

Transmutations of Fiddle Music:  
Tracing Folk Melodies to their Roots

by

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*Certificate of Approval*

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Samantha Jane Braman has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Music.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis accompanies my senior violin recital, an exploration of the roots of folk melodies in traditional fiddle music from the Southeast of the United States and the East Coast of Canada as well as classical compositions by Béla Bartók and Grażyna Bacewicz. First, I examine Irish music, analyzing the rhythmic structures and ornamentation of the tunes. Then, I track a tune that traveled from Ireland and Scotland to Missouri, noting changes in rhythm and bow pattern. I then follow a tune that traveled from Ireland to Cape Breton Island, noting the differences in syncopation and tempo. After this, I shift my discussion to two classical compositions: Polish Capriccio and Romanian Folk Dances. I examine the ways Bacewicz and Bartók incorporated folk melodies in composing these pieces. They added new parts, accompanying lines, and articulations while preserving the melodies and motives of their source material. This analysis helps me understand the important role of folk music in community as well as in the development of national identity. In my recital, I included two original fiddle tunes that I composed inspired by other preexisting melodic and motivic ideas, thus embarking on a similar process of folk music transmutation.

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## Introduction

Folk music is community music. It is the music that resonates between circles of tapping feet in bar corners, living rooms, summer campfires, and rickety porches. It is easy to trace most modern music back to folk music roots. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “folk” as “of, pertaining to, current or existing among, the people; traditional, of the common (local) people, esp. opposed to sophisticated, cosmopolitan” (n. def. C1b). Folk music resists arbitrary hierarchical standards of urban society, existing to preserve tradition, community, and cultural identity. While the fiddle and the violin are the same instrument, the fiddle is most commonly associated with the aural tradition of folk music while the violin is associated with classical music read from paper. Fiddling requires a communal learning process. Because the folk music of the fiddle is intrinsically tied to community, it is impossible to study its history without also studying the movement of people during the same periods. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, migrants from Scotland and Ireland brought their fiddles and tunes across the Atlantic to North America. These Celtic tunes shifted dramatically when they reached the New World, specifically in the Appalachian Mountains in America’s Southeast and Cape Breton, a tiny island off the East Coast of Canada in Nova Scotia with more fiddlers per capita than any other place in the world. A similar process of transmutation occurred in Eastern Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century from folk to classical music. Composers like Béla Bartók and Grażyna Bacewicz used Eastern European folk melodies and structures to inspire their classical compositions. These melodies came from rural regions of Transylvania, Crişana, and Bihor in Romania, Torontal and Turda-Arieş in Hungary, and Kujavia in Poland. Virtuoso musicians performed these works in metropolitan cities like Budapest and Warsaw, exposing urban audiences to these rural melodies for the first

time. The use of folk melodies in classical music helped form national identity in Poland and Hungary while the transatlantic evolution of folk melodies resulted in new fiddle styles in Canada and the United States.

## Chapter 1

Irish music serves as the basis for both Cape Breton and old-time music, the fiddle music of Appalachia. Though Ireland is a relatively small country, each county has its own distinct fiddling dialect. For example, County Donegal fiddling is raucous and energized, with driving bow triplets like the Scottish style while County Clare fiddling is slow and lilting, with many syrupy slides and dark, modal keys. Despite these regional differences, all Irish fiddle music is tied to traditional dance forms. Reels, jigs, slip jigs, slides, mazurkas, hornpipes, polkas, and highlands are only a few of the Irish dance meters that inform the tunes. A reel is an upbeat, dance tune with either 2/4 or 4/4 time signature. It has a binary form, with an A part and B part, each usually eight bars so the tunes are an even, danceable 32 bars. Some of these tunes, like “Lord Gordon’s Reel,” have third and fourth parts, often functioning as variations. This reel originated in Scotland as a 2-part tune. However, Michael Coleman, an Irish fiddler from County Sligo, played it with three extra variation parts and recorded it in 1934.<sup>1</sup> The “C” and “E” variations are based on the melody of the B part, whereas the “D” variation is based on the A part. This impulse to add new variations to a tune or combine tunes together in a medley comes from a goal to keep dancers energized through a shift. This shift might be

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<sup>1</sup> “Lord Gordon’s Reel,” Traditional Tune Archive, May 6, 2019, [https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Lord\\_Gordon%27s\\_Reel](https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Lord_Gordon%27s_Reel)

a drastic switch to a tune in a new key or tonality, or it might be something understated like the addition of a new ornament.

