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Rustic Roots and Fiddle Hell: An Ethnography of Fiddle Camps in the Northeastern United States

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Rustic Roots and Fiddle Hell:
An Ethnography of Fiddle Camps in the Northeastern United States

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The Division of The Arts
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by
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Introduction

On the night of August 20th, 2016, I find myself and about 15 other people huddled under the main tent in sheltering from the lightning, thunder and driving rain. We are all ankle deep in water and the tent has metal poles. Fiddles and various other instruments are piled in their cases on chairs in the driest corner of the tent or are being clutched to their owner's chests. There is one lamp on a stool in the middle of the tent, and we are all circled around it singing our hearts out, a cappelLa, since it is impossible to play any stringed instrument in this weather. Jerry, Chris and I all lead some songs and sea shanties, and everyone is bellowing as loud as they possibly can. Most people are various levels of intoxicated; a couple of them are on hallucinogenic mushrooms. We have rescued the camp stash of liquor from Whiskey Rock--a rock on which we ceremoniously place whiskey--and a bottle of Jameson is going around. The high point of the night was a particularly drawn out and stinky rendition of Weldon Yard led by Chris and sung at half the speed and three times the volume of our usual renditions. The syllables at the end of each line are drawn out ridiculously long, everyone shouting at the top of their lungs into the center of the circle, trying to sing over the thunder. Dave Reiner recorded that session and told us the next day that we had reached 95 dB on his decibel meter, which approximates the volume of a New York City subway train at a close distance. This was my third year coming to Rustic Roots Primitive Music Camp and this was one of the most memorable moments of my time there. It was a moment that we all agreed was absolutely typical of Rustic Roots, despite the fact that it is a fiddle camp and there was not a fiddle in sight. This moment,

in all of its absurdity, in many ways embodies the philosophy behind this camp; retreat from the stresses of day to day life in society, connection with the outdoors, and celebration of folk and fiddle music, not only as musical traditions but as the basis of a community.

In this ethnography I will explore Rustic Roots as both an educational institution and a social gathering, as well as examining its structure and atmosphere in comparison to Fiddle Hell, another camp with overlapping attendance. This project will ask the following questions: What different teaching styles are used in the camp structure and how do they play into the culture of these camps? How do different structures and pedagogical values relate to musical values? How does this musical subculture complicate conventional notions of modern American adulthood? What is the purpose of withdrawing into a camp structure temporarily? How do questions of race and class play into the subculture of fiddle camps and folk music in general (which is predominantly white and middle class)?

Fiddle Camp for Dummies

Fiddle camps are gatherings where folk musicians of various ages, levels, instruments and styles come together to learn and play music. Camps are usually held in the summer and last about a week. Often they are in rural areas and have a rustic or semi-rustic atmosphere: people stay cabins or tents, and most activities take place outside. Different camps have different focuses in terms of age range, skill level, and style, and the atmosphere of a camp can differ wildly depending on these. The two

camps I will focus on here, Rustic Roots Primitive Music Camp and Fiddle Hell (informal motto: “I’ll see you in hell”), are both camps specifically for adults, which cultivates a significantly different atmosphere from family friendly camps aimed at teaching children and teenagers.

Setting the Scene: Rustic Roots

Rustic Roots is a very tight knit community. There are only about 25 attendees each year, most of whom are returning members and know each other outside of the camp setting. Some people will show up for a day or two at different points in the camp if they cannot be there the entire time, and they are always greeted with great enthusiasm. Rustic Roots is run by four founding members: Chris and Rachel, a married couple and the camp’s main musical leaders, Andy, the camp director, and Winnie, who hosts the gathering every year at her property in rural Connecticut. Chris, Rachel, Winnie and several of the attendees (myself included) are friends of many years who are all (minus Andy) part of the same folk music community in Providence, Rhode Island. Chris and Rachel are the musical leaders of the camp as well as of the extended folk music tribe of which it is a part.

Rustic Roots was Chris and Rachel’s brainchild, a project they came up with and prevailed upon Andy Reiner, a long-time student and friend, coordinate and direct it, claiming that as the youngest he has more energy for it. The idea behind Rustic Roots is creating a camp that is relaxed and open with as few rules as possible and as cheap

as possible to make it more accessible, especially to young people. It is open only to adults age 18 or above, which keeps it as loose and responsibility free as possible.

The word “rustic” in the name is not unwarranted. Winnie has hosted the camp every August for the past 6 years at her home in rural Connecticut. The house has a large yard surrounded the several acres of woods where campers pitch tents for the week. We are not allowed in the house unless the wasps attack, which did happen the first time I went three years ago. Campers stay in tents, bring their own food and cook communally over an open fire or on camp stoves. There are two latrines in the woods, which are basic trenches each equipped with a shovel, a bottle of hand sanitizer and a Folgers coffee can with a roll of toilet paper. There is one porta potty, to be used only in the dark or when it rains or if the idea of going in the woods is just too much. Gradual upgrades have happened each year; Sheila, a Civil War reenactor and camper extraordinaire, brought two bottomless chairs to put over the latrines for easier access, and this year for the first time we had a shower, which consisted of a hose rigged up inside a tarp tipi-like structure with a tapestry of a Japanese geisha hung by way of a door. This was a very exciting development for everyone.

The basic facilities are not inviting for many potential campers, but they allow the tuition price to be kept down at \$350 per person, a fraction of the average cost of a weeklong camp. Because of this, Rustic Roots is self-selecting. In Rachel’s words “Anyone can come, but they have to be willing to be super rustic.” There are only a few people who enjoy the type of atmosphere it creates, but those who do tend to keep

coming. This year, the sixth year running, was somewhat smaller than past years, and everyone there was a returning camper. As Chris put it:

It's certainly not for everybody, we've had a few people over the years who, like one lady went and got a hotel room because it was all just too much for her, tents and lats and people yelling their heads off at 2 in the morning. I mean either you like that sort of thing or you don't. But the people who like it really like it.

Three main tents are set up around the property, one is the kitchen where everyone stores their private or communal food and cooks over camping stoves. Another is set up at the other end of the lawn for larger group classes, and a third, smaller tent is placed by the pond at the bottom of the hill. Classes take place under the tents, under a tree near the kitchen, or occasionally in the screened in porch attached to the house. The main hub of the camp is the fire pit, which is always kept burning and is surrounded by long wooden benches made from boards placed on top of logs, and a plethora of camping chairs that migrate about the camp as needed. People cook communal meals over the fire, eat, relax, sing and have morning and evening jams here. Also near the fire is whiskey rock, a large boulder covered in various bottles of hard liquor as well as the camp supply of bug spray. Whiskey Rock is also the drop off point for any lost-and-found rosin. There are no rules surrounding whiskey rock or the massive communal beer cooler by the kitchen besides "enjoy yourself and know your limits. Oh and please do your dishes!" There is a seemingly endless supply of seltzer

and beer, which is usually consumed at a steady pace throughout the day, and the harder drinks are broken out at night during jamming. This is a general trend more than a rule; one of the main missions of Rustic Roots is to be completely judgment free zone and no time is too early to go wild.

