Fiddling is one of the most pervasive genres of traditional instrumental music in North America. With a history dating to the earliest colonial settlement, North American fiddling demonstrates both continuities with old world sources and a variety of new world manifestations. Widely represented in commercial recording, as well as subject to an intensive "revival" with its attendant collections, instructional materials, and the like, North American fiddling is also the subject of a growing body of scholarly literature.

The music of Emile Benoit, the particular fiddler whose compositional process I examine here, exemplifies the fiddling tradition in a small French speaking region on the west coast of Newfoundland, the Port-au-Port Peninsula. Exposed to music derived from old-world French, Scots, Irish, and English, and new-world French-Canadian, Cape Breton, and American, as well as other Irish- and Anglo-Newfoundland sources, fiddlers in Emile’s musical community follow the most widely shared parameters of North American fiddling tradition. A few basic rhythms in relatively quick tempos, duple compound (usually with a pulse approximately MM 138) and simple (MM 120) for step and figure dancing predominate, along with waltzes. The playing of slower, non-dance tempo instrumental airs noted by Burman-Hall (1984:158) is not common among musicians in this area, although those fiddlers on the Port-au-Port most influenced by Cape Breton and Scottish models do perform medleys in changing rhythms and tempos.

While played in differing instrumental ensembles in various regions and styles throughout North America, in French-Newfoundland the fiddle is primarily a solo instrument, although the recent influence of American country music has sometimes brought it together with the guitar. Traditional
fiddlers are usually seated when performing, with the instrument often held against the chest rather than under the chin and generally played in first position (cf. Burman-Hall 1984:165–69). This practice, which Emile follows, favors a few tonalities, conditioned by the ergonomics of fingering patterns, using tonic notes D, A, G, and C.6 There is a very large repertory of distinct traditional tunes, and very little alteration is required to produce the perception of a distinct new item.7 Virtually all traditional tunes in this region employ the two-strain structure most common throughout North America and the British Isles. Each strain is usually repeated in performance, often with slight variation in the closing phrase. As is also typical, one strain is high, the other low in pitch. Although some regional styles seem to favor one or the other order of these parts, among Emile’s repertory both arrangements are found. The strains may generally be analyzed into two phrases, which in turn contain two shorter, sometimes repeated, motifs. The closing phrase of each strain is usually identical or closely related, serving to unify the whole.8

Along with collection,9 description and analysis of style has preoccupied many researchers (Goertzen 1983:11–12).10 The composition of new repertoire, however, while widespread and familiar to most fieldworkers and enthusiasts, has not been well documented. Although awareness of this phenomenon is found quite early (Joyce 1873:22, quoted in Barry 1939:101), most folk music scholars considered it to be more of an anomaly than representative of the genuine workings of an authentic tradition. They have been more concerned with processes of transmission and variation than with generation, conceiving traditional music, both vocal and instrumental, as a received repertory of melodies which are varied as they are transmitted through time and space (Bayard 1939, 1950, 1951, 1954; Bronson 1969:144). This perspective has been shared by most fiddle-tune researchers. Burman-Hall, for example, characterizes the “method of tune re-creation according to the individual player’s proclivities” which results from a “gradient of players, from the carefully refined on down to the ‘rough and tumble’ variety” who produce “marked, and sometimes highly personalized, individual styles beyond the habitual regional tendencies” (which can rightly be said to characterize the traditional context) as “equivalent to the foreground realization of a general structure and therefore analogous to a reversed Schenkerian process” (1984:153, 172–74 and 1978). This orientation has led scholars to emphasize the discovery and delineation of regional, historical and, occasionally, personal fiddling styles, while overlooking processes of composition and perhaps misconstruing their place in the dynamics of tradition.11

Pronouncements on the generative processes which lie behind the seemingly endless number of tunes and tune variants discovered and
recorded by collectors have been based largely on studies of tune variation within regional repertoires rather than on the observed practice of particular creators. Samuel Bayard, working in Pennsylvania, has examined tune relationships, described the kinds of transformations which might account for what he finds, and noted the probable significant impact the creativity of individual musicians has had on collected repertoires (1982:6–7). Like Bruno Nettl, Bayard postulates a hypothetical folk composer for purposes of discussion (Nettl 1983:112–13). Most recently James Cowdery proposes that tune relationships in the *Melodic Tradition of Ireland* be thought of as “metaphors for the study of folk composition” for “ultimately, folk composition can seldom be studied directly” (1990:93).

But seldom is not never and, thanks to a long and close relationship with Emile Benoit, a particularly active folk fiddler and unusually prolific composer, I have been able to study these processes more directly. Born in 1913 in Black Duck Brook/L’Anse-a-Canards, Emile Benoit learned to play from his uncles and other community musicians and began playing for weddings and such as a teenager. As a young man he achieved the role of pre-eminent dance musician on the Port-au-Port Peninsula, one which he maintained until the early 1960s when local musical tastes for public performance changed under the influence of mainstream mass-mediated North American culture, and the traditional solo fiddle and accordion gave way to country and rock styled bands. In the 1970s a movement for Newfoundland cultural revitalization opened new opportunities for his musical expression. Today he has once again become a premier performer in what is now a musical community of international scope, traveling widely in North America and Europe to appear at folk festivals, particularly those with a French cultural theme, and often appearing along with younger musicians in various ensemble formats. Emile provides an excellent focus for a study of creative process because he is an undisputed representative of his local tradition, while at the same time it is vividly apparent that he does much more than serve as a conduit for these traditions. Unlike most fiddlers, who put their individual stamp on a largely traditional repertoire, Emile is a prolific, self-conscious creator and innovator whose compositions are widely accepted as exemplary.

A moment by moment account of composing is indeed difficult to document, for it is a solitary pursuit. I have, however, caught glimpses of these private moments, sometimes while listening and recording unobtrusively, often in an adjacent room, as he composes, or as recorded on the working tapes of compositional ideas Emile has just recently begun making for himself as an *aide mémoire* (MUNFLA Quigley tapes 14 and 45). Alone at home, most often early in the morning, Emile begins to play his most recent compositions, taking pleasure in a new creation and fixing it in his mind. He
plays tunes and bits of tunes which he recalls from the past, allowing his fancy to lead him without concern for the quality of performance. He allows his fingers to roam over the instrument almost at random, while attentive to pleasing combinations. The formless, unpredictable, fragmentary melodic result is difficult to follow or transcribe, as we shall see, but such music-making without the constraints imposed by performance practice is, in fact, the crucial context for composition, and one which can only occur when he is alone.

Elsewhere, I have examined the central generative musical process in a case study of the creation of one particular fiddle-tune (1990). This revealed an aural-mechanical pre-performance compositional process which I dubbed melodizing to distinguish it from the standard generative models of improvisation and composition. Here I wish to incorporate that concept into a larger view of generative musical processes, building on that study by extrapolating general practice and principles from a variety of sources, including analysis of tunes at various stages of their development, elicited demonstrations of composing, Emile’s own recollections and reflections on compositional practice from interviews and his narrative introductions to various compositions, and his commentaries on my recordings of his compositional practice.

Many, indeed most, previous discussions of generative musical processes focus either on improvisation or composition, two concepts which are often seen as opposed to one another, but neither of which seems completely appropriate to describe the kind of musical creativity evidenced by Emile. Nettl argues that both are instances of the same musical creative process and that all performers thus “improvise” to some degree, in the sense that all musical performance combines to some degree different kinds of premeditated and on the spot decisions (Nettl 1974; cf. Smith 1983:32). In this view variation in performance becomes a kind of improvisation (cf. Ó Súilleabháin 1987). The concomitant focus on particular items and the ways in which they are realized by performers generally implies a “tune family” model of divergence leading to the development of new tunes, a model which has been progressively recognized as inadequate for this repertoire.

Emile usually makes very few “on the spot” melodic decisions in performance and these are limited to a few kinds of ornamentation and slight variation. (An important exception, rather unique to Emile, will be examined below for the revealing contrasts offered to typical compositional practice.) Composition is conceived as a process quite distinct from performance in this tradition. Emile’s compositional intention is to produce a “tune” which can be recalled and performed with very little variation. This, in fact, operates as one of the prime constraints shaping his creative process, for he must
compose without the aid of musical notation and fix the products of his musical imagination for subsequent evaluation. Various possibilities must be held in the mind and played several times over for aural evaluation without losing the overall scheme, even though he is now able to use a tape recorder to help in this process. As he commented about the creation of one medley of tunes which occurred while driving home,

But you know I'm gonna tell you the facts true, the way I compose it there, I had the notes here and there you know, when I got home, well I took the violin, I practice it but it wasn't the same thing, because you never do things twice the same. Because [even] when I compose something now and I put it on the tape recorder, gosh, it takes me an hour before I can get, like, that right, you know, the rhyme.... Well c'est ça.

(MUNFLA Quigley tape 17)

Because Emile's creative intent is clearly directed to the production of fixed compositions while his methods are conditioned by the ephemeral quality of his aural/mechanical medium, I would characterize his creative process as one of aural composition. Given favorable social and psychological circumstances, the act of composing is initiated by a creative stimulus which leads to the generation of an initial musical idea. Its purely musical aspects may arise spontaneously and be linked with some extra-musical association after the fact to produce a titled tune, or be intentionally generated in response to some particular extra-musical stimulus. Emile then develops this musical idea by means of a combination of experimentation, evaluation and modification to produce a fixed melody.

