as “heavily compressed,¹⁶⁰ clean, technical, polished, and accurate.”¹⁶¹ Jack

¹⁵⁷ “Stomp boxes” or “kick-pads” typically refer to a type of pedal that sounds like a kick drum each time it is hit. In Scottish traditional music, artists typically stamp on the pedal in time to the beat. This triggers a sampled sound which is then mixed to sound similar to a kick drum, bass drum, or loud foot stomping, depending on the desire of the band.

¹⁵⁸ An “octave pedal” doubles the sound of the instrument line one octave below. In Scottish traditional music, it is most commonly used on string instruments such as guitars and fiddles.

¹⁵⁹ Paul Anderson, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

¹⁶⁰ MacColl and Badcock both mention “compressed” sound. “Compression” is an audio recording production technique which reduces the overall dynamic range of a track. This technique is commonly used across genres to amplify quieter sounds in order to increase the overall volume of a track and give it more impact. For live performance, there are pedals which apply compression in real time. In the context of traditional music, this technique can work to heighten the overall impact of a track or live performance, but can also suppress some of the, often desired, dynamic variation. For example, when compression is applied too strongly, it can minimize contrast to the point that a track or performance is loud but has no impact because it has no dynamic variation.

¹⁶¹ Lauren MacColl, Interview with the author, February 6, 2020.

Badcock echoes MacColl in stating that “there is so much perfection now in trad music... it’s compressed, clinical.”¹⁶² He suggests that the high end audio production used during the recording process has influenced live performance. Badcock specifically mentioned that many musicians in Glasgow record albums at Chris Waite’s studio, and therefore his production sound has become part of the city’s sonic palate. Musicians will record an album in the studio and use specific technological filters, such as reverb or distortion, on the track. The studio also offers the possibility of recording take after take and editing tracks until they are “clean and accurate” as MacColl indicates. Once musicians have the polished recording, many want to recreate that sound in live performance. They will therefore incorporate pedals into their stage setup which help them achieve the same, or similar, sounds. Badcock and others suggest that this pattern has led to the recent increase in technology and pedals on stage.



Figure 3.11: Project Smok performs at the Hug & Pint in Glasgow. Note the variety of different pedals, especially the guitarist’s pedal board. November 9, 2019. Photo by the author.

Laura-Beth Salter contends that to describe the Glasgow scene as a “melting pot is an understatement” because of the variety of musical elements that are now encapsulated in the sound of the city’s traditional music.¹⁶³ She further explains the shift in sound by describing how traditional music has always been a form of dance music, but the way that people want to dance has changed. Following trends in Pop and Electronic Dance Music (EDM), bands are crafting more moments of build-up, tension, and release. Popular music scholars have shown how EDM production techniques commonly known as “build-up” and “drop” create tension and a heightened emotional intensity (Solberg 2014). These techniques also serve to “re-energize” a group of dancers and lead to synchronized motion such as jumping up and down in time to the

¹⁶² Jack Badcock, Interview with the author, May 5, 2020.

¹⁶³ Laura-Beth Salter, Interview with the author, May 12, 2020.

beat (Solberg and Jensenius 2017; 2019). In Scottish traditional music, similar moments of build-up are created through riffs and sequences.¹⁶⁴ Couper, Oakes, and Edey used a combination of these techniques in their performance at the Scots Fiddle Festival (see Figure 3.10 video and accompanying vignette). In the past, bands would string together tune after tune, leaving no room for improvisation. Now, in between tunes, the accompaniment instruments might play a long chord progression, known as a harmonic sequence, and a melody player will improvise short riffs based on the tune melody over the top of the progression. Or, more commonly, the melody instruments might amplify the sequence of the chord progression as it builds back toward the tonic by playing scales and arpeggiated patterns.¹⁶⁵ These techniques are often supplemented by stomp boxes and octave pedals which add layers and complexity to the sound. When combined, these stylistic elements build tension and foster a style of dance more in line with EDM and popular club going. The popularity of this shift in sound has prompted the creation of more bands like Shooglenifty and Elephant Sessions which are known for being party bands.

Amongst my interlocutors, opinions differ as to which audiences musicians are catering to with these new sounds. Laura-Beth Salter says that more performers are creating music for their peers rather than regular audiences. This itself functions as a way of networking. As I described in Chapter Two, musicians in the Glasgow scene have to be seen to get gigs. If a fellow musician sees and hears their peer performing something that catches their attention, they might be more likely to invite them to collaborate on a future gig.

In contrast, Jenn Butterworth suggests that technology itself is now a way to cater to audience desires. Using technology like a stomp box provides a kick drum or bass beat that an audience can cling to, and dance to. Bands such as Talisk, Gness, and Kinnaris Quintet all use some form of stomp box. Luc McNally points out that using pedals and technology is a way to make a more complex sound with fewer musicians. For example, using just two added pedals, such as a stomp box and bass octave pedal, can make a trio sound like a five-piece band. This addition of technological equipment allows smaller bands to compete with larger bands for headline performance spots. This can be financially beneficial to the band, and help elevate their reputation amongst audiences. Technology also allows bands to be more versatile, and cater to different kinds of shows, festivals, or venue spaces. For example, Gness could play an acoustic folk club on one night, and then fill out their sound with a range of pedals the next day for a performance at The Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. Having a versatile stage setup allows musicians to cater to venue or promoter specifications and audience desires which increases the number of potential gig opportunities.

While many musicians feel the need to keep up with the times through technology, Ali Hutton contends that using technology is bad if you use it just to use it. Calum McIlroy suggests that young musicians are replacing musical technique with technology:

¹⁶⁴ A “riff” is a term often used in popular music and jazz to describe a short melodic fragment or harmonic ostinato which, when repeated, can form the basis of a song or groove (Kennedy et al. 2013). In Scottish traditional music, it might be a short melodic fragment that is based on the tune melody or accompanying harmonic sequence.

A “sequence” is the repetition of a passage at a higher or lower level of pitch. If the repetition is of only the melody it is called a “melodic sequence”; if it is of a series of chords it is a “harmonic sequence” (Kennedy et al. 2013).

¹⁶⁵ For one example of this type of musical sequence, see Figure 3.10 and accompanying video:

<https://youtu.be/ZSsa79G492o>

In particular, note the repeated progression that builds from 0:47 to 1:15.

“It’s kind of creating short cuts around technique, I think. I mean I have to say across the board, young people in general, and I am generalizing, but... if you look at people older than me, like a generation above (in their late 30s), all these guitar players. They all have really great technique. They’re all really fluent in terms of positions on the fingerboard, flat-picking...self-accompaniment to tunes—they can all do it and they can do it well. Whereas now, and it’s probably to do with the whole session scene...guitar players are only good for hammering out the I IV V, and there’s not many solo guitar players anymore, or people who are capable of doing that. And I’ve seen recently, people referring to themselves as solo guitar players but they’re using a kind of loop station and I just don’t think that’s the same thing. And so I think it’s kind of creating a thing where [because of technology] people are enabled to shortcut the technique.”¹⁶⁶

Technology allows musicians to do more with less. It can make a few musicians sound like a big band, or function to replicate the studio sound by adding reverb or other special effects. These effects can disguise a simple chord structure, and even perhaps a lack of technique as McIlroy suggests. Technology can also be used to incorporate non-traditional sounds over the top of tunes. Here, I have primarily addressed how technology functions for most contemporary bands in Glasgow’s music scene. However, some artists, such as From the Ground and Jenny Sturgeon, use technology as a whole separate track that becomes a primary staple of their sound. For example, Jenny Sturgeon incorporates nature sounds (such as crashing waves and bird calls) into her projects and chooses to use technology on stage because she wants to recreate the sound recorded in the studio.¹⁶⁷ Whatever musicians use it for, incorporating technology adds a layer (or more) of complexity to a group’s sound. This complexity is the antithesis to the “simplicity” and “understated performance” that many of these same musicians describe when characterizing traditional music virtuosity.

Ali Hutton explains the changing trad scene and the incorporation of technology as part of moving the tradition forward:

“[Traditional music] has changed a lot from just playing tunes... I think now it kind of feels relevant, like how it’s all moving forward, like how other music is developing. I think there are similar sounds in rock and pop. You can hear what people are listening to and what they’re enjoying: timing and offbeats, you know... It’s massive now, trad music. It’s cool for kids to want to play trad music now and that’s because it’s moving with the times...parallel with other genres of music.”¹⁶⁸

Technology adds complexity. It keeps the music more relevant to the times while simultaneously catering to an audience that values these sounds. Using technology also aids in audience interaction. When a performer starts kicking a stomp box, the whole crowd bobs to the beat with new-found energy. Musicians can therefore use technology to foster other elements of stage craft, such as body movement and gesture, which are key to engaging the audience. Therefore, while technology appears to be the antithesis of what Scottish musicians value about virtuosic performance, in actuality, it contributes to creating a virtuosic performance by facilitating various elements of stage craft.

¹⁶⁶ Calum McIlroy, Interview with the author, May 7, 2020.

¹⁶⁷ Jenny Sturgeon, Interview with the author, May 11, 2020.

¹⁶⁸ Ali Hutton, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the ironies and juxtapositions of musical mentalities, and how they simultaneously collide and work together to create a successful performance. Understated performances are given in overstated, flashy spaces. Forced facelessness and lack of agency is presented in sparkly attire. Technically difficult and layered music is enshrouded in self-deprecation. Virtuosity must be understated, yet confident. Precarity fosters stability.

Scottish musicians describe virtuosity as bringing to life simplicity through confidence and control. They also describe it as a carefree authenticity – a laid-back and reverent way of being that resists the appearance of a career-driven approach. Yet the sound of the scene is complex, polished, technical, and crafted. New technology is increasingly being used to align the tradition with popular sonic aesthetics and maintain relevancy with other contemporary styles of music. In many ways, the traditional music scene is striving to be a popular music scene. Musicians, club owners, festival organizers, and promoters are creating glitzy stage productions, including more electronic sounds, and using theatrical tactics – such as scripted walk-ons – to parallel the increasing spectacle of the popular music realm.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, using technology in live performance gained a whole new meaning. With virtual performance being the only form of live performance, many musicians found creative ways to rethink the elements I discuss in this chapter and present them in the new medium. In Chapter Two, I described how musicians such as Paul Anderson and Shona Donaldson gave livestream performances from their living room. They garnered successful followings largely due to stage chat – perhaps better called “living room chat” in this instance – and telling stories over Facebook Live. They read comments from the virtual stream as a way to interact with the audience that they could not see. Donaldson often brought out her glitzy performance costumes to the livestream stage, despite it being her own living room. Members of Kinnaris Quintet started a series called “Sunday Sparkles” which consisted of a different band member dressing up in their usual sparkly attire and playing tunes solo in a virtual stream on Sundays. Singers such as Siobhan Miller gave livestream performances during which they would encourage the audience to sing along at home – Miller could not hear anyone, of course, but she joked about “everyone sounding wonderful.” Tim Edey used a looping pedal during his livestream performances so that he could layer guitar and melodeon together at the same time. Despite this more complex technical setup, he presented his music with a humble demeanor and brought simple tunes to life through showcasing his impressive fingerpicking and harmonic expertise.

Over the course of my research, several musicians have mentioned to me that the quality of musicianship is higher than ever before in the Scottish traditional music scene. Others have said that you do not have to be as good to achieve success. Despite these contradictory attitudes and whatever their level of skill, fame, or success, Scottish musicians agree that the audience response, interaction, and connection are the best part of live performance and something they seek to foster. Audience engagement and virtuosity are key elements of stage craft that musicians use to elevate their status amongst both their audiences and peers. These tactics help them combat precarity and maintain their careers. During pandemic-time virtual performances,

musicians did their best to build rapport with their audiences using every element of stage craft in their skillset. However, audience interaction and connection are nearly impossible to replicate through a virtual wall. The primary forms of reciprocation that a musician feels during a virtual performance include audience comments in the chat window, heart and clapping emojis, and perhaps small donations in their virtual tip jars. As musicians have transitioned back into performing for live audiences again post-pandemic, there has been a renewed sense of appreciation for audience interaction in live performance. In describing the gig with the best audience connection she has ever experienced, Laura Wilkie recounts her experience performing at The Barrowland Ballroom, a 1,900 standing-capacity venue, during Celtic Connections:

“That was the first time, ever, I felt like life was complete. Because it was as if the musicians on the stage and the crowd were not two separate things. Honestly, it felt like we were all sharing this thing.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

Chapter 4

Institutionalization, Credentialing, and Infrastructures of Support for Scottish Music and Musicians

Over the last three chapters, I have outlined the tactics that musicians employ to build their career, both on and off the stage. I have also considered the social environments that they must navigate and the behaviors they must exhibit in order to thrive in this precarious employment environment. This chapter turns to the credentialing opportunities and infrastructures of support that have been built within Scotland to aid musicians. Many of these institutions are centered on encouraging artists in their creative process, however others offer support for practical necessities and emergencies.