The emphasis on freedom and lack of structure is a large part of what makes Rustic Roots distinctive as a camp. Because it is so small and adult only, everyone is left to take care of themselves. There is no schedule, only Andy's list of things that are happening each day, with vague times attached. There are three workshops times each day during which campers either split up by instrument or interest. There are lessons for individual instruments during which the instructor for that instrument will teach a certain tune or skill, and general workshops such as songwriting. The workshops start about a half hour later each day, which is a blessing, as everyone gets gradually more addled and sleep deprived over the course of the week. After breakfast or lunch when everyone is pretty much in the same place, Andy will call out what is happening in the next workshop period and give a vague time, for example "Everyone grab a beer and meet by the pond for dirty shanties in 15 jazz minutes!" As Chris explains:

So the idea was that it would be very loose...we've been in those situations where first workshop is at 9 in the morning, so that was one of the first rules, when we all sat around the table, Rachel myself and Andy and we said what do we really wanna do, and we talked about cooking on the fire and having a lat, and one of the things was, first period starts at ten thirty. None of this nine to five shit. And so Andy came up with the idea of having first period start half an hour

later every day, which is brilliant. And then of course like today even that doesn't matter, things just happen whenever, and it's all good.

Evenings are taken up by loud and raucous jamming by the fire. The tunes played are usually standards of Chris and Rachel's repertoire, which are taught in workshops or already known by a sufficient number of people to be played in a jam session. Most of the tunes are old time tunes; other genres are mixed in as well, as are many of Rachel's indefinable crooked tunes. Playing usually devolves to singing by the pond around midnight. Chris and Jerry are the main song leaders, and the songs vary from dirty shanties to goofy songs, ballads, work songs and "nasty old shit" like This a y Nicht and other old minor key songs about death. Singing tends to go later and later each night, once ending after seven in the morning on the final day.

"I'll See You In Hell"

Fiddle Hell is a fiddle camp that I attended for the first time in November of 2016. It is also run by the Reiner Family (mostly David Reiner, Andy's father) and is the absolute opposite of Rustic Roots in almost every way. Fiddle Hell is better described as a convention than a camp. It takes place on a weekend, Friday afternoon through Sunday, in early November at a hotel/convention center in Massachusetts. There were

about 200 people there, mostly middle aged, though there were some youth and children.

The structure consisted of a series of hour-long workshops throughout the day from nine thirty in the morning to midnight with half hour breaks in between. Eight to ten workshops of various sizes were happening at any given time in the different conference rooms, each room (even small ones) set up with microphones and speakers for the instructors. Various teachers would hold workshops on different subjects and areas of fiddle music. Fiddle Hell has an impressive staff in terms of both numbers and quality. Several of the instructors are graduates of or teachers at Berklee College of Music in Boston, which has an extensive folk music program, and many are quite successful musicians, some with their own camps.

Many of the workshops at Fiddle Hell are dedicated to teaching a single tune, which is described in the schedule either by its name or the specific tradition it comes from (old-time, Cape Breton, Scottish, Irish etc.) In these workshops, which are divided into beginner, intermediate and advanced categories, the tunes are broken up into small phrases by the instructor (the length depending on the level of the group) and taught piece by piece, then combined into larger phrases and eventually the whole tune. These workshops will either teach one complex tune or have multiple easier/shorter ones. Some workshops are also focused on teaching specific stylistic distinctions of a type of fiddling, such as Irish ornamentation or polyrhythmic bowing in old-time music. Other classes teach specific skills such as yodeling or calling (reciting the steps in a contra dance) or introductory skills such as how to participate in a jam session.

The schedule also has jam sessions in various styles led by one or two faculty members in that field. The faculty would lead the jam, sitting in the center of the room with the microphone with students in a semi circle around them. Students are free to call (suggest) and lead tunes, but the session leader ultimately has control over what is played by taking up or passing over tunes called by participants. I personally found these hour-long sessions to be much too short with too much time spent debating the next tune. They tended to end as soon as the group got more comfortable and things started picking up. For those who wanted to jam more there were specified areas along the hallways with chairs set up and signs reading "open for jamming" where anyone could start playing together at any point. I witnessed one duo on Friday, a fiddler and a banjo player, who played in one of the jam areas all afternoon without stopping or going to any workshops. Other players would cycle in and out of this group over time, but the two of them remained. As jam sessions got larger they became more and more dominated by fiddles, which made up the vast majority of the convention. This led to a very homogeneous sound, with twenty or so fiddles all playing the melody with a couple guitars or occasionally a mandolin, which is also a melody instrument. This homogeneity of sound is rivaled only by the overwhelming visual homogeneity of the all beige walls and carpeting throughout the building. These two factors combined give Fiddle Hell a sound and atmosphere I would describe as almost completely opposite to that of Rustic Roots. This was particularly surprising to me, considering the fact that Fiddle Hell is run by Andy's family, and he is a director at both camps.

There was one jam session at Fiddle Hell that stood out from the rest, which was the “Whomp” on Friday night, organized by Andy. The name “Whomp” comes from one of Chris and Rachel’s past bands The Whompers, and refers to the wilder style of playing favored by Chris and Rachel and the Rustic roots crowd, a style Chris refers to as “Blam”.

Blam. Group blam. We’ve always done it. My first band was a country blues band and a lot of those bands just sort of ‘play the music’ but we always played it like it was rock and roll. We always had this approach that we mixed up the types of music. If we liked it we played it and we played in our own way.

“Blam” consists of lots of yelling and jumping up and down a playing as loud as possible, Chris doing full body conducting where he rocks his whole upper body back and forth with the beat, and Rachel bend double over he fiddle and sawing away wildly. It is the sort of high intensity jamming that will get you at least one if not several broken bow hairs by the end if you are doing it right. Whomp is not a term used much at Rustic Roots, since most jams with Chris and Rachel have this type of energy and are just called jam sessions, but it serves well to differentiate in an atmosphere like Fiddle Hell where this is not the sole playing style.

Rachel had originally intended to be at Fiddle Hell as an instructor this year, but had to call it off when Chris got sick and was in the hospital. She had decided to come for the Whomp though and when I told Andy this when I got there he was overjoyed.