Irish fiddlers infuse specific ornamentation like triplets, grace notes, and rolls in their tunes. Bow triplets, sometimes called “trebles,” involve moving the bow quickly and percussively down-up-down. To play a grace note, one must strike the pitch above the main pitch (the “upper neighbor”), slightly delaying or interrupting the intended note. Early North American settlers continued playing versions of these two ornaments with the new styles of old-time music and Cape Breton music respectively. However, the roll still remains unique to Irish music. This ornament involves a series of grace notes, first to the upper neighbor, back to the original pitch, to the lower neighbor, and finally to the original pitch once again. Similar to grace notes, the goal is not to hear all these individual pitches clearly—instead it is to disrupt the original pitch. The roll matches the sound of wind instruments in Ireland and Scotland (bagpipes or Uilleann pipes) that do not have the ability to easily articulate rhythmic changes within one pitch, as fiddlers do with bows. Pipers use these ornaments to distinguish rhythms, and fiddlers have adapted their playing to match this technique.

Old-time music evolved from these Irish tunes in Appalachia. This music is the traditional fiddle style from North Carolina, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and several other American southeastern states. Like Ireland, each state has slight regional differences in playing. Old-time music is the precursor to bluegrass. Like bluegrass fiddlers, old-time fiddlers play in configurations with banjo, guitar, bass, and mandolin. However, while bluegrass fiddlers are more concerned with moving tradition forward into the realm of improvisation, old-time fiddlers focus on preservation. Old-time fiddlers learn tunes from source recordings of players from the early 1900s (when

phonograph wax cylinder recording technology was first invented), scrutinizing nuances of bow pattern and ornamentation. They play these tunes over and over again in jam sessions, falling into a trance-like groove that comes from the constant rhythmic pulsing of guitar and banjo.

In the first half of the 20th century, field recorders, folklorists, and ethnomusicologists like Alan Lomax began traveling to these Appalachian states to find and document music from previously unknown musical masters. They recorded old fiddlers playing their most obscure tunes learned from grandfathers and grandmothers, singers recalling heartbreaking, 40-verse murder ballads, and blues guitar players picking away at melancholy songs. When Lomax returned from his trips, he made these recordings available to the wider music community. Lomax began his work for the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress with his father, John Lomax, in 1933. He continued recording and studying traditional music during the excitement of the folk revival of the 1960s, somewhat prompted by new access to these recordings.<sup>2</sup> His work is hugely influential for musicians today who still listen back to those recordings (many scratchy or distorted) and learn the tunes exactly as the source fiddlers, like Wade Ward, Luther Strong, Marcus Martin, and Emmett Lundy played them. However, Lomax's project had ethical issues as many ethnographic endeavors do. He repeatedly claimed copyright and reaped financial benefit from the music of these often poor, unrecognized artists.<sup>3</sup> This was especially the case for the black musicians Lomax

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<sup>2</sup> American Folklife Center, and Congress, "Lomax Family at the American Folklife Center: Alan Lomax Biography," The American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, September 1, 2014. <https://www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax/alanlomaxbio.html>

<sup>3</sup> Mark Davidson, "The Problem of Alan Lomax, or the Necessity of Talking Politics During the Lomax Year," Sound Studies Blog, Sounding Out!, April 9, 2015. <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/04/09/the-problem-of-alan-lomax-or-the-necessity-of-talking-politics-during-the-lomax-year/>

recorded, as racial and socioeconomic class divisions situated him in a position of inflated power.

