

An Important (and Long-Overdue) Supplement to *An Appalachian Collection*

Since *An Appalachian Collection* was first published in 2008, it has gone out of stock three times, in part due to its relative popularity outpacing smaller printings. But the primary culprit for the gaps between availability, I confess, is that shortly after the original publication, I began wishing I'd done things a bit differently. In fact, as the years have gone by, I've been wanting to overhaul several aspects of the collection, and use the pressure of those asking for an out-of-stock item to bring a second, revised edition to completion. It would be a fairly hefty undertaking, and newer projects and other distractions keep taking precedence (for now).

As a stopgap, this supplement was put together to remedy some of the more glaring issues printed in the original tune book. The historical, informational amendments, below, should be easy enough to absorb and retain, and may in fact already be known to you. But the musical adjustments will likely be more challenging to adopt and employ consistently, especially for those pipers who have firmly established Scottish-style ornamentation and articulation patterns into their playing. It took a while to work out this new approach to playing Appalachian tunes on pipes, and several more whiles to more fully incorporate the groove and these important stylistic changes into my own playing. The journey has been effortful at times, but also very rewarding and fruitful in terms of achieving a more effective and convincing way of playing Appalachian music on the pipes.

Amendments to the Forward:

A more complete picture of the early arrivals of white settlers to Appalachia should include mention of the fact that one of the most significant waves first came from Scotland *via Northern Ireland*—specifically the populations now referred to as the Scots-Irish, or Ulster Scots. This was a large group of chiefly Lowland-Scots and Northern-English Protestants that had previously been planted in Northern Ireland by the English in an attempt to colonize, anglicize, 'civilize', and ultimately control Ulster. It's a fraught and complicated history about which I still have much to learn. But suffice to say, a great deal of friction resulted from this colonization, resulting in large waves of Scots-Irish leaving Northern Ireland and making their way to the New World—first to the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the U.S., and later spreading into the broader region now referred to as Appalachia, where land was cheaper. The Scots-Irish then had a significant amount of interaction—both violent and peaceful, and to greater degrees than originally documented—with various Native American tribes, and those populations newly arrived from West Africa, England, France, the rest of Ireland, and Germany. The Highland Clearances and Scotland's own potato famine also brought a large number of Scots to North America, directly from Scotland. These refugees not only landed in the Eastern U.S., but also in Canada—most notably in Nova Scotia ("New Scotland"), where language, music, and dance traditions have in some cases only barely evolved from their Scottish origins.

Amendments to the Introduction:

Without question, the core template for traditional Appalachian music and its accompanying dance forms came from the Scots-Irish settlers. What was not emphasized enough in the 2008 introduction, however, was the extent of influences from the traditions of the enslaved Africans—not only the

introduction of instruments like the *ngoni* and *akonting* that would later become the banjo, but also particular rhythms, modalities, dance styles, dance choreographies, and even the practice of calling dances. What was not even mentioned in the original introduction is that there were also significant influences, though to lesser extents, from the music and dance traditions of various Native American tribes (e.g. Cherokee), and English, French, and Irish settlers. All of these populations traded, co-mingled, and socialized with the Scots-Irish, helping to shape what we now know as the Appalachian/Old-Time tradition. But again, it was the West African traditions that were the most influential beyond the core Scots-Irish template, as evidenced by the significant differences between Appalachian and Cape Breton (Nova Scotian) styles. After all, the Scottish settlers in Nova Scotia also co-mingled with Native American, English, French, and Irish populations, but not West African (at least not even remotely to the same degree as in Appalachia).

Recommended reading for those interested in a deeper dive into this history and these cross-cultural links:

- Webb, Jim, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (Broadway Books, 2005)
- Orr, D. and Ritchie, F., *Wayfaring Strangers: The Musical Voyage from Scotland and Ulster to Appalachia* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014/2021)
- Jamison, Phil, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance* (University of Illinois Press, 2015)

Musical amendments:

At the time of publishing the first and so far only edition of *An Appalachian Collection*, and even when releasing *The Piper in the Holler* album (2012), I had a vague sense that I hadn't quite found a way of playing Old-Time tunes on the pipes that felt completely convincing and authentic to the genre. I was still heavily influenced by the articulation patterns and specific ornaments endemic to the Scottish piping tradition—specifically that of competitive Highland piping, which had been my only arena for playing the pipes for most of my piping career up to that point. In subsequent years, I've not only evolved my approach to playing Scottish tunes—focusing more on simpler dance-friendly grooves, and less on technical complexity, prowess, and perfection—but especially to the playing of Appalachian tunes. Regarding the latter, I've found that further simplifying the 'gracings', and shifting a significant portion of them away from the strong beats and over one notch to emphasize the off-beats, has had a surprisingly big impact in terms of the pipes synthesizing with the irresistible grooves of Old-Time fiddle and banjo playing. For someone who'd spent over 30 years trying to master the Scottish style of articulating pipe tunes, this was a fairly monumental shift. And yet despite the enormity of the task to break up and re-cast a very cemented way of articulating music on the pipes, to the casual listener it is a difference so subtle as to be only barely perceptible. But it really is the difference between playing Appalachian tunes in a Scottish way, and playing Appalachian tunes in an Appalachian way. Both options work musically, but I think you'll find playing grace-notes more on the off-beats, with swing, will clinch the deal in terms of producing a truly enlivened Appalachian groove. (It's also really fun!) Your fellow musicians, and any dancers, will absolutely appreciate the difference. This revised approach will hopefully be apparent in the performances featured on *The Birds' Flight* album (2021).

To illustrate this concept, and offer a glimpse of how tunes printed in a second edition might appear, compare this excerpt of the originally published setting of 'Campbell's Farewell to Red Gap':



to this updated setting:



(More on that metrical change and the higher incidence of E grace-notes in a moment.)

Another crucial element in terms of establishing an appropriate groove, an element not sufficiently emphasized in the original publication, is that of 'swing'. Though the eighth-note (quaver) groupings are printed as being even, or 'straight' (as a means of reducing visual clutter), you'll almost certainly find that playing these with a noticeable amount of swing will further help the cause of creating a more convincing musical drawl.

Employing both the off-beat emphasis and the right amount of swing will also enthuse and greatly aid anyone who may be tempted to dance to your music. The off-beat articulation emphasizes the 'lift' of the dance—literally the moments when the dancers are becoming airborne—while the swing helps accentuate the overall pulsing of the tune. Ultimately you'll want to keep tapping your foot on the downbeats, but aiming more for a 1+2+1+2+ groove that matches the phrase "Cook-a-**CHICK**en Cook-a-**CHICK**en", as opposed to 1+2+1+2+ or "**BLACK**-and-Decker **BLACK**-and-Decker" for Scottish reels. (That's a very over-generalized, but hopefully still illustrative, example.)

Do note, however, that the faster you play a hoedown, the more the swing gets ironed out; it's pretty much impossible to swing a hoedown on the pipes at 120 beats per minute. But practicing these tunes at a slower tempo with a relatively heavy swing will ensure some of that accentuation will be present at higher speeds, if not in an immediately perceptible way. (It's a bit like adding a few splashes of bourbon to your pie dough: the alcohol will evaporate when things heat up, but the effects—the very subtle flavoring and added lightness and flakiness—will still be delightfully present in the final crust.)

Speaking of eighth-notes, one other change that would likely appear in a future edition involves

hoedowns being set in a 2/2 'cut time' meter rather than a 2/4 meter. This will not only further reduce visual clutter on the page, but is more in line with the current convention of notating hoedowns (and reels for that matter).

For those who enjoy an extra little challenge, I would also promote abandoning a number of high-G grace-notes in favor of E and D grace-notes, when possible—the latter two sounding more harmonically (however briefly and microscopically) with most of the tunes, and perhaps also imitating the plucking of the higher 5th (drone) string of the banjo. Further, the high-G grace-note may be too quiet to be stylistically effective on conically-bored chanters—e.g. Highland and Border pipes—and too loud and 'chirpy' on cylindrically-bored chanters—e.g. smallpipes.

One other idea involves the drones: plugging, or otherwise muting the bass drone of your instrument as a means of both matching the aesthetic of many of the instruments most commonly associated with Appalachian & Old-Time music, and as a means of sounding less Scottish—i.e., establishing an even greater distinction between the two genres. In terms of the Appalachian aesthetic, it's worth noting that, prior to the arrival of bluegrass music at least, very few instruments in the region were capable of playing notes as low as the bass drone (save possibly the banjo, which rarely tunes down that low). The quintessential 'high lonesome sound' of mountain music could be translated to 'high *dronesome*' for us pipers, whereby we make more use of our tenor drones—baritone and alto, too, when available.

Until a subsequent edition of *An Appalachian Collection* is complete, I strongly encourage fellow pipers to apply the themes of simpler, off-beat accentuation and swing to the settings found in the original publication. I equally encourage fans of this genre to both remember and acknowledge the remarkable genealogy of this music, and the varied cultures and traditions that combined to form what we know and love as Appalachian and Old-Time music.

Finally, revised settings of previously-published tunes, a few additional traditional tunes that missed the 2008 boat, and several tunes from *The Birds' Flight* project are available as downloadable PDFs via BirchenMusic.com (some for free). These will help reinforce the above musical amendments, and further expand the offerings published in the original collection.

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