Five-String Fiddle and the American Vernacular

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FIVE-STRING FIDDLE AND THE AMERICAN VERNACULAR

Patrick Daly

Submitted for the award of PhD

Dublin Institute of Technology
Conservatory of Music and Drama

April 2015

Supervisor: Dr Mary Lennon
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the emergence of the five-string fiddle in contemporary North American fiddle culture within the past ten years. By interacting with leading artist-level practitioners, the research documents the evolution and impact of the instrument to date in exploring the possibilities the five-string fiddle presents for musical performance and innovation.

North American vernacular music and, in particular, the contemporary fiddle playing landscape, exemplifies virtuosic and innovative idiomatic technique and improvisation as central to an overarching musical explosion, evidenced in the music of many high level, multi-stylistic contemporary practitioners. Within contemporary American fiddle performance, it is compelling to observe how many of the most innovative and highly regarded players now perform on five-string fiddles.

The research uses a qualitative research methodology, drawing on interviews conducted with seven leading American fiddle players, each of whom has adopted the five-string fiddle in their own musical practice. The participants represent a rich cross section of American fiddle culture. They emerged naturally during the course of the literature review, and in-depth listening research, as particularly relevant sample cases. All participants were identified as leading exponents of the diversities encompassed in American fiddle music, between them sharing extensive professional recording, performance and academic experience, and all playing on five-string instruments. The research is further illuminated through practice, reflecting on my own musical work in illustrating how I have personally adopted the five-string fiddle, drawing influence from the research in demonstrating some wider possibilities of the instrument.

This enquiry is important as it addresses the lack of specific research to date regarding the five-string fiddle, despite the significance it holds for some of American fiddle music's leading exponents, and consequently, for fiddle music itself. Equally significant, is the role of the instrument in facilitating the performance of innovative extended instrumental techniques, in particular, the five-string fiddles association with the rhythmic/percussive 'chop' bow techniques, now, so conspicuous within contemporary groove-based American string music.
The findings of this research established the definitive emergence of the five-string fiddle, and subscribe that the five-string has now become a widely accepted part of the mainstream instrumentation in American music. This understanding emerges clearly through the words and practice of the participants. From this perspective, the research identifies the musical reasons that inspire the instrument's popularity and elaborates through practice, the musical possibilities it presents to others.
INTRODUCTION

In outlining their recently established American Roots Music Program, Berklee College of Music state that the ‘artistic validity of a wide range of American roots styles including blues, gospel, folk, early country music, bluegrass, old-time, cajun, western swing, polka, Tex-Mex, and others is beyond dispute’ (online http://www.berklee.edu/focused/roots). The emergence of this course, in many ways, recognises the contemporary social contexts and artistic levels present in American vernacular music. When discussing American vernacular music, course director and former chair of Berklee College of Music String Department, Matt Glaser, (2009, p.v) describes the ‘world of contemporary fiddling’ as having ‘exploded in the last twenty years’. He points to the distinguished work of fiddle player, Mark O'Connor, as exemplifying this development. Glaser notes that O'Connor ‘has demonstrated that it's possible to play various forms of fiddle music, Jazz and contemporary classical music, all at a very high technical level, and sometimes even simultaneously’ (ibid). Many high level practitioners are increasingly apparent in contemporary American fiddle music, including many who have passed through Berklee, as either students or as faculty members. Significantly, many of these players chose to play on a five-string fiddle. It is this phenomenon that forms the central focus of this research.

The violin, or fiddle, as it is often referred to in folk music, has had a profound and well documented influence on many wide-ranging styles of music. For four hundred years or so, since its emergence, it has co-existed as a primary instrumental force in the development of classical music, while also being central in many diverse folk music styles across the world. The fiddle has occupied a pivotal role in American vernacular music since it arrived with the early settlers and it has been of paramount importance in the ongoing development of many of the musical styles noted above. The instrument continues to inspire new standards of musical performance in the hands of multi-stylistic practitioners, who, in demonstrating highly developed musicianship, technical virtuosity and improvisation skills, encapsulate the explosion in contemporary fiddling, as described by Glaser.

Looking closely at some of the fiddlers at the forefront of the contemporary scene, a significant new development has emerged. High profile musicians such as Darol Anger,
Casey Driessen, Brittany Haas, and many more, perform on five-string fiddles, that is, instruments which have an added fifth string, a low \( c \), which extends the range of the classic four-string form of the instrument to that of a viola. Many five-string players feature regularly in professional periodicals such as *The Strad*, *Strings*, and *Fiddler Magazine*, yet, surprisingly, the impact of the five-string fiddle on their music is often, on a large scale, not addressed in the literature. Anger (2008, p.1) states that the five-string fiddle has ‘caught on and is likely here to stay’. He believes that people who play five-string instruments ‘seem to love them and don’t want to go back’ (*ibid*). When this increased prominence of the five-string instrument, amongst some of the most respected musicians of a generation, is considered in the context of the historical, musical and cultural stature of the violin, it presents itself as a much more salient and yet broadly under researched subject of enquiry.

**Research Questions**

This research examines how the past ten years have witnessed the pervasive emergence of the five-string fiddle within contemporary North American fiddle culture. This exploration is inspired by my own sustained interest in playing and listening to American fiddle music, an engagement maintained since I began to play fiddle as a teenager, both in the folk and classical realms, and from my own interest in, and adaptation of, the five-string violin over the past five years.

The objective of the research is to present a definitive account of the five-string fiddle and its recent intensification in American fiddle music by integrating the personal understandings and experiences of the musical innovators involved, with a study of their work on the instrument. This is supplemented by an inquiry into the possibilities the instrument presents for practitioners. The research also poses a number of sub questions:

- Why would some of the greatest contemporary American musicians choose to play on a five-string fiddle?

- What does the five-string offer to the professional practice of these musicians, that presents it as a more attractive and interesting option than the established and much sought after instrument that emerged in Italy in the sixteenth century,
and which has remained relatively unchanged since?

- What influence does the emergence of the five-string fiddle have on musical performance, composition and improvisation, and on the musical role of the fiddler in American music?