In the first half of this chapter, I consider how the ethos of Scotland's folk music revival impacted the institutionalization of traditional music and contributed to the rise of credentialing opportunities through degree programs and award competitions. These programs offer musicians the chance to build their careers with accolades and accreditations focused on musical skill. Drawing on the experiences of my interlocutors, I consider the impact that these institutions have on shaping the scene, and the opportunities they provide. The second half of this chapter turns toward infrastructures which offer grant-based aid. I explore how these institutions have been built with the understanding that musicians live precarious lives – a perspective that has been crucial to providing widespread support and positive conditions for musical labor.

Institutionalization and the Rise of Credentialing Programs

Since the Scottish folk music revival of the 1950s, a resurgence of public interest in traditional music has been met with new professional opportunities and an increased attention to financial support. The School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh was founded in 1951 with the goal to “collect, preserve, research, and publish material relating to the cultural traditions and folklore of Scotland.”¹⁷⁰ While initially focused on collection and preservation for the School of Scottish Studies archives, the program expanded in the 1980s to include degree programs in Scottish ethnology and Celtic studies. In the 1970s at the height of the revival, the idea of working in traditional music as a career started to develop and grow exponentially. Simon McKerrell (2011a) has described this transformation in how musicians used to view playing music as a hobby and how they transitioned to making it their livelihood. Coming out of the revival, audiences began to grow and so did the number of folk clubs and other intimate venues (McKerrell 2011a). With increased opportunity to perform, young traditional music players realized that they could make a living from their music, and began to put groups together and tour to these new venues (McKerrell 2011a). In Chapter Two I presented a case study of fiddler John Martin who started playing traditional music as a hobby during the revival period, and eventually transitioned into a full-time professional touring artist with one of the most well-known folk bands from Scotland.

¹⁷⁰ “School of Scottish Studies Archives,” University of Edinburgh, last modified August 23, 2021, <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/cultural-heritage-collections/school-scottish-studies-archives>.

Throughout this timeframe, the attention garnered by the revival also impacted public policy. In 1993 the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) issued the *Charter for the Arts* which drew special attention to Scottish “traditional arts” as a matter of public importance (McKerrell 2014).¹⁷¹ Except for a brief mention in 1984, this was the first time that “traditional arts” were made a priority in a SAC policy document (Francis 2018; McKerrell 2014). In the decade that followed, a series of SAC reports examined the social impact of traditional arts.¹⁷² One crucial report authored by David Francis in 1999 details “how there is a willingness to support traditional music in Scotland yet the underlying lack of institutionalization of the music undermines this in local communities through a lack of key educational and information resources” (McKerrell 2014, 162). Francis goes on to offer suggestions for the development of education, information, and advocacy for traditional music (McKerrell 2014). In hindsight, the focus on institutionalization in this report is critical to understanding how Scottish music has developed, both historically and since this policy document’s publication. As I will demonstrate, this confluence of factors throughout the revival and the new attitudes toward traditional music that emerged have been the impetus for the development of educational and credentialing programs, new forms of outreach, and increased funding to support traditional music in Scotland.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, folk and traditional music performance programs started gaining momentum at established universities. The Traditional Music program at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland was founded in 1996 (Dickson 2018). The option to specialize in bagpiping was added to this program in 2000, in collaboration with the National Piping Centre.¹⁷³ This was followed in 2001 by Newcastle University establishing its Folk and Traditional Music degree, which was the first of its kind in England.¹⁷⁴ The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS), previously known as the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMD), and Newcastle University are two of the primary destinations that young Scottish musicians choose to attend university in order to study traditional music. Newcastle University markets their Folk and Traditional Music Program as focusing on performance and group playing, while giving students the opportunity to “study the social and cultural context of traditional and folk music, and how music helps to construct identity and culture.”¹⁷⁵ RCS promotes a personalized approach which nurtures the “creative development of the individual” through consolidating performance technique, repertoire, and personal style.¹⁷⁶ In Chapter Two, I explored how musicians’ choice to attend RCS is partially influenced by the desire to move to Glasgow and develop a network in the city. However, the degree itself is also alluring to young musicians due to its promise of providing international performance opportunities and teaching

¹⁷¹ For a detailed history of the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) including its reconfiguration due to “devolution” and the “arm’s length” mechanism, see Galloway and Jones (2010).

¹⁷² For an analysis of the Scottish Arts Council reports from the 1990s and 2000s, see McKerrell (2014).

¹⁷³ Ali Hutton, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Newcastle University is located just across Scotland’s southern border in Newcastle upon Tyne, northeast England. “Folk and Traditional Music BA Honours,” Newcastle University, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/undergraduate/degrees/w344/>.

¹⁷⁵ “Course Summary,” Folk and Traditional Music BA Honours, Newcastle University, accessed March 28, 2023, <https://pdf.ncl.ac.uk/ug/2023/w344.pdf>.

¹⁷⁶ “BMus Traditional Music,” Undergraduate Programmes, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/courses/bmus-traditional-music/>.

them to be “entrepreneurial” artists in the industry.¹⁷⁷ All of these courses and more throughout the UK now offer musicians the ability to focus on traditional music while earning their university education credentials.

The mission statements put forth by these degree programs are telling in their attention to placing technique and creative innovation in conversation with the preservation of tradition. On one hand, these programs were created with revivalist ethics – to safeguard the tradition and continue its promotion and dissemination. On the other hand, there is a recognition that traditional music is constantly changing and that these programs must cater to the shifting sounds of contemporary performance and the new era of professionalism. Taken together, they highlight the challenges of bringing traditional music into a higher education setting, particularly a conservatory which is heavily associated with musical performance.

Ethnomusicologist Judah Cohen has argued “the institution's place within a dynamic multifaceted model of musical transmission's values and practices serves a key role in creating and negotiating ideas of musical practice and identity” (Cohen 2009, 321). Historically, and especially early on in ethnomusicological scholarship, there has been much critical attention placed on folk music educational institutions due to the prevalence of westernization and colonialist instructional practices (Stock 1996 and 2004; Racy 1991; Nettl 1985). In writing about conservatory-style programs founded across the globe (Iran, South India, Korea, USA, China, and Ghana) Bruno Nettl (1985) observed how Western Art music curricula was often imposed on non-western traditional musics. Examples include, but are not limited to, a focus on notation rather than oral transmission, the imposition of Western music theory, the canonization of repertoire, and an increased interest in the preservation and reconstruction of historical genres (Nettl 1985; Stock 1996 and 2004; Hill 2009). Going beyond stylistic influence and modes of instruction, some educational institutions have specifically been founded to serve political and ideological agendas. Notably, across Eastern Europe and Asia, folk musics have been modified to further the nationalist politics of the state and disseminate propaganda (Stock 1996; Zemtsovsky and Kunanbaeva 1997; Wang 2003).¹⁷⁸ Ethnomusicologist Juniper Hill observes that “in many countries the policies instigated through such institutions have significantly altered virtually all aspects of folk music, including its transmission, performance contexts, social meaning, arrangements, orchestrations, intonation, instrument design, scholarship, history, and development” (Hill 2009, 221). However, institutionalization does not necessarily entail state appropriation or the imposition of westernized methodologies. Recently, there has been a rise in scholars writing about cross-collaborative educational practices involving the blending of Western Art music and folk music techniques (see Yang and Welch 2014; Sheridan and Byrne 2008; Leung 2020). Amongst these works, scholars find consensus in observing and suggesting that educational institutions incorporate more uses of oral transmission into their curricula to improve student engagement. Within the Scottish music scene, oral transmission is a recognized

¹⁷⁷ “BMus Traditional Music,” Undergraduate Programmes, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/courses/bmus-traditional-music/>.

¹⁷⁸ There is an immense literature from scholars of Russian and Chinese music demonstrating how music institutions have been used to propagate state politics. For a few of the many examples, see Edmunds 2000; Nelson 2004; and Olson 2004. State sponsored support of the arts continues to be a contentious issue with governments wielding the power to aid or suppress musical careers. See Valerie Hopkins and Georgy Birger’s 2023 article in the New York Times about Russian pop star “Shaman.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/09/world/europe/shaman-putin-russia-ukraine-war.html>.

and celebrated component of the tradition, and a technique used by many instructors in the traditional music programs.

Compared to some of the examples above highlighting government oversight, instructors and administrators of traditional music programs in the UK enjoy relative autonomy over their decisions. However, with autonomy comes great responsibility. Scholars and performers of Scottish music are wary and careful around institutionalization due to historical precedents set within their borders. The following three examples demonstrate Scottish institutional legacies of standardization and recontextualization that sit in a complicated relationship with the notion of tradition.

In her dissertation “Fiddle Teaching in Shetland Isles Schools, 1973-1985,” Pamela Swing (1991) discusses how the educational institutionalization of the local Shetland fiddle style was invaluable in that it contributed to a revival of the musical practice. However she also describes this as a revival based on the “re-invention” of tradition. Recontextualization is key to her argument; Swing explains how instructors sought to groom their students for playing on the stage, rather than for dances. She argues that this shift from situational context (playing for dances) to presentational context (stage performance) led to a “crisis of context” in which there were not enough performance opportunities for these fiddlers in Shetland. She suggests this incited a dynamic of rebellion, which led to students wanting to break away and form their own approach to fiddle music. In contrast to this, RCS focuses on catering to individual style and encourages the entrepreneurial spirit of its students.

Margaret P. Duesenberry’s dissertation (2000), “Fiddle Tunes on Air: A Study of Gatekeeping and Traditional Music at the BBC in Scotland, 1923-1957” traces how the BBC shaped the performances of early radio broadcasting musicians to suit their own aesthetic standards. She focuses on solo fiddlers and Scottish dance bands to reveal how the BBC sought to “assist traditional players” in developing certain stylistic traits and favored particular aspects of performance practice (Duesenberry 2000, 3). In an effort to succeed in broadcasting auditions, some traditional musicians altered stylistic elements, repertoire choice, personnel or instrumentation, and learned basic elements of Western harmony and classical violin technique. Duesenberry’s impressive and extensive archival work leads to a critical conclusion. First, working with the BBC led to a standardization of ensemble size and certain harmonic and bass line traits for dance bands. Second, fiddlers across Scotland who listened to these broadcasts learned new repertoire and/or aspects of technique and style which they incorporated into their own performance practice (Duesenberry 2000, 294-296). The BBC therefore directly influenced stylistic changes to the tradition.

Finally, arguably the most well-known case of Scottish institutional standardization centers on the highland bagpipes. As a distinctive and recognizable icon of Scottish culture, bagpipes have historically been a target of both repression and revivalism. This has been well documented and parsed from a wide range of perspectives by many Scottish scholar-musicians including Allan MacDonald (1995), Roderick Cannon (1995), John Gibson (1998), William Donaldson (2000), and Joshua Dickson (2006). In William Donaldson’s historical study of the Highland Societies of London and Scotland, he explores the influence of these institutions on the establishment of the competitive piping style in the late eighteenth century. Donaldson

demonstrates how the Highland Societies sought to create printed texts for pipe music which ultimately became a means for stylistic prescriptive control, “enabling an authoritative ‘standard’ version to be established” (Donaldson 2000, 98). Focusing specifically on *piobaireachd*,¹⁷⁹ Allan MacDonald argues that “patronage and ‘preservation’ through a competitive system has meant that many alternative settings and styles have been ‘ironed out’ in order to set a standard for judging” (MacDonald 1995, 12). Institutional standardization through the Highland Societies, military, and competitive spheres has had a profound impact on the style of bagpiping today throughout Scotland and abroad. Joshua Dickson who, as of 2023, is head of the Traditional Music Program at RCS, has written specifically about the impact of institutionalization in relation to changing traditions. In his 2006 book “When Piping was Strong: Tradition, Change, and the Bagpipe in South Uist,” Dickson traces how the standardized piping style became known as the proper way to play, despite the locals’ own knowledge of piping predating its institutionalization. Through his ethnographic account, he demonstrates how upon its return to the islands, the rapport of institutionalized piping permeated public conception of what “good piping” meant to residents of South Uist in the Outer Hebrides. There has been a resurgence of “Gaelic bagpiping” (MacDonald 1995; Gibson 1998; Dickson 2006) since the folk instrumental music revival of the 1970s, and a variety of bagpiping styles currently coexist throughout Scotland. However, the legacy of institutionalization has had a lasting impact on musical styles, dissemination, and perceptions of tradition.

