

OFCRI 2019 - Some background to the Tunes. Matt McConeghy

Set One

Girl I Left Behind Me (aka, 'Brighton Camp', in Irish 'An Spailpin Fanach – The Rambling Laborer) is an 18th C tune, perhaps much older. It was included in many music collections from 1759 on, often with lyrics. From at least the time of the American Civil War it has been used by naval and military units as a farewell tune when leaving an encampment.

Marching to Pretoria - Pretoria is a city in South Africa. It was the capital of the South African (Boer) Republic and was the scene of fighting during the Boer War- Pretoria was captured by British forces in March 1900. The song may date from the British attack in 1900 or from the time (about 1860) when the Boers marched from the coast to the interior of the country. Despite its grim background, apparently it was included in some songbooks published for use in American schools in the 1930s and slipped into our folk tradition through the classrooms. Folk singer Josef Marais did a popular version.

Spanish Cavalier – by William D. Hendrickson, published in San Francisco in 1881, is a schmaltzy romantic ballad about a Spanish soldier leaving his love behind as he goes off to war. There is a fun version online sung by Riley Puckett, the vocalist and guitar player famous as a member of the seminal Hillbilly group 'The Skillet Lickers'. Like many turn of the century ballads, it was originally set for piano in Bb.

Nobody's Business ('Ain't Nobody's Business" as opposed to the Rihanna song "Nobody's Business) was published in 1922 by Porter Grainger and Everett Robbins. First recorded Oct 19, 1922 as "Tain't Nobody's Bizness if I Do" by Anna Meyers and the Original Memphis Five. It was the best-selling race record of 1949. In the sultry 1923 version by the great Bessie Smith (see Youtube) the lyrics include: "I'd rather my man would hit me/ than to jump right up and quit me/ I swear I won't call no copper/ if I'm beat up by my papa/Tain't nobody's business if I do"

Gaspe Reel – 'Gaspe' (GaspAY) is the region of Canada along the eastern estuary of the St Lawrence River near the Atlantic. A traditional tune played by many French-Canadian fiddlers in New England and Quebec such as Louie Beaudoin, Isidore Soucy, Phillippe Bruneau, etc.

Strawberries and Raspberries (les Fraises at les Framboises) a traditional Quebecois tune well known to many fiddlers. The iconic New England dance caller Ralph Page included a singing call to this tune in his book of Contras. A chorus says: "*Ah, les fraises et les framboises, du bon vin j'en ai bu. Croyez-moi, jolies bourgeoises, J'me suis jamais tant plus.*" Which could be rendered – "Ah, the strawberries and raspberries, I've had good wine, and believe me, pretty ladies, I can never get enough."

Government Reel - The great Quebecois violiniste Joseph Allard recorded this tune with his trio 'Les Chevaliers du Folklore' in October 1936. You can hear his recording and hundreds of other original recordings at the Bibliotheque et Archives Canada (google "virtual gramophone").

Apples, Peaches, Pumpkin Pie – (NOT the 1967 song by Maurice Irby, which was #6 on the Billboard Chart in 1968 by Jay & the Techniques) This is the Frankie Yankovic (1915-1998) "slovenian style" polka. Also known as the "Hide and Seek Polka" from the lyric "*Apple Peaches, Pumpkin Pie, Who's not Ready, holler 'I', Let's all go play Hide and Seek...*" Yankovic was raised in Cleveland where he was taught accordion at age 9 by an immigrant boarder in his Mother's boarding house. He served in WW II and nearly lost his hands from frostbite during the Battle of the Bulge. He won the title "America's Polka King" in a facedown contest in Milwaukee in 1948.

Crooked Stovepipe – A Canadian Reel may have been composed by Nova Scotia fiddler Colin J. Boyd who also composed the popular jig, “Little Burnt Potato”. Boyd was a well-known player of Scottish-style tunes in Cape Breton who recorded several disks. A fine 1932 Columbia recording of his, ‘Tarbolton Lodge’ is online on YouTube. ‘Crooked Stovepipe’ was recorded as early as 1932 on a 78 disk by the “Polka King” Hughie McDonald (d 1976).

The Montrealer – Where did this come from? At least, it’s a great example of how fiddle tune names get confused. There are at least six or seven Montreal Reels. The tune we often call “Reel de Montreal” is sometimes called the Sherbrooke Reel, which confuses it with another tune called the ‘Glise de Sherbrooke’ (a pseudo name – there is no French word ‘Glise’) - that tune is compared to the ‘Donegal Hornpipe’, or to the hornpipe by the great British composer James Hill called ‘The Navvie on the Line’ aka ‘The Clog Hornpipe’. There is a another Reel de Montreal from the great Quebecois violiniste Joseph Allard, and another from Isidore Soucy. It is evident that there is a huge amount of borrowing between Irish/British and French-Canadian players, both tunes and titles. In the end, a good tune is a good tune.