While most of Emile's tune-title narratives do not refer to an initial musical idea and Emile does not now recollect the starting point for many of his compositions, he does tell a few such stories. These reflect Emile's beliefs concerning the nature of music and musical creativity and provide several striking instances of these. My own observations of tune genesis provide more mundane examples of his generative heuristics.

Emile characterizes all sounds as potentially musical, but especially sounds with a particular texture or tone quality of a sort he can imitate with what I would describe as a vocal high pitched nasal whine of a pulsing rhythmic intensity. Such sounds in Emile's environment have on several occasions served to trigger initial ideas for the creation of new tunes. In the following conversation Emile recounts two such occasions.

EB: I got the sound of the wings eh? [While travelling in a jet] I was in the hind seat in behind the wing eh? And listening to that [makes a high pitched nasal hum], you know, a sound [makes the sound again] and I didn't sing it, but I had that, you know? So I took the violin and I played it. It was easy, easy to play and I play it right low. After a little while I got it and then I open up [laughter]. Jeez cripes, they started getting up. They started getting up from their seats. Oh there
was about twenty-five or thirty all in line, to go to the washroom, they wanted to know what was going on [laughter]. So, the pilot, not the pilot but the waitress, he was a man.

CQ: The steward, yeah.

EB: So I went around, and I went up, he put me on the telephone for fifteen minutes. Played. They all went, sat down in their seat [laughter]. So I played the *Flying Reel*, so I told them there that I just compose it.

CQ: It struck me that the, both the plane, that wing sound, *Flying Reel* sound, and the bandsaw, are both real sort of high pitched.

EB: That's right, yeah.

CQ: And I wonder whether, well, it just seems interesting, I mean, does fiddle music always have that kind of penetrating sound?

EB: Oh yes. When it happened, it uh, it [referring to the *Bandsaw Reel*] was a shot of grease eh? And it stuck eh? And it squealed [imitates sound with high pitched, pulsating, nasal “eeeeeeeee”]. Squealed eh? Gee [Emile's facial expression emphasizes the act of noticing this sound], that there, that'd make a nice, that'd make a nice jig, nice reel. So I went home and I, I never played all the reel, but it just, the start of it eh? So I uh, finish it.

CQ: What was the start of it? Do you remember which part was the start of it?

EB: Oh yes, yes, yes. Well the squeal is, this here is the squeal eh? [plays a related portion of *Bridgett’s Reel* by mistake, as follows]

**Example 1. a. Bridgett’s Reel**

![Example 1. a. Bridgett’s Reel](image)

Bien, bien bien bien, I’m sorry. [pause] [plays high part of *Bandsaw Reel* as follows]

**b. Bandsaw Reel**

![Example 1. b. Bandsaw Reel](image)

See? [plays trill]
Catching Rhymes

C. Bandsaw trill

\begin{music}
\begin{music}
\begin{music}
\end{music}
\end{music}
\end{music}

CQ: That bit there is the [sound of the saw].

EB: [Imitates sound again] . . . that note. So I keep on, and then. Well I never played the whole, the whole thing right at once. When I got it there, then I worked on it eh? [plays Bandsaw Reel as in Example 2. (MUNFLA Quigley tape 30)]

Example 2. Bandsaw Reel

\begin{music}
\begin{music}
\begin{music}
\end{music}
\end{music}
\end{music}

It is clear, especially from the conclusion of this discussion, that the triggering sound has a direct correlative in the emphasis on the a’” note reinforced in the case of the Bandsaw by the repeated upward movement to b”; played by the little finger, this is the highest note available in the first position. This seems to be what distinguishes it from Bridgett’s Reel which he begins to play by mistake, as he corrects himself by trying to stay up on the a’” longer than he does in Bridgett’s; an effect achieved by repeating the
a”-b” combination. The *Flying Reel* employs a similar melodic realization of the sound of the jet engine (see Example 3).

**Example 3. Flying Reel**

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\[ \text{Example 3: Flying Reel} \]
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On another occasion the sounds of his truck while driving seem to have stimulated a musical response.

EB: I’m gonna tell you this story, a good enough story. I was coming from Stephenville, five or six years ago. And uh, when I got to Picadilly I was alone, I start to think about you know, sounds in my, with the truck I suppose and the road and this and that and I got a sound [hums] or something. So I start hum that at first, I didn’t sing it but I had it in mind. I was practice, practicing in mind and after a while I got it, good sound, and when I got in West Bay this, another sound again, came. So, it was the same sound but a little different. And when I got Lourdes another sound again. So, *Making the Curve for Black Duck Brook*. So ok, *Picadilly Slant* first and then I turns on *West Bay Centre*. (MUNFLA Quigley tape 30)

This response to my queries about how musical ideas occur to him recounts the stimulus for a medley of tunes named after places along his route home. The sounds of Emile’s truck referred to in this instance would seem to include both the sound quality of the tires’ hum and rhythmic character of the ride. *Making the Curve to Black Duck Brook*, for example, he says was inspired by turning the truck around a sharp corner towards home from Lourdes, which made his tires squeal, especially in the fall of the year when the road was wet (Benoit 1980b).

While environmental sounds have occasionally stimulated a spontaneous musical response from Emile, this musical impulse is translated into terms he knows and can manipulate. Thus a high pitched squeal inspires melodic motifs centering on the a” which move among the adjacent notes. These are variations of the note combinations with which he is already familiar and suggest possible routes to follow in shaping the rest of the tune.

The seeds of a new composition are to be found among the melodic ideas with which he is familiar from the repertoire he already knows. When the initial musical idea is not spontaneously evoked Emile consciously searches through known tunes for fertile ideas and he often explains the sources of his compositions in terms of the known tunes from “off of” which he has “taken” the new “note,” a somewhat flexible concept that refers most often to borrowing a motif. This is how he explained the genesis of the *Part Time Fisherman’s Reel*: 

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\[ \text{Part Time Fisherman's Reel} \]
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EB: Now I composed the *Part Time Fisherman’s Reel, Part Time Fisherman*, it’s almost the same [as the *Bandsaw Reel* which he has just played]. I got the note off of that. (MUNFLA Quigley tape 30)

Emile has taken the first phrase of the second strain from the *Bandsaw Reel* and moved it over one string, developing the rest of the tune from this kernel (see Example 4).

**Example 4. A “string shift” 5th transposition**

*Calamus (Candlemass) Day Set* is a composition consciously developed from an “old time” set tune (MUNFLA Quigley tapes 45 and 46). Somewhat unusual in its rhythmic patterns and use of a short, four bar strain form, it may well have been only partially recalled. The new first strain emphasizes the same notes but shifts the distinctive b’ to the end of the phrase. A second phrase is added to create an eight bar strain. The new second strain moves further from the source tune, employing standard arpeggio figures in D major and reiterating the added material from the first strain (see Example 5).

Sometimes the relationship between tunes taken from one another, as here, is quite clear, while in other cases what has become of the original “note” may be more obscure, as in the case of a medley of tunes he calls the *Wedding Waltz*:

EB: Now, you take this, the *Irish Wash Woman*. How they calls that *Rigadoo*? Well anyway, they compose that on the *Irish Washwoman*. And, I compose a
Example 5. a. The “old timer” source for Emile’s Calamus Day set

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b. Emile’s Calamus Day set

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waltz, I calls it the Wedding Waltz but I took a note off the Irish Washwoman and the Ragadoo [an alternate pronunciation]. I uh [sings melodies of Waltz, and Riggydoo (his usual pronunciation)] 1st strains transcribed in Example 6] see, see that? So I stole a couple a notes from it eh? But it goes good. Then I plays that, and then I jumps on the Riggydoo and then, Irish Washwoman in a minus key [an idiosyncratic term he has derived from hearing others identify some of his pieces as in a minor key] and then I turns in, [unclear] eh? [sings Irish Washwoman, Example 6d] Then after that I put this piece here, [Example 6e, which] was composed by the Irish Washwoman too, by the note this one now [sings Irish Washwoman, Example 6f] see? Well that’s the way it works, from one to the other. (MUNFLA Quigley tape 8)
Example 6.

a. *Wedding Waltz* 1st strain

b. *Riggydoo* 1st strain excerpt

c. *Riggydoo* 2d strain excerpt

d. *Irish Washwoman* excerpt

e. *Irish Washwoman* excerpt

f. *Irish Washwoman* excerpt
In this instance it seems the first strain of Riggydoo provided the musical materials for the Wedding Waltz based on the b minor and A major triads. The third tune in the medley is a loose transposition of the Irish Washwoman into b minor. While changing to a 6/8 meter, it naturally enough emphasizes the same notes as the first two tunes and its second strain moves into the same upper ranges as that of the Riggydoo using basic arpeggios again. Perhaps this brought it to Emile's mind as he experimented with these notes. Once he recognized the incipient Irish Washwoman melody, a transposition to its more usual key of G would have seemed natural and easily accomplished because the tonic b' is a core fingering note in G as well as the first of its melody in that key. Emile seems to have self-consciously created the Wedding Waltz itself based upon the Riggydoo, combined the two, and then incorporated further musical associations as they developed. His observation that "they compose" the Riggydoo "on" the Irish Washwoman is a conclusion based in retrospect on his own train of musical thought.

While this process of "taking off" a tune may be explicitly perceived and acknowledged in this manner as well as consciously employed, it is also implicit in the compositional practices which I have documented even when unacknowledged (MUNFLA Quigley tapes 14 and 45). Emile typically begins relatively private playing sessions with rehearsals of his most recent compositions and then departs from the known. He may try to reconstruct partially recollected tunes or explore the possibilities of musical motifs which occur to him.

