The Evolution and Migration of Scottish Fiddle and Social Dance

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The focus of this ethnographic field project is Scottish fiddle and social dance. Our project uses the cultural markers of Scottish fiddle and social dance to trace the movement and adaptation of the Scottish diaspora, and to study social dimensions of expressive culture.

In tracing how these related practices evolved from the rootstock in Scotland as Scots migrated to Ulster (Northern Ireland), Cape Breton, the North American colonies, and westward across the continent to the Pacific Ocean, we came across numerous local opportunities for ethnographic research.

In the "who knew?" department, it turns out that Southern California is a hot node in the global Scottish music and social dance scene and more generally a place where urban "celtic heritage" seekers have been bonding together through music and dance for decades.

Thanks to funding from the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, we started work on this project in mid-2013. We are busy interviewing local practitioners of Scottish music and social dance; conducting participant observation in local Los Angeles-region Scottish and Scots-derived fiddling and dancing; making audiovisual recordings of local Scottish fiddle and dance practitioners; and digging through Scottish music and historical archives at CSUN, Royal Scottish Country Dance Society-Los Angeles, and the Huntington.

Our initial research has expanded our vistas in regards to not only the migration of the rural Scottish music from Scotland to North America, but also the movement of the rural Scottish music to the towns, the cities and to the European continent. Did you know that Beethoven wrote 24 Scottish songs?
Our team brings an insider perspective to this research: Andrew is a long-time member of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society-Los Angeles, Christina dances with RSCDS-San Gabriel Valley, and both belong to the Scottish Fiddlers of Los Angeles. Christina fiddles and Andrew plays clarinets of all sizes.

Having an interdisciplinary approach and a practitioner-scholar research team helps bring anthropological perspectives together with ethnomusicological scholarship -- and allows us to explore the practice of heritage reclamation across temporal, spatial and social contexts.

Interested in hearing more or getting involved? Contact Christina von Mayrhauser at cvm@csun.edu or Andrew Lund at clarinetandrew61@gmail.com.

*Photos courtesy of C. Hendershot and B. Harmon.*