Dominant narratives of old-time music history have erased the voices and stories of black musicians who developed the Clawhammer banjo style. The banjo was originally a West African gourd instrument, appropriated from black slaves in America by white minstrel musicians. Minstrel shows began in the 1840s, featuring variety show acts such as burlesque and blackface performances by white entertainers. These racist shows profited off the spectacle of mocking and impersonating black slaves, casting them as inferior, silly, and subhuman. Robert B. Winans and Elias J. Kaufman write about minstrel performer Joel Walker Sweeney in their essay *Minstrel and Classic Banjo: American and English Connections*, saying he was the first “white man in the documentary record to play the five-string banjo in America, having learned the technique from slaves on his father’s farm in Virginia in the 1820s. Sweeney traveled on his own and with circuses through the South as a blackface banjo player and singer.”<sup>4</sup> The racist power dynamic between black slave and white minstrel performer characterized the earliest incorporation of banjo in American music.

The Irish tunes that came to Appalachia during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries grew melodically simpler and rhythmically more complex with the addition of the banjo. Clawhammer players strum a “bum-ditty” repeating pattern with their right hand in a claw shape, using their thumb to pluck the highest string of the instrument. The thumb alternates with the other fingers (either pointer, middle, or both) which strike the notes of the melody on the other four strings. In this style, it is impossible to play every single

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<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Winans and Elias J. Kaufman, "Minstrel and Classic Banjo: American and English Connections," *American Music* 12, no. 1 (1994): 2, Accessed April 5, 2020. doi:10.2307/3052489

pitch and ornament of an intricate Irish fiddle tune. Thus, banjo players fulfill a role somewhere between the guitar's rhythmic steadiness and the fiddle's melodic movement. This banjo style is responsible for the rhythmic complication of the tunes, a defining contribution to old-time music from enslaved black Americans.

To match the galloping rhythmic effect of the banjo, old-time fiddlers developed a bow technique of rocking, pulsing, and vertical bow motion. While most violinists and fiddlers think about bowing as a horizontal motion, old-time fiddlers also think vertically, digging their bows down into the strings to create a "pulse" effect. Holding the fulcrum of bow against string, the bow can rock side to side and pick up neighboring resonating strings. This is why many fiddlers tune their fiddles out of standard tuning (GDAE) into a different open string tuning. Some of these tunings include cross tuning (AEAE or GDGD), calico tuning (AEAC#), or high bass (ADAE). When a fiddler cross tunes, they can use all the strings to resonate fully in the key in which they are playing. This increases the rhythmic potential of the bow as the risk of dissonance decreases when all open strings notes are within the same key; It is easier to play two—or more—mutually resonating strings at a time. Tommy Jarrell, a fiddler born in 1901 from North Carolina, bowed his fiddle with a fluid, figure-eight motion. Those who visited Jarrell in his home during the 1980s or who listen to the recordings from that time try to emulate his bow patterns. Jarrell used bow triplets in his tunes, ornaments that carried over from the Irish "treble" technique. These old-time triplets start with an up-bow stroke on the off-beats of quarter notes instead of the Irish technique starting with a down bow to replace a dotted quarter note.

"Flowers of Edinburgh" is a reel that originated in Scotland, written by dancing master, violinist, fiddler, and composer James Scott Skinner in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This tune found its way into repertoires in Ireland and other Celtic traditions. However, the old-time version is a melodic anomaly. Art Galbraith, a fiddler from Springfield Missouri, recorded it in 1981. His great-grandfather Andrew Galbraith, a dancing master in East Tennessee, handed down this version that dates back to at least 1840.<sup>5</sup> While the original Scottish version is an even 32 bars, the old-time version is 36 bars with extra beats in both parts—it is “crooked.” Crooked tunes are uneven and thus cannot be easily danced to. This is the result of cultural interactions with Indigenous groups in the United States, as many Native American song structures are based on a “series of continual beats”<sup>6</sup> instead of phrases of grouped notes. Perhaps this influence is most obvious in Metis style fiddle music, which blends French and First Nations fiddling styles, and the resulting tunes are almost all crooked.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Scottish and Northwestern Irish settlers landed in Nova Scotia, bringing bright, buoyant, energetic, and fierce fiddle tunes. “My Mind Will Never Be Easy” is the Irish root of the Cape Breton tune “My Mind Will Never be Aisy.” County Clare Irish fiddler Martin Hayes plays the Irish version of the tune as a slip jig, a jig in 9/8 meter instead of 6/8. Because of the extra beats, slip jigs feel slightly uneven, even though Irish dancers have specific steps to match such tunes. Cape Breton fiddler Brenda Stubbert plays a version of the tune that she picked up from the playing of Margaree fiddler, Cameron Chisholm;<sup>7</sup> However, this version is in 6/8. She plays it much