An initial musical idea may also be generated from a distinctive physical characteristic involved in its production. This seems to be the case for several tunes which employ a motif in which an a', played on the d' string with the fourth finger, alternates with the d". He became fascinated with this technique, unusual in the traditional repertory, and used it in tunes which were composed at much the same time. In another instance, Emile observed that it was repeated playing of a high trill between a" and b" which initiated a composition (MUNFLA, Quigley tape 30).24

Perhaps the fundamental cognitive act which provides an initial musical idea is what has been called "noticing" (Perkins 1981:78–83). Emile may notice an ambient sound which evokes the tone quality or rhythm of fiddle music and translate this into a melodic idea. He may take notice of a particular melodic figure in a piece he already knows and use it as the starting place for composing a different melody. He may focus his attention on a particular physical aspect of sound production and work from this kernel. This act of noticing which results in an initial musical idea may be evoked spontaneously, or Emile may set out intentionally to generate novel note combinations and physical sensations. But however these are generated, Emile must first find a melodic starting place when composing.

As composing became an important and distinct activity, Emile developed several heuristic devices to provoke such possibilities. As he suggested
several times, allowing his fingers to wander through patterns which he knows, while exerting a minimum of evaluative restraint, is the primary means by which Emile generates new possibilities. These wanderings take the form of rhythmically free melodic movement of traditional types, such as arpeggios, short scalar passages, and ascending or descending interlocking thirds, all within particular fingering patterns. But, as examples of Emile actually composing show, these explorations are made within a flexible envelope bound by traditional phrase structure and thus they do not extend indefinitely without form.

His use of this self-conscious generative heuristic technique has most likely contributed to the formal innovations in some of his compositions which begin with fixed free rhythmic melodies, externalizing a formerly internal and often unconscious process. If nothing strikes his fancy to be noticed as an initial idea, Emile is likely to try moving in unexpected melodic directions, altering some pitches and changing tonality. But this generative response is already verging on the developmental phase of the compositional sequence. This indicates that the stages I have distinguished are primarily an artifact of analysis. In practice much may happen so quickly as to seem simultaneous and unconscious.

Once Emile has noticed an initial musical idea he goes through a process of nearly simultaneous experimentation, aural monitoring, evaluation and modification through which he develops the idea into a tune. On one occasion which can serve as an example of his typical procedure, Emile willingly complied with a request to compose something while recording (Example 7, from MUNFLA Quigley tape 49). He began by playing a short scalar passage from d' to g', sounding a typical intervallic opening for tunes in D major. As he progressed this melodic unit was quickly stabilized and repeated, at first more times than would be appropriate in a finished tune, in an experimental fashion, to create a phrase. A leap up to the d" and scalar descent to e' provides a link for a slightly varied repetition of the first melodic unit a step higher, a jump back to d" and descent to the tonic d' to fill out an entire strain [Example 7a].

If not particularly distinctive, its units being so predictable, it is effective melodically. Challenged to create something quickly and under scrutiny, Emile seems to have relaxed his selective criteria, rather than continuing to experiment with more possibilities as he did in the creation of more genuine compositions.25

The second strain of this demonstration composition was more difficult than the first for Emile to "catch," as he would say, that is to achieve a fixed form. In its rendering he seems to intend that it move up to the octave tonic, through a standard arpeggio. He tries several patterns reiterating the c#" and descending to the a' or e', and he makes tentative moves toward extending the melody in the later passes through the strain. After a few minutes and four passes through the entire tune form, that is, twice for each strain, Emile stopped, leaving the second strain still unfinished (see Example 7b).
Example 7a. Emile composing at my request, beginning with first strain

\[\text{Example 7a. Emile composing at my request, beginning with first strain}\]
Creating a second strain is known traditionally as “turning” a tune, reflecting the fairly common practice of composition in which a traditional first strain serves as the initial idea. Because in this repertory of fiddle tunes the second strain will almost always “rhyme” (as Emile would say) by ending with the same phrase as the first, one of its potential components is thus partially decreed. As Emile crafts an entire tune, portions of it have at least been already essayed by the time he comes to experiment with the second strain.

I then prompted him to set this new “composition” to a dance rhythm. He immediately began at a typical dance tempo and meter which he maintained throughout. Both strains underwent variation, the high strain more so in the subsequent performance. The tune seems to have an extra cadential phrase, a relic of melodic units generated in the previous compositional phase but not fully integrated because of the uncompleted nature of this demonstration (see Example 7b).

Emile’s demonstration composing, while revealing, is somewhat distorted by the nature of its performance. Emile felt constrained to produce something on demand and quickly. As a result he did not seem to notice any striking characteristics in initial musical ideas. Rather, the first patterns which came to mind and fingers were employed without much evaluation and simply were extended to complete the strains. In the actual composition of Madeleine’s Glass of Lemon Pie, which Emile recorded for me in an unfinished form during the Christmas season of 1983, I found that he experimented with several more melodic ideas by varying their rhythm and length while crafting them to fit one another. The overall two-strain form provides a flexible envelope within which he may experiment but to the boundaries of which he must always return. The challenge is one of compressing musical ideas into a form of limited length rather than expanding them.

These examples reveal at the core of Emile’s compositional technique the process of melodizing, which I characterize as cyclic. It is initiated by a musical idea which is realized as a melodic motif played as an experiment. This is aurally monitored, evaluated, and subsequently modified accordingly. The eventual output is a fixed melodic unit. In practice, however, additional cycles are begun immediately following the initial experiment, so that experimentation is always within the structural parameters of the fiddle tune form. This form requires several motifs in sequence which must “suit” one another, requiring that they be evaluated together and adjusted to one another. Thus from the very start Emile is shaping a whole tune, and evaluation is happening at several levels. The new motif is evaluated itself, but also in relation to the initial motif, which itself is retroactively evaluated together with the new experiment.
This sequential experimentation may continue, but it is limited by the formal constraint requiring repetition. This bounding within a recursive framework distinguishes melodizing from improvisation per se. Even when intentionally searching out new possibilities, Emile plays naturally in the customary repetitive form of several related motifs he has learned from tradition, not in an endless stream of concatenated motifs. In practice, then, the melodizing process might be best envisioned as a spiral through time, the modification cycle for each motif overlapping throughout, continuing until evaluative standards are satisfied, modification ceases, and exact repetition is achieved. It seems, then, that Emile melodizes within a flexible...
overall framework provided by the fiddle tune form, which effectively limits
the number of motifs generated in sequence and directs the form, to some
extent, of his experimentation.

Crucial to this model of the compositional spiral is the genesis of melodic
motifs usable in the fiddle tune form. These units are created from musical
materials and along patterns with which Emile is familiar. It is this aspect of
the aural compositional process which seems most formulaic. The clearest
example of a formulaic approach is found in what Emile calls “rhyming” or
playing “rammages.” This is how he identifies his former practice of creating
new tunes, often while playing for dances, and “letting them go.”

EB: Oh well I’m going to tell you, that’s a long time that I’m composing. On the
first I didn’t put no name on.

CQ: How come?

EB: Well now I was tired of it, tired playing that one. You know, fed up. Like
you say, everybody gets tired of the same thing all the time. So, and then being
in a party or something, a time [Newfoundland dialect for a festive gathering],
I play something else eh? A rhyme eh?

CQ: What do you mean, a rhyme?

EB: You know, rhyme [mouth music sounds]. As long as it suit.

CQ: So you wouldn’t have composed it beforehand.

EB: No, no.

CQ: Just like making it up on the spot.

EB: Yes but it’s gone, it’s gone. Well I might play it maybe for a half and hour
or something like that, but it’s gone, it’s gone. So next time I goes back again
I might play it again, you know. I gets tired of that. Another one again. I compose
some rhyme again, everybody going full swing. Oh, you know, new eh? You
know, sound funny, you know. Good and eh, different. So people [get] up [to
dance] eh? (MUNFLA Quigley tape 30)

These comments suggest that Emile did on occasion create what he calls
“rhymes” while performing, continued to play them for a while, sometimes
remembering them for another occasion, and then forgot them when their
novelty had worn off, a process that certainly sounds improvisational.
Emile’s use of this term to describe these musical products, however, is
revealing: rhyme refers primarily to a structural principal of tunes, while
rhymes are not necessarily nor usually complete pieces in themselves. Emile
explains that a tune must rhyme, but by this he generally means that the notes of a melody must "sound together" in consonance. The concept of a rhyme thus refers to a melodic phrase constructed from one chordal fingering pattern. His performance of rhymes does not necessarily cohere into a fully elaborated tune.

That Emile's improvisational rhyming might produce the substance of fiddle tunes without their form is supported by a 1964 recording of Emile's performance at a local dance (MUNFLA Tape 64-15/C115). On this tape were several pieces that I did not recognize. When I played this tape back for Emile in order to record his comments he identified an especially odd-sounding one of these in a deprecating manner as "rammages," a local word meaning "bits and pieces" (Gerald Thomas, personal communication). Emile elaborated his commentary in English, describing the piece as "foolishness," "language you don't understand," "nonsense," and "like a hash" [a one-pot meal of many different foods]. The piece consists of his playing short melodic segments maintaining the same meter, but without ever shaping them into a repetitive form. These melodic motifs seem to be taken from other tunes in his repertoire.