- What does the future hold for the five-string fiddle and the music that is played on the instrument?

Structure of Thesis

The first three chapters establish the background and context of the research through the lens of the existing literature, while also engaging with music recordings and film, in surveying what is primarily an aural tradition.

Chapter 1 details the development and cultural eminence of the violin, exploring the instrument in the context of its position and history in American vernacular music. The two distinct literatures are extremely broad in nature. Chapter 1 considers the relative consistency of the instrument's form since its emergence in contextualising the significance of the rise of the five-string fiddle amongst some of America's finest fiddle players in recent times. This chapter examines the vast field of American music and surveys the development and central role of fiddle playing in American folk music styles, in examining the music's, and the instrument's, capacity for adaptation and reinvention. Chapter 1 explicates styles such as Old-Time, and the Blues, and details the emergence of Bluegrass and related styles, where the five-string fiddle was first heard in the music of fiddlers such as Bobby Hicks and Johnny Gimble from the early 1960s.

Chapter 2 focuses on the five-string fiddle and outlines its recent emergence in the hands of professional artist-level fiddlers. From Hicks and Gimble, through to players like Darol Anger, Casey Driessen, Brittany Haas, Dan Trueman, Lauren Rioux, and more, the instrument has become increasingly popular across various styles in the contemporary American fiddle scene. Chapter 2 examines how the instrument has been addressed to date in the literature, mapping the rise in its use within the context of contemporary fiddle music and among the artists named above.
Chapter 3 focuses on the technical and performative aspects of the fiddle in American music, looking at what makes the instrument sound idiomatically American. Engaging with the literature around fiddle technique, this chapter outlines the existing repertoire and the role of improvisation within that structure. Contemporary approaches to technique, improvisation and composition, in the context of the five-string fiddle, are examined, in considering the fluidity of the music and musicians and the impact that the instrument has had to date.

Chapter 4 outlines the epistemological perspective and research methodology adopted in the work. The qualitative focus of the research is explicated, detailing the use of the interview as a primary means of data generation, along with the subsequent approaches to data analysis. This chapter also describes the research's interaction with my own musical practice and the five-string fiddle.

Chapter 5 outlines the data emerging from the interview process, focusing on the voice of the fiddler and the individual experiences of the participants with the five-string fiddle. The personal thoughts, and the experiences that brought these artist level musicians to the five-string fiddle, are central to this research; their individual stories will form an essential perspective on the subject. The discussion is structured thematically in examining a broad range of emergent topics discussed by the participants.

Chapter 6 concentrates on the use of the five-string fiddle in performance, as described by the participants in the interviews, in the context of their own musical practice. The data presented is intersected with video examples of the participant's own practice, to aid in the creation of an overall musical picture of the rise of the five-string fiddle in American music.

Chapter 7 examines the interaction of the research with my own musical practice on the five-string fiddle. Throughout the research process, I was endeavouring to develop my own practice, drawing inspiration from the work of the participants and how they had approached the instrument. This chapter describes that process. In doing so, I again consider the responses of the participants, now, through my own practice. I present a
suite of video examples of my own practice which are discussed in this chapter in terms of the research.

Chapter 8 reviews the research questions and discusses the findings by way of a conclusion, making some final observations regarding the implications of the work, and presenting suggestions for future related studies.

A Practical Perspective

At the beginning of this research, I decided, that no matter how the research unfolded, I wanted to look at and develop my own music making during the process. This seemed then, and continues to feel now, exactly the right journey for me to take. The project could have been approached exclusively from the perspective of social research, yet for me questions would remain, about what the meaning of what the participants said presented to music making for the wider world. What does it mean for the music I want to make? The project could equally perhaps have undertaken more practice based methods, but at the loss of unearthing the five-string phenomenon itself, in favour of my music, and this would not have addressed my questions either. Having considered all of this carefully, I decided to engage fully in social research methods, but to keep a reflective eye on my own music throughout. This involved identifying and absorbing the various musical concepts and techniques thrown up by the research findings, as innovated and discussed by some of the greatest fiddle players in American music.
CHAPTER 1
FROM CREMONA TO THE COLONIES, FROM STRADIVARI TO SWING

1.1 Introduction

This chapter constructs a condensed overview of the ancestry and development of the violin and of American fiddle music, and examines the interaction between the two. Simultaneously exploring two distinct literatures, the chapter surveys and points to the relevant texts, audio and film recordings and other sources that offer information central to the focus of this enquiry.

Structured in two parts, part one of this chapter presents an over-arching review of the literature, introducing the instrument known both as the violin and the fiddle and outlining some general concepts of folk music and the American vernacular by way of introduction. Part two of this chapter systematically engages with theoretical and historical perspectives in relation to the emergence and development of the violin. In setting out his research and information guide to North American fiddle music, Beisswenger (2011, p.xix) presents a suggested fiddle music chronology, proposing it as a useful timeline to researchers as a ‘general historical framework from which to approach their work’. Beisswenger orientates his timeline as follows: before 1500, the 1500s, 1600s, 1700s, 1800s, 1900 to 1930, 1930 to 1960, 1960 to 1980, 1980 to 2010. Drawing broadly upon this timeline and concentrating on the context and significance of the fiddle’s journey into and through American music, the chapter leads the reader to the earliest examples of the use of the five-string fiddle in Bluegrass music.