Andy had bought a whole lot of glow sticks and various LED doodads to decorate the room and musicians (something he also brings out once every Rustic Roots) and the lights were turned out. Rachel also brought and distributed a giant bag of various bits of odd costume clothing and froufrou¹, a throwback to a New Year's Eve parade she and Chris used to lead in Providence called the Banished Fools. They have lots of these odd traditions that they carry around with them to their various social circles along with their specific repertoire of tunes. These tunes, which are the main repertoire at Rustic Roots, also dominated the Whomp.

Rachel is one of the people at the center of creating that ecstatic party-jamming atmosphere, and I highly doubt it would have been half as good without her. She completely took over the space with her playing, bringing a completely different jamming style that was immediately taken up by those of us who had played with her before and were familiar with it, and which drew in other players as well. For me this felt like coming home, and it saved an otherwise fairly miserable weekend.

The Whomp felt oddly subversive within the structure of fiddle Hell, creating such a wild atmosphere in an otherwise very controlled environment. A couple times people peeked in but then withdrew quickly, apparently put off by such a scene. It established a little pocket of weirdness in the event but was still held within strict structure. We were wild and out of control for exactly one hour and had to begin and end on time. This phenomenon bears considerable resemblance to Hakim Bey's description of "Temporary Autonomous Zones" (TAZs) as a space "considerably suspended

¹ Various pieces of brightly colored and voluminous fabric items.

outside the institutional state power, an ideal place for new creative experiments.”² This “mini revolution” against institutional fiddle power, while on a much smaller scale and technically organized as part of the schedule, still had a distinctly anarchist flavor that set it apart from the other events.

One of the main differences between this and a Rustic Roots jam (besides the larger size and the time limit) was the presence of children. Despite the similar sound, this made the Whomp very distinct from the atmosphere at Rustic Roots, an 18 and older camp where children are excluded specifically to create minimum responsibility. While Fiddle Hell is aimed mostly at adults, there are some younger players there as well, which necessitates a more “family friendly” atmosphere that is intentionally not a factor at Rustic Roots. At the Whomp there were about 5 younger teen or preteen players who Rachel especially encouraged to play and join the center of the circle. One even managed to start a tune. the Butterfly, a standard slip jig and many fiddlers’ first tune. This was a moment that really brought me back to going to Chris and Rachel’s jams as a child and being encouraged in the same way. In Chris and Rachel’s sessions, the experience level of a player doesn’t really matter so long as they are playing and participating in the group. Overall Fiddle Hell seems to be very rigid and focused on the pedagogical process of teaching tunes, contrasting dramatically with Rustic Roots and its loose structure and ecstatic atmosphere focused on jamming. Fiddle Hell does not provide food for attendees, so they have to either walk or drive to the strip mall down the road for meals. For the carless plebeians such as myself this walk consists of a

² Yurchak 1999, 88

short hike through the hotel parking lot up a small weedy embankment, around a fence and through the strip mall parking lot to the restaurant of our choice. I find this lessens the communal feel and results in people going out to eat with the people they already know, rather than engaging with new people. This stands in stark contrast to Rustic Roots, where communal cooking and eating is a central part of the experience. The large size of Fiddle Hell also contributes to this difference. It is impossible to know everyone, whereas at Rustic Roots there is no choice but to know everyone.

On Saturday night there was a camp concert, which was one of the weirder experiences of the weekend for me. The three largest rooms on the first floor were opened up to create one massive room with a stage at one end. Andy, wearing a bright purple suit, was the MC, and introduced each performer, most of them faculty and established musicians, with a list of their accomplishments and a plug for their CDs which could be purchased in the camp store. All the performances were very good, but I found the atmosphere very alienating. I think this was some combination of the physical distance between audience and performer (bridged by a very loud sound system), and the elite quality of the performance, rather than an open mic where anyone can perform. It was also very long, lasting just under three hours. It essentially constructed the main focal point of the weekend as one of performance rather than participation, enforcing a strict divide between player and audience as well as between faculty and attendees.

There is an equivalent moment at Rustic Roots, a sharing circle where everyone sits in a circle and each person is given a turn to perform something they have been

working on, which they can either take or pass on. The performances go around the circle counter-clockwise, the Jameson bottle goes around clockwise. This is an egalitarian system made possible only by the small size of the camp, as it would be impossible to make one bottle of Jameson last in a group of over two hundred people.

These two examples illustrate a key difference in the ideology of these two camps, Fiddle Hell placing an emphasis on display of expert musicianship in a performance context, while Rustic Roots emphasizes participation from all levels in a communal sound.

After this year's Rustic Roots, which seems to have been the last, Andy has decided to move the camp to Colorado, changed the emphasis to Bluegrass music and Grateful Dead tunes, and added bathrooms, which leads me to believe that Chris and Rachel, not Andy were the main ideological force behind this camp, and without them it will be completely different in fundamental ways. The weakness of this camp structure, communal as it is, is that the philosophy behind it, as well as the music itself, relies heavily on Chris and Rachel's specific social and musical energy; if that leadership is not present the music easily falls apart so does the entire community surrounding it. This is something that would not happen at a place like Fiddle Hell, where the structure would hold together relatively well regardless of changes in social dynamics. At Rustic Roots, which is deeply social and mostly unstructured, the group is very dependant on maintaining a positive social dynamic; a structure that allows interpersonal issues to easily disrupt the functioning of the camp. Thus Rustic Roots relies heavily on existing friendships and the creation of a euphoric atmosphere in order to function properly. The

intensity and potential exclusionary nature of this arrangement results in most returning musicians having preexisting friendships outside of Rustic Roots, or, like me, having grown up within this musical community and experienced its dynamic.

Reflexive positioning

When I was a kid, my father started playing didgeridoo in a band called the Providence Wholebellies, who took an eclectic approach to interpreting folk music. (Wholebellies are a Rhode Island term for fried clams). They played folk music from a variety of genres, including old time, Blues, Irish, and English. The group was led by a Chris and Rachel, and consisted of six other regular members: Mikey D on drums (a single tom and a splash cymbal), Bob on bass, Winnie on triangle and washboard, Steve on Viola, my dad on didgeridoo, and Phil on penny whistle and accordion.

There were no rehearsals, only performances/jam sessions at a bar in downtown Providence called the Trinity Brew Pub, where they were paid in free beer. Chris was the song leader, as he was the only one who knew all the words to anything, and he led the band in a variety of songs from the standard Irish ballad “Kilgarry Mountain” to such ridiculous tunes as “Donkey Riding” to which the only lyrics were various permutations of the phrase “Oh how I love to go riding on a donkey.” This was one of their most popular and loved tunes, and never failed to get people up and dancing. The rest of the band sang along on the choruses or filled in with hopeful vowel sounds during the verses.