Playing rammages is both formulaic and improvisatory, but it does not produce fiddle tunes. It is rather like externalizing one part of the compositional process, that is, a generative melodizing device, without bringing it to completion, by suspending the "formal" constraint for repetition of fixed strains. Because it occurs during dance accompaniment performance, however, the rhythm must be maintained. It is perhaps this which is most reminiscent of improvisation, for there too the composer/performer must evaluate his product instantaneously even while shaping the next phrase. There is no time for reflection and correction of the choices he has made; he must go on. The result is a restriction of experimentation and a reliance on known, fixed melodic material drawn from other repertoire items: phrase units which are combined and simply not repeated enough to coalesce and be recognized as a "tune." The result in Emile's rammages is both freer formal play employing the juxtaposition and combination of fixed melodic phrases drawn from other tunes, what Titon calls preforms, and paradoxically less inventive, again in Titon's terms (1978:96), because these preforms are not experimentally transformed as they are during Emile's melodizing in a conscious search for new note combinations.

Is this kind of spontaneous composition which Emile reports, and I observed as "rammages," improvisation? It would seem to be spontaneous composition in performance, as Nettl has characterized improvisation (1974), through variation using preforms, but occurring here in a type of tradition which hampers rather than facilitates the process. Invented on the spot from bits and pieces of other tunes without the opportunity to fit these
musical units into one another, performances do not achieve a repeatable form and are “let go,” like other improvisatory music which is notoriously difficult for performers to repeat once the moment has passed. The musical product is likely to seem fragmentary, both to Emile, who deprecated the recorded performance, and to knowledgable listeners within this tradition who try to perceive the “tune.” Emile’s occasional willingness to risk such performance in public is a mark of the the adventurous personality which supports his compositional activity.

By transferring this improvisatory technique out of the performance milieu to a private situation, however, Emile is able to harness it for his compositional ends, disciplining his melodic inventiveness to polish his creations into more finished and memorable form. Because Emile is not performing while composing he can reflect upon each possible choice as he tries it. He must, however, retain his experiments aurally since he has no means to preserve them for later consideration. Moreover, Emile’s primary means to externalize musical choices for consideration is to play them. Thus a composing session may sound like improvisation, for he plays continually throughout. This melodizing, however, is in the service of generating units which will fit together in the short repeatable melody of a fiddle tune, and is not a recognized performance form in and of itself.

Emile has recently discovered that the tape recorder holds the potential to change this limiting factor, and has begun to record works in progress on a machine given to him by his children (MUNFLA Quigley tapes 14 and 45). He does not actually work with the recorder on, however, preferring to wait until he has as close to a finished product as he can get in a particular sitting before recording. As a result the tape recorder has become more useful as a means to increase his compositional output by saving new tunes with much less effort than it takes to fix them in mind through repetition than it has as a true aid in the melodizing process.

While scholars have emphasized the range of variation among related melodies in fiddling tradition as a whole, for Emile and other performers of his musical community a fiddle tune exists as a unit repeatable in its performance with a limited degree of specific kinds of variation. Different musicians might acknowledge having different versions of the same tune, and indeed a single musician might know more than one such version, but these would be considered distinct entities. There is no provision for the gradual unfolding of melodic ideas in performance through variation, which is of rather limited extent and is cosmetic rather than progressive in character. The characteristics of this type of tradition, which would be described as dense and narrow by Nettl (1982:11–12), channel Emile’s desire to create new musical statements into composition through melodizing, rather than the more improvisatory rhyming in performances which produce rammages.
When Emile does attempt to create in public performance there is a disturbing period while the tune takes shape. As the audience perceives it, he does not seem to know what he is doing because the degree of variation from strict repetition becomes unacceptably high. Emile will often carry on through such uncertainty to a melodic line which he is able to repeat and which will serve. Taking a slightly known melody and transforming it into a fiddle tune in this manner is the most common form of composition in performance which I have observed. While he was performing at a bar one night, for example, a patron asked him to play Danny Boy. Not too sure of the melody, Emile gave it a try; but it was quickly transmuted into a fiddle tune rhythm and format. This process is much the same as that described as “taking a note off” another tune. In this case, however, the whole melody is so utilized rather than just a small portion of it.

Learning a new tune may engender a similar transformation. On one occasion I played a piece on the accordion and he joined with me in order to learn it. Once again the tune was soon changed and a new piece, dubbed Colin’s Missing Note, was created. After some experimentation it was transposed a fifth higher, by shifting the fingering over one string and conforming it to standard patterns of fiddle fingering (see Example 8).

This is an example of the “wholesale remaking” of melodies by traditional performers hypothesized by Norm and Anne Cohen as the

**Example 8. Colin’s Missing Note and its source tune**
traditionalizing process by which popular tunes have been given an oral-
traditional character (1973). It places the locus of this process firmly within
the musical cognition of the individual musician rather than a community
responsible for “re-creation.”

All these examples indicate that the result of Emile’s constant disassem-
bbling of his repertoire for re-use and reshaping is a tightly interwoven web
of compositions with countless interconnections at all constituent levels.
However, while Emile clearly draws upon melodic ideas familiar from his
repertoire of traditional tunes and previous compositions he is also trying to
develop novel tunes by “changing the notes,” as he would say, that is, by
transforming them. Typical transformations include rearranging the notes of
a triadic motif. One may compare, for example, Kibitzer’s Reel and Ron
Hynes’ (see Example 9). Or similarly, he can change the sequence of step
motion in melodic phrases constructed within the same tetrachordal “finger
area,” as is the case with portions of the Bandsaw, Skeleton, and Skipper’s
reels (see Example 10).

Changing rhythms is another way to create one tune from another, as
Brian Tobin’s has been from Martin White’s (see Example 11).

Once an initial melodic motif has been generated and noticed Emile
builds his fiddle tune primarily through repetition. Simple repetition is one
solution, as in the Breakwater Boys’ Breakdown. Repetition with slight
variation is common, often achieved through inversion of a portion of the
Example 9. Manipulation of triad-based motifs

a. Kibitzer’s Reel excerpt

b. Ron Hyne’s Reel excerpt

Example 10. Changing step motion in a tetrachordal “fingering-area”

a. Skeleton Reel excerpt

b. Bandsaw Reel excerpt

c. Skipper’s Reel excerpt

melodic phrase. Repetition at a neighboring pitch level in sequential manner is also frequent, as with one measure units in the first strain of Arriving to St. John’s, or two-measure segments in Bridgett’s Reel. Repetition with slight variation also operates to generate eight bar phrases composed of two four bar segments differing only in the final resolution, as in Reel de la Pistroli (see Example 12).

So closely tied to the process of experimentation through which Emile develops his initial musical ideas as to be virtually simultaneous is their evaluation and modification according to criteria applied at several different levels. Each melodic experiment is evaluated as a potential phrase of a finished tune. Subsequent phrases are evaluated as potential components of a strain. The whole is measured against the model of fiddle tune form within which experimentation has proceeded throughout the composing process. The evaluative principles in terms of which melodic experiments are
Example 11.

a. Martin White’s

A

\[\text{Music notation image}\]

B

\[\text{Music notation image}\]

b. Brian Tobin’s

A

\[\text{Music notation image}\]

B

\[\text{Music notation image}\]
Example 12. Expansion of melodic ideas by repetition

a. Breakwater Boy’s Breakdown excerpt

b. Bridgett’s Reel excerpt

c. Arriving to St. John’s excerpt

d. Reel de la Pistroli

measured are expressed by Emile as the need to find notes which “suit,” “balance,” and “rhyme.”

Notes which suit are limited to certain scales as realized within the basic fingering patterns “on” a relatively few tonic notes, commonly found in local tradition and partly dictated by fiddle tuning and fingering. Melodies are built around triad fingering patterns of arpeggios and scalar passages within this gambit and that of the tetrachord available within first position on each string. It is within the musical soundscapes defined by these parameters that Emile searches as he develops a new composition.28

When composing in the instances considered above, for example, Emile never moves outside the tonality defined by his initial choice of tonic and the associated fingering positions. Alternation between f#” and f” natural is a possibility he has recently discovered for changing the “sound” of a tune without affecting its fingering, thus making it easy to implement. Modulation to different tonics and their associated fingering patterns does not occur within single compositions, although it is found in medleys of tunes which
would have been created as distinct entities, that might have led from one to another, as did the components of the *Wedding Waltz* medley.

When explaining that the notes of a tune must rhyme, Emile is often referring to harmonic relationships with which he is familiar. Asked directly what it means when one [piece] rhymes with another piece, Emile responded with comments such as “there’s two sounds, but they still meets together, eh. They sounds together” (MUNFLA Quigley tape 20). Consonant intervals which he employs include unisons and octaves sounded with the open fiddle strings, fifths, to which the open strings are tuned, fourths as sounded by the first and second fingers on adjacent strings, and major thirds as sounded by the first and third fingers on adjacent strings. While searching for possibilities within the musical soundscape of a particular tonality, Emile is looking for notes and patterns which rhyme, that is, notes which he knows will “sound together.”

Exploring this topic on one occasion Emile suggested we play *Colin’s Missing Note* one string apart, one on the G, the other on the D. Emile’s expectation that our playing of a tune in parallel 5ths, essentially one string “apart,” would naturally “rhyme” indicates that his understanding of harmony is based on the practical experience of playing a solo violin, in which such parallel notes are consonant. His harmonic concepts have not been much elaborated through ensemble playing. He shows a relative lack of concern about the chords played by accompanists, for example. Most guitar players in his home community are familiar with only a basic country music-derived repertory of I, IV, and V major chords in D, G, A, C, and perhaps some seventh fingerings and the a and e minor, but probably not b or f# minor. Emile prefers such guitar accompaniment as his son Gordon provides, which often does not closely follow the potential chord changes implied in his melodies that young urban guitar players, more broadly influenced, tend to employ. What seems to matter most to Emile in accompaniment is rhythm, not harmonic complexity.