Part One

1.2 The Literature: An Overview

Broyles (Nicholls ed 1998, p.156) points to a consideration shared by this research:

In a country as varied as the United States it would be impossible to discuss all the types of folk music that immigrants brought with them or which developed in particular regions or among particular ethnic groups.
Beisswenger (2011, p.xix) also acknowledges that, regarding a literature review, 'the idea of creating one is daunting' considering the vastness of the field and the various approaches that could be undertaken. In this context, the following discussion deals with identifying and bringing the reader chronologically through the most relevant genres that impact upon the contemporary American fiddle world, a scene which has witnessed an explosion in the use of the five-string fiddle in recent times. In preparing this chapter, the *Cambridge History of American Music* (1998) proved to be an excellent over-arching study of the diversities in the field of American music. Equally, Crawford's (2005) *American Musical Life* presents a detailed study of the very broad nature of American music. American fiddle music is, historically, a predominantly aural tradition. Carlson (2001, p.9) contrasts the breadth of literature available regarding classical violin methodology to that attending to the technical aspects of fiddle performance, stating that 'American folk fiddle technique essentially has had no written history'. Beisswenger (2011, p.xiv) proposes that the 1944 publication by Samuel Bayard, *Hill Country Tunes*, focusing on the fiddle and fife music of Pennsylvania, marked the beginning of 'the scholarly study of North American fiddle traditions'. He also acknowledges the preceding work of musicians, writers and tune collectors dating back to the 1600s in archiving important information regarding the music and musicians of the North American fiddling traditions.

Beisswenger’s work proves a very useful resource, detailing a vast collection of references to the literature associated with American fiddle music. The material is delineated under categories such as general sources, genre, selected ethnic groups, and selected regional and national groups. The text places emphasis on established traditions rather than ‘musicians who present highly personal interpretations’ (*ibid*, p.xiv), a description which could perhaps be attributed to some of the practitioners central to this research. References to Darol Anger, Casey Driessen, Brittany Haas, and Matt Glaser, are categorized under Jazz and Progressive (*ibid*, p.120). Anger and Glaser are also accounted for in Bluegrass, as are fellow five-string fiddle players, Michael Cleveland and Bobby Hicks (*ibid*, p.65).

Literature regarding the violin is abundant, emerging from wide ranging fields of study, including violin performance, musical composition, musicology, ethnomusicology, music pedagogy, music history, violin making, acoustics, physics and physiology (Katz,
Periodicals, such as *Fiddler Magazine*, *Strings* and *The Strad*, offer some of the richest information sources in the context of the nature and purpose of this research. They present many relevant articles, such as artist profiles, interviews of leading American contemporary fiddle players, and reviews of their recordings and performances. Fiddle tune collections and instrumental method texts also prove to be useful information sources, as they are typically written primarily by practitioners. Regarding the violin, this chapter concentrates on establishing the instrument’s relative consistency since the mid-sixteenth century, while pointing also to periods of change and development, with a view to contextualizing the status of the instrument within the research. This historical review is intersected with literature concerning American fiddle music. It will be focused on the fiddle’s inherently central position, and on establishing an idiomatic and cultural context for the instrument in bringing the reader to the five-string instrument and its recent emergence and impact within contemporary American fiddle music. If there is a relative consistency regarding the fiddle's journey through American music, it must be the instrument's apparent capacity to adapt and develop, to inspire change and rejuvenation, while maintaining a central role at the heart of the music itself. This is notably exemplified by the recent proliferation of the chop bow stroke which has developed from a simple rhythmic down stroke, originally absorbed from the mandolin technique of Bill Monroe in Bluegrass music, and pioneered on the fiddle by Richard Greene (Reel, 2007, p.16). This now highly elaborate and technical bow stroke, inspiring the latest groove based fiddle and string styles, as played by Anger, Turtle Island String Quartet, Driessen and Haas, amongst others, takes its place in a rich lineage of musical reinvention, which will be discussed in later chapters.

**1.3 What is a Violin? A Short Introduction to a Long Story**

It is an extension of the human body: it rests on the collarbone and communicates its vibrations to our bones and the empty spaces of our bodies, which then resonate in turn (Menuhin 2009, p.116).

The violin has existed in its current physical form since the mid-sixteenth century. Drawing on the intertwining ancestry of thousands of years of musical performance and evolution of musical instruments, the work of luthier Andrea Amati (b. before 1505; d.1577) (Dilworth, 1992, p.11) and his sons, Antonio and Girolamo, 'the brothers Amati', culminated in the design of the instrument which has since remained relatively
unchanged (See Fig 1.1). Sandys and Forster (2006, p.90) substantiate the view that 'there has been no permanent or essential change since the latter part of the sixteenth century'. More recently, the high profile American musician Mark O'Connor (2012, 1min 50) queried:

...if there's another contraption that like the violin, viola, cello, basically the violin family, that was invented that long ago that has not been developed or improved upon in all these years.

O'Connor's point serves to capture the air of consistency that surrounds the violin, yet it is also a somewhat broad statement. In his early career, O'Connor had played on four and five-string electric instruments made by American violin company, Zeta, so he does have some direct experience of developments in violin making. He states that he has, for the last twenty five years, performed broadening styles of 'American classical music' on an instrument that was invented four hundred years ago (ibid, 0.25).
While small details of design may differ from the violin of one particular maker to that of another, the instrument has many common and defining characteristics. The violin, since its invention, has comprised four strings, tuned g- d- a- e, sounded by a bow. In considering over-arching perceptions of the violin, and recognising its social position and musical versatility, Cooke (1992, p.234) attributes that '[n]o other musical instrument has until recent years been so widely used among all classes throughout the world'. This sentiment is echoed throughout the literature, encapsulated warmly in Schoenbaum's *The Violin: A Social History of the World's Most Versatile Instrument* (2013, p.xxi)

Standing or sitting, for better or worse, at any latitude, longitude, or time of day, the violin could be played solo or in groups, by royalty or rustics, artists or entertainers, professionals or amateurs, adults or children, men or women. American slaves or Russian serfs.

From the modern mass manufactured factory instrument, to the hand crafted, prized possession ‘fine’ violin of the artisan workshop, the instrument continues to attract considerable attention, speculation and lore. Marchese (2007, fourth cover) asks '[h]ow does a simple piece of wood become the king of instruments?'