There is a deep attention to the preservation of tradition present in the scholarship and contemporary performance practice of Scottish traditional music. But there is also an understanding that change is part of the tradition. Balancing between these two perspectives is the motivating force driving further institutionalization: these programs are encouraging more players and fostering a thriving scene. In all three of the cases presented above, the institutionalization process increased participation in traditional music. A similar driving force is the motivation behind the creation of the folk music degree at Newcastle University where founders seek to further disseminate and raise the profile of traditional music (Keegan-Phipps 2007, 101-102).

Kathryn Tickell is one of the founders of the Folk and Traditional Music Program at Newcastle University and a well-known performer of Northumbrian pipes and fiddle. In an interview with ethnomusicologist Simon Keegan-Phipps, she expressed concern over standardization and an ethic of elitism that might emerge out of participation in the degree program (Keegan-Phipps 2007, 101). She also wanted to make sure the program was set up in the best way possible:

“You’ve got that thing of-do you do the course, or not? You know, or do you think, ‘oh, that’s really difficult to teach traditional music, therefore we’ll not do it at all.’ And then somebody else is going to do it and maybe in a way that you really wouldn’t agree with.”

¹⁷⁹ *Piobaireachd* (or, *ceòl mòr* the “great music” in Scottish Gaelic) is primarily performed on the highland bagpipes, and is a theme-and-variation solo form. It typically begins with a theme (also called the “ground” or the “*urlar*”) that is followed by variations with cumulative proliferating grace notes, and finally a return to the final theme. A single *piobaireachd* is played alone and can vary in length depending on the number of variations and the tempo, typically lasting anywhere from ten to thirty minutes.

“I think there are loads of potential problems in the whole idea of teaching traditional music in this sort of [way]... So it was kind of ‘I’m going to make sure I’m involved, to make sure –or to do whatever I can to make sure– that nobody comes out thinking that because they’ve got a degree in folk music, it means that they can then tell a traditional musician how to play and how not to play.’”¹⁸⁰

Tickell and the other founders of the degree are clearly conscious of the potential problems to arise out of educational institutionalization. As Keegan-Phipps (2007) points out, a major concern for Tickell was that young musicians would graduate from the degree with a superiority complex. She and other instructors have made a point to lead by example and encourage students to teach and participate in community music programs so that they do not become aloof (Keegan-Phipps 2007, 102). In speaking to several graduates of Newcastle University and RCS during my fieldwork, I never encountered anyone who operated in the elitist manner of concern to these degree programs’ founders suggesting that their efforts have been successful.

The potential for canonization and standardization of content and musical style has been another key issue of concern in the formation of these programs. As I have demonstrated in the historical cases detailed above, Scottish musicians and scholars are well aware of the consequences in standardizing style, repertoire, and technique. Ethnomusicologist Juniper Hill has written about how homogenization and standardization have increasingly become a concern in folk departments in Sweden and Finland (Hill 2009). She suggests that this is leading programs to encourage “personal expression and exploration beyond idiomatic boundaries” (Hill 2009, 216). An individualized approach which caters to personal expression is a key part of the program at RCS. Department head Joshua Dickson has stated that at RCS they “strive to ensure that students gain the maturity and judgement to be able to interpret style within traditional boundaries, and thereby to stretch the boundaries further” (Hill 2009, 216). More recently, he has called for a “post-revivalist” approach to the degree which takes “account of the individual’s role (and potential) as a creative artist in a wider folk or traditional context, and beyond” (Dickson 2018; 91).

In speaking with both instructors and students from RCS, I encountered an understanding that instructors are there to help and guide, but not to dictate. For some students, this has resulted in questions about institutional teaching methodologies and performance preparation at the professional level. These questions and experiences also demonstrate the underlying challenges of teaching traditional music in a setting associated with Western Art music.

Aidan Moodie and Siobhan Miller both studied at RCS and are now full-time professional singers. They are grateful for their time in the program because, for each of them, it has opened doors, facilitated connections, and led to musically fulfilling experiences. They are also extremely appreciative of the knowledge that they learned from their Scots song instructors. However, looking back on their time as students, they are also able to articulate what they missed within the instructional environment. Both Moodie and Miller encountered a need for more technique-based training, particularly in the realm of vocal delivery. Upon graduating and

¹⁸⁰ Kathryn Tickell, Interview with Simon Keegan-Phipps (2007) in "Déjà vu? Folk Music, Education, and Institutionalization in Contemporary England." *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 39: 101-103.

starting to tour full-time, singing every night, both confronted challenges in their performance practice that led them to seek additional instruction and support for vocal care. Miller specifically notes:

“It was a real eye opening and learning curve for me. I knew that I wanted to do it [perform professionally] and if I was going to carry on I had to make some big changes. And I learned a lot, then, about warm ups and now I always do those warm ups.”¹⁸¹

While Miller and Moodie are both vocalists, some of my other interlocutors who are instrumentalists expressed similar sentiments, with one guitarist noting that in order to improve his technical skill he specifically asked his instructor to be “hard on him.”

The case of technique offers a compelling window into the struggle that degree programs encounter when incorporating folk music into a Western conservatory-based environment. What types of technique are students seeking, and who is best equipped to teach it? Is there a danger of eclipsing or losing traditional performance styles through the teaching of vocal and instrumental techniques developed in the context of Western Art musics? In 2014-2015, Joshua Dickson undertook a review of the traditional music program at RCS. In his summary and analysis of the findings, Dickson writes that when the traditional music degree was first established in 1996:

“What made traditional music *traditional*, in other words, was reflected in a focus on its social, cultural, linguistic, participatory and ethnomusicological foundations, and precisely a lack of focus on such explicit technical performance training as was considered so redolent (and therefore inappropriate) of the western art music paradigm. But in retrospect it can be argued that, once transposed into a conservatoire context, the lack of explicit technical training in some disciplines left students at risk of injury: traditional Scots singing staff struggle to teach students how to keep their vocal anatomy healthy, for instance; fiddlers struggle to avoid wrist problems over time. Students of today very much expect and desire such training, and are disillusioned when they do not encounter it” (Dickson 2018, 89).

RCS has made some changes since Moodie and Miller graduated. In 2019, RCS incorporated a vocal technique class into the curriculum which features instruction from a musical theater teacher, Marjory Watson. Scots singer Cameron Nixon states that even though Watson had a slightly different approach to singing than what he had previously learned with his Scots song teachers, she offered him great help in the area of technique.

This case begs the question, does the fear of westernization and standardization keep programs or instructors from imposing *more* than technical style onto students? When teaching performance practice, how do instructors strike a balance between passing down the tradition and nurturing individual artistic expression? Students who have grown up studying a mixture of folk and Western Art music may also carry certain expectations about what constitutes ideal forms of instruction based on their experience with a combination of transmission styles. As Swing (1991) has shown in the case of fiddle teaching in Shetland, enforcing standardization of content and performance context has the possibility to result in student rebellion. Focusing on the individual and supporting their personal style partially mitigates this issue. The promise of freedom to pursue individual projects and creative ideas is also alluring to young artists which helps in

¹⁸¹ Siobhan Miller, Interview with the author, March 16, 2020.

recruitment and therefore increases participation in the tradition – a goal that has been central to these institutions since their founding.

Professional Preparation in an Institutional Setting

At both Newcastle University and RCS, the traditional music degree programs are set up to aid students in their professionalization process. RCS specifically offers a “Professional Skills” class for musicians during their first year of study, and provides opportunities for students to perform at some of the largest festivals in Scotland and abroad in Europe and North America.¹⁸² In this aspect of the degree, the attention to the individual and encouragement to pursue their own personal projects is once again central to the educational process.

One of the primary ways that the RCS provides international touring opportunities is through the External Engagements Office. This office is a mediating service which works to connect students to overseas gig opportunities, often in the business or governmental spheres. Rosie Munro, who formerly worked for the office, explains that foreign governing bodies contact the office with gig opportunities, and then the office finds student musicians to fill the request based on who is available.¹⁸³ Calum McIlroy, who participated in several of these gig opportunities across Europe during his time at RCS expresses what preparing for these performances entails:

“A lot of time you’re put together with folk you don’t normally play with so you’re then having to come up with new material. And a lot of time [the gigs] are short notice so you don’t have much time, so you’ve got to rehearse like four times in a week trying to get together an hour long setlist for a Burns supper.”¹⁸⁴

Rehearsing four times in one week for one gig is a big investment of time for student musicians who are juggling other commitments. It can also be a challenge to collaborate with other artists when musicians do not know one another’s strengths, abilities, and creative processes. However, learning to work with new colleagues and perform in unusual environments also helps to train students for situations they may face as future professionals. In general, my interlocutors feel that the payment for these gigs makes the extra work worthwhile, and they also appreciate the opportunity to travel. From a marketing perspective, the benefits can be great as well since international gigs look good on a CV and can help build up a musician’s biographical press material.

Once students enter their advanced years of study, RCS supports touring opportunities to some of the largest and well-known folk festivals in the Scottish music sphere. Cameron Nixon traveled to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia with some of the other RCS students to give a performance

¹⁸² “BMus Traditional Music,” Undergraduate Programmes, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/courses/bmus-traditional-music/>.

¹⁸³ Rosie Munro, Interview with the author, March 24, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Calum McIlroy, Interview with the author, May 7, 2020. In this statement, McIlroy mentions a “Burns supper.” This references a type of event that takes place in Scotland and the diaspora to celebrate Scotland’s national poet, Robert Burns. Burns suppers are held annually around the poet’s birthday, January 25th, and often include music, poetry reading, and a dinner featuring haggis.

at the renowned Canadian folk music festival, Celtic Colours. Not only was this an enjoyable performance for the students, but they also got to sight-see and attend other musicians' concerts. For unknown musicians in the scene, securing a booking at festivals such as Celtic Colours can take years of networking and persistent communication. This opportunity gives students musicians an instant leg-up and the chance to perform for the organizers who, after seeing them, may be more likely to extend an offer to perform at future festivals.

The impact of international performance and study opportunities can also be seen in students' final capstone projects. Scottish fiddler Isla Ratcliff used her time spent in Cape Breton as inspiration for her final RCS Masters recital and her debut solo album that followed. After performing at Celtic Colours and studying for four months on international exchange at Cape Breton University, she decided to further research and explore her familial connection to the area. This research inspired her to compose a set of tunes which she performed live for her recital titled "Memories of Cape Breton," and then recorded and released on her album *The Castalia*.¹⁸⁵ Since graduating from RCS, she has been invited to "dep" or fill in for Cape Breton fiddle player Mairi Rankin in the well-established band, The Outside Track.¹⁸⁶

While folk music degree programs provide many opportunities, students musicians have to actively pursue them, and often still look beyond the institution to further their professionalization in the Glasgow music scene. RCS's course in "Professional Skills" teaches students some of the basics of behind-the-scenes work, such as email administration, accounting, creating posters, and maintaining social media. However, McIlroy wishes that the course had focused more on how to "get gigs" and "get yourself out there" including more knowledge about how to present oneself when booking gigs.¹⁸⁷ Intangible skills such as these are harder to learn or ask mentors to discuss, making an instructor's first-hand experience particularly valuable. As I will explain further towards the end of this chapter, other organizations within the scene such as Hands Up for Trad and the Traditional Music Forum have recently started to cater to these interests and provide mentorship opportunities and one-off workshops focused on honing professional communication skills.

Graham Rorie and Aidan Moodie also felt that they had to make professional opportunities for themselves during their time as students, especially early on. The fiddler and guitarist/singer, respectively, from Orkney started their duo, Gnoss, in their first year at RCS because "the aim was to have something off the ground already by the time we graduated."¹⁸⁸ Both Rorie and Moodie found very little institutional support for local gigging in Glasgow so early in their degree, but since they had already been performing at home in Orkney they wanted to keep it up in Glasgow. Rorie also reports that he had witnessed a common pattern of other bands struggling to get gigs for the first two years of their existence. He noticed that after about two years, larger festivals started to take these bands seriously. Due to these personal observations and their own business savvy, Rorie and Moodie were able to start Gnoss early in their studies and get those two years of band establishment done before leaving university.