Rhyming also refers to consonance in sequence, probably based on his experience of using triad-based fingering patterns. Thus, the notes of a melody must suit by rhyming, particularly the melodic closure of a phrase which must rhyme by returning to the tonic. During one interview Emile suggested I compose something myself in the manner we had been discussing. I complied and we used my efforts as a talking point for further discussion. Asked what considerations should guide the continuation of my initial phrase he replied,

EB: You change it for to suit the sound, you come down now and suit the sound you got up there. Well the same like a person acting, he goes and he goes right, in place, and back again, eh? In music it’s the same thing, eh? Got to balance. It’s an answer, yes.
CQ: So like question and answer. Down here for one part, right? Would you then do, the next part you go higher up?

EB: You got to suit, you got to make it suit, yeah. (MUNFLA Quigley tape 20)

Where the melody “got to go,” as Emile points out, is back to its beginning. The concluding phrase must rhyme with the initial phrase by “bringing the note” back to the tonic. Possibilities for extension of the initial musical idea into higher ranges and back down are largely determined by the tonality established in the initial unit for “it got to suit what you got up there.” No matter where it goes, the melody must return to its initial phrase for it “got to balance” by providing an “answer” for the initial “question.” The final phrase of a strain in particular must rhyme by providing a melodic cadence. While so-called circular tunes are known in the tradition, Emile prefers a clear resolution to the tonic, as suggested by his efforts to rework one of his brother Joachim’s compositions which does not resolve to the tonic g’ at the end of the strain. Emile found this unsatisfactory and spent quite a while playing the piece over and over trying to find an interesting way to conclude on this note.

Despite the constraints imposed by his understanding of which notes will suit one another, however, Emile observed in conclusion, “But you [can] change it [the notes] in any kind of way, long as they suit,” perhaps responding to my seeming desire for guidance and rules of composition to follow. For Emile, composing in this manner is not like following a set of guidelines which are guaranteed to generate acceptable tunes. Rather he is searching for something new, trying to innovate within the parameters of acceptable musical organization by using the musical means at his disposal. Melodic ideas which balance are likewise those which suit and answer one another to provide a sense of completed form. Rhythm is also important to this sense of completeness. In the same discussion Emile explained,

EB: Well balance, sure. If you, you does this, you plays it, say [plays Colin’s Missing Note changing tempos at each phrase]. See you lose your balance there. If you jumps on that note you goes fast or you goes slow. If you don't keep time, well you lose the balance, you're just no good. Your reel's no good.

CQ: So it’s got to be even.

EB: Yes, yes, it’s got to be there. Yes, yes, yes. Sure if you plays the violin you got to keep time. You got to try to have it even. Or else you gonna go halfways then turn, speed faster. Speed faster if you want, but keep faster. Keep the same distance again. Right? Don't go faster, jump slow again, something like that, if the reel or the jig or the waltz don't suit. It gotta suit. It gotta balance. It gotta go, you know?
Indeed, a good tune not only “gotta go,”

It gotta fly, like a bird. It gotta fly, nice. Yeah. (MUNFLA Quigley tape 20)

Not surprisingly for a musician whose musical forms serve primarily as dance accompaniment, rhythm emerges from Emile’s comments as the paramount musical value. His brief comments on the quality of different tunes most frequently make reference to their “going good,” having a “good beat,” so that “it balance good” (MUNFLA Quigley tape 8).

As he explores different combinations of notes Emile listens for possible melodic units which balance well. In his use of the tape recorder as a composing aid this process is externalized. He explains in the following conversation that after recording “all kind of foolishness,” that is, unformed musical ideas,

EB: I listens to it and if I picks any sense in it so, I do something with it. And if there's no sense in it, well if there's no sense in it for me, there's no sense in it [laugh]. . . . It’s the balance, you see? Anything at all, down there [referring to the lower range of notes on the G string, where I was attempting to compose something in his manner].

CQ: Balance is the the thing. It’s got to have the right—

EB: Yeah, yes.

CQ: —beat to it.

EB: Yes. Any kind of air, that's how you got to work it. (MUNFLA Quigley tape 49)

In other words, melodic phrases must be clearly defined within the meter. This usually means a closed melodic phrase of two 2/2 or 6/8 meter measures. While coincidence of melodic markers of closure with the metrical frame is typical, occasional discrepancies are found, most commonly involving added or dropped beats which do not disturb the basic pulse. Some tunes seem to have extra phrases, producing longer strains than usual. This would seem to result from genesis during the melodizing process of more material than needed for standard form, as in the case of the composition created on demand which I discussed above.

To summarize components of the compositional sequence considered thus far, the core process of development from an initial musical idea is one of continuous experimentation, evaluation and modification. It may operate on initial melodic units ranging from entire tunes and strains, through phrases, to short melodic fragments. Whatever the size of the unit with which he begins, Emile proceeds to experiment by playing within a loose fiddle
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tune template delimited by its formal constraints. The number of potential musical units with which he can experiment at one time is limited by the need for repetition which requires that they be held in short term memory as they are modified in light of their evaluation. Individual phrase units are evaluated for their qualities of balance and rhyme. This process may take from a few minutes to a couple of days. It may seem to occur spontaneously and its processes appear unconscious or it may be quite consciously directed.

This process of melodizing is facilitated and directed, it is clear, by relatively flexible schemata. These operate at all constituent levels, providing the standard length and shape of entire tunes and strains as well as possible melodic material. Fingering patterns play an especially important role in guiding choices at the smaller phrase levels. The first strains of Kibitzer's Reel and Ron Hynes', for example, clearly contain units constructed within the same fingering patterns (see Example 9, above). The most common of these would be appropriate within only a few tonalities, thus further limiting choices easily “at hand,” to borrow David Sudnow's diction (1978). This multi-level use of schemata constrains Emile's choices within each tonality, producing a repertoire with a high level of similarity and consistency among and between its different items.

Such dependence on schemata for guiding creative thinking is generally associated with models of improvisation in music and folklore. Schemata which are able to both provide “ready-made” units and serve as plans for exploratory thinking, however, have been identified as an important component of creative work in general (Perkins 1981). Their use need not imply that the thinker is any less inventive or interested in producing and perfecting useful (that is, creative) innovations within whatever realm of operation. Indeed, their use seems to accompany the work of especially prolific producers, whose “fluency” of production depends in part on their having a large repertoire of unconscious units and patterns on which to draw. These schemata provide mental structures which “allow a person to perceive or act effectively by anticipating the organization of what the person apprehends or does, so that the person need not function as much from scratch” (ibid.:161-74). Emile's compositional practice is clearly directed to innovative goals while strongly reliant on schemata. From the creator's viewpoint schemata are less constraints on his imagination than they are its facilitators, providing possibilities for exploration by “pre-selecting,” in Emile's case for certain melodic “sounds” known to be fruitful.

This analysis would seem to account for both the traditionality of Emile's compositions and their originality. A more radical change in form has also been produced by Emile, however, through a kind of long-term composition conducive to innovation in which novel elements progressively accumulate.
In recent years the most distinctive pieces in his repertoire have become short “suites” which begin in a relatively free-rhythmic format, which sounds rather formless to a traditional ear, before being given a dance pulse and rhythm. The first of these was Roaming Scott, composed in 1977 or 1978 and recorded on Emile’s Dream (Benoit 1979). Cast in 2/2 meter, it was played more slowly than dance tempo and though having two strains, they were of non-standard length (see Example 13). As he explains its genesis now, it was “something that I composed” and “was a long time playing it by myself and I was kind of shy to play it in public.” Indeed, “even I wouldn’t play it to my family.” When requested, however, he did play it for a visitor from St. John’s, typical of the urban revival musicians who were taking an interest in his music at this time.

“By gosh,” he said, “that’s good. That sounds good. Play it again!” So I played it again . . . “Well,” he says, “that’s beautiful! Gee I love that.” So, good enough. I played it. So, I kept on then and I wasn’t shy no more (quoted in Thomas 1982:12).

Example 13. Roaming Scott, original version

The tune, a product of the kind of “wandering” within a tonality already examined, was one which caught Emile’s fancy, but which was not immediately cast into dance rhythm. He expected that this would not be well received by his listeners and so kept it largely to himself. The visiting Scott who changed his mind was Scott Swinden, a geologist from St. John’s working on the west coast. An accomplished bluegrass and old-time musician on the guitar and mandolin, he often sought out traditional
musicians with whom to socialize while “in the field.” He enjoyed this tune and encouraged Emile to perform it. Emile quickly discovered that it was well received by audiences in the concert situations in which he increasingly began to find himself.

During this period and the years immediately following, Emile’s compositional activity increased and the associated process of free-rhythmic “searching” became more self-conscious. At the same time he was exposed to arrangements of fiddle tunes and songs into complex medleys by the contemporary folk ensembles, such as Figgy Duff, with whom he worked and shared many stages. These factors apparently combined to produce conditions favorable to experiments such as Roaming Scott. At first, however, he remained unsure of their value, perhaps not having internalized the new aesthetics underlying this form, aesthetics tailored more to the concert stage than the dance hall or “kitchen rackett.” Indeed, I have noted negative responses from some in his local milieu, who considered the non-dance rhythm sections to be musically nonsensical. The value of the new form was confirmed by positive audience response to Roaming Scott, significantly brought from outside the traditional milieu. Encouraged, Emile began to explore further the possibilities of this new musical form, and Roaming Scott provided a convenient starting place. Continued experimentation produced the altered and extended Welcome to Holiday Inn by 1981, which he recorded on Ça Vient du Tchoeur/It Comes from the Heart (Benoit 1982).