Love Letters in the Sand – written by J. Fred Coots and Nick and Charles Kenny in 1931, supposedly inspired by Hendrickson’s “The Spanish Cavalier”. It was a huge hit for pop idol Pat Boone in 1957.

San Antonio Rose – the signature song of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, written by Wills and first recorded in November 1938, re-recorded in 1940. Bing Crosby had a big hit with it the same year.

Loggieville Two Step – Loggieville is a small town in New Brunswick. This is one of many tunes composed by the nationally famous New Brunswick fiddler Matilda Murdoch (1920-2016) known as “The Sweetheart of Loggieville”.

Rhode Island Waltz – there is a handwritten version of this tune in the archives of the OFCRI. Composed by a member.

Ellis Island Waltz - I don’t know any sources for this tune except Frank Moon. He may have composed it.

Flowers of Edinburgh – There are hundreds of ‘Flower’ tunes honoring young ladies and sometimes men, and this tune has multiple names from multiple sets of lyrics. It is one of the most widespread fiddle tunes, having appeared in British tunebooks from 1749 on. In America it was recorded in tunebooks in 1777 in Connecticut, and 1783 in NH. Still a great tune!

Boys of Blue Hill – (or, Beaux of Oak Hill, or many other names). I have heard speculation that this tune may be one of the few tunes that was composed in America as a reel, then travelled back to the Old Country and was converted to a hornpipe. The American version, ‘Twin Sisters’, is a common session tune to this day in Appalachia.

My Love She’s But a Lassie – (known by at least 20 different titles in different regions, e.g. ‘Too Young to Marry’, ‘Sweet Sixteen’ etc) this tune became popular around the end of the 1700s and still is common from Appalachia to Australia. Robert Burns wrote the lyrics which are most widely known.

Jamie Allen – James ‘Jemmy’ Allen (1734-1810) nicknamed the “Duke’s Piper” was born in Northumberland, UK. He was a virtuoso performer on smallpipes having been taught by his father, a noted performer and composer. He played before royalty at the coronation of George III, but he was quite a reprobate and lost his appointment with the Duke after being convicted of bigamy and other misdeeds. Convicted of horse stealing in 1803, he was sentenced to death, later commuted to transportation for life to Botany Bay. He died in prison in Durham, England in November 1810 days before a pardon from the Prince Regent arrived to free him.

Helena Polka – recorded by Jimmy Dorsey and many others, it was written by William Tillinghast and published in New York way back in 1851. The original sheet music is easily found online at the Library of Congress.

Jessie Polka - this tune came from a Mexican tune called “Jesusita en Chihuahua” nicknamed “J.C. Polka”, hence Jessie Polka. The original song lyrics describe the ‘soldaderas’ - women who supported the Revolutionary soldiers in the Mexican Revolution of 1912. Jessie Polka became popular from the recording by Cliff Bruner (1915-2000) and the Texas Wanderers, an influential swing band. Bruner learned the tune as a child from farm workers near his home in Beaumont. I have heard this tune played by Mariachi bands in the Southwest.

Whiskey Before Breakfast – this is a tune of the Canadian West. It became popular from the playing of the great Metis fiddler, Andy DeJarlis (1914-1975) of Manitoba, who recorded it in the 1950s. (The Metis are an ethnic group made up of the descendants of Scottish and Native American families who settled the plains of Canada from the time of the Fur Trade). DeJarlis’ version can be heard on YouTube. There is an argument whether he composed the tune or just heard it and standardized it. He composed or scored hundreds of tunes and played them on Don Messer’s TV program as well as in numerous other broadcasts and on over 30 LPs. ‘Black Velvet Waltz’ is another of his tunes.

Summertime Medley

Note that nearly all of these tunes have excellent versions available on YouTube. The fiddle tunes as annotated by folklorist collectors are included in Miller and Perron’s “New England Fiddler’s Repertory”, in “The Milliner-Koken Collection of American Fiddle Tunes”, in “Old Kentucky Fiddle Tunes” by Jeff Titon, in “The Waltz Books I, II, III” by Bill Mattingley, “The Portland Collections 1,2, 3” by Songer and Curley, David Brody’s “The Fiddler’s Fakebook”, Samuel Bayard’s “Hill Country Tunes” and others...