I only went to the Trinity shows a couple of times, since at that point I was too young to be staying out late at bars, but later they began playing at the Mediator, a small church/community hall that they rented out once a month. There was an audience entrance fee of 5-10 dollars, children free, and it was always crowded. Since my mother by that point had become the unofficial band manager, I never missed a show. We always got there early to set up and deck out the hall with string lights and froufrou. Everyone brought food and drinks to the shows, and they became a regular potluck party, with everyone dancing and hollering and jumping up and down along with the band, which varied in size depending on who all showed up. The main members were the only ones who actually got paid from the door (usually between ten and twenty dollars each); everyone else was just there for fun.

This was my introduction to the world of folk music, but I only started playing it when Phil Edmonds gave me a penny whistle and offered to teach me for free. Eventually I moved from the whistle to playing folk music on the cello, for which I was taking classical lessons at the time. I began playing with the Wholebellies (as an unpaid member, or “Halfbelly”) and played at Chris and Rachel’s house party jam sessions, which were essentially all the energy and exuberance of a Wholebelly gig but with more people, different tunes, a much smaller space and no time limit. Andy was not part of the Wholebellies, since he was studying at Berklee College of Music in Boston at that point, but he was often at the house parties, which was how I knew him. After my first year of college, I was finally deemed old enough to go to Rustic Roots, which several inner circle members had been asking me about for some time, having

only a vague idea of my actual age. The camp had previously been ages twenty-one and up, but an exception was made for me since I was so familiar with the group. The website now says the camp is open to ages eighteen and up, a rule they seem to have changed for my sake, despite alcohol being one of the central features of the camp. I honestly think they were also just craving a bassline, since there had been no cellos or bases attending previously. I was the only cello student registered, but Andy still hired a cello teacher just for me. After that everyone seemed to agree that the cello was now an essential part of the camp and they didn't want to be without it. There has been a cello teacher both years since then, and not, I think, solely for my benefit. This has been one of the most distinctive aspects of the camp for me, that the addition of one person can make such a big and lasting difference for camp as a whole.

Conclusion and Overview of Chapters

Having grown up within the musical and social scene of which this camp is a part, I have a sentimental and deep relationship and investment in the community and the music that is embodied at Rustic Roots. Conversely, I felt alienated by my vastly different experience of the musical culture surrounding Fiddle Hell. Therefore, while any claims about ethnographic objectivity are clearly impossible in this case, I have found that my own experience has made me an ideal subject to study as I register my own personal reactions to what these two camps, both as ideological forms and physical manifestations, have to offer.

Over the next two chapters I will discuss how the performance and pedagogical styles of fiddle music at these two camps and how they relate to musical culture and

social ideologies. The vast differences in how the same styles of music - and in many cases the same tunes - were experienced in these two contexts demonstrates how in social music traditions such as these, aspects that may be defined as “extra-musical” are in fact part of the music itself.

Chapter 1

“Okay Now Let’s Just Keep Playing Until You’ve Got It:”

Pedagogical Practices in Fiddle Music

On the afternoon of the first day of camp, Andy tells everyone to grab a beer from the cooler and meet by the pond for Shanty singing. There will be lots more singing throughout the week, but this is the only time it is in workshop form. The structure of the session remains the same though. Once everyone is gathered in a circle, drinks in hand, Jerry, the leader of the session, breaks into song with *Banks of the Sacramento*, a humorous shanty about venereal disease, set to the tune of *Camptown Races*. Jerry sings the verses, and the rest of the group joins in on the “Hoodahs” and the chorus, which sings: “Blow boys blow, for Californ-i-oh, there’s plenty of grass to wipe your ass on the banks of the Sacramento”. Most of Jerry’s songs are varying levels of obscene, and they have become a staple of Rustic Roots, both for their humorous content and their simple and “joiny-inny” shanty structure. There is no special teaching session for the songs. Instead the group picks up the chorus as they go, and those who already know the song sing along on the chorus and the verses if they are familiar enough. This type of on-the-fly learning is one of the mainstays of the Rustic Roots pedagogical style, and is essential for both jamming and song sessions, where players are likely to encounter unfamiliar music.

This chapter will discuss two dominant pedagogical styles that appear in folk music and observe how they manifest at both Rustic Roots and Fiddle Hell. I will refer to these styles as direct instruction and immersive learning. The chapter asks how

different cultural ideas about fiddle music are fostered through emphasis on these different teaching styles. The chapter will focus on the following three categories of inquiry: teaching formats (including workshops, lessons, and jam sessions), repertoire (both instrumental and vocal repertoires, as well as appropriate playing techniques), and the etiquette of the jam session. This chapter will explore how pedagogical values in these folk music settings relate to social values around community and musical performance.

Styles of Learning

At Rustic Roots everything is learned and played by ear. Many people who attend can read music, and Rachel mentions going through many songbooks in her search for new tunes, but within the camp, though recording tunes for later review is encouraged, any kind of sheet music would likely be regarded as taboo. As Chris put it, “Really this is music that you learn by ear. And that’s the best way of doing it and that’s the way it’s always been done.” Having the tunes memorized gives players an easily portable library of tunes and lends smoothness and spontaneity to jamming. The lack of sheet music also frees up players for the improvisation and constant visual communication that creates engaging jam sessions. Keedan, a viola player, sights this as one of the main attractions of Rustic Roots, and bemoans the lack of this type of approach among fiddle players in his hometown of Cincinnati: “I went to one ‘jam session’ I had heard about...and it was a bunch of old people with music stands and sheet music playing really simple tunes.”

At Rustic Roots, jamming refers not just to everyone playing a tune at the same time but to a myriad of intricacies of group playing that make up a jam session. To the circle of musicians who play with Chris and Rachel regularly, this is as much a social ritual as a musical experience. While a significant portion of the time at Rustic Roots is dedicated to the teaching of tunes, the greater emphasis of the camp is on learning to play socially, an ability which is not taught directly so much as it is absorbed through experience.

Direct Instruction and Immersive Learning

There are two main methods of knowledge transmission in fiddle music: direct instruction and immersive learning. Direct instruction includes lessons and workshops wherein a teacher instructs the student or students on a tune, set of chords or technique. In these settings tunes or techniques are transmitted through explanation, demonstration and repetition, and by deconstructing material into smaller easily learned segments. This is the dominant pedagogical approach at Fiddle Hell. As a much larger event with a much shorter timeline, it packs in a huge number of workshops in a myriad of different subjects, allowing attendees to absorb as many tunes and techniques as possible.