### 1.3.1 The bow

The sustained singing tone of the violin and that of the wider string family is produced by the drawing of the bow on the string, described as bowing. Beament (2001, p.156) identifies that ‘it is the bowed sound which has established the instruments position in music for several centuries'. Further sound production techniques include *pizzicato* (plucked), bounced bow techniques, such as *spiccato*, and other 'extended techniques', such as *col legno*, using the stick rather than the hair of the bow on the string. The bowed stick is considered to be one of the earliest human inventions, and Beament (2001, p.157) attributes the lineage of bowed string instruments and the violin bow directly back to the hunter's bow. Haigh (2009, p.7) similarly states that the 'widely accepted view of the bow's origin is that it was invented by the horse-riding warrior nomads of central Asia in the eighth century or shortly before'. The use of the bow as a mechanism to vibrate a string can be ‘traced back to almost six centuries before the violin family’s evolution’ (Stowell 2001, p.38) with the non-standardised bows that were used on earlier instruments initially being used to sound the emerging violin. Kolneder (2003, p.16) suggests that while bowing is the most typical form of violin tone
production, ‘the process is actually extremely complicated and in its most minute details not yet entirely understood’.

Since the work of François Tourte (1745-1835), the professional standard bow has been made using Pernambuco wood (*Caesalpinia echinata*) originating from Brazil (Kolneder, 2003, p.45) and features an inwardly curved stick that is made to increase in tension when the bow hair is tightened (Beament, 2001, p.158). The bow uses horse hair to which rosin, ‘partially refined natural resin’ (*ibid*, p.162) is applied in order to adhere the bow to the string, thus cultivating the sustaining sound. According to Stowell (2001, p.46), the development of the Tourte model bow has ‘enabled performers to produce a stronger tone’, and it both inspired and made possible the emergent bowing techniques of eighteenth century music. Some contemporary bow makers, such as Benoit Rolland, and Bernd Müsing of Arcus Bows construct bows from carbon fibre, including the Arcus 'Vega' bow for five and six-string violin (See Fig 1.2). American bow manufacturer ‘CodaBow’ also make a carbon fibre bow for extended range violins, called the 'Joule' bow.

1.4 An Instrument of the 'Folk'

Menuhin (2009, p.99) writes:

In its origins, the violin was an instrument of the people: in villages the violinist's job was to escort the wedding party and get the guests dancing - whether in Russia, Poland, Romania, Norway, Scotland, [or] the Blue Mountains of Virginia.

The concept of folk music has its origins in Johann Gottfried Herder’s 'Volkslied' (‘folksong’) from 1778-79 and ‘has been defined and developed in multiple ways by collectors, scholars and practitioners, within different geographical locations and in
different historical periods’ (Pegg, Oxford music online). The ethnomusicologist, Mark Slobin (2011, p.3), suggests folk music ‘...is more of a working practice', than just 'a set of songs and tunes'. Slobin sees American folk music as 'featuring the mountaineers of Appalachia and the African American Blues singers, all playing acoustic instruments - guitar, fiddle, banjo - with a hint of social significance' (ibid, p.1). For Goertzen (1988, p.107), '[c]ontemporary fiddling is an extremely vigorous contest and concert art', suggesting that twentieth century fiddle music may 'edge towards' art music, acknowledging the interaction of folk, popular and art music as an 'important part of the history of American fiddling'. This point is increasingly evidenced in the work of many contemporary fiddlers since the end of the twentieth century. The fiddle, and increasingly the five-string fiddle, in the hands of exponents like Darol Anger or Dan Trueman, demonstrates the meaningful convergence of folk fiddle styles and what may be considered to be art music (such as the string quartet), and interaction with contemporary composition techniques and use of electronic elements. These developments will be explored in Chapter 2.

Mitchell (2007, p.7) acknowledges the inherent difficulties in defining folk music, suggesting that, from the 1930s in the North American context, 'the understanding of the concept of “the folk” began to broaden' (ibid, p.9). Nettl (1976, p.14), writing 30 years earlier, voiced similar concerns. He affirms that '[f]olk music in the United States reflects the history and composition of American society’, a description that, appropriately, for this research, encapsulates the breadth of influence and adaptation permeated by the convergence of so many immigrant cultures, as evidenced in the multi-stylistic American fiddle world. Much of America’s folk music has ‘been appropriated from sources ranging from European dances to reform hymns to popular song’ (Brooks, 1998, p.43), typically reflected in the subcultures of immigrant groups. Each community, suggests Brooks, (ibid, p.44) ‘seeks to preserve its own music without change’ whilst also seeking to ‘enrich its tradition by absorbing alien material whenever it appears useful’. This is the situation for most subcultures to varying degrees and is most certainly apparent in American folk music. This claim is evidenced by the existence of definitive stylistic genres and traditions within an overarching terrain that demonstrates progression and the development of new styles, which, within their innovation, also draw heavily on the already established musical sub-cultures. Performers such as Crooked Still, Punch Brothers, Republic of Strings, and many more,
exemplify this, drawing rich influence from Bluegrass, Old-Time, folk song, and popular song, instantly recognisable as American, even though they are not necessarily any one of the above. Nettl (1976, p.15), in this regard, writes that 'the majority of ethnic groups in America participate in a combination of traditions', capturing the fluidity of most American vernacular or folk music communities.

Filene (2000, p.4) discusses American 'vernacular' music, suggesting the term encompasses music 'employing a musical language that is current, familiar, and manipulable by ordinary people'. According to Filene (ibid), vernacular music requires less formal training than classical, though high levels of training can be applied to it, noting that vernacular music included Appalachian mountain music, and the Blues, and encompassed equally, newly emerged genres such as Hip-Hop and Techno. Rosenberg (1997, p.37), concerning Harry Smith's 'Anthology of American Folk Music' (1952), states that Smith, in naming it 'American Folk Music' suggested a collectivity that appealed to a significant part of the public', demonstrating the widespread understandings of the term, folk music. Rosenberg (ibid) acknowledges however, that 'today we may deconstruct it and interpret it from many sides', similarly recognising the many, varied and related musical styles inherent in the over-arching understandings of American folk music. Of particular relevance to fiddle music, and to this research, Beisswenger (2011, p.vii) specifically identifies North American fiddle genres to comprise Bluegrass, Blues and Rock, Cajun, contest fiddling, Country, Jazz and Progressive, Minstrelsy, Old-Time, and Western Swing.