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<sup>5</sup> Howard W. Marshall, *Play Me Something Quick and Devilish Old-Time Fiddlers in Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2012): 90-105

<sup>6</sup> Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, “Metis Music,” Canadian Studies Center, Accessed April 5, 2020, <https://jsis.washington.edu/canada/resources/music-collection/metis-music/>

<sup>7</sup> Paul S. Cranford, “My Mind Will Never Be Aisy,” Cranford Pub Search Engine (Cranford Publishers, July 29, 2014), [http://www.cranfordpub.com/tunes/Scottish/MyMindNever\\_Aisy.htm](http://www.cranfordpub.com/tunes/Scottish/MyMindNever_Aisy.htm)

faster than the Irish counterpart, and her driving bow style propels the melody forward instead of slinking back behind the beat. She accents beats by placing a mordent-like ornament, sometimes called the “Cape Breton Wiggle,” on peaks of phrases. These ornaments involve quickly going down to the lower neighbor and returning to the original pitch. The “Cape Breton Wiggle” is similar to the Irish roll in that the goal is to disrupt the pitch, matching the articulation of pipes. Piano parts provide the bouncing syncopation that grounds the melody of the fiddle, making piano an essential instrument to Cape Breton music. The pianist’s driving beat impels a downward energy that matches Cape Breton step dancers’ goal of keeping their feet “close to the floor” and their upper bodies relatively sturdy.<sup>8</sup> This lively feel contrasts with the darker, drowsier sound of Irish music. At Cape Breton “kitchen parties,” one fiddle is passed around a circle with an accompanying pianist. As their name suggests, these parties are lively music sessions in the casual comfort of the home. Each fiddler plays a medley of tunes, each tune only repeated once before the next in the medley. These Cape Breton tunes retained the melodic complication of Scottish and Irish music, and it’s almost impossible to pick them up after only one round, likely the reason the fiddlers don’t jam all together in this music style.

## Chapter 2

The transmutation of fiddle tunes, however, is not limited to folk music traditions. Classical music composers in Eastern Europe during the early 1900s took inspiration

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<sup>8</sup> Mats Melin, "Step Dancing in Cape Breton and Scotland: Contrasting Contexts and Creative Processes." *MUSICultures* 40, no. 1 (2013): 40  
<http://ezproxy.whitman.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.whitman.edu/docview/1560576802?accountid=1208>

from nearby rural folk sounds and incorporated them into their compositions, sometimes subtly as an underlying idea, or clearly as the central theme. Polish born composer Grażyna Bacewicz composed Polish Capriccio in 1949, a piece more subtly inspired by folk influence. Born in Łódź, Poland in 1909, Bacewicz was a child prodigy and composed her first piano piece at thirteen. She studied violin and piano at the Warsaw Conservatory of Music, then philosophy for a year and a half at the University of Warsaw. Along with a group of other Poles, Bacewicz took composition lessons with renowned composition teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris during the 1930s. During this time, she explored the neoclassical style and achieved substantial national and international acclaim for her compositions. She then taught at the State Conservatory of Music in Łódź, and while working there composed the Capriccio.<sup>9</sup>

This piece seems to be structurally based on the Kujawiak dance form.<sup>10</sup> Stephen Downes writes about the Kujawiak, “The usual form is ternary, with a faster middle section and an acceleration to the final cadence. The changes of tempo often reflect characteristic preoccupations with sleeping and hunting.”<sup>11</sup> Following this structure, the Capriccio has a slow, *Andante* beginning, in a low register:

*Figure 1. Measures 1-6.*<sup>12</sup>

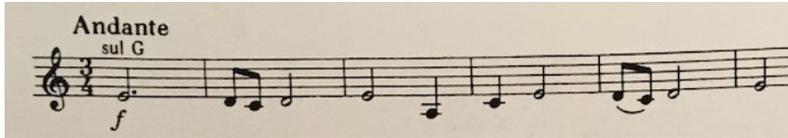
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<sup>9</sup> Judith Rosen, “Grażyna Bacewicz: Her Life and Works,” *Polish Music Journal* 5, no. 1 (2002), <https://polishmusic.usc.edu/research/publications/polish-music-journal/vol5no1/grazyna-bacewicz-life-and-works/>

<sup>10</sup> Alex Burns, “Grażyna Bacewicz: Her Life, Legacy, and Polish Caprice,” *Illuminate Women's Music*, April 11, 2018. <https://www.illuminatewomensmusic.co.uk/illuminate-blog/grazyna-bacewicz-her-life-legacy-and-polish-caprice>

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Downes, “Kujawiak,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, Accessed 5 Apr. 2020. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.whitman.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.15651>

<sup>12</sup> Grażyna Bacewicz, *Polish Capriccio* (Kraków, Poland: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1950)



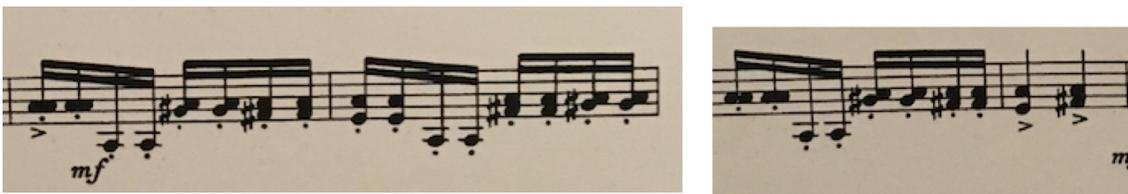
This theme rises in intensity as it moves to a higher register, then transitions into the quicker middle section, *Allegro non troppo* and *Molto allegro*. Measures 41-44 introduce the central theme of the piece based on an octave leap:

Figure 2. Measures 41-44.<sup>13</sup>



An octave leap is the distance from pointer to pinky finger on the violinist's left hand, a relatively natural and idiomatic finger position. This kind of idiomatic structure in melody is characteristic to folk music. Measures 25-28 indicate a *poco a poco accelerando* which continues for the duration of the piece, yet the acceleration increases drastically following the quick ascending C major and A major scales. What had been a phrase based on eighth notes is now based on sixteenth notes, prompting this sudden quickening:

Figure 3. Measures 102-105.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Bacewicz constructed this piece around ideas of acceleration and interruption—new phrases come in to bump old ones out of the way, rendering the flow completely unpredictable. Creating this constant environment of interruption is how Bacewicz moved this otherwise relatively simple folk motive into the realm of compositional complexity and brilliance.

Around 1954, Bacewicz decided to reduce her yearly number of concerts and solo performances to focus on composition. She continued composing steadily through the Stalinist period despite widespread artistic repression. Among a growing list of prestigious awards, she won the National Prize in 1950 for her *Concerto For String Orchestra*, later performed by the National Symphony Orchestra in the United States.<sup>15</sup> She eventually moved away from neoclassical music to experiment with other compositional styles, like sonorism, aleatoricism, and 12-tone. In his essay *Fifty Years of Freedom: Polish Music After 1945*, Piotr Grella-Możejko quotes Mark Morris discussing her experimentation: “Her idiom was founded on neo-classicism, but in the later 1950s, influenced by Bartók, she sought to combine his expressiveness and sense of drama with the 12-Tone techniques that were being rediscovered in Poland. From 1960 she developed a more avant-garde idiom, still expressive, often dramatic, and sometimes with almost Impressionistic effects.”<sup>16</sup> Bartók not only set an example for Bacewicz’s avant-garde music, but his constant emphasis on ethnomusicology and folk music sources also set an example for pieces like this Capriccio.