In Welcome to Holiday Inn the original Roaming Scott tune appears as the first “piece,” as Emile describes it, of the new composition, but it has been slowed and incorporates new trills and slurs (see Example 14).

**Example 14. Comparable portions of Roaming Scott and Welcome**

**a. Roaming Scott**

\[ \text{dotted eighth notes} \quad \text{dotted eighth notes} \]

**b. Welcome**

\[ \text{rit.} \quad \text{rit.} \]

The second “piece” is further slowed and played more freely. It employs musical material from the first strain, taking one-bar units and altering them somewhat, changing the melodic contour. Its second strain likewise follows its predecessor, but compresses it by not repeating units from the first strain.
This section also experiments with more alternation between f#" and f" natural intonations and a stronger use of c natural than in the first section. The third piece shifts into dance tempo and uses c natural throughout, employing units from the first strain of the second piece, and altering those of its second strain further in this process. The entire composition has the character of a musical train of thought, recording the process of Emile's exploration of possible ways to change "the notes" and "sound" of his original Roaming Scott (see Example 15).

The new composition, a medley of changing tempos and shifting tonality unlike anything Emile had composed previously, was titled when Emile again encountered Scott at the Holiday Inn in Corner Brook, where he played it for him. Its success inaugurated a new genre of tunes in this form including Madeleine's Glass of Lemon Pie and medleys such as the Wedding Waltz.

For many years Emile appears to have acted relatively unselfconsciously, aiming primarily for melodic innovation within aesthetic norms closely tied to dancing, by composing in a formulaic manner approaching that of improvisation. Further innovations occurred as the compositional process came under more conscious control when he began to take this activity more seriously in response to both external and internal stimuli. Constraints on form and tonality, consciously loosened to allow for melodic experimentation, became subject to alteration themselves. A new form consisting of medleys of related melodies in changing meters, tempos, and tonalities was developed which seems to preserve stages, previously less conscious, in the compositional process. Steps along the path of musical thought were externalized and preserved in the final composition. While the resulting form seems to have been discovered by Emile for himself, its flowering was facilitated by a shift in the values and performance settings of his musical milieu which encouraged its development.

The generative schemata with which Emile explores melodic possibilities are those he learned from tradition and has discovered himself. Their manifestation in his active repertoire, and realization through performance, are conditioned, however, by situational factors. These act not only to restrain radical departures from the norm, but may also encourage innovation. Emile's musical communities have played an active role in shaping his creative product, but not in quite the usual sense of "selecting" from among slight individual variations that which suits popular taste (Bronson 1969:149, discussing Sharp 1965 [1907]).

The communal forces acting within the compositional process are more akin to the principle of "continuity" which exerts "flexible control" over variation resulting in "relative stability" postulated by Bronson.
Example 15. *Roaming Scott, Welcome to the Holiday Inn*

I

```
\begin{music}
\newclef {treble}
\\end{music}
```

II

```
\begin{music}
\newclef {treble}
\\end{music}
```

III

```
\begin{music}
\newclef {treble}
\\end{music}
```
The variations of individual singers occur within the tradition, that is to say, in a habit of musical thought, the product of minds steeped in an idiomatic continuity. They are in no danger of radical departures from the traditional norm, because such alterations as occur to these minds are confined to the area of legitimate change. (Bronson 1969:150)

But Bronson underestimates the creative element in traditional musical expression, distinguishing between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” deviations,

not subtly but by a crude separation of arbitrary departures (willful substitutions, groping restorations, conscious creations) from such alternative or variant phrasings as are exemplified in successive renderings of a stanza or song by the same singer. The latter are “legitimate,” and they move within, and activate, the genuinely positive and recreative part of tradition. They are, we may infer, the all-but unconscious expression of true musical instinct steeped in traditional habits of musical thought. (Bronson 1969:146)

Here Bronson lapses into a stereotype of the unconscious folk performer. My analysis shows that it is just such intentional acts which he brands as illegitimate which characterize the creative process in Emile’s “traditional habits of musical thought.” While Emile is an unusually prolific composer in his traditional community context, his compositional activity is not anomalous, as almost all local musicians claim to have made at least a few of their own tunes. It is because Emile is both so clearly steeped in the knowledge of his musical tradition and also able to provide so many instances of composition at work that I have been able to examine the elusive generative processes of tradition in some detail. I expect that my conclusions will prove generally applicable to most traditional fiddling and perhaps apt for other such types of tradition as well.

This account of Emile’s compositional process, along with other more recent tune studies (such as Goertzen 1983; Cowdery 1984), challenges the adequacy of the tune family concept, one of the few theories we have to explain the processes of tune genesis in the type of tradition represented by Emile’s repertoire, to fully account for the contributions of creative musicians to their tradition. The musical elements of his compositions are so densely interconnected that its family trees would most probably emerge as an impossibly tangled growth. This may be due to a more consciously manipulative attitude toward musical materials held by instrumentalists than singers, with whose repertoire the theory was elaborated (Goertzen 1983:113). However, Cowdery has found similar complex interconnections within Irish language singing tradition (1984). The more dynamic relational principles of melodic outlining, conjoining, and recombining which he proposes for the Irish tradition, based on examination of both vocal and instrumental repertoire, were developed to
show that Irish tunes are composed and developed in relation to other tunes in
delible ways, creating a changing repertory of tunes which all 'sound right';
[that] this changing repertory is certainly generative in itself . . . [and that] Irish
traditional musicians operate in a world of melodic potential. (Cowdery
1990:123)

These concepts and the weighted transcription model he employs to
portray a tune group are also appropriate to describe many of the
relationships within Emile's repertoire. However, cataloguing all the routes
of variation available to Emile, which might provide a map delineating strong
and weak tune relationships, would likely be a never-ending task for, in a
sense, such routes are what Emile seeks to discover and follow himself. My
examination of compositional practice shows Cowdery's concepts of tune
relationships at work in the processes which produce them, but these
processes also include intentionally innovative strategies not so well
accounted for by Cowdery's analysis.

The transformational potential within the tradition enables musicians
like Emile to meet the challenges of change alluded to in my discussion of
the innovations associated with Roaming Scott (cf. Hopkins 1976). This
potential for transforming allows such a piece to be both traditional and
innovative at the same time. Thus the creative process of the individual
composer becomes the “primary alembic” of tradition (Ives 1979:423), rather
than the “alchemy of communal reinterpretation,” as McCullough has
restated the more conventional formulation of communal-re-creation (Barry
1933), in reference to the compositions of Irish fiddler Ed Reavy, which, for
him, “become traditional when . . . accepted by traditional players and
subjected to the process of variation” (McCullough 1979:10–11).

In this analysis I have tried to develop a perspective which takes fuller
account of individual musical action than previous scholarship on related
material. This is an emphasis still quite recent in ethnomusicology and
increasingly at the center of attention in many of the humanistic sciences
(Rice 1987; and respondents Harwood 1987; Koskoff 1987; and especially
Seeger 1987). Although I have maintained a narrow focus on musical
processes here, there are of necessity many hints at so-called extra-musical
psychological and social factors with which these are inextricably bound
up.32 Musical tradition does not exist in a pristine cognitive isolation. A too-
limited focus of inquiry on the relationships among musical materials
abstracted from their context of use risks overlooking the lived experience
of music-making which gives it meaning. A perspective emphasizing musical
process and practice, messy and encumbered as these are, offers more
potential as a means to assess and appreciate the value of music in society
and culture in terms of the human experiences involved in its creation; and
this is the inspirational mission which Blacking characterized as the goal of
ethnomusicological research (Blacking 1973:50, 53).
Notes

1. I wish to thank my teachers and colleagues Gerald Thomas at Memorial University of Newfoundland and James Porter at the University of California, Los Angeles for their help and comments. Fellowship support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada at the Centre d'Études Franco-Terreneuviens at M.U.N. was instrumental during the analysis and writing-up of my fieldwork data. The archivist and staff of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) have always been generous with their assistance. Most of all I wish to thank Emile Benoit and his family for their unstinting hospitality and assistance without which this study would not have been possible.

2. These types of publications have become far too numerous to cite here. Although now somewhat out of date, Hickerson and Holzberg's "Bibliography of Fiddling, Fiddle Tunes, and Related Dance Tune Collections in North America" remains a useful source (1974). Far more comprehensive is Mendelson's "Bibliography of Fiddling in North America" (1975–77). Miller's reference guide to Folk Music in America annotates a variety of popular and scholarly sources concerning the fiddle (1986:216–22). The Hogans' introduction to "Canadian fiddle culture" includes a brief survey of recordings along with lists of festivals and fiddlers' associations (1977). Rosenberg provides a preliminary bibliography of the many tune books which are published in Canada, often by the fiddlers themselves (1980). The production of fiddle literature continues and the bibliographies of the more recent scholarly studies cited in my discussion should be consulted for up-to-date references. Despite the large number of folksong collections from Newfoundland, save for a few dance tunes published by Karpeles (1931 and 1970[1959]:258) and Geenleaf and Mansfield (1933:375–81), Russell's collection of tunes learned from Rufus Guinchard and his notations in the notes to a collection of Emile Benoit's compositions and stories are the only sources for Newfoundland instrumental music (Russell 1982; Thomas 1982). However, many commercial recordings of Newfoundland dance music have been released; Music from French Newfoundland documents other instrumentalists in Emile's musical milieu (Pigeon Inlet Productions LP PIP 734). The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive maintains a nearly complete collection of commercial releases in Newfoundland in addition to their extensive field recordings, of which I have partially indexed the accordion and fiddle collections. Earl Spielman conducted a number of interviews with fiddlers in the vicinity of St. John's, which have been useful in gaining a broader picture of fiddling traditions throughout Newfoundland (MUNFLA Ms. 75–307). Emile Benoit, the fiddler discussed herein, is represented on several LP discs and films (Benoit 1979; 1980a with descriptive notes by James Horby; 1980b with commentary by Gerald Thomas; 1982, with notes by Thomas).