1.4.1 Some say fiddle, some say violin

The violin is widely considered to be a perfect instrument for many performance styles. Concerning it, Heron-Allen (1885, p.104) asked: 'How is it one never hears of improvements to the violin?', suggesting that other musical instruments 'advance in perfection with the march of progress, but the fiddle seems to stand still'. Carlson (2001, p.5) attributes the fiddle’s pre-eminence in American music to 'the fiddle's capacity for strong rhythmic articulations as well as beautiful ringing tones'. Typically referred to as the 'fiddle' in folk music, and the 'violin' in classical settings, the violin or fiddle, in the physical sense at least, is the same musical instrument. Increasingly though, such exclusive conceptual separations of fiddler and violinist appear to blur within American music culture. Lieberman (1999, p.7) encapsulates her ambitious vision of the
contemporary violinist as:

One who knows fiddle styles (Irish, bluegrass, old time, Scandinavian, Cajun, country et al.); can improvise in any style, greets odd meter such as 5/8 or 11/8 with expertise; can play rhythm violin; wails on the blues with lightning and thunder, and is equally at home with the classics.

Mimi Rabson (online https://www.berklee.edu/people/mimi-rabson) describes a similar vision in her approach with students towards removing the historical exclusivities inherent in music education:

Many string players come to Berklee with a strong background in classical music, but few improvisational skills. They read pretty well but interpret everything through a classical music lens. I help them work on the new skills they need to become strong improvisers and to develop a unique musical voice. Playing over changes, as well as hearing and expressing the subtleties that make one genre different from another, are core issues for me.

Guntharp (1980, p.35) states that 'what really differentiates the two is the way they are played', suggesting that 'next to the human voice, the fiddle is the most popular folk instrument in North America' (ibid, p.13). Cooke (1992, p.235) distinguishes 'between those “violinists” who have learned the playing style and repertory of classical Europe and “fiddlers” who play a local dance or dance-song repertory', identifying the musical style and repertoire as the distinguishing feature, with the physical instrument, however named, remaining the same. Linda Burman-Hall (1975, p.48), Professor of Music at the University of California, suggests that '[i]n the art of folk fiddling, the complex of widespread and highly conventionalized mannerisms of performance thoroughly distinguish the fiddler from the violinist'. This is certainly evidenced throughout the development of American fiddle styles, with an idiomatic and extended technique that is clearly distinct from the technical repertoire of the violinist, forming a significant, identifiable and inventive part of the soundscape. In this regard, this research will proceed to use the term fiddle in the context outlined above relating to American fiddle music, while referring to the instrument as the violin when regarding the classical contexts of the instrument, and its history and development.

On the instrument itself, fiddlers often opt to have their instrument set up with a flatter bridge than that of the classical violinist, so as to facilitate ease in double stop playing, one of the classic sounds of American fiddling. Krassen (1973, p.6) notes, in this context, that as a consequence of the substantial use of double stops in most American fiddle styles, 'fiddlers flatten their bridges so that just enough arch is left for single
string playing when required'. Philips (1984, p.123), on the same theme, writes that 'Old-Time fiddlers who consistently play two strings at once have a flattish bridge'. Bluegrass fiddler and fiddle workshop owner Byron Berline (Fili, p.33) remarks that 'most classical players couldn't play on a flat bridge because it's not what they're used to'. The reduced bowing angles, created by the arc of a bridge that is quite flat, does certainly make fast single note playing difficult to execute cleanly, yet this compromise is acceptable to many non-classical players, as the advantages presented for double stop and open string drone playing outweigh such difficulties. Berline (ibid) notes, that, on his five-string fiddle, 'the bridge tends to have more of an arc' (See Fig 1.3). Other aspects of set up that may differentiate the typical instrument of the fiddler from that of the violinist would often include string choice and height from the fingerboard. The fiddle player may opt for a lower/faster string action and may also prefer steel strings, while the violinist would typically use gut or synthetic strings in striving to achieve a more rich and broad tonal range.

Fig 1.3: Jonathan Cooper five-string bridge curve (photo by Amanda Kowalski)
Part Two

Intersecting the Chronology of American Fiddle Music and the Evolution of the Violin

1.5  Before 1500, Before the Violin

Anick and Reiner (2000, p.12) note that the violin, as we know it today, 'didn't even exist when Columbus first set foot in America [1492]'; 'The history of American music begins with American Indians, who were the original inhabitants of North America' according to Levine (1998, p.3), with the music of the American Indians displaying a 'nearly exclusive emphasis on singing rather than instrumental music' (ibid, p.4). Levine (ibid, p.24) does observe, in relation to the fiddle, that European-American fiddle music repertory was absorbed by the Tahono O'odham tribe in southern Arizona during the nineteenth century, where it continues to be evidenced today.