¹⁸⁵ "The Castalia," Isla Ratcliff, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://islaratcliff.com/the-castalia/>.

¹⁸⁶ For a detailed discussion of "depping," see Chapter Two.

¹⁸⁷ Calum McIlroy, Interview with the author, May 7, 2020.

¹⁸⁸ Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.

Along the way, they also made creative decisions which stemmed from a desire to be musically fulfilled and to develop their career. Moodie discusses the decision to change Gness from a duo into a four-piece band:

“We realized that the kind of gigs we want to play and the kind of music we want to make – It was so much easier to do that with the extra layers that having four people brought. And it’s the best decision that we’ve ever made... It’s so much harder to create your own sound and be innovative with just two instruments. [Having the extra instruments and layers was] the key to being anywhere near where we are today.”¹⁸⁹

While this choice allowed them to explore more musical options and be more creative, it also set them up to get bigger gigs at festivals and play on larger stages – a professional decision that they had to figure out for themselves.¹⁹⁰

An institutional education does not guarantee a successful performance career. However, the credential can be useful for booking gigs and establishing credibility. Graham Rorie feels that “the scene doesn’t really care if you’ve got a degree or not.”¹⁹¹ However, he is aware that his schooling at RCS can be a useful line on his CV and open doors. Rorie figures that approximately 30% of the promoters that he works with find his degree to be an added bonus or add a level of credibility to his status. For musicians who focus their careers on teaching, the credential is more of a necessity. Conversely, those who primarily lead sessions or gig in ceilidh bands are unlikely to need it. As I noted in Chapter Two, aside from providing a line on a CV, the RCS degree also provides other types of rewards, such as connecting musicians with others in the scene, providing performance opportunities in the city and abroad, and simply allowing musicians time to work toward their goals in the city, while being supported by the government. While the degree is not a necessity, the tangible and intangible rewards it provides can only help to open more doors and expand a musician’s network.

Degree programs have many merits in their founders’ desire to increase participation in the scene, garner performance opportunities for students, and assist with the professionalization process. The educational institutions that I have discussed here provide spaces for instructors to pass on their knowledge and train the next generation of performers. In doing so, these programs seek to stabilize the tradition – to support it, ensure that it continues, and does not fall into a precarious state. According to student musicians, these degrees provide a valuable experience but do not always offer as much guidance as they might like or expect in an educational setting. However, teaching students to be independent and entrepreneurial in their approach to navigating their career may also be more valuable than it appears. Musicians’ careers are precarious. There is no formula or well-defined path to success. Therefore, part of becoming a successful musician is developing the independence to navigate this precarious livelihood.

¹⁸⁹ Aidan Moodie, Interview with the author, March 16, 2020.

¹⁹⁰ In the traditional music scene, no matter how good a duo is, they are often assigned to perform on smaller stages. A larger band that physically takes up more space requires a larger stage. The extra layers of sound are also important to festival directors who are looking for groups that will excite the audience through their musicianship, but also the sheer power of their sound.

¹⁹¹ Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.

Credentialing through Competitions and Awards Programs

For numerous young Scottish musicians today, educational credentialing has served as a way for them to move to the city, make connections in the urban scene, start forming bands, and get an introduction to international touring. Along with their educational journey, many of my interlocutors have sought to further establish themselves by participating in other credentialing opportunities such as competitions and award programs.

Award competitions are not a new genre. Instrument and vocal-specific competitions – for bagpipes, fiddle, accordion, singing, and others – have existed for centuries in Scotland (Gibson 2014; McKerrell 2005, 2011b; Eydmann 1999; Russell 2007; McKean 1998). As I demonstrated above with respect to the highland bagpipe, institutionalized competition can lead to a standardized competitive style that has implications for stylistic and aesthetic reconceptualizations of tradition. The challenges of bringing folk and traditional musics from around the world into competitive arenas has been well documented by ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and anthropologists. These discussions are often intertwined with concerns relating to “refinement” (Henry 1989), authenticity (Spencer 2009; Goertzen 1996), preservation and revitalization (Fleming 2004). In some cases, competitions have been an integral part of folk music revivals (Blaustein 2006; Goertzen 1996) where they have encouraged community participation (Scales 2007) or been a means to motivate young players to study traditional music (Sky 1997).¹⁹²

For my interlocutors in Scotland today, competitions offer both tangible and intangible opportunities to build their careers and hone their musical skills. Paul Anderson grew up competing in fiddle competitions from an early age. For him, these were instrumental in helping to build his confidence and further his career. Anderson explains his own experience and how fiddle competitions have historically contributed to building a musician’s reputation:

“By the time I was 10 or 11, I entered my first fiddle competition... I followed that up with the Elgin Festival which was probably the biggest fiddle competition in Scotland at the time, without going to things like the Golden Fiddle Championship. [The Golden Fiddle Championship] was the big national championship sponsored by The Daily Record which is a big newspaper. So, if you won that, it would have been the equivalent of Glenfiddich when it was running... But the exposure and the media that you got from being the Golden Fiddle Champion was much greater because you were on the front page of The Daily Record [and] you usually had a spot on the evening news on the television where you would get a chance to play. And that would lead therefore to bookings at big fiddlers’ rallies and concerts and things... I think it led to more of a reputation being built.”¹⁹³

¹⁹² There is a large body of scholarship written about the *fleadh* in Ireland, which is sponsored by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (The Irish Musicians’ Association, known informally as CCE). As arguably the most well-known annual competition-gathering for Irish traditional music, scholars have written about both the *fleadh* and the institution of CCE in regards to many of the topics I mention here, including authenticity (Spencer 2009), community-making (Stoebel 2015), regional identity (Kearney 2013), preservation and revitalization (Fleming 2004). In addition, Rachel Fleming notes that winning the All-Ireland championship at the *fleadh* “carries great prestige in Ireland and abroad and can help launch a professional music career” (Fleming 2004, 244).

¹⁹³ Paul Anderson, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

After Anderson started winning fiddle competitions, he found that it was “really good for my confidence and it gave me a sense of self-worth. And it fired up an interest to a greater extent in the Scottish music.”¹⁹⁴ In his statement above, Anderson compares the Golden Fiddle Championship to the Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship which ran from 1989 to 2015 and, as Anderson explains, represented the crowning achievements of Scottish fiddle competitions during that time.¹⁹⁵ The Glenfiddich Piping Championship continues to this day and remains at the top of the competitive piping arenas.

Anderson competed for approximately seventeen years before he became too busy with performance commitments and grew weary of competition. In his own words, “I couldn’t be bothered with it anymore.” Having won the Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship in 1995, he competed for two more years and eventually retired from competing in 1997. Shortly thereafter he was invited to start judging competitions.

While some of these competitions and awards may carry small cash prizes, this is not the primary reason that my interlocutors have chosen to put themselves through, often high-stress, competitions. The most tangible rewards that come out of these large competitions are future performance opportunities and recording contracts. The less tangible, but important incentives, are the opportunities that they offer for honing personal technique and skill, networking, marketing and name-making press, and high production value video content creation.

Two of the most high-profile competitive award programs in the Glasgow music scene today are the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition and the MG Alba Scots Trad Music Awards. Both programs are sponsored in part by the BBC and Hands Up for Trad. For these award programs, the BBC sponsorship is largely centered around the production of the performance and the visual spectacle that I describe in Chapter Three. There is therefore little risk of changes to musical aesthetic standards, as Duesenberry (2000) uncovered in the BBC’s early radio broadcasting history. Hands Up for Trad is an organization which was founded in 2002 by Scottish concertina player Simon Thumire and “exists to increase the profile and visibility of Scottish traditional music through information, education and advocacy.”¹⁹⁶ The organization has an extensive reach, running an impressive number of different services and outreach opportunities. It also coordinates a variety of educational opportunities for the community such as Scotland Sings, Distil, Tinto Summer School, and one-to-one mentorship advice. In addition, the organization actively promotes traditional music and culture by running “Footstompin’ Free Scottish Music Podcast” and encouraging the community to take part in “World Play a Strathspey Day” and “Gies a Scots Phrase Day.” Hands Up for Trad is involved in at least a dozen other projects as well, having successfully made itself a part of the fabric of the contemporary traditional music scene.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Anderson, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

¹⁹⁵ “Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship,” Enjoy Events, Glenfiddich, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.glenfiddich.com/uk/explore/latest-events/glenfiddich-fiddle-championship/>.

¹⁹⁶ “About Us,” Hands Up for Trad, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://projects.handsupfortrad.scot/handsupfortrad/about-us/>.



Figure 4.1: Calum McIlroy performs in the final of the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition. February 2, 2020. Photo by the author.

Several of the career-minded musicians whom I interviewed have felt the pressure to participate in award competitions for the sake of their careers. While many state that they dislike the nature of competitions in general, they recognize that this may be a once in a lifetime opportunity with significant cumulative positive outcomes. Calum McIlroy decided to compete for the BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year award because he thought it would open doors. He made it all the way to the final round of the competition and noted that this allowed him to build connections with Simon Thumire and with the musicians who accompanied him throughout the competition. Another 2020 finalist, Cameron Nixon, had always wanted to participate in the competition but strategically left it for the end of his studies at RCS. He knew that participating in the competition would bring him more fame and therefore more gig opportunities, and so he wanted to be able to take full advantage of these without having to worry about school commitments.

Luc McNally also went into the competition hoping that it would further his musical career, however he admits to being more skeptical of the competition process. “I’m not a big fan of competitions. It’s not like a gig, is it? It’s just a totally different vibe.” However, he decided to

participate because “it felt like a good excuse to have a little more exposure.”¹⁹⁷ He describes this decision in more detail:

“With respect for the nature of competitions, I think they are definitely a decision that you make almost exclusively to further your career, at least in my eyes. I think it was a good experience to do the Young Trad. I mean, it prepared me for doing competitions. But I don’t know whether it improved me as a musician.”¹⁹⁸

Thinking more about it retrospectively however, he does recognize that the competition helped further his solo career. As a guitarist and someone who to that point had primarily accompanied others, this competition called for the reverse. In this instance, he had to think more about himself as a solo artist by stepping into the lead melody role. He also had to create chord charts and work with the backup band to feature his own music. McNally’s perspective on the competition is particularly useful for considering how certain instruments often get privileged in the competitive circuit. In Scottish traditional music bands, guitar is used almost exclusively as an accompaniment instrument. When a guitarist is the lead musician in a band, they are almost always also singers. In that case, the guitar still remains an accompaniment instrument to the voice, even if that musician is center stage. Yet the BBC Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition is open to all instruments and may encourage more of this role reversal that McNally experienced during the competition process. The underlying matter here is that while this competition may have helped further McNally’s solo career, he appears less certain of whether it enhanced his musical skill as an accompanist.

Rosie Munro feels that most of the big awards that musicians can apply for right now in the scene are for young musicians and bands. For many of these events, incentives to compete include widespread recognition and future performance opportunities. For example, finalists in the BBC Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition go on a tour together each year at the end of the competition which includes dates outside of Scotland in international locations. Folk festivals such as Celtic Connections and the Orkney Folk Festival often hold “Open Stage” competitions in which any new young band can compete for the title. Winning these events usually guarantee a performance slot at Celtic Connections the following year. Aidan Moodie describes how early on in his musical career, his local band from Orkney won both of these Open Stage competitions which helped them to stand out and begin to build a following:

“We got kind of lucky with that [Orkney Folk Festival’s Open Stage competition] and the dominos kept falling. Because we won the open stage, purely because of the ‘aww’ factor because we were like 13 and I guess it’s a lot more adorable than all the adults. So we won that and that gave you a slot at the Danny Kyle Open Stage. So we went down to play that at Celtic Connections and then we got one of the Danny Kyle awards. So then the next year we were supporting Four Men and a Dog at the Fruitmarket.”¹⁹⁹

In this quote, Moodie retraces his steps through a series of competitions that led to his band’s performance at one of Celtic Connections’ biggest venues, The Old Fruitmarket. A “support gig” is the British term for performing as the “opening act.” Under normal performance

¹⁹⁷ Luc McNally, Interview with the author, May 13, 2020.

¹⁹⁸ Luc McNally, Interview with the author, May 13, 2020.