3. Among the scholarly overviews of fiddling in North America, Burman-Hall (1984), which integrates observations from several of her earlier studies, provides the fullest easily accessible account. Blaustein's study of the Old Time Fiddlers' Association movement also covers the historical background of fiddling in North America quite thoroughly (1975:6–62). Feintuch 1983b covers much the same ground in a very condensed manner. Goertzen's geographic study of Billy in the Low Ground is quite revealing of historical continuity and change in the case of a tune with Scottish origins. Its widespread occurrence in North America allows him to characterize various style periods and areas (1983, 1985). Wells's social history of fiddling in New England, along with recorded examples of various styles which have influenced fiddling in this area, is particularly useful because some of these same influences, especially those of Cape Breton and Québec, have been felt in French-Newfoundland (1978). The great variety of Canadian fiddling has not been adequately surveyed in print. Gibbons provides a range of representative transcribed selections in Folk Fiddling in Canada: A Sampling (1981). He has also reported on the province of British Columbia (1982), while Proctor and Bégin present research from Ontario (Bégin 1985; Proctor 1963). Further samplings are to be found in a special fiddle issue of the Canadian Folk Music Bulletin (1985). Ornstein provides a brief overview of the study, history, and repertory of fiddling in Québec (1982). Trudel provides a historical introduction and detailed analysis of one family's fiddle and dance traditions...
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(Trudel 1977a, 1977b). Joyal 1989 includes extensive bibliography, discography and filmography. Begin 1981 presents transcribed and analyzed repertory from Jean Carrignan, one of Québec’s best known and virtuosic fiddlers. The recording of Cape Breton fiddling on commercial LP disc has been thoroughly examined by McKinnon, who provides extensive discography and tune annotations along with a narrative history of this recording genre and consideration of its effect on tradition (1989). The notes accompanying the Topic LP disc Cape Breton Scottish Violin and Dunlay’s introduction to her tune collection incorporate stylistic descriptions (Shaw 1978; Dunlay 1986). Garrison 1985 provides more information about the social aspects of fiddling in Cape Breton, as, in a brief and impressionistic manner, do the album notes to Cape Breton fiddler Joe Cormier’s recording of The Dances Down Here (Cormier 1971). Although directed to the enthusiast more than the scholar, The Cape Breton Fiddler provides a valuable compendium of information (MacGillivray 1981). The closely related fiddling tradition of neighboring Prince Edward Island has been studied by Hornby (1983, 1985, 1990). There has been little published scholarship on instrumental music and fiddling in Newfoundland other than my own (Quigley 1985, 1988, and 1990); unpublished studies include Swackhammer 1979. British Isles fiddling in general is too large a subject area to provide even a bibliographic gloss here, but the reader will find I make many references to significant works with particular relevance to my specific research questions. Porter 1989 is an up-to-date and comprehensive bibliographic guide.

4. Emile generally presents himself on a first-name basis in his public performance personae and I will follow that practice in my references to him in this paper.

5. Local terminology for these rhythms, most widely called jigs and reels, is not nearly so simple or neatly codified. Indeed throughout much of Newfoundland any tune with a slower tempo might be called a waltz (Quigley 1985:26–27). A full exploration of Emile’s ethnotheory can be found in Quigley 1987:394–473; for a discussion of dance and music terminology elsewhere in Newfoundland, see Quigley 1985:16–18. One finds reels, duple simple in rhythm, generally notated in 2/2, 2/4, 4/4 meter. I have sometimes used 2/4 for Emile’s reels because it allows easily readable representation of a basic pulse subdivided into combinations of two and four subdivisions, as the accompanying foot tapping patterns suggest is the rhythmic structure; sometimes 2/2 because the 2/4 meter bar lines do not visually suggest the melodic motifs; 2/4 meter bars employing sixteenth-note divisions generally appear too cluttered to my eye. What matters to Emile is the sense of rhythm, a duple organization of pulse, sub-divided into two and four divisions, generally carrying melodic motifs and phrases of two and four pulses. My notations are a compromise among the various options to present a visually accessible and suggestive representation of a musical idea.

6. Emile’s tunes on D and G often have a strong pentatonic character, perhaps reflecting a preference for first and third fingering combinations, as is suggested by Peter Cooke for the Shetland Isles repertory (1986:102). Emile and other fiddlers are able to play in other keys, such as F and B flat, but do so only occasionally. In other regions this may be more common, but is often an aspect of individual preference. Linda Burman-Hall also mentions E, a key common among bluegrass influenced fiddlers, but which I have never encountered among musicians on the Port-au-Port (1984:67–68).

7. Nettl’s comments on “Types of Tradition and Transmission” have addressed the kind of repertoire characterization I am making here (1982).

8. This description briefly summarizes a detailed examination of traditional norms of rhythm, tonality, form, and technique in Emile’s repertory (Quigley 1987:406–73).

9. While fiddle tune collections are legion, few provide even minimal scholarly apparatus. Tune collections are, in general, addressed to a popular audience primarily interested in them as sources for new repertory. Tunes are given in single versions of presumably heavily edited skeletal notation without accompanying notes; very little information is provided about the performers or the collectors. I have not included these sources in these bibliographical asides, although because this “popular” model is so pervasive students of fiddle tradition must perforse make what cautious use they can of all the sources available. Rosenberg has surveyed these
publications in Canada (Rosenberg 1980). Goertzen has explored issues in the use of historical collections (1982). Bayard's _Dance to the Fiddle, March to the Fife_ (1982) and Jabbour's notes which accompany the Library of Congress LP disc, _American Fiddle Tunes from the Archive of Folksong_ (1971) provide the best models for scholarly annotation of tune collections, while Christeson's _Old-Time Fiddler's Repertory, Volumes 1 and 2_ (1973, 1984) strike a fairly successful middle-ground. Attention to the social contexts of fiddling is sometimes found in collections, such as the instructional _Learning the Fiddler's Ways_ (Guntharp 1980). Fleischauer and Jabbour's study of the Hammons family's traditions (1973), which includes fiddling among other musical forms and genres, is perhaps the best example of this integration in a recorded collection. _The Northern Fiddler_ (Feldman and O'Doherty 1979), referring to Northern Ireland, is unusual and significant for its reflexive consideration of the role of the collectors themselves in creating the current social context for the fiddling they record.

10. Samuel Bayard initiated these concerns with his pioneering collection _Hill Country Tunes_ and subsequent studies of fiddling in Pennsylvania and West Virginia (1939, 1950; 1951, 1954, 1956, 1957, 1966, 1969[1944], 1982). In the first systematic large scale comparative study of fiddling in the American South, Burman-Hall identified four major American styles (1975:56–62), while at much the same time Spielman explored a wider geographical range of comparison including Canada, the Northeast, and Midwest United States (Spielman 1975). Unfortunately, he identifies only rather gross distinctions among Scottish, Irish, French, and “old time” contest styles in Canada. Apart from some mention of the Canadian French, these surveys dealt primarily with Anglo-American traditions. Researchers have since begun to address a wider range of North American fiddling traditions including those of Native- and African-Americans (Bennet 1985; Lederman 1985; Taylor 1987; Wolfe 1989; Zwigoff 1991). Reiner and Anick's _Old Time Fiddling Across America_, which includes a useful discography, is a good example of this growing scope as represented in instructional literature. They comment on the emergence of three super-styles in old-time fiddling, “Texas, Southern, and New England/Canadian” (1989:15), continuing a discussion of the effect of the old-time fiddling revival on fiddle style begun by Blaustein (1972) and Hicks (1972). The counterbalancing persistence of distinctive local traditions despite these processes of amalgamation and homogenization has not been addressed in print to my knowledge. Other recent works incorporate extensive social historical analyses (Bronner 1987; Cauthen 1989; Wiggins 1987).

11. These perspectives are particularly predominant in the major scholarship on fiddling style already mentioned, such as Burman-Hall 1968, 1973, 1975, and 1978, Goertzen 1983 and 1985, and Spielman 1972, 1975, and are even found in studies which acknowledge the active role of particular musicians in giving the tradition its character and take more account of performance context, such as Blaustein 1975, Burman-Hall 1984, Feintuch 1975, 1983a, and 1984–85, Feldman and O'Doherty 1979, Joyal 1980, O’Suilleabháin 1987, and Cowdery 1990.

12. While Emile is quite unusual in the degree of his compositional activity, most instrumentalists in his community have a few pieces of their own making. Emile’s learning process, however, has been entirely traditional (Quigley 1987:102–31), his compositions are generally accepted, and he is widely acknowledged as having mastery of the tradition. Moreover, the phenomenon of a few particular fiddlers as prolific composers may be typical and has been documented within closely related traditions. Cape Breton’s Dan R. MacDonald (Cameron 1985), and the Irish American fiddler Ed Reavy (Reavy 1971), are good examples of this phenomenon.