Immersive learning refers to absorbing information through observation and active participation, such as in jamming. In a jam session, a player must take part in playing a tune that they may or may not know beforehand while adhering to the various codes of jam etiquette such as accounting for variations, responding to the visual and musical cues of the tune leader, responding to other players, navigating harmony or

chords, and negotiating solos. It is this type of learning, and the experience of jamming which is the main focus at Rustic Roots, where the goal is to create a musical community. In this context the tunes, especially faster tunes with less emotional range, are merely texts that comes alive only when played in a group context. Kiri Miller makes a similar observation on the role of the songbook within the Sacred Harp tradition. “After all, if one could reconstruct the tradition from notation, one wouldn’t need to travel, learn from lifelong singers, or otherwise participate in the national community.”

In a setting like Rustic Roots, where there are many levels of skill, these categories might blur. Jamming, especially in the evenings, has a party atmosphere and is focused on playing socially and for fun rather than as a specific teaching or learning exercise. Most of the tunes are simple (joiny-inny) or previously known to most players. However, if a player is floundering either with the tune or with an aspect of jamming etiquette, they may find themselves on the receiving end of some very strong eye contact and visual cues from more experienced musicians to help get them back on track. In these instances, aspects of direct instruction are incorporated into a more immersive playing environment.

Teaching Formats

Classes during the day can also be divided into two types: lessons by instrument, which teach tunes and playing technique, and themed workshops, which can cover a variety of subjects from songwriting to exercises in polyrhythms. Essentially all fiddle

camps have these types of activities, which serve to expand players' tune repertoire and also provide a well-rounded approach to various aspects of music. At Rustic Roots, these kinds of teaching contexts, while important, seem to play a more supporting role, largely providing skills and knowledge that inform the production of a complex and dynamic jamming scene, which is considered the main event of the camp. At Fiddle Hell, learning new tunes is placed at the forefront, focusing on the raw tune as an object in and of itself that remains largely unchanged by the group playing context.

Lessons

There are five instructors at Rustic roots: Chris on harmonica and jaw harps, Rachel and Andy on fiddle, joy on cello, jerry on guitar and voice. Each teacher is in charge of teaching lessons to their instrument group. Instruments that don't have a specific teacher generally go by their position in the ensemble: mandolins are primarily melody instruments and so join the fiddles, banjos and guitars are grouped together, weird noisemakers join whatever class Chris is teaching, and the one time there was a bassist he joined the cello group.

Generally there is one lesson session each day for instrument groups, and for me this meant a one on one lesson every day learning tunes, usually one or two in a session depending on the skill level of the student(s) and the difficulty of the tune. Surplus time is often used to go over harmony and/or chords and techniques used in the tunes.

Most tunes in the old time tradition follow and AABB form, in which the tunes have two parts, referred to as the A and B part. In most cases each part is played twice

before moving on to the next part and returning to the beginning when all have been played through. Some tunes may have three or more parts: C, D, etc. or follow different forms such as AAABB or ABAC.

At Rustic Roots lessons are the first activity of the day and take place in the mid to late morning, depending on the day of the week. (Classes start progressively later every day to make up for increasingly long and wild nights). Andy will announce that lessons will take place in some amount of time “15 jazz minutes” being the standard approximate suggestion. Sometimes there is a previously decided location for each instrument group that is announced, and other times they will simply gather and wander off to find a location that has not yet been taken. Often each group establishes a meeting place for their lessons at the beginning of the week that will be used for subsequent lessons. In the past, cellos have claimed a space down by the pond and most recently on the porch of Winnie's house.

Usually a cello lesson will be dedicated to learning a tune or tunes, the chords and bassline, and then workshopping associated technique issues such as chops, rhythmic bowing, variations on chords, and singing while playing.

In our first lesson of the week, Joy teaches a tune called Sacred Rock, which she and Andy wrote together. She starts by playing the whole thing to give an impression of the full tune and then breaks it up into smaller pieces to make it easier to learn. She starts with the first phrase of the A part and once all the students (in this case just me) have that mostly memorized we move on to the second phrase, and then combine the two before moving on to the third phrase. These segments of the tune vary in length depending on their complexity and on the level of the student. Once we have gotten

through the whole A part we play it through a few times to solidify the tune before moving on the same process on the B part. After both parts are loosely memorized we play the tune over and over, at first together and then with Joy playing the baseline, until it is solidified.

At Fiddle Hell these types of tune learning sessions make up the majority of the classes, making it an excellent opportunity for people trying to collect a lot of tunes at one time that they can add to their repertoire. When asked about her plans to attend fiddle hell, Rachel said:

I think what's really great about is every fiddle player you ever wanted to learn from (well not every one) but a massive number of great fiddlers are gonna be there, you can go to a massive number of different sorts of jams and learn so many different sorts of music, so I think that's gonna be really fun.

Workshops

Each instructor also teaches various workshops in their fields of expertise. These workshops take place in early to mid-afternoon and are open and optional to anyone who wishes to participate. Every year Chris holds a workshop on twelve bar blues, Jerry does the dirty shanty workshop (which is more of a session) and Joy teaches songwriting and vocal harmony. Occasionally campers with a particular area of interest will conduct a workshop as well. In 2016, Alex, a fiddle player and friend of Andy's, taught a class on polyrhythms, and David Durand held one with his didgeridoos and various noisemakers he had brought along.

Jam Sessions

___ While there are lessons and workshops at various points throughout the day, the main focus is on jamming and playing as a group rather than individual lessons or tune learning. There are two or three workshops every day that involve teaching tunes or technique, and the rest of the time is usually spent jamming in groups of various sizes. There are two basic types of jam sessions at Rustic Roots. The main open jams are campfire jams, large sessions played around or near the campfire each night. They usually consist of half to three quarters of the camp attendees at any given time, and participants rotate out over the course of the night. Chris and Rachel are the leaders of the campfire jams, meaning they choose the tunes (though they are always open to suggestions) choose the speed, lead the beginning and endings of the tunes, and cue other musical changes, such as transition from playing to a sung repetition of a tune.

Smaller groups of two to six people also crop up throughout the day in various locations. These groups will often be focused on a specific genre with repertoire outside the standard camp tunes, such as an Irish or bluegrass jam. Tunes in these genres, or more challenging “non-joiny-inny” (difficult to pick up on the fly) tunes which are known to fewer people will often be played in these smaller groups of people more familiar with that specific repertoire. When Dave Reiner (Andy’s father and the main organizer of Fiddle Hell) is at Rustic Roots, as he often is for a few days out of the week, it is common to wake up to the sound of him burning through his repertoire of ragtime tunes by the fire, sometimes accompanied by another camper on ukulele. These small groups also crop up for a cappella singing.