Boyden (1990, p.8) describes the violin as having 'evolved from several [parents] early in the sixteenth century', noting in particular the contribution of three bowed instruments, the rebec, the Renaissance fiddle (fidel) and the lira da braccio. With the emergence of the violin in combining the attributes of its predecessors, each of these instruments themselves subsequently became obsolete. The rebec (See Fig 1.4) can be traced to the thirteenth century. Remnant (1986, p.30) concludes that various forms of the word are apparent in writings from c.1300, but not in literature pre-dating this. Boyden (1990, p.9) explains that the instrument was fretless and positioned at the neck for performance. The instrument was constructed without a sound post, which would suggest the rebec's timbre was not that similar to that of today's instrument. Reconstructions suggest it to have been 'pungent and penetrating, even raucous, with some of the nasal quality of the oboe' (ibid, p.9). Remnant (1986, p.1) refers to a boxwood instrument 'with grooves for five strings' similar in shape to the rebec, named the 'Mandora' and stored in the Metropolitan museum, New York, dating from c.1400, demonstrating the non-standardised and evolutionary nature of pre-violin like instruments. In the context of this research, the Mandora also demonstrates that in the overarching history of string instruments, five-string instruments have been present since the earliest developments.
Remnant (1986, p.xxii), in her text *English Bowed Instruments from Anglo-Saxon to Tudor Times*, suggests that the term 'fiddle', is the safest word to describe all medieval bowed string instruments, though she subsequently sets out clear classifications of particular instruments in her work and attributes the word 'fiddle' to most appropriately signify the medieval fiddle (See Fig 1.4) (1986, p.61). According to Boyden, the Renaissance fiddle, from around 1500, typically had five strings, though one of them worked as a drone, not stopped by the finger. He describes this instrument as 'similar to the violin, being in the soprano register, of comparable size, and constructed of a top and back with connecting ribs' (1990, p.9), noting however, that it was usually fretted. Stowell (2001, p.174) also suggests that the medieval fiddle commonly had five strings, one of which was used as a drone. The instrument appears to have had no standard tuning, and was played by a bow similar to that used to sound the rebec and many other medieval string instruments.
The lira da braccio, (See Fig 1.6), had five strings to be played by the fingers, tuned according to Boyden (1965, p.10) \( g \ g' \ d' \ a' \ d^* \), and two additional drone strings. Remnant (1986, p.2) describes the lira da braccio as having 'five strings over the fingerboard and two lateral drones' citing a preserved example held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (by Giovanni d'Andrea, 1511) and a later example by Giovanni Maria, kept at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
Considered from the perspective of this research, it is clear that five-string instruments were significant precursors of the violin. This research thus, could be considered to be book-ended by five-string instruments, the Renaissance fiddle and the lira da braccio as discussed above, and the contemporary five-string fiddle, which will form the subject of Chapter 2 and the central focus of this research in the context of American fiddle music.

Another, separate, family of instruments emerging in the literature regarding the history of string instruments informing this research, is the viol. *The Grove Concise Dictionary of Music* (1994, p.861), describes the viol as ‘a bowed string instrument with frets’ typically played between the legs or on the lap of the performer, giving rise to terms 'viola da gamba' and simply 'gamba' to refer to the instrument. A contemporary of the emerging violin, Woodfield (1988, p.3), indicates that research is inconclusive as to the viol’s place of origin, citing Dart and Boyden, who proposed it as emerging in Spain in the fifteenth century. Ambiguities, regarding the viol’s relationship to the violin, appear to have existed in literature. For Bachmann (1925, p.6), ‘the viols were the immediate predecessors of the violin’, however Woodfield (*ibid*, p.2), amongst others, strongly rejects such connections, citing van der Straeten, who states that ‘it must be clearly understood that the viols were not the parent of the violin family’. Boyden (1990, p.3) suggests Ortiz's *Tratado* (1553) as an early treatise on playing divisions on viol instruments, which are 'elaborate instrumental figurations improvised around a given
part or melody'.

1.6 The 1500s and the Emergence of the 'True' Violin

Boyden introduces his text, *The History of Violin Playing from its Origins to 1761*, citing Praetorius (*Syntagma Musicum*) from 1619, who decided that 'since everyone knows about the violin family, it is unnecessary to indicate or write anything further about it'. This evidences a relatively widespread acceptance of the violin in the form it takes today by the early seventeenth century. The Hill Brothers (1963, p.229) attribute the term 'true violin' in differentiating the violin from the viol family, discussed above. 'True violin' is also used by Boyden (1990, p.6) to 'distinguish earliest forms of the violin' from the instrument that is accepted as the standard today. In contemplating the definitive emergence of the violin from its ancestral precursors, Boyden (*ibid*, p.6) considers questions such as: ‘What structural features must it have? How many strings?’ In defining the instrument, and in his construction of an approximate timeline of its emergence, Boyden (*ibid*) proposes that the violin emerged between 1520 and 1550 and describes this time as the instrument’s formative period. Boyden (*ibid*) states that the ‘earliest type of violin appeared not later than 1530’, in the form of a three string instrument, tuned g-d-a, the three lower strings of the true violin; he suggests that an instrument representing an example of the true violin was in existence by around 1550.

*The Oxford Dictionary of Music* states that the instruments of the Brothers Amati significantly contributed to the work of the Cremona school, establishing it as the benchmark for violin making across Europe. The instrument evolved through four generations of the Amati family in Cremona. Their refining process reaching its pinnacle in the work of Nicola Amati (1596-1684), whose 'grand' pattern incorporated all the developments of his father [Girolamo] and added some of his own' (Dilworth, 1993, p.12). The instruments of Nicola Amati are particularly highly regarded violins. The 'grand pattern' instrument was constructed with the intention of increasing tone production and, according to Boyden (1990, p.195), 'it is significant that even in the late eighteenth century his violins cost far more than those of Stradivari’.

Mark Katz cites Hans Gerle's *Musica Teusch auf die Instrument die grossen unnd kleynen Geygen* (1532, p.578) as the first mention of the violin in print by way of introducing his own annotated bibliography of the instrument, *The Violin: A Research
and Information Guide (2006). Katz's survey, the first such review since De Fidiculis Bibliographia (Heron-Allen 1894), catalogues 'a wide variety of writings on the instrument', though the writer acknowledges that a 'truly complete bibliography of the violin will never exist' (2006, p.2). This work serves as a valuable resource, pointing comprehensively to diverse information sources regarding research of the violin. However, the book's understandable limits, and its clear remit in dealing only with the classical understandings of the instrument, render it far from being a complete research guide to the violin in the context of this research.

According to Boyden (1990, p.3), in Europe, the violin initially would have predominantly doubled vocal parts in performance and consequentially, performance techniques of the instrument would have 'remained undeveloped'. He points to the early use of the violin in dance music of the time as an exception in promoting development of idiomatic performance technique on the instrument. Boyden observes that the earliest example of music written specifically for the violin was composed by Lambert de Beaulieu and Jacques Salmon in 1581 in France for a royal wedding (1965, p.56).