13. I have documented this development in his career (1987:151–62). Thomas 1981 and Narvaez 1982 characterize the musical dimensions of Newfoundland’s cultural revitalization at that time. That examination of the most innovative and creative participants in a tradition is a valuable means of exploring the “flexible limits” of tradition has been noted by Owen (1980:59).

14. The composition of _Madeleine’s Glass of Lemon Pie_ is so examined in Quigley 1990, using my recordings as the aural equivalent of preserved manuscripts in the study of European art composers (cf. Sloboda 1985:102).

15. One problem with using composers’ own accounts of their methods as source data, noted by John Sloboda, is that they may tend to explain what they believe should have happened
rather than what they actually did (1985:121–22, citing Nisbet and Wilson 1977). Since the dynamics of this process are linked to what may or may not be easily recalled (Sloboda 1985:122, citing Ericsson and Simon 1980), it would seem that the more remote the actual experience the more likely the account is to be so conditioned by expectations. These observations are part of his case for using what cognitive psychologists term “protocols,” a subject’s introspective comments recorded simultaneously with the process being examined, rather than their recollections as data. From an ethnomusicological or folkloristic perspective, however, such recollections and narrative accounts, strongly shaped by the informant’s beliefs, can be crucial for the discovery of how composing is seen within the musical system itself.

17. Sloboda identifies similar methods of inquiry used by cognitive psychologists of music, although in reference to either written composition or improvisation. He suggests such “playback” of recorded performance as a method of elicitation because the nature of the improvisational process precludes recording a simultaneous protocol (1985:102–3).

18. Improvisation has been defined in a variety of ways which are effectively reviewed by Smith (1983:16–34). He argues that there is a lack of terminology to describe the relationship between improvisation and recreative processes in the performance of music transmitted person-to-person and retained through memory which “reflects the lack of a clear understanding as to how the process differs from improvisation and from the written composition of music” (ibid.: 34–35). L’Improvisation dans les musiques de tradition orale provides the most complete consideration of this subject, offering many particular studies and an overview of its conceptualization (Lortat-Jacob 1987). The Nineteenth Yearbook for Traditional Music (1987) likewise brings together a number of articles around the theme of “creativity, particularly the process of improvisation” (Trimillos 1987: xi). Common to most uses of the term is the concept of music which is composed during performance. This is certainly not true of all music which is not notated, as was emphasized by Bruno Nettl at a period when “primitive” music was widely viewed in this manner (1954: 82).

19. These might be placed at the far ends of a spectrum ranging between rapid and slow composition, following Nettl 1974.

20. In the context of blues guitar playing, Titon also sees variation as a type of improvisation which employs “preforms,” small memorized musical building blocks, “joined in varying combinations” in performance (Titon 1978:91). Variation, in this sense, may be combined with invention, in which “novel sound sequences” are formed “at the moment of performance by applying principles of blues melody construction to the smallest unit, the individual tone, interval, or chord” (ibid.:96). Emile’s use of pre-existing melodic material as a springboard for invention and the subsequent re-use of the newly formed motifs as new points of departure suggests less of a dichotomy between the two processes. Perhaps the crucial difference in these cases is that Emile is not performing while composing, allowing for extended experimentation and reworking of the preforms, rather than their on-the-spot assembly. When he does come closer to improvisatory composition in performance, he does seem to employ the preforms at his command more in the manner described by Titon.

21. Although Burman-Hall adopts this perspective, analyzing variation as resulting from different foreground realizations of underlying deep tune structures (1978), she has noted this problem: “The difficulties of establishing boundaries to a tune family . . . demonstrate the high degree of cross-influence exerted from within the tradition. This cross-influence has caused convergence as well as divergence in the repertory” (1973:754). Goertzeln explains changes in versions of the tune Billy in the Low Ground in Britain and America since the eighteenth century largely in terms of variation in patterns of performance occasion, noting in conclusion that the adequacy of the tune family concept for describing the relationships among the tunes in this repertoire has not been demonstrated and suggests further study of the processes of variation is needed (Goertzen 1983:191). Most recently Cowdery challenges its applicability to the sean-nós songs and dance tunes—the melodic tradition—of Ireland (1984; 1990:93).

22. My impression from other conversations is that the insistent rhythm of the truck’s engine was also significant. Other examples of rhythmic mechanical sounds are among the few examples of similar accounts in the literature. Peter Cooke describes “some monotonous
rhythm” as an important source of inspiration for tune composition in the Shetland Isles, citing the instance of an “old BMB single cylinder six-horse engine” (1986:94). Rhythmic sounds found in nature are mentioned by Irish fiddler John Doherty as an important source of inspiration for the “old musicians”: “The old musicians in them days, they would take the music from anything. They would take music from the sound of the sea, or they would go alongside of the river at the time of the flood and they would take music from that” (Feldman and O’Doherty 1979:50).

A longer narrative follows in which the sound of a galloping horse’s hoofs, occasioned by an otherworldly encounter, inspired a reel which commemorated the experience. Accounts of natural sounds and supernatural experiences as the inspirations for tune creation are typical in Irish tradition (Jardine 1981, cited in Cooke 1986:95, 153). Such accounts of musical inspiration drawn from the environmental soundscape are found in other musical genres as well. Titon cites cases from blues performers, interpreting this as part of their role in giving voice to universal “truths” and shared “human patterns” which “affect” the singer who “translates” the experience in a public manner (Titon 1984:139–40).

23. Composition from preexisting elements in liturgical chant has been called centonization (Chew 1980). In this scholarship an original emphasis on distinguishing traditional formulae and original material has now given way to “attention to the principles underlying the music” (ibid.:57). Leo Treitler has been most influential in this shift, arguing that the presence of formulaic units in music termed “centonate” result from oral transmission (1981). Jack Bevil applies this analytic approach to Anglo-American folk song melody (1984). All these studies, however, have examined the formulaic character of large repertoires of melody rather than the practice of particular musicians. My work with Emile would suggest that use of pre-existing melodic units is only one strategy for oral composition. The recurrent musical motifs which Emile draws upon, for example, serve primarily as a starting place for imaginative transformation, rather than as a restrictive constraint on where he may go and what he may use. Indeed, the constraints imposed by traditional aesthetic norms must be temporarily lifted to allow imaginative freedom for the generation of new compositions.


25. This observation is born out by my case study of the composition of Madeleine’s Glass of Lemon Pie (1990).

26. This process is illustrated by transcriptions of Emile’s melodizing in composing Madeleine’s Glass of Lemon Pie (Quigley 1990).

27. I use Titon’s term preform because it can encompass pre-existing musical units of varying size and type, whereas I have used phrase and motif here to suggest the components of a strain (Titon 1978).

28. I recognize that this is not the usage of the term soundscape as coined by R. Murray Schafer (1977), who applies it to environmental sounds, but I nevertheless find it apt here, to describe possible musical routes suggested by compositional moves.

29. A. B. Lord’s Singer of Tales, which demonstrates that the oral composers of epic narratives were able to achieve their fluency through the use of formulaic language and larger stereotyped units, is the seminal work in folklore developing this theoretical perspective (Lord 1970[1960]). Sloboda argues that “what distinguishes improvisation from composition is primarily the pre-existence of a large set of formal constraints which comprise a ‘blueprint’ or ‘skeleton’ for the improvisation,” while “the keynote of the compositional process seems to be the moulding and perfecting of musical ideas. Although an idea may come spontaneously, unbidden, and instantaneously, its subsequent development may take years” (Sloboda 1985:138–39).

30. Titon has similarly extended his concept of preforms to address spontaneous behavior in language and daily life, as well as music (Titon 1992:140–48; 1988:278–88).

31. I have modified Thomas’ phonetic transcription style, meant to convey the language as spoken, while remaining true to the content, as it is somewhat inconsistent with my own practice (cf. Thomas 1983:187–93).
32. I have explored the *musical worldview* which supports Emile in his creative activity elsewhere (1988), but a fuller consideration, particularly of the social dimensions of compositional practice, must, unfortunately, await another occasion.

**References**


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Archival Sources Cited
(Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive)
Tapes 64-15/C115-117. Recorded on 15 August 1964 by John A. Widdowson in Lourdes and Black Duck Brook, Newfoundland. Emile Benoit performing along with friends and family at a dance and later party.
Quigley Tape 14. A copy of Emile's practice tape from June 1984, which he made during a visit
to his daughter's home in Amherst, Massachusetts. Contains his newest compositions as
well as some old pieces he remembered and "proto-pieces."
Quigley Tape 17. Recorded at the Sound Symposium in St. John's on 16 July 1984. Emile
performing for a small audience with other musicians taking turns in a "workshop" format.
interview of several hours length in which I pressed Emile to elaborate on the concepts of
balance and rhyme.
Quigley Tape 30. Recorded on 22 December 1983 at Gerald Thomas's home in Torbay. Contains
tunes and discussion of composition technique.
Quigley Tape 45. Recorded on 10 March 1985 at Emile Benoit's home in Black Duck Brook.
An interview and copy of his then current practice tape.
Quigley Tape 46. Recorded on 10 March 1985 at Emile Benoit's home in Black Duck Brook.
An interview.
Quigley Tape 49. Recorded 22 March 1985 at Gerald Thomas's home in Torbay. Made while
videotaping.
Ms. 75–307. Transcripts of interviews with several fiddlers recorded by Earl Spielman in the St.
John's area.