¹⁹⁹ Aidan Moodie, Interview with the author, March 16, 2020.

conditions, a support act is a group that is less well-known than the headline performer. Concerts at Celtic Connections often include a support act, however, these performances function more like split bill concerts. At Celtic Connections, support musicians are often also well-known and some audience members specifically attend to see the support musicians. For Moodie and his band, the opportunity to play at The Old Fruitmarket as young teenagers boosted their careers by introducing them to a large audience as a legitimate act that could hold their own in concert with the established Irish band, Four Men and a Dog. After the fact, this gig also operated as a past performance accolade that would help them to secure other festival gigs in the future.

Why Compete?

Even if a musician does not win a competition, the less tangible opportunities make the investment worthwhile. The value of an award or nomination granted at the Scots Trad Music Awards lies in the recognition and marketability that follows. The BBC Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition leads to networking, touring, and recording opportunities. Participating in the competitive environment can also help musicians build confidence on stage and encourage them to hone their technical proficiency, increase their repertoire, and advance their ensemble skills. Open Stage competitions lead to festival bookings which in turn open doors to more venues. In the process of booking gigs for his band, Gness, Graham Rorie has observed the power of awards and how they can be essential for obtaining certain types of gigs:

“I remember phoning up a folk club in the very far south of England. They didn’t have an email address or anything, you had to call them up. I gave them a phone and I said ‘My name’s Graham, I play with this band.’ And he was like ‘Well, to start with, I don’t really want to hear from you unless you can tell me what awards you’ve won.’ I think they were quite an old-fashioned system, but they were really heavily focused on: you need to have someone who can endorse the fact that you can play on a national level.”²⁰⁰

As Rorie alludes to here, not all venues place the same value in awards. He has found that venues in the English folk scene tend to value awards and accolades more than Scottish venues.²⁰¹ In Scotland and other international locations, he finds that the list of past festivals on a musician’s CV carries the most clout when speaking with venues. Similarly, Innes White has observed that playing any sort of large festival is good for his career:

“In terms of doing things proactively to further my career, I think every musician kind of thinks, if they’re going for a gig, they think that doing any gig is good for their career. Certainly there’s always a frantic flurry of people trying to play at Celtic Connections every year because that’s seen as something that helps your career – lots of band’s careers are really kickstarted at Celtic Connections. So that’s a big one... I think any big festival is seen as a thing that will be good for your career. And it’s not so much that people go for one particular festival...”²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Graham Rorie, Interview with the author, March 23, 2020.

²⁰¹ Simon Keegan-Phipps and Trish Winter (2013) have written about the “folk industry” that has emerged in the English folk music scene and the importance of awards to musicians’ promotional materials. Despite the increasing commercialization and professionalization of the “folk industry,” they argue that it is able to coexist with the “established philanthropic, anticommercial, and amateur ethos of the folk arts” (Keegan-Phipps and Winter 2013, 490).

²⁰² Innes White, Interview with the author, March 24, 2020.

In contrast to award competitions, many of which are geared towards young musicians, a list of past performances at large festivals can help bands at any stage of their career secure more festival bookings. To put it bluntly, festival gigs get festival gigs. As White clearly states above, any gig a musician does has the potential to lead to more work. Therefore, every gig White plays he views as potential fodder for his career.

Luc McNally offers a nuanced perspective on what it means to further one's career while still finding fulfillment as a musician:

“Every opportunity you get is truly one to improve your career. But I think you have to equate your career with your own personal journey as a musician. I think those two things have to move in tandem with each other.”²⁰³

By equating his career and personal musical journey, McNally demonstrates how deeply the mindset of a being a musician has changed since the folk music revival. Not only has there been a significant shift towards professionalization, but today musicians also choose to pursue opportunities and build their careers in a manner which appeals to them as creative individuals.

Infrastructures of Support in Scotland

Degrees, awards, and recognition are useful for building a convincing biography and CV. These programs can also serve as incentives for honing skills and building a musician's network. However, despite having attended university and winning a plethora of awards, a musician may still be living gig to gig and unable to fund their creative ideas. I turn now to discussing some of the organizations which offer financial support to Scottish musicians for their creative projects.

Creative Scotland

Creative Scotland is a public body that supports the arts, screen, and creative industries across Scotland. The organization was established as a result of the 2010 Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act, which merged the functions of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen into one entity.²⁰⁴ Creative Scotland distributes approximately £107 million GBP annually in funds supplied by the Scottish Government and National Lottery to individuals, organizations, and specified activities which they deem make an “important contribution to the development of the arts.”²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Luc McNally, Interview with the author, May 13, 2020.

²⁰⁴ “Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010,” Acts of Parliament, Legislation.gov.uk., accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/8/section/37>.

²⁰⁵ “Funding Overview,” Funding, Creative Scotland, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/funding-overview>.

In May 2020 I spoke with Siobhan Anderson who had worked with Creative Scotland as a Music Officer for over three years at that time. She described to me how they support artists through three different categories: Regular Funding, Targeted Funds, and the Open Fund.

The “Regular Funding” category uses government funds to support over 120 organizations on a large-scale level, with the idea that these institutions will create a network of support for the arts.²⁰⁶ Organizations that fall into this funding category are able to apply for a three-year cycle of support. For example, Hands Up for Trad receives approximately £400,000 GBP every three years from Creative Scotland, averaging £133,333 GBP per year.²⁰⁷ Other traditional music organizations that are supported at this level include the Celtic Connections Festival, Fèis Rois, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, and Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland (TRACS). Assuming that these organizations maintain a successful application every three years, they are able to budget for upcoming projects at least two to three years in advance.

Creative Scotland also provides the “Targeted Funding” and “Open Funding” categories which cover individual projects and specific activities, respectively. “Targeted Funding” supports causes such as the Youth Music Initiative, which aims to “create access to high-quality music-making opportunities for children and young people, particularly for those that would not normally have the chance to participate.”²⁰⁸ Targeted funding organizations also form a part of the network that Creative Scotland aims to build for artists.

Many of my interlocutors have been involved in organizations such as the Youth Music Initiative or grew up studying the traditional arts through Fèis Rois. However, they have felt the impact of Creative Scotland most directly through their individual project pursuits and applications to the “Open Fund.” The Open Fund is primarily supported by funding that the National Lottery allocates for charity organizations. Creative Scotland is given approximately 3% out of this total charity pot.²⁰⁹ For the 2021-2022 financial year, this portion amounted to a budget of £13 million GBP which Creative Scotland distributed to individuals in awards ranging from £1,000 to £150,000 GBP.²¹⁰

At the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, Creative Scotland temporarily suspended the Open Fund and reallocated the remaining money to create the “Bridging Bursary.” Siobhan Anderson explains who could apply to this award and how generous the organization was about allocating funds:

“People could come in for up to £2,500 pounds, and it was sort of no questions asked, just tell us who you are, what you do. As long as you’re based in Scotland and your activities are seen as creating original artwork, or working as an artist is your main sort of income. So there was no

²⁰⁶ Siobhan Anderson, Interview with the author, May 22, 2020.

²⁰⁷ “Regular Funding Organisations 2018-2021,” Regular Funding Network 2018-21, Creative Scotland, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/latest-information/funded-organisations/regular-funding-2018-21>.

²⁰⁸ “Youth Music Initiative Funding,” Targeted Funding, Creative Scotland, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/funding-programmes/targeted-funding/youth-music-initiative>.

²⁰⁹ Siobhan Anderson, Interview with the author, May 22, 2020.

²¹⁰ “Open Fund,” Funding Programmes, Creative Scotland, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/funding-programmes/open-fund>.

assessment of ‘oh they are an award winning musician’ versus they are straight out of RCS. You would not be judged at all.’²¹¹

Anderson recalls that they had about £1.6 million available for this fund, and it went very quickly. They later got additional money from the Scottish government and other foundations, and were therefore able to distribute more money during a second round of “Bridging Bursary” awards.

With so many organizations and individuals seeking funding, Creative Scotland’s regular review process is rigorous. According to Anderson, the applications are reviewed with special attention given to how well an artist’s project aligns with Creative Scotland’s ambitions, priorities, and key themes.²¹² These elements are detailed in their 10 Year Plan document which is accessible on their website and covers the years 2014-2024.²¹³ Creative Scotland does not expect artists to fulfill every element in their 10-year plan, however Anderson stresses that the “public benefit of the project is very important.” Creative Scotland holds a written agreement with the National Lottery regarding how lottery funds must be used, and this agreement explicitly states that funds must be used for “public benefit.” When artists apply for funding, it is therefore critical that they describe how they will engage the public, whether that is through social media outreach, venue accessibility, or discounted tickets for disadvantaged groups. Anderson also notes that the “environmental impact of projects is much more prominent within the new application form. We ask applicants to really think about that.” The “environment” is one of Creative Scotland’s four themes, and is one that I have often observed to be privileged in the content and execution of many traditional music projects. Anderson notes that the environment does not necessarily have to appear as a creative thematic element in a project, but rather that it might appear as “is your new album wrapped in cellophane? Or are you using public transport while on tour?” However an artist’s project caters to Creative Scotland’s goals, Anderson states that they are looking for work that is “innovative and high quality” and that they “always want to make sure their money is going toward artistic content and supporting artists.”

Creative Scotland funds all genres of music, art, and screen projects, however they do acknowledge that traditional music does have some advantages for winning grants due to its status as Scotland’s national music. Anderson explains:

“Within the music team, traditional arts is an area that Creative Scotland sees as really important... It’s our national art form, so if we don’t support it then there’s a danger... we need to protect it. I wouldn’t say that traditional music is prioritized, but it’s definitely viewed as really positive. Sometimes I feel it’s more difficult for pop and rock acts [to secure grants] because trad arts has this different element...”²¹⁴

In this statement, Anderson’s language is reminiscent of revivalist mentalities towards protection and preservation. While it is clear from her detailed descriptions of the organization’s funding

²¹¹ Siobhan Anderson, Interview with the author, May 22, 2020.

²¹² Siobhan Anderson, Interview with the author, May 22, 2020. This whole paragraph draws on my interview with Siobhan Anderson, and all quotes are hers.

²¹³ “The 10 Year Plan,” What We Do, Creative Scotland, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.creativescotland.com/what-we-do/the-10-year-plan>.

²¹⁴ Siobhan Anderson, Interview with the author, May 22, 2020.

schemes that Creative Scotland privileges new ideas and innovative projects, their foundations in the folk music revival remain to the financial benefit of traditional music and musicians broadly defined. Amongst the traditional music community, Creative Scotland has become the go-to resource for creating albums, funding tours, and financing personal development. In the following section, a few of the funded projects that I witnessed come to fruition between 2019 and 2022 are presented as examples.

Traditional Music Projects Funded by Creative Scotland’s Open Fund

Creative Scotland has fully funded many of my interlocutors’ solo albums and band projects. They financed Siobhan Miller’s first two solo albums and have contributed to other collaborative projects in which she has been a participant. Fiddle players Isla Ratcliff and Laura Wilkie both received funding in June 2021 to finance their debut solo albums. In Fall of 2021, Glasgow-based traditional music band Eabhal received funding for their second studio album, and folk trio Talisk received funding for their third studio album. During the summer of 2020, Creative Scotland partnered with Gness on their new album crowdfunding campaign. In this instance Creative Scotland agreed to match whatever the band could raise through their own networks, up to a certain level. Gness ultimately secured crowd-funding support past their target goal and, with the help of Creative Scotland, were able to fully fund the recording and production process for their album.²¹⁵ All of these new album projects received grants ranging from £5,000 to £18,000 GBP – sums which can be lifechanging for independent musicians.²¹⁶

In singer/songwriter Jenny Sturgeon’s experience, grants from Creative Scotland “make it possible to be a musician and do other projects besides gigs.”²¹⁷ She specifically notes that she has been able to try more experimental projects due to the grant funding. This aligns with Creative Scotland’s mission statement to privilege “innovative projects.” Sturgeon’s recent project *The Living Mountain* is an audio-visual performance inspired by Nan Shepherd’s book of the same name. Each song is based on a chapter title and explores the human connection to the Cairngorm mountain range and greater natural world. In live performance, Sturgeon pairs her songs with projected visuals featuring 1940s archival footage of the natural world from the National Library of Scotland.²¹⁸ Sturgeon studied sea birds for her PhD and enjoys blending her interests in ornithology and the natural world with her music. In some instances, she uses tracks of nature sounds, such as bird calls, to blend the live footage with musical elements. The outside funding she has received has allowed her to explore these experimental ideas and collaborate

²¹⁵ In the traditional music scene, the full production cost of an album greatly varies depending on how much time a band needs in the recording studio, whether or not they hire a producer and/or marketing team, and how much they spend on design and packaging. It also depends on how much work the bandmembers are willing to do themselves and what additional skills they each might have. For example, if one bandmember is skilled in graphic design, the band could save on packaging design costs. Through crowd-funding campaign websites and personal conversations, I have heard of total production costs ranging from £4,000 to £30,000 GBP, with most averaging between £10,000 to £15,000 GBP.