1.7 The 1600s and the Expanding Horizons of the Violin in America

Kate Van Winkle Keller's (2007, p.34) study of early American dance and music suggests that when the French landed near, what is now present day, Jacksonville in June 1564, 'they had a number of musicians with them: a violin, spinet, horns, trumpets and fifes'. John Utie is widely attributed as being the first named fiddler to land in America, arriving from Britain in 1620, one of the first of many immigrant settlers who would continue to arrive from Britain, and subsequently from across Europe, with 'fiddles, songs, folk tales' (Haigh, 2009, p.143). According to Maurer (1950, p.1), 'the Francis Bonaventure sailed up James River with Virginia's first fiddler', referencing Utie's arrival in Jamestown, Virginia. Jamestown was founded in 1607 as the first permanent British colony. The name Utie is also referred to by Warner (1984, p.18), pointing to a James Utie landing from England in 1620, citing court records, referring to Utie as a fiddler and 'musitione'.

Scott Reiss (2002, p.4), of the Hesperus Early Music Ensemble, indicates that 'the violin, the most common instrument for dancing, and the more private viol (viola de
gamba) were favourite instruments on both sides of the Atlantic' in relation to the acculturation of musical instruments brought to America by seventeenth and eighteenth century immigrants. The Hesperus ensemble's recording, 'Early American Roots' (1997), features very early country dance and cotillion music, and, like all folk music, this would have been typically disseminated aurally. Reiss cites printed collections such as \textit{The English Dancing Master} (Playford 1651) as a primary source of notated material. He \textit{(ibid, p.5)} also refers to \textit{The Division Violin} (1684), in exemplifying typical publications of the time that presented transcribed or suggested improvisations for violin performance, referred to as 'divisions'. He observes that 'before this century, improvisation was an important part of instrumental music performance', referring to the decreased use of improvisation that was evidenced as classical music became increasingly codified.

\subsection*{1.7.1 ‘Is that a Stradivarius’?}

Returning focus to Europe, Stowell (2001, p.10) states that by the early seventeenth century the instrument was ‘rapidly transformed from a provider of popular dance music into a vehicle for the most sophisticated artistic ends’. These developments were further advanced by Italian violinist/composers such as Cima and Monteverdi, and are exemplified by Corelli’s Op.5, from 1700, which, according to Stowell \textit{(ibid, p.3)}, ‘summarises and codifies the musical, idiomatic and technical achievements of the violinist-composer of the period’. Corelli is credited as being the first owner of the 'Harrison' Stradivari, built in 1697 (Silvela, p.265), an instrument described by the National Music Museum, University of South Dakota, as the 'greatest concert violin built before 1700'. For Kolneder (1998, p.131) ‘the instruments of the Guarneri and Stradivari families represent the very apex of violin making’. In surveying the instruments chosen by master solo violinists of the classical world, the two makers appear consistently. While Menuhin played exclusively on Stradivari violins for much of his career, he describes the Guarnerius, the 'Lord Wilton' as his crowning acquisition (1996, p.97).

If one name is synonymously associated with the violin though, it is Antonio Stradivari, described by Dilworth (1992, p.13) as 'the most famous follower of Nicola Amati'. In many ways, the social status and cultural gravity of the violin can be understood through the lens of Stradivari’s legacy. One of today's foremost violin experts, Stewart
Pollens (2010, p.2), introducing his recent study on the work of the instrument maker, writes that 'Stradivari has long been recognised as the greatest violin maker of all time'. On the subject of Stradivari's achievements, Faber (2004, p.xv) also asserts that the maker is 'perhaps the most celebrated craftsman in history', recounting the experience of many who have carried a violin case, to be asked at some point, 'is that a Stradivarius?' Faber (ibid, p.xv) does draw our attention to the so called 'golden period', beginning around 1700, when Stradivari's 'final redesign of the sound box' resulted in violins that are regarded today as the finest in existence. Menuhin (2009, p.96), in discussing his first Stradivarius violin, describes how the instrument's 'roundness and breadth were the source of the sound it produced'. Exemplifying the 'golden period', Menuhin (ibid) cites the 'Soil' (Fig 1.7), made in 1714, as 'one of the greatest violins of the world', speaking of combined qualities 'enabling the instrument to do justice to every emotion imaginable'. Nigel Kennedy (1992, p.76) regards the Guarneri violins as 'not as much publicised, but even more exciting' in comparison to the Stradivari (the 'Cathedrale') that he performed on in his early career. The Hills (1932) provide a detailed analysis of The Violin-Makers of the Guarneri Family, and Kolneder structures his chapter, 'Italian violin making in eighteenth century' (1998, p.127), around a discussion of Antonius and Joseph Guarnerius Del Gesu, grandsons of Andrea Guarneri, the first generation of violin making in the family.

Fig 1.7: Stradivari 'Soil' violin 1714 (Pollens 2010)

1.8 The 1700s: Violin Making Flourishes, America Flourishes

Kolneder (1998, p.127) attributes the fact, that 'after 1700 the demand was such that making string instruments became a flourishing enterprise', to the increase in
instrumental music in the seventeenth century, in forms such as the sonata and concerto grosso, to be found in violin music by Corelli, Torelli and Vivaldi. Beisswenger (2011, p.xx) writes that while the violin became increasingly integral to European composers, concurrently 'country dances were becoming popular in England, Germany, Spain, and France' and these traditions arrived in North America with immigrants. By the early eighteenth century, the solo violin concerto had become firmly established, such as those by Vivaldi and Torelli; consequently, the acoustic performance requirements placed on the instrument were increased. The modifications to the design of the violin in response to the requirements of the late eighteenth century included a lengthening of the neck, in turn influencing a slimmer fingerboard profile. The bass bar and soundpost were both thickened to cultivate a more powerful sound. Stowell (2001, p.33) argues that 'despite the changes in the various violin fittings, the main body of the instrument remained unaltered throughout this period of transition', dually demonstrating the relative consistency of the violin form since its emergence, but equally, exemplifying the instrument's potential for adaptation in response to overwhelming musical requirements.