More specific interests such as these are what make up a bulk of the workshops at Fiddle Hell. Here the real focus is on providing master classes in areas such as Scottish fiddling, Swedish tunes, and advanced bluegrass tunes, and separating students by level to maximize the efficiency of these classes. Attendees at Fiddle Hell may come away from the weekend having learned more tunes of greater complexity, but the jam sessions are somewhat bland by comparison.

Jam sessions are where a lot of the learning takes place in terms of etiquette and social playing. David Durand, a camper at Rustic Roots who is fairly new to the world of participatory folk music, describes the experience of learning on the fly from Winnie, who is one of the most experienced musicians in the group. Winnie primarily plays triangle and washboard, but often plays the fiddle during camp. David is not a fiddle player, but brought his didgeridoos, as well as a plethora of noisemakers and small percussion instruments (though he is not a percussionist either), including a hollow turtle shell and a shaker made from a giant dried bean pod. David describes a point in one of the jam sessions when Winnie is playing percussion with a drumstick on the turtle shell, and he is following along with the bean. She establishes a fairly simple rhythm, and when he gets to a steady and comfortable place with it she moves on to more complicated rhythms while he holds down the beat. If he ever falters with the rhythm she will switch back and play with him until he has it steady again.

Generally I was playing something simpler than her if I was doing it right. It was awesome, because it wasn't a rhythm class or anything, it was just the fact that she's a really good time keeper...it was great feedback even though she never said one thing, but the second your mind wandered you could tell.

This is an excellent example of the type of teaching that goes on in a jam session. It is mostly wordless and uses example rather than explicitly stated suggestions to guide less experienced players. In a session consisting of entirely experienced players, these types of interactions would not occur, but at Rustic Roots, where players of all levels are mixed together, instructors or more experienced musicians may correct or support less confident players by intentionally playing next to them and modeling whatever aspect of the music they are having trouble with, be it melody, chords, or some aspect of etiquette that has been trodden on.

Etiquette

Stated and Implied Rules

Here is a list of rules that I have observed during my years as a student at Rustic Roots. Rules with an asterisk are officially stated; those without are derived from my own observations:

1. Have fun.*
2. Fart a lot.*
3. Listen*
4. Know your limits*
5. Follow the leader *
6. Wash your dishes*
7. Remain within the parameters of the emphasized musical styles (folk music please) except during designated times

8. Acoustic instruments only
9. Musicians with the most experience have a higher status within a jam session
10. Chris and Rachel are the assumed leaders of any session they are in.

The explicit rules are laid out in a camp meeting on the first night, at which time we also all sign the document promising not to sue, which Andy has written out in a large notebook and passed around. It's all very official.

Inclusivity and its Limits

Rustic Roots strives to be as inclusive as possible to all levels of musicians. There are no divisions by player level in jam sessions, and very little in the lessons and workshops. Chris teaches a class on harmonica for beginners, but that is really his only option since there have been no advanced harmonica students in the years I have been there. All the other instrument lessons are all inclusive. This is for several reasons. Firstly there are not enough teachers or students to make divided classes a feasible option, and as an adult camp, most – though not all – people who go are already advanced at their instruments. Secondly, part of Chris and Rachel's philosophy has always been to invite and encourage people of all ages to play music together. This was certainly the case with me when I was a young and certainly terrible cellist at their jam session parties.

At the beginning of the week, Andy does a short review of jamming etiquette for those new to the scene or unsure how the process works. Rustic Roots has no strict jamming rules, but rather a set of guidelines and polite practices, such as listening first if

you don't know the tune, following the jam leader regarding speed or tune variation (this one is particularly important as there are many variations on fiddle tunes and the ones played at rustic roots are often unique Rachel-ized versions), and don't get too wasted and mess up a jam. As Andy put it "you are still responsible for everything you play, even if you are really drunk". David Durand comments on this and the relief it gave him as a newcomer to jamming:

You're just not constantly running into people who play music that well and that freely, and to have them be really relatively enthusiastically welcoming of people coming in and learning and letting them have a little space at the same time that they actually talk about good etiquette so you don't just go in and muck everything up, that aspect of the community that I already knew about was what got me in

This is one of the starkest differences between Rustic Roots and Fiddle Hell, which is heavily stratified by player level meaning the beginners are never in a workshop or jam session playing alongside the most experienced musicians. David will weigh in on this too:

They always talk about fast and slow as a big differentiator, and that never seemed like something that would ever come up at Rustic Roots or with any of those musicians, and you might have Sheila playing rhythm guitar, I mean she's an okay musician but she's not that fast or amazing in any way, and then Chris might be blowing 64ths in his crazy harmonica solos, and it's not a problem, right? You need slow stuff as well as fast stuff in almost any kind of music, so

you can be doing a harmonic rhythm or even a piece of the harmonic rhythm like “okay the tonic! I can play that!” because you have a big crew.”

Varying levels of emphasis on these different aspects of learning and teaching fiddle music are major factors in the differing cultures of Rustic Roots and Fiddle Hell, and say a great deal about their differences in priorities. At Fiddle Hell it seems the focus of the musical culture is the teaching of many different types of tunes and the collection and recreation of tunes in a precise and accurate way. As Turino discusses in his old-time chapter of *Music as Social Life*, this is the approach of many musicians in the middle-class old-time string-band tradition.

Here closely circumscribed habitual performance provides comfort, while rendering a tune precisely and continually learning and playing new and increasingly difficult or esoteric tunes provide the challenge.³

This emphasis solely on the melody leads to very static jam sessions, in which the whole group is playing a tune all together with little to no harmony or variation. Because every player is essentially playing the same thing, there is very little need for communication outside of deciding when to end together (indicated by a lifted foot from the leader) which results very repetitive, predictable jam sessions devoid of the intense social aspect present at rustic roots. The bare melody of a fiddle tune is comparable in many ways to the text in musical traditions that use notation. The information on the page in the Sacred Harp singing tradition conveys only a small portion of what takes

³ Turino 2008, 181

place within the musical performance. In *Traveling home: Sacred Harp Singing and American Pluralism*, Kiri Miller quotes a singer on this subject:

[The printed music] is about one hundredth of one millionth of what actually goes on. You can't reconstruct it out of genetic materials, from, I don't think. From the notation, because that's not the music. It's just sort of ink.⁴

Likewise simply repeating a tune in unison without harmony or improvisation – though it certainly involves many more intricacies than would appear on a page of sheet music – leaves out a huge portion of the potential musicality and social bonding that occur within a more complex jam session.