²¹⁶ Exact grant sums for each project are available publicly through Creative Scotland’s website. For more information, see: <https://www.creativescotland.com/funding/latest-information/awards-listings>.

²¹⁷ Jenny Sturgeon, Interview with the author, May 11, 2020.

²¹⁸ “The Living Mountain,” Jenny Sturgeon, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.jennysturgeonmusic.com/thelivingmountain>.

with a variety of people, such as writer Nan Shephard and creative producer/curator Shona Thomson, who were instrumental in creating this project.

In a similar blending of music composition with the natural world, Charlie Grey and Joseph Peach released and performed a project in 2019 titled *Air Iomall* which translates from Gaelic as “On the Edge.” For this project, funded by Creative Scotland and Help Musicians, Grey and Peach sailed on board a Dutch tall ship with the intention to visit five uninhabited islands on Scotland's West Coast: The Shiant Isles, North Rona, The Flannan Isles, Sula Sgeir and St Kilda.²¹⁹ With the help of filmmaker Hamish MacLeod, they documented their trip at sea and on land as they learned about the history of the islands and performed live on St Kilda. Grey and Peach composed music inspired by the trip which they produced as an album and as the soundtrack accompanying the film. At Celtic Connections 2020, I attended their performance of this production during which they projected the film on a large screen and played the soundtrack live beneath it. The music was cinematic as they wove traditional-sounding melodies with sequences that built tension and release. Sometimes the melodies would fade away into atmospheric sounds as if to highlight the ocean waves crashing against the shore. Grey imitated the sound of birdcalls through wispy, icy, bow-strokes on fiddle that almost sounded like harmonics. Peach used the piano and accordion to create long pedal tones, drawing our attention to the stark, expansive landscape of the islands while simultaneously evoking sonic connections to bagpipe drones. Most of the music was slow, with Grey and Peach stretching time between phrases. Here and there, Grey jumped in with a speedy tune over the top of Peach’s slow-moving harmonies to match the dynamic visuals of the boat racing through the water. Upon the release of this music as an album, one fan commented, “This album is beautiful and spare and evokes the landscapes of Scotland in a quiet and delicate way.”²²⁰

Graham Rorie’s project *The Orcadians of Hudson’s Bay* provides a final example of the innovative and historical projects that have recently been funded by Creative Scotland in the traditional music scene. Rorie, an Orcadian fiddler himself, composed an entire suite of music about the Orcadians who travelled to The Hudson’s Bay Company in Northern Canada to make a living in the fur industry during the 18th and 19th centuries.²²¹ The eleven-track suite features pieces celebrating important people, places, and events in this shared history between Orkney and Canada. Rorie researched and composed this work over four years, and presented it for the first time in a headline concert at Celtic Connections in 2020. In the context of Scottish traditional music, Rorie’s compositions are modern, syncopated, and complex, with some of the melodies and rhythms bringing the listener to unexpected places. He orchestrated for a full band including two fiddles, guitar, bass, accordion, piano, and percussion. The arrangements feature multiple melodic layers and harmonies which are punctuated by bass hits and set over constant drum kit beats. Over the pandemic, Rorie worked to turn the piece into a recorded album – his debut solo album – which featured the original performers from his Celtic Connections show and artwork design by fellow Orcadian artists.

²¹⁹ “Air Iomall,” Charlie Grey and Joseph Peach, Bandcamp, last modified June 10, 2019. <https://cgjpmusic.bandcamp.com/album/air-iomall>.

²²⁰ “Air Iomall,” Charlie Grey and Joseph Peach, Bandcamp, last modified June 10, 2019. <https://cgjpmusic.bandcamp.com/album/air-iomall>.

²²¹ “Graham Rorie, award-winning Orcadian fiddler, announces debut album,” Folking.com, April 15, 2021, <https://folking.com/graham-rorie-award-winning-orcadian-fiddler-announces-debut-album/>.

All of these projects are innovative in their multidimensional approach to performance. Sturgeon and Grey and Peach created audio-visual blends of live and pre-recorded elements. They also included themes related to the land and nature in a time when the world is increasingly focused on climate change. All three projects featured historical and archival research and reimagination, drawing on local institutions such as the National Library of Scotland. Additionally, they all privilege newly composed music – in some cases, pushing the limits of what might be considered traditional – and leaving the historical components to be featured in the stories, narratives, or visual elements.

Creative Scotland focuses their assistance on creative and performance-oriented projects. However, they also help make it possible for artists to perform and tour. Scottish rock band Skerryvore received funding to support their international tour of Australia in 2019. And Ciarán Ryan’s folk band Dallahan was awarded a grant from Creative Scotland specifically to cover the cost of a van hire for their tour within the UK. This allowed them to bring home a “decent fee, not a great fee, but a decent fee” versus spending all their money on travel expenses.²²²

The immense support offered by Creative Scotland and other funding agencies has become an essential resource for artists in the scene. However, it does have its limits. Several of my interlocutors indicated that much of the funding is geared towards new imaginative projects as well as artists who are at the beginning of their careers. Aileen Reid notes that the application process for Creative Scotland grants is heavily skewed towards performers and creators, rather than teachers. Musicians who make their primary living through music education might find it harder to pursue a creative project if they do not already have a track record of performance-oriented endeavors. Additionally, Reid points out that one of the questions on the grant application asks artists to describe what they have been doing for the last two years. If a musician has had children or been away from the industry for other personal reasons, she says it can be hard to get funding because there is no recent music industry-related work to show.²²³ Tom Oakes describes how pervasive Creative Scotland funding is throughout the scene, but also how the applications can be a challenge to fill out:

“It’s complicated. It’s a learnt skill to do funding applications and most people either don’t have the time, or the ability, or can’t be bothered. But when I think about it, I’ve had loads of help from Creative Scotland, I just haven’t applied for it directly. But the amount of things that they’ve paid for is amazing.”²²⁴

Creative Scotland focuses their support on artists who live and work in Scotland. Their primary concern is that funding must be used for public interest within Scotland and so this restricts the types of projects which are eligible to receive support and the musicians who are eligible to apply for them. Siobhan Anderson notes how this approach is different from other funding organizations like Culture Ireland which supports projects in the diaspora.²²⁵ While

²²² Ciarán Ryan, Interview with the author, May 6, 2020.

²²³ Aileen Reid, Interview with the author, May 18, 2020.

²²⁴ Tom Oakes, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

²²⁵ In his 2020 report detailing the state of the Traditional Arts Sector in Ireland, Jack Talty interviews artists who assert that Irish music has a more positive reputation internationally and in the diaspora than it does in Ireland. He also states that “many effective and successful folk and traditional arts advocates in Scotland and Norway have

unsure of a direct correlation, she does wonder if the attention to their diaspora has contributed to why “everyone knows what Irish culture is,” unlike Scottish.²²⁶ Arts councils such as Culture Ireland and Creative Europe emphasize their interest in encouraging cooperation and exchange of culture across European borders and internationally.²²⁷ In contrast, Creative Scotland and Arts Council England focus their attention on supporting artists at home.²²⁸ For Scotland, this stance has directly benefited the traditional musicians in the scene and therefore contributed to the maintenance of the tradition.

In his 2014 analysis of state funding provisions for the Scottish arts, Simon McKerrell calls for more transparency in how qualitative funding decisions are made in organizations such as the Scottish Arts Council, now Creative Scotland (McKerrell 2014). In light of the ever-evolving scene, continued research is needed in this area. However, this chapter offers an ethnographic analysis of Creative Scotland’s funding operation and the types of organizations and projects that they prioritize in the traditional music sector. Creative Scotland’s vested interest in building up the creative industries at home has contributed to a network of institutional opportunities and direct support for artistic projects. Traditional music is viewed as a “national music” within the organization which has led to an outpouring of support for local musicians in the last decade. Time will tell whether this support contributes to a wider knowledge of Scottish traditional music at the international level.

Safety Nets and Support at Home

During the pandemic, Creative Scotland created the “Bridging Bursary” award to help musicians manage the sudden stop to all work. However, they typically focus on funding creative and innovative projects. For times when health fails or devastation strikes, there are other systems in place for Scottish musicians that provide safety nets and offer assistance.

Help Musicians

Help Musicians is an independent UK charitable organization which assists musicians of every genre who are at any stage of their career. On their website, the organization draws attention to the precarity of musical careers, stating “Even when you ‘make it,’ being a musician is a pressurised and financially insecure existence.”²²⁹ Whether a musician is just starting out, a professional, or in retirement, Help Musicians offers support. They supply a range of services in health and welfare including crisis funding, a mental health helpline, long term illness care, retirement support, and terminal illness and bereavement services. They also have preventative programs such as their “hearing health scheme which aims to prevent hearing problems that

looked to the international reputation of Irish traditional arts with envy, as a model of best practice, unaware that traditional artists in Ireland feel largely unsupported at Governmental level” (Talty 2020, 126).

²²⁶ Siobhan Anderson, Interview with the author, May 22, 2020.

²²⁷ “Creative Europe – Culture strand,” European Commission, accessed April 9, 2023, <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-culture-strand>.

²²⁸ “About Us,” Arts Council England, accessed April 9, 2023, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>.

²²⁹ “Why We Exist,” Help Musicians, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.helpmusicians.org.uk/about-us/why-we-exist>.

would otherwise bring a musician's career to an untimely end."²³⁰ While they generally specialize in health and emergency support, they also offer a handful of services for creative support including scholarships to help fund album recording, touring, and attending graduate school at specified conservatories.

Nearly every one of my interlocutors under 45 told me how at some point in their careers they have sought support from Help Musicians. Laura Wilkie explained how she has applied for their help several times when she has had to cancel out of tours due to illness and ongoing chronic health concerns. While initially unsure if she would qualify for assistance, she found that after reaching out with a simple email, "they were amazing...they made it really easy for me to feel that I was entitled to help and they wanted to give me help... They made it really clear that it didn't matter what your affliction or condition was, if you needed help, me or anyone, they did not discriminate."²³¹

Wilkie notes how they do have conditions for assistance. A person must earn over 50% of their income from music jobs and cannot have more than £60,000 GBP in savings. They also look at bank statements and sometimes do home visits. While Wilkie acknowledges that this might be terrifying for some people, she felt supported during the home visit and says that they are "genuinely the best, most universal, unbelievable organization. They just genuinely want to help everyone."²³²

For instance, Help Musicians gave Wilkie an emergency grant when she had to cancel out of a three-week tour due to her health, and set her up with assistance for managing her chronic pain including helping her find a therapist and covering a month of yoga classes. She also commented how they helped Angus R. Grant with services and support when he was suffering from cancer at the end of his life. Similar to Wilkie, banjo player Ciarán Ryan recalls that "there's been twice when members of Dallahan have been ill and couldn't work, and [Help Musicians] have paid them money to cover their expenses for the month of tour."²³³ Another one of my interlocutors who is a fiddle player has taken advantage of their hearing scheme to get her ears tested and get set up with specialty ear plugs for musicians. While normally these ear plugs might be above her budget, due to Help Musicians and her Musicians Union membership she spent less than £40 GBP total.

Siobhan Miller elaborates on the period in her life when she first transitioned from being a student into gigging full time and started having issues with her voice:

"I went through this really scary time where I kept losing my voice and had to cancel shows... [Help Musicians] stepped in and they gave me money to see the top specialist in Ear, Nose, and Throat... And they helped me fund lessons off the back of that so that I could go and have these private lessons [in technique] that I hadn't had. And that was such a huge help for me... There's not a lot of help when you're self-employed if things are not going right and they are such a fantastic organization."²³⁴

²³⁰ "What We Do," Help Musicians, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.helpmusicians.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do>.

²³¹ Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

²³² Laura Wilkie, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

²³³ Ciarán Ryan, Interview with the author, May 6, 2020.

²³⁴ Siobhan Miller, Interview with the author, March 16, 2020.

Aidan Moodie also received help for vocal technique lessons with funding from Help Musicians:

“They were phenomenal. I was having some bother with my singing voice and going super hoarse all the time, and they allocated a set of funds for me to go and see a vocal therapist, which is incredible because it just totally sorted me out... All us trad singers with no idea what technique even is!”²³⁵



Figure 4.2: Aidan Moodie performs with Gness at the 2019 Scots Fiddle Festival in Edinburgh. November 16, 2019. Photo by the author.