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Rosen, “Grażyna Bacewicz: Her Life and Works”

<sup>16</sup> Piotr Grella-Możejko, "Fifty Years of Freedom: Polish Music After 1945," *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 39, no. 1/2 (1997): 191, Accessed April 5, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/40869897](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40869897)

In 1910 and 1912, Bartók visited small villages in rural Romania to record and transcribe folk melodies on a phonograph wax cylinder recording device, in awe of their simple beauty. These melodies would later be the basis for his six-movement composition, *Romanian Folk Dances*. Because Bartók constantly worked to define and reflect Hungarian national identity in his pieces, *Romanian Folk Dances* is a nationalist piece. In his article, *Sounding Authentic: The Rural Miniature and Musical Modernism*, Joshua S. Walden argues that Bartók saw the authenticity in rural folk music that urban regions in Hungary lacked. He writes, “Indeed, Bartók argued in his essays that music constituted the purest mode of expression of folk peoples, who represented the vestiges of an authentic community that had been lost in modern Budapest.”<sup>17</sup> Using this music as a compositional springboard, Bartók sought to bring this rural music tradition and culture into an urban setting and celebrate its authenticity. At the same time, Bartók’s praise of this authenticity reflects a sense of fetishization. This music came from Romani people who technically shared the same nationality as Bartók, but not the same race, and were thus oppressed in their marginalized and subordinate position. David E. Schneider acknowledges this in his book *Bartók, Hungary, and the Renewal of Tradition*, writing, “Yet transcription is also appropriation. At the very least, notation and arrangement of peasant music appropriates an artifact from a rural oral tradition for an urban literate one.”<sup>18</sup> Though cultural exchange is present in every interaction between groups of people, systems of power (socioeconomic status, race, gender expression, etc.) can move

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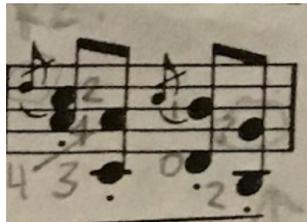
<sup>17</sup> Joshua S. Walden, “Béla Bartók’s Rural Miniatures and the Case of Romanian Folk Dances,” in *Sounding Authentic: The Rural Miniature and Musical Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3

<sup>18</sup> David E. Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary, and the Renewal of Tradition: Case Studies in the Intersection of Modernity and Nationality*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006): 185

that exchange into the realm of appropriation. Acknowledging this likely power dynamic in Bartók's field work is essential for analyzing his music and understanding his influence.

In comparing Bartók's source phonograph recordings to his resulting composition, it is clear that he preserved the "motto" phrases from the original melodies. In Bartók's essay *The Influence of Peasant Music*, he discusses the "ways in which peasant music is taken over and becomes transmuted into modern music."<sup>19</sup> He details his two main techniques: one that champions the melody with subservient accompaniment, and one where "the melody only serves as a 'motto' while that which is built round it is of real importance."<sup>20</sup> Bartók clearly preserved the "motto" of the first movement, *Dance with Sticks*, as it is easily identified in the source recording of two violinists from Voiniceni in Mureș County, Transylvania, Romania. Though they are playing the melody in a higher octave, he still preserved their grace note ornamentation, as seen here in bar 18:

Figure 4. Measures 18-19.<sup>21</sup>



The second violin in this recording is playing a lower chord progression that supports the high melodic violin line. Bartók used the chords from that violin part to write the piano

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<sup>19</sup> Béla Bartók, "The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music," *Tempo*, No. 14 (1949): 20, Accessed April 5, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/943852](http://www.jstor.org/stable/943852).

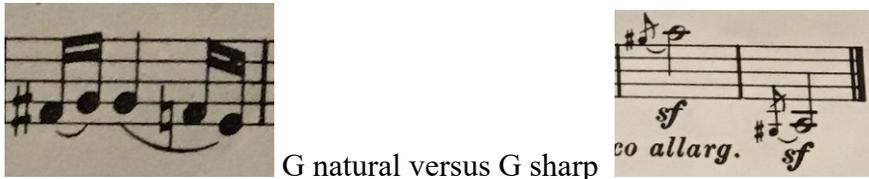
<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Béla Bartók, *Romanian Folk Dances* (Vienna, Austria: Universal Edition, 1926)



Walden writes, “Despite the sound of A minor in the melody, therefore, the final effect of the harmony is resoundingly major.”<sup>25</sup> The grace notes that precede the final notes of the four prominent violin phrases is a G sharp, the expected leading tone in a melodic minor scale, again contrasting with the G natural of the natural minor scale:

Figure 7, 8. Measures 7-8, 51-52<sup>26</sup>



While there is the sound of a voice singing or chanting in the background of the recording, Bartók did not write any vocal line, as the piece is scored for piano and violin. The violinists of the recording launch into a second section in D major which Bartók did not include after the familiar “motto” concludes.