What led the Whomp (essentially Rustic Roots style jamming) to stand apart at Fiddle Hell was the variation in instruments and player level leading to a much more diverse sound, as well as the festive and slightly absurd atmosphere created by the strange costume pieces and glow in the dark bangles handed out before the jam. Many players from Fiddle Hell did not know the standard Rustic Roots tunes that were played, and so were forced to play harmony where they might normally play melody. Also we were all standing, which standard for jamming at Rustic Roots, but was the only time at a Fiddle Hell event where no one was seated.

At Rustic Roots, the teaching style emphasizes group playing, teaching tunes not only in individual lessons but often to the whole camp so that they can become part of the jam sessions. While most workshops are led by the official instructors, anyone with

⁴ Miller 2010, 106

a good jamming tune or an interesting piece of musical knowledge is encouraged to share it with the group.

It's very egalitarian, there's not this "I'm the teacher you're the student, sit and learn" it's more like everybody just gets together and shares knowledge and stuff like that. And we like it like that.

Placing jamming at the forefront emphasizes the importance of music played by the group rather than the individual, and promotes more communal music making and thus tighter bonds in the community itself. It is not so much a place to gain musical knowledge, though it does that as well, so much as a place to retreat into musical experience.

Chapter 3

Politics in Folk Music; Folk Music as Politics

In this chapter I will discuss the following questions: How does folk music relate to ideas of adulthood, nostalgia, and rejection of modern American capitalist values? How do questions of race, gender and class play into fiddle music, specifically white middle-class old-time and how does this complicate liberal nostalgic ideologies?

Rustic Roots is a space separated from modern expectations of adulthood in which participants can shed daily responsibilities and focus exclusively on a single experience. However, this prolonged intense social atmosphere, while they may be considered utopian by those participating, by the end of the week, can be alienating to those coming to it from the outside.

Every year on the last evening of Rustic roots there is an open party/jam session where friends and family (still eighteen and older) can come and jam and party. For some, like David, attending the party convinces them to come to the full camp, but for others, even longtime friends who jam with Chris and Rachel on a regular basis, this experience can be strange or alienating. Attendees of the camp have been participating in this intense musical sociality for the whole week of the camp and are running on a mix of prolonged sleep deprivation, alcohol, marijuana and complete musical immersion, resulting in what both insiders and outsiders have referred to as a euphoric state. This difference in mental states creates a barrier between campers and newcomers, one that no one who just arrived could hope to catch up to, even with the

best of jam sessions. The exclusionary nature of this situation, unintentional as it is, seems to have discouraged attendance at these end-of-week parties, which have shrunk in attendance over the years I have been going to rustic roots, likely due at least in part to this strange social dynamic. In my personal experience, I found myself completely unable to dedicate necessary time to friends I had invited (friends completely unfamiliar with the scene and music) because I was much more invested in jamming and kept running off whenever a good tune started. The addition of Jerry's bawdy songs into the repertoire is also a little much for some attendees, especially without the context of the full camp.

To many attendees, Rustic Roots is a retreat from the pressures and stresses of day-to-day life in society; a way to safely protest modern expectations of adulthood. In Chris' words: "This is not that real world. This is a place where you can remove yourself from all the modern plop." In this way rustic roots can be likened to Hakim Bey's description of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ).

Decentralized experiments that exist outside the legal framework of state-controlled society, connected by informal networks of communications through a loose and shifting membership.⁵

Rustic Roots is not explicitly political, but its very foundations are based in a critique of individual isolation in modern society and an ideal of community-based

⁵ Yurchak 1999, 88

society that Chris, Rachel and Winnie have held to both inside and outside of Rustic roots. According to Winnie:

There are people all over the world with the power to create these kinds of scenes, and it takes a lot of energy and dedication and a philosophy about community, where the community is your priority and that's what you want to create and that's where you want to live.

This idea of community is consistent with folk community that Turino describes in *Music as Social Life*; one that “isn't imagined but actual; nonetheless, it is sporadic, temporary, and geographically diffuse”⁶ The same community still exists outside of the camp setting, only much more spread out and integrated into everyday life. Rustic Roots is a way of condensing that community for a short period of time into a more idealized form of community. This aspect of camp is much more important than any considerations of profit, as despite the price that attendees pay, the camp is overall a financial loss. In fact a large portion of the money goes to travel costs to make sure everyone they want manages to get there. The money left at the end would not add up to minimum wage for those running it, but this is not a big concern. As Chris stated, “It's not about money, it's about vibe.”

This desire to create a community that specifically focuses on communal music is not unique. In *Music as Social Life* Turino discusses the emergence of the folk revival in the 60s out of a sense of lack among white youth from the suburbs who grew up in a

⁶ Turino 2008, 161

culture without communal music or dance practices. He sites the prevalence of these traditions in cultures around the world, suggesting that they make up some essential part of human sociality, one who's lack we instinctually notice.⁷ Ron Pen makes a similar connection in discussing the popularity of Sacred Harp singing, another communal musical tradition.

The media that severed Americans from oral tradition and developed a national culture at the expense of indigenous local practice has induced a rootless and nostalgia-seeking generation to return 'home' to warm themselves in the flow of traditional community singing.⁸

At Rustic Roots this musical nostalgia is combined with a desire to interact more directly with nature. Chris addresses this idea at length:

Doing this, you're putting yourself in this position like, when the bad storms come...but the nice thing about is – well some people say – that this is how people used to live. Actually it used to be a lot more difficult, I mean look at all the shit we've got: nice modern tents...but there's something nice about drinking water that doesn't come out of a tap, and when the wind blows you've gotta figure out what to do, and people are hungry, and you've gotta have the fire, and all that business. Because it's where we came from, not that long ago. A few thousand years ago on the planet most people lived something like this, and that's not that long ago. And lots of places they still do. And we sort of forget

⁷ Turino 2008, 159

⁸ Pen 1994, 95

about it in our modern world with houses and cell phones and computers and everyone running around and having to do things that are really important that actually aren't."

One of the ultimate goals of Rustic Roots is to create a temporary space outside of the constraints of society (TAZ) in which people can eat bacon for every meal if they want to. With the absence of children, attendees are released from any need to be a role model, which everyone takes full advantage of. One of the main manifestations of this is the absolute glee with which people participate in Jerry's obscene song repertoire.