I first heard Moodie perform with Gness when they were starting out as a duo at the Orkney Folk Festival in 2016. Upon returning to Scotland in 2019, I saw them perform in their new four-person lineup and was immediately struck by the sheer power of Moodie’s voice. At that time, I did not know about his vocal technique lessons, but I knew that his vocal timbre was clearer and that his delivery was stronger than ever before. Over the course of my fieldwork in 2019-2020, I saw Moodie and Miller perform several times at a range of venues from more intimate folk club spaces to their headline performance at Celtic Connections. In both cases, their technique coaching did not appear to impact traditional stylistic elements such as ornamentation and phrasing. Rather, it helped them to deliver these elements in a healthier way without injuring their voices, which in turn brought clarity and strength to their overall tone.

²³⁵ Aidan Moodie, Interview with the author, March 16, 2020.

Approximately one week before Luc McNally was set to compete in the final round of the 2018 BBC Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition, he slipped on some water in his kitchen, fell, and shattered his elbow. The BBC reported on the accident, saying “Instead of taking to the stage at Glasgow's City Halls on Sunday, guitarist Luc McNally is more likely to be found at home in his flat, resting a plastered arm, drinking milk and taking painkillers.”²³⁶ Not only did McNally have to drop out of the final of the competition, but he also had to cancel several appearances at Celtic Connections, and upcoming gigs with his bands Sketch, Snuffbox, and Dosca in the following months. As someone who earned all his income from music jobs at that time, and suddenly was incapacitated in one arm, he had no idea how he was going to survive the coming months, and so he applied for support from Help Musicians:

“It was incredibly easy. Especially at a time when everything was quite difficult, and I could only write [type] with one hand. I submitted a form, and I think two days later, received funding. And they funded me until I was better. Totally brilliant. I couldn't recommend them enough.”²³⁷

In March 2020, when COVID-19 caused a complete loss of work and became the worst health crisis in my interlocutors' lifetimes, Help Musicians and Creative Scotland sprang into action. Both organizations, as well as smaller institutions like Stonehaven Folk Club and Hands Up for Trad, created grant endowments that many musicians applied to in order to help them get through the loss of gigs and income. Musicians who applied for the Covid-19 support grants from Creative Scotland and Help Musicians were able to secure approximately £3,000 GBP total. I spoke with Luc McNally just after he had filled out the application for the Covid-19 grant through Creative Scotland. McNally stated:

“It's like the simplest Creative Scotland form I've ever seen in my life. Normally it's a lot harder than that. But they set that up. They made it very easy to fill in. You just had to be honest about the situation which I think for most people is not too difficult right now.”²³⁸

Welfare

Tom Oakes also applied for Covid-19 support funding from Help Musicians and Creative Scotland. However, before that time he had not personally applied to these agencies. He sought out a different form of government support: welfare. After graduating with his degree in traditional music from Newcastle University it took a couple years for him to start gigging regularly. He knew that his end goal was to become a professional musician and so he used government social support structures to fund himself while he worked to further his credentials:

“I was lucky enough to live in quite a cheap flat and Newcastle's quite a cheap place to live. So I signed on for a couple of years, on unemployment benefit, just so I could [do music professionally] and did a load of training courses in music industry... It was a bit miserable, but it was better than getting a full-time job in nothing related to music. Quite a lot of people told me that that was what that system was for. And that once you've got a degree, you have a right to that

²³⁶ “Guitarist's Young Trad Musician competition hopes ruined by cooking rice,” *BBC News*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-42831416>.

²³⁷ Luc McNally, Interview with the author, May 13, 2020.

²³⁸ Luc McNally, Interview with the author, May 13, 2020.

for a little bit – to work out where you’re going. And it’s definitely not enough to live off, unless you’re single and have very cheap rent, which I was at the time. But it was uncomfortable enough to want to get out of it as quickly as possible.”²³⁹

Rates of government support vary depending on a range of factors including dependents, education, employment status, disability, and more.²⁴⁰ Even in the simplest of circumstances, the benefit is barely enough to live on, as Oakes notes above. However, I describe Oakes’ case briefly here to present another strategy that musicians can and have used in the UK to further their careers. While Oakes was living on unemployment support, he was able to take courses to advance his technical skills in the music industry. He also spent nearly every weekend in Edinburgh where he attended sessions and networked with the local community. He was therefore able to practice and improve his musicianship while simultaneously forging connections that would further his career once he started gigging full time. After living in Newcastle for nine years, including the time he attended university, he drew on his established connections and moved up to Edinburgh to pursue his professional career.

Additional Resources of Support

This chapter has primarily focused on the resources that my interlocutors actively draw on to support their careers. However, there are many other agencies and resources available within the UK. One of the most far-reaching institutions is the Musicians’ Union (MU). The MU functions as a cross between a safety net and a source of creative support for all genres of music. During my fieldwork in Scotland, I attended three different workshops that they hosted in collaboration with another supportive network, The Traditional Music Forum. These workshops were free and open to anyone who wanted to attend, whether or not they were a member of the MU. In one session titled the “Performing Rights Workshop,” the MU brought in a speaker who works for the Performing Rights Society (PRS), the company that guards copyright and royalty right protections for musicians in the UK. He explained the process of publishing, monetizing, and protecting musicians’ claims to their royalties through PRS. He answered questions and was knowledgeable in the genre of Scottish traditional music – not a small feat considering most performing rights agencies are geared towards popular music. During the “Negotiating Skills Workshop,” the MU secured a speaker who spent two hours talking about different tactics that musicians can use when booking gigs and negotiating contracts. On the performance side of the spectrum, at the “Stage Presence Workshop,” the MU hired Dr. Kath Burlinson who is a communication skills coach. She spent two hours doing group exercises that included individual instruction in improving a person’s impact and poise from the moment they step on stage. All of these workshops were publicized through social media and were available to anyone who could travel to the city center of Glasgow or Edinburgh.

In addition to providing accessible workshops, the MU also campaigns for issues impacting all facets of the music industry. In July of 2020, after several months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MU’s umbrella organization “UK Music” launched a campaign called “Let the Music Play.” In this campaign, UK Music petitioned the government to provide more support to

²³⁹ Tom Oakes, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

²⁴⁰ “Benefits,” Gov.UK, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits>.

the arts. They referenced how governments in countries such as Germany and Australia were quick to respond to the crisis by providing emergency funding to their music industries.²⁴¹ In the demand letter written to Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, they noted both the cultural importance and economic impact of the music industry. They cited the statistic that in 2019, live music contributed £5.2 billion to the economy and sustained almost 200,000 jobs across the UK.²⁴² The government responded by announcing a £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund support package for the arts. This was welcomed by the industry, however the “Let the Music Play” campaign organizers expressed concern over the restrictive eligibility for securing grants and loans from this funding, indicating that those who did not already have a track record of obtaining public funding might be at a disadvantage.²⁴³ UK Music and the Musicians Union continue to work toward providing support and advocating for musicians in many areas, including health and wellbeing, equality in the workplace, fair pay, and more. Several of my university-age interlocutors and other familiar faces from the scene were in attendance at the MU’s workshops that I observed – an indication that young traditional musicians in Glasgow are actively using the resources that are available to them and looking beyond the university for professional support.

The majority of the institutions and resources that I have discussed throughout this chapter are geared towards fostering the creative industries within Scotland. However, this infrastructure also supports the export of traditional music internationally. In addition to their regularly scheduled programming, festivals such as Celtic Connections and the Orkney Folk Festival provide open stage competitions and showcase opportunities for “up and coming” artists. They also partner with organizations like Showcase Scotland Expo which “exists to further the live export opportunities for Scottish based artists working in the genres of folk, traditional, world and acoustic music.” On their website, Showcase Scotland Expo further adds, “We aim to forge relationships with overseas music trade events and to lobby for showcase opportunities for Scottish based artists.”²⁴⁴ Showcase Scotland Expo’s organizational board consists of booking agents, musicians, digital media production specialists, and festival managers. They are funded primarily by Creative Scotland, and therefore also have two Creative Scotland employees, including Siobhan Anderson, who observe their activities. Showcase Scotland Expo actively works to find markets for traditional Scottish music and intervene to create opportunities for artists. They have a variety of different projects for which musicians can apply to participate. Some of these opportunities include performance receptions in front of top music industry professionals from around the world, guaranteed performance slots at booking conferences, and stages dedicated to Showcase Scotland Expo’s curated lineup at large international music festivals. Each year, Showcase Scotland Expo orchestrates “The Visit” during which they bring delegates from a certain region of the world to Scotland to experience local music and culture. The schedule includes showcases featuring around twenty different artists, and visits to cultural heritage sites, distilleries, and breweries. Delegates are wined and

²⁴¹ “Let The Music Play Campaign Calls for Vital Financial Support from the Government,” All News and Features. Musicians’ Union, last modified April 28, 2021, <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/let-the-music-play-campaign-calls-for-vital-financial-support-from-the-government>.

²⁴² “Let the Music Play,” Campaigns, UK Music, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.ukmusic.org/advice/covid-19/let-the-music-play/>.

²⁴³ “Let the Music Play,” Campaigns, UK Music, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.ukmusic.org/advice/covid-19/let-the-music-play/>.

²⁴⁴ “About Us,” Showcase Scotland Expo, accessed June 3, 2022, <http://www.showcasescotlandexpo.com/about-us/>.

dined throughout the weekend, and in return, many musicians get international gig opportunities. Showcase Scotland Expo reports that after “The Visit” in 2014, seven artists secured agency deals totaling over 280 individual bookings for the year following the event.²⁴⁵

Tom Oakes believes that participating in Showcase Scotland Expo events has grown ubiquitous within the traditional music scene:

“We usually apply for whatever things Showcase Scotland are doing. But I think that’s all quite standard of everybody. I think that’s just what you have to do to get any extra gigs. Most stuff Showcase Scotland does seems to be application based. I guess they want people that are established, but not too established. So you need to prove that you’ve got some gigs, that you’ve got a bit of a social media following, but also that you have a need to go to that area or play for those people.”²⁴⁶

Amongst my interlocutors, Showcase Scotland Expo has a good track record of connecting traditional musicians with delegates, promoters, and gig opportunities in foreign countries. Oakes has made the conscious decision to apply for these showcases in an effort to further his career. When he performed at an event geared towards Australian delegates, he was successful in securing a series of gigs abroad the following year.

In addition to orchestrating large events, Showcase Scotland Expo provides reports and analysis of opportunities for touring abroad. Anyone can access country-specific reports on their website which are filled with advice for touring abroad and contact information for booking agencies, venues, media representation, and labels. This type of information is quick to go out of date, however it offers a good starting point for musicians who are actively working to secure new opportunities abroad.

Conclusion

Resources for musicians who are living and working in Scotland range from credentialing opportunities, to creative funding and emergency assistance. Many of my interlocutors have relied on these different avenues of funding in order to survive and continue working as full-time professional musicians. The common thread that ties all of these different opportunities and services together is their reliance on musicians actively seeking support. While welfare services and institutions such as Help Musicians may appear to cater to socialist-based ideals, in reality they promote an ethic of entrepreneurialism. Artists have to actively pursue competitions, write grant applications, and apply for emergency assistance in order to win awards or receive support. Artists also have to be willing to take advantage of these resources and accept help when it is offered.

While the Scottish government has created many opportunities for musicians, they could look to other European countries for further examples of baseline support structures for artists.

²⁴⁵ “The Visit,” Events, Showcase Scotland Expo, accessed June 3, 2022, <http://www.showcasescotlandexpo.com/events/the-visit>.

²⁴⁶ Tom Oakes, Interview with the author, May 9, 2020.

Despite the international recognition of Irish music and culture, Irish traditional musicians have long called for more government support of their creative industries at home (Talty 2020).²⁴⁷ During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Irish government developed a task force to determine how they could better support Irish cultural workers. Based on their recommendation, the government allocated funds in 2022 to establish a universal basic income pilot program. The program promises to provide 2000 artists €325 per week for three years in an effort to let them focus on their artistic pursuits (Marshall 2023). While official results of the study have yet to be published at the time of this writing, the artists who have randomly been selected for the study already cite positive outcomes including lower anxiety, and the ability to practice and focus on their creative ideas (Marshall 2023).