It seems he maintained a similar compositional approach in all the other movements. However, the second and third movements were originally played on a Romanian peasant flute, called a *furulya*. Bartók composed the third movement in the same high register as the *furulya*, recreating its high, wispy timbre. When compositional collaborator and violinist Zoltán Székely arranged an edition for violin and piano, he chose to put the entire violin part for the third movement into false harmonics. Violinists play false harmonics by placing their pointer finger on the pitch two octaves below the one they want to play. The pinky finger then lightly rests on the string a perfect fourth above the pointer finger’s pitch. With a quick bow stroke, the desired note two octaves higher will sound. These harmonics further mimic the feathery tone of the original

<sup>25</sup> Joshua S. Walden, “Béla Bartók’s Rural Miniatures and the Case of Romanian Folk Dances,” 17

<sup>26</sup> Béla Bartók, *Romanian Folk Dances*

instrument. Because there isn't a second instrument in the original recording, Bartók composed a soft, rhythmically steady left hand accompaniment that reinforces the haunting, quiet mood. Walden writes, "Bartók produces an eerie effect, as swirling arabesques in the right hand contrast with the left hand's lulling insistence."<sup>27</sup> This "lulling insistence" is only heightened by the fact that there are not many chord changes in the piece, and the left hand toggling motive stays consistent throughout.

## Conclusion

Bartók saw this peasant music as the catalyst for a renaissance of Hungarian classical music.<sup>28</sup> Bacewicz's *Capriccio* is part of a parallel renaissance in Poland, led by Polish composer Karl Szymanowski. His nationalist compositions synthesized "sophisticated Western compositional techniques with primeval elements of Poland's native music. . ."<sup>29</sup> Bacewicz's piece reflects this synthesis as she moved the Kujawiak dance form forward into the realm of neoclassical music. Bartók writes about the value of folk music in composition,

"The right type of peasant music is most varied and perfect in its forms. Its expressive power is amazing, and at the same time it is void of all sentimentality and superfluous ornaments. It is simple, sometimes primitive but never silly. It is the ideal starting point for a musical renaissance, and a composer in search of new ways cannot be led by a better master"<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Joshua S. Walden, "Béla Bartók's Rural Miniatures and the Case of Romanian Folk Dances,"

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<sup>28</sup> Béla Bartók, "The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music," 19

<sup>29</sup> Piotr Grella-Możejko, "Fifty Years of Freedom: Polish Music After 1945," 183-184

<sup>30</sup> Béla Bartók, "The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music," 19

Bartók saw a genuine quality in folk music—he saw value in the process of passing melodies from one set of ears to the next. This same aural process is responsible for the development of Cape Breton and old-time fiddle music styles, two of Ireland and Scotland’s most far-reaching and identity-defining branches in the vast family tree of traditional fiddle music. Bartók believed in the intentionality of folk music idiosyncrasies. The Irish roll in “Lord Gordon’s Reel,” the extra beat in the old-time “Flowers of Edinburgh,” and the driving bow style of the Cape Breton “My Mind Will Never be Aisy” delineate the regional, musical dialects that characterize these styles. Though these small details are rarely played identically each round through a tune, and almost never notated in sheet music, they have withstood generations of aural transmission. Studying the roots of folk melodies is like studying the etymologies of words: tracing a tune’s musical path far enough back provides the context of the place from which it came. It can thus provide insight into how people experience community in those places. Whether it be a kitchen party, square dance, village celebration, or ceilidh (the Gaelic word for music party), folk music upholds an essential unifying role within communities.

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