Salty Dick's Uncensored Sailor Songs: Gender and Race in Traditional Music

Jerry and Chris are the main song leaders at Rustic Roots, and they each have their own repertoire. Jerry specializes in sea shanties and sailor songs, and at Rustic roots he is particularly beloved for his extensive repertoire of dirty songs. According to Jerry, the people who originally collected and wrote down many of these songs were so horrified by the lyrics that they either didn't record them or changed the words to more family friendly versions, making the original versions nearly impossible to find in print. He has collected a number of the songs he knows onto an album titled *Salty Dick's Saucy Sailor Songs* with the intention of preserving them as the tradition shrinks. These songs are not for the faint of heart, and they make Rustic roots and even more niche market. Rustic Roots is a haven for Jerry, because while he has dedicated his life to finding and preserving these songs in their original forms, they are so disgusting that his

family has banned him from singing them in the house. Many of them are extremely explicit in their humor, and often contain misogynistic lyrics. This is a case in which the tight-knit social structure of Rustic Roots is particularly important, as it allows there to be a group understanding about these songs as documents rather than ideologies and enjoy them for their humorous qualities. Jerry does not defend the problematic content of these songs, but focuses on the humor in them as worthy of preserving, as well as the history of a culture that is now disappearing.

These songs are funny. And that's why we like them; they make people laugh.

And that's why, not to sound too highfalutin but it's important to preserve this sliver of folklore because it can go away if you don't do something.

Chris, who also leads many of the a cappella songs, usually sings versions that omit the more controversial lyrics, occasionally resulting in the same songs being sung with slightly different lyrics depending on who is leading. This does not generally affect the group, since in the context of sea shanties the leader often sings the verses solo and is only joined by the group on the chorus. However it does bring up some questions in cases of songs that mention race.

Many common versions of sea shanties omit mentions of race, most likely for the purpose of avoiding controversy by skirting the subject altogether. For example, in the song Florida, there are lines that Chris sings "a sailor's wages are never high" and "the girls all dance to the ol' banjo" while Jerry, who tends toward preserving uncensored shanties sings "a black man's wages are never high" and "the yellow girls dance to the

ol' banjo" . There is another version, likely the most historically "authentic" with the line "a nigger's wages are never high" which all agree would be in no way appropriate for an almost entirely white middle class group of singers to use. It is more comfortable to sing Chris's version, pasty as we are, but this results in the complete whitewashing of a song that originated among African American riverboat workers. In this case it is arguably more problematic to erase the history and heritage of the song through omitting the references to race than it would be to keep them in. On the other hand we are a bunch of white people singing about how terrible it is to be a black sailor. This question could also be applied to many songs in the repertoire that have African American origins but do not reference race directly, including Lead Belly songs and many of the work songs (or "I hate work" songs) that are group favorites. In a group that is entirely devoid of black representation, this issue is easier to ignore, but the general consensus seems to be that they are "too good not to sing." Rustic Roots, like many middle-class folk and old-time communities, is very racially homogenous which results in an overall lack of discussion of these issues, despite acknowledgment of the origins of many of the songs and tunes in the old-time tradition.

Conclusion

Over the course of the week, Rustic Roots establishes an intense sociality among the group; a result of constant close proximity, cooking eating and playing music together for a week straight, a sense of shared values, and similar altered states of

mind which are both environmentally and chemically produced. The elevated oxytocin⁹ alone produced by such prolonged and intense social musicking could likely create a mild high, even without the addition of alcohol and other drugs.¹⁰ These factors in combination with lack of stress from work or other outside sources create a sense of euphoria experience during and after the camp. David discussed this feeling at length when I interviewed him after the camp was over:

I hardly slept, I was up till like 4:30 or 5 every night cause I just couldn't miss anything, and then the sun would wake me up I guess, I don't know. I didn't ever set an alarm but I was up by 9 or 9:30 every day and didn't feel astonishingly tired...OH and when I came back everybody said how rested I looked! And I was like "No. I'm just joyful" and actually it was kind of annoying for [my family] because I was just ridiculously happy and relaxed for like four weeks.

Production of this type of environment hinges on the suspension of the day-to-day experience, or what Chris refers to as "modern plop." This kind of engagement would not be possible without the lack of regular responsibilities and retreat from society. This notion is not an uncommon one in modern society, but I believe the presence and quality of the music at Rustic Roots sets I apart. Folk music is the ideal subject around which to self-select and create a community of like-minded individuals, and this "intentional interest group"¹¹ to quote Turino, is a very efficient way of

⁹ Studies have shown that group music production, both vocal and instrumental, increases production of the hormone oxytocin⁹ "the love hormone" which has a positive impact on "pro-social behaviors" and promotes feelings of trust, relaxation and psychological stability.

¹⁰ Keeler et al. "The neurochemistry and social flow of singing: bonding and oxytocin."

¹¹ Turino 2008, 161

jumpstarting a desired community atmosphere and creating a social setting and dynamic that makes the structure of this camp possible.

Conclusion

In this Ethnography I set out to examine the world of fiddle camps through the lens of my own experience within the world of fiddle music by examining Rustic Roots and Fiddle Hell as sites of two different approaches to traditions of fiddle music within middle-class non-traditional communities. Within this I focused specifically on how social values are expressed through music in the form of camp structures and pedagogical focuses, and how in many ways musical and extra-musical values become entwined. The overall failure of this project at any attempts of objectivity on these matters further illustrates how entrenched the social and musical ideals become.

I found that the physical and conceptual differences between Rustic Roots and Fiddle Hell correlated strongly to differences in the sound and experience of the music produced. Fiddle Hell was a fairly large event taking place over the course of a weekend to make it more widely accessible, and was highly structured and organized with the goal of allowing attendees to absorb as much information as possible in a short amount of time. Great emphasis is placed on presence of expert musicians, who are the focus of both the workshops and performances, and while individual performances were beautiful and highly accomplished, the jam sessions were anemic and uniform.

In complete contrast to this, Rustic Roots is small, community oriented very unstructured, creating a space that is largely isolated from the outside world and which champions communal living and music making. At Rustic Roots the entire community is interacting and playing constantly, creating an experience of jamming that to my (admittedly biased mind) is much more intense and satisfying.

Given further time and research, I would like to have done more in-depth research and analysis on matters of race, gender and class in relation to these cultures of fiddle music. This is an area that I find fascinating but did not manage to address to the extent that it deserves. A future study might center the question of race in the history of old-time fiddling as a fundamental but largely unacknowledged factor in the production of white middle-class fiddle culture. Tangentially related but also interesting would be research on the rates of depression among people who participate in communities such as this, given the widely experienced sense of euphoria and contentment among those attending Rustic Roots, and my own depressed state during and after Fiddle Hell.

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