In France, “Intermittent du Spectacle” is an unemployment insurance system that recognizes the precarity of entertainment industry careers. Artists who meet eligibility criteria (including working a certain number of performance hours each year) are able to receive unemployment benefits and systematic compensation for days “not worked” (Casse 2020). This system recognizes that artists often use these “unwaged days” for administration, networking, and organization – the types of behind-the-scenes work that I discuss in Chapter Two. The system does have restrictions; for example, it excludes teaching hours from the overall hour count despite the fact that this is a large part of many professional artists’ regular earning portfolio (Casse 2020). However, for artists working full time in the performance industry, it offers consistent financial security while giving them space to pursue creative endeavors.

Both of these programs seek to offer stable, reliable income sources to artists – the antithesis to precarious employment. Scottish musicians have been trained to operate with an entrepreneurial spirit and to seek out opportunities – yet their lives and careers would be far less precarious if they could depend on consistent support.

Since the folk music revival, government-sponsored financial support for traditional music has largely been distributed through institutions designed to protect and promote the creative industries. In essence, an infrastructure of support in Scotland has been built up because of the precarity of the tradition, musicians’ lives, and livelihoods. As this project has shown, the tradition is a strong force today in Scotland, and that must be attributed in part to some of these institutions. Perhaps these institutions are also the means to developing further reliable support and to reducing the precarity found in musicians’ livelihoods. At the moment, the opportunities offered by these institutions come along much like gigs: some are sought out, some come in at random, and some are the direct result of another. Degree programs and award competitions offer credentialing opportunities and intangible opportunities such as networking and international travel. Grant organizations, such as Creative Scotland, foster creativity and make it possible for many musicians to realize projects that they would otherwise be unable to fund. When a health crisis strikes or a chronic issue becomes unmanageable, Help Musicians is

²⁴⁷ A 2020 report by Jack Talty commissioned by Trad Ireland/Traid Éireann details the many opportunities and issues facing musicians in the Irish traditional arts sector (Talty 2020). He lists the opportunities and resources available to artists (in brevity), gives an overview of the challenges facing the Traditional Arts Sector, and makes recommendations for improvement. I have not encountered a singular document as comprehensive as this in the Scottish music scene, however I hope that this chapter offers a starting point for Scottish musicians who are seeking resources at home.

available to offer emergency assistance. Through their individual creativity and ethic of entrepreneurialism, musicians have learned to sew these opportunities together, making a patchwork quilt of support that holds together lives and careers.

As I sat in Aidan Moodie's living room on a rainy afternoon just before Scotland went into lockdown, he told me that he had started to think about all the different organizations that had helped him over the years:

"I mentioned Hands Up for Trad – we got nominated for Album of the Year last year and a couple years ago we got nominated for Up and Coming [Artist of the Year at the Scots Trad Music Awards]. [That] led into the showcase at Showcase Scotland, which then led into the Russia trip that we did which came off because of Showcase Scotland's partnership with the English Folk Expo, which is one down in Manchester tied with the Manchester Folk Festival... And it's not as if you play at this and then all of the festival bookings are yours. But there have been definite opportunities which we can link back to these things. And even having Celtic Connections on the doorstep. We wouldn't be anywhere near where we are if we hadn't been taken astronomically more seriously that first year because of winning the Danny Kyle which was through Celtic Music Radio, which are folk that have played our music since we started with the Gness guys. So that's a whole bunch of institutions that are really working to find good music and get it out to people."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Aidan Moodie, Interview with the author, March 16, 2020.

Conclusion

“There’s so much more to it than just getting on stage and playing well and having a good gig... There’s a lot more to it than just being good at your instrument.” – Ali Hutton²⁴⁹

Performers of Scottish traditional music are resilient, hard-working, and dedicated practitioners who operate within a dynamic, thriving, and ever-changing scene. It is extraordinarily poetic that Glasgow, the Scottish city historically associated with manufacturing industries and commerce, has become the epicenter for career-driven young musicians. In popular spheres, a musical career is often assumed to be entirely about playing music. However, as my interlocutors have repeatedly pointed out throughout this project, “there’s a lot more to it” and it involves a lot of hard work.

This project is about precarious labor – the precarity of living and working as a professional musician in Scotland’s traditional music scene. Throughout this dissertation, I have explored how precarity manifests as both an ontological experience and a socio-economic condition. Musicians both function in an ontological state of precarity and engage in the labor regimes and political-economic structures which foster precarious labor. I have demonstrated that precarity presents challenges to musicians’ lives and careers, but also how it has prompted individual creativity and been the reason that institutions have built far-reaching infrastructures of support. Due to timing and circumstance, the COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in the research and writing of this dissertation. While I could never have anticipated nor wished such cataclysmic global precarity, in many ways it facilitated a deeper understanding of the primary issues at stake.

Throughout these chapters, several themes have emerged which demonstrate the complexities of working as a professional musician, and the creativity with which Scottish musicians have learned to operate in a precarious employment environment.

First, the power of an entrepreneurial spirit cannot be overstated. Musicians have been entrepreneurs since long before this idea became a buzzword or synonymous with a career path. Behind the scenes, Scottish musicians must rely on their own self-motivation and resourcefulness to build their careers and fill their schedules. This includes developing new ways to manage their workload, acquiring skills beyond musicianship, and pursuing their own credentialing and funding opportunities.

This ethic of entrepreneurialism is also deeply intertwined with the individualism that has become a necessary element of self-promotion and personal musical style. Scottish musicians must embrace a “look at me” approach by constantly finding new ways to promote their individual projects and skills. They physically go out into the scene to “be seen” and interact with their fellow performers, and design new marketing campaigns for fan engagement through social media. In their educational studies, they develop their own personal musical style that sits within the boundaries of the tradition but does something new. Innovation and experimentation are also highly encouraged by funding institutions when musicians apply for assistance in developing new creative projects. On stage, some musicians make statements through sparkly

²⁴⁹ Ali Hutton, Interview with the author, May 14, 2020.

outfits or flashy, technical musical performances. These impressive visual and musical displays are further enhanced by dramatic spectacle in stage production, and musicians' attention to crafting interaction and rapport with their audiences.

Today, this individual-centric approach to self-presentation, promotion, and performance is fundamental to what it means to operate as a performing artist. However, in Scotland, this way of being sits in an uncomfortable, incongruous relationship with perceptions of authenticity and societal expectations of self-deprecation.

Despite its slippery ideology, authenticity – as it is perceived by musicians and audience members – has emerged as another underlying theme throughout this dissertation. As I chronicled in the Introduction, authenticity has historically been linked to definitions of tradition, and the preservationist mentality of the folk music revival. This mentality influenced the early development of educational institutions and the infrastructures of support in the Scottish music scene. On stage, some musicians claim authenticity by presenting themselves as being part of a legacy of tradition bearers. They also admire it in each other – discussing it in tandem with their descriptions of virtuosic performance, and with reverence in regard to their favorite fellow performers. Socially, authenticity is connected to expectations surrounding self-deprecation and what it means to present oneself as a sincere and humble British citizen. Through their impressive ability to impart humor and share stories, Scottish musicians have found ways to work within these social constraints and to promote themselves and their careers in a positive light.

From the booming sounds of stomp boxes at the Celtic Connections Festival Club to the delicate bowstrokes of solo fiddle over Facebook Live, the influence of technology in the traditional music scene also emerged as a critical theme in my research. Musically, the increasing use of technology is evident in the shifting aesthetics of new recording techniques, the use of effect pedals, and the incorporation of pre-recorded tracks to create new sonic landscapes. Behind the scenes, it has become essential to musicians' business and promotional practices. Live performance videos have become necessary elements of a musician's press kit, and social media promotion has permeated all aspects of daily life. Technology has also been a lifeline – the source that musicians used to continue to connect to their audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media streaming platforms, such as Facebook Live, and video conferencing tools, such as Zoom, became essential spaces for musicians to perform, collaborate, and teach. Through livestream concerts and collaboration videos, technology has allowed musicians to explore new avenues of virtual performance and to develop enhanced practices of networking.

Finally, despite the attention to individualism, this project has shown that to achieve success, musicians must also rely on others. Throughout Scotland, extensive infrastructures of support help provide credentialing opportunities, fund creative projects, and grant emergency assistance. In particular, the network of musicians and organizations in Glasgow offer many resources and opportunities for those who wish to build their career through the urban scene. At the moment, musicians must actively seek support and weave together opportunities to maintain their careers. Perhaps a future exists where these organizations can come together to create a cross-institutional network of reliable, consistent support.

The research for this dissertation has relied heavily on the voices of my interlocutors – prioritizing ethnography and lived experience as the primary means to seeking greater understanding. In many ways this aligns with the Scottish tradition itself, where oral transmission processes have long been the greatest resource for passing down tunes, stories, and other cultural practices. I have also included the voices of Scottish music scholars – many of whom are also skilled practitioners – who have come before me. Their words have shaped my understanding of Scottish music for over a decade and been an influence on my own performance practice. Within the field of ethnomusicology, there is a relatively small number of scholars currently studying Scottish traditional music. While it has been encouraging to watch this body of scholarship grow over the last decade and move toward addressing contemporary themes, there is still so much work to be done and room for new voices to join in the conversation. To broaden the reach of this project and deepen my analyses, I have brought in sources from ethnomusicologists studying diverse musical practices and literature from fields such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology. This approach has been crucial to developing an interdisciplinary understanding of the issues at stake, and demonstrating how the Scottish music scene can be a lens through which to understand musical labor across the world.

In Scotland, musical livelihoods have always been precarious. For that to change will require systemic transformation and widespread popular reconceptualization of the labor that a music career entails. This project seeks to open that door and will hopefully be a point of entry for some readers. It has been my goal throughout this dissertation to give a well-rounded understanding of Scottish musicians' lives and the work they undertake to maintain their livelihoods. It is also my hope that revealing how Scottish musicians navigate precarity may be useful to anyone facing their own form of precarity for the first time. The COVID-19 pandemic struck right in the middle of my fieldwork. But tomorrow it could be something else. Whatever comes their way, I am confident that Scottish musicians will be ready to adapt, perform, and continue to play the tradition forward.

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Appendix

Formal Interviews

Anderson, Paul. Skype: Glasgow and Tarland, Scotland. May 9, 2020.

Anderson, Siobhan. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. May 22, 2020.

Badcock, Jack. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. May 5, 2020.

Baxter, Craig. Café Hula: Glasgow, Scotland. March 11, 2020.

Butterworth, Jenn. Café Hula: Glasgow, Scotland. March 12, 2020.

Dignan, Julia. The Black Cat: Edinburgh, Scotland. January 20, 2020.

Duff, George, Kevin Macleod, and John Martin. Sandy Bell's: Edinburgh, Scotland.
March 13, 2020.

Geddes, Roo, and Neil Sutcliffe. Café Hula: Glasgow, Scotland. December 3, 2019.

Hawksworth, Catriona. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. May 12, 2020.

Hutton, Ali. WhatsApp: Glasgow, Scotland. May 14, 2020.

Jones, Aaron, and Claire Mann. Personal Home: Beattock, Scotland. May 21, 2016.

Katz, Mike. WhatsApp: Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland. May 21, 2020.

MacColl, Lauren. Millennium Hotel: Glasgow, Scotland. February 6, 2020.

Maclennan, Matthew. Cranberry's: Glasgow, Scotland. January 14, 2020.

Martin, John. The Waverley Bar: Edinburgh, Scotland. March 15, 2020.

McIlroy, Calum. Skype: Glasgow and Aberdeenshire, Scotland. May 7, 2020.

McNally, Luc. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. May 13, 2020.

Miller, Siobhan. Papercup Coffee Company: Glasgow, Scotland. March 16, 2020.

Moodie, Aidan. Personal Home: Glasgow, Scotland. March 16, 2020.

Munro, Rosie, and Innes White. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. March 24, 2020.

Newman, Sean Paul. WhatsApp: Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland. June 2, 2020.

Nixon, Cameron. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. May 13, 2020.

Oakes, Tom. Skype: Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland. May 9, 2020.

Reid, Aileen. WhatsApp: Glasgow, Scotland. May 18, 2020.

Rorie, Graham. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. March 23, 2020.

Ryan, Ciarán. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. May 6, 2020.

Salter, Laura-Beth. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. May 12, 2020.

Steel, Eilidh, and Mark Neal. Personal Home: Helensburgh, Scotland. January 15, 2020.

Sturgeon, Jenny. Skype: Glasgow and Shetland, Scotland. May 11, 2020.

Sutherland, Adam. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. March 20, 2020.

Wilkie, Laura. Skype: Glasgow, Scotland. May 14, 2020.