In relation to this research, Heron-Allen (1885, p.107) describes examples of further experimentation centred on five-string violins as 'combinations of the violin and viola, i.e., tenors with a high e string added, or violins with a low c string added', suggesting the 'violalin' by Hillmer c.1815 as an example. Stowell (2001, p.177) accounts for a selection of five-string instruments, including Woldemar's 'violin-alto' (c.1778), described as 'an interesting compromise between violin and viola' involving 'the addition of a fifth (c) string to, basically a violin body'. Woldemar composed his Concerto in C (1787) for the instrument; the piece was performed by Chrétien Urhan, who, according to Stowell (ibid), was a champion of the violin-alto. Kolneder (1998, p.190) refers to Woldemar's instrument as a 'five-string violin-violin (with a c string)'. Also of relevance to this research, Stowell also lists the 'viola pomposa' (or violino pomposo) tuned c-g-d-a1-e2 or d-g-d1-g1-c2-, used c.1725-70, but evidencing a limited repertoire (Bach, Telemann, Graun) and he also refers the fretted 'quinton', 'a five-string compromise between the violin and viol', noting some popularity in the 1700s. Paulinyi (2010, p.1) defines the 'viola pomposa' as 'a 5-stringed instrument tuned in c-g-d-a-e' with a timbre similar to the traditional orchestral viola.'
Refocusing to America of the 1700s, Epstein (2001, p.592) states that while African emigrants had landed in Virginia by 1619, it was closer to 1800 before any significant record of 'African musical activity' existed. He describes how (ibid, p.598) 'as early as 1694 a black fiddler was playing for the dancing whites of Virginia'. Lieberman (1997, p.8) also addresses the violin in context of 'the early days of America' and considers the emergence of the violin among slave musicians and in particular the evolution of the Blues as a musical form. Lieberman (ibid) describes how slaves 'entertained their masters playing square dance tunes and classical music' and these performances made a major contribution to the development of the Blues idiom. Cooke (1992, p.234) notes that early white settlers in North America 'preferred to teach their musically talented black slaves to play the violin for them', so they could take part in social dancing. Van Winkle Keller (2007, p.115) presents a selection of advertisements dating from 1733 to 1785 regarding runaway slaves, many of which point to the slave's ability to play the fiddle as an identifying feature.

Also of particular interest to this research are the settlements of Scots-Irish, who began to arrive after the leases on farming land in Ulster began to expire, and eventually settled in the Appalachian mountain regions of Virginia and West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and North and South Carolina. These States would later become the centre of Old-Time fiddling. Kirtley (1995, p.34) writes that 'many settlers brought with them fiddle tunes and traditions from Scotland and Ireland', pointing to tunes such as Soldiers Joy, Moneymusk and Fishers Hornpipe as examples still remaining in the repertoire. Fishers Hornpipe is used by Glaser (2009, p.35) to present a study of tetrachords and modulation for Bluegrass fiddlers. O'Connor (1991, p.26) identifies a solo singing tradition of 'English-Irish balladry of the Scots-Irish', and states that 'the Scots-Irish element in Appalachia was well established by the end of the eighteenth century'. Keller and Koegel (1998, p.49) discuss secular music in America until 1800 in detail. The violin is referred to particularly in relation to the availability of instrumental tutor books, such as John Boyle's 1769 publication, An Abstract of Geriniani's Art of Playing the Violin and (in 1778) the instruction books for violin and other instruments, presented by H.B. Victor. This text also refers to the emergence of music stores, citing advertisements in 1759 by Michael Hillegas of Philadelphia, an importer of, amongst other instruments, Italian violins, and similarly, the music store of John Rivington, who was based in New York from 1773 (ibid, p.63).
1.9 The 1800s: The Violin Changes with the Times

In general, according to Stowell (2001, pp.177-178), many of the string instruments designed in the nineteenth century were 'attempts to resolve the problems of viola sonority', notably Ritter's 'viola alta' c.1875, a to-scale enlargement of the violin and incorporating a fifth e string. For Kolneder (1998, p.193), '[t]he great art of eighteenth-century violin making resulted in the wide distribution of master instruments' not only in Europe, but, significantly also in the United States. Consequently, the demand for new instruments declined when we move into the nineteenth century. With increased acoustic and tonal projection expected of the violin for performance in large concert halls, but with most pre-1750 violins intended for 'smaller halls, thinner strings, a lighter, more elegant style of playing', the '...rebuilding of old master violins soon became customary' (ibid, p.195). The move towards this rebuilding work emanated from Paris at the turn of the nineteenth century; by 1840, 'virtually all violins made before 1750' (ibid p.196) had undergone modifications such as installation of a heavier bass bar, a longer neck and a higher bridge, as discussed above. Stowell (1992, p.21) distinguishes the Baroque from the modern violin, suggesting the 'main outward difference' to be the neck, which was typically shorter, thicker and at a lower angle to the body in the Baroque instrument. He also points to the lighter bass bar, strings, tailpiece and soundpost and a flatter bridge curve.

A dramatic increase in emigration to North America in the early nineteenth century witnessed the arrival of many strong musical traditions (Beisswenger, p.xxi). Regarding the significance of instrumental dance music from the Anglo-Celtic traditions, and in particular, the importance of the fiddle in nineteenth century America, Broyles (1998, p.140) recognises that 'no other instrument being more important or ubiquitous at this time' in the transmission of the style across all of America. In relation to the music itself, Broyles (1998, p.141) comments that '[a]lthough Irish and Scottish fiddling traditions differ considerably in performance practice, there are many areas of overlap', particularly in a sharing of dance types, and tunes that are common to both traditions. Broyles (ibid, p.141) suggests that 'the fiddle was the favoured instrument for dances', stating that the dancing master would often carry a fiddle. In rural areas a single fiddler would play for dances, while urban centres would typically have bands, which could include two or more fiddles, in combination with flute, clarinet and banjo, the emphasis being on melodic material with little harmonic structure in evidence. These bands were
the precursor to the 'string band' (see p.31).

Broyles (ibid, p.135) points to instrumental tutors as being particularly significant in researching nineteenth century Anglo-Celtic music in America. He observes that '[b]ecause of the tutors and many instrumental collections, we know more about nineteenth-century folk dance music than folksongs of several important ethnic groups'. Fiddle conventions and competitions emerged increasingly in the nineteenth century across America. Goertzen (1988) (pointing to Randolph, op. Cit., p. 71) accounts that '[f]iddle contests in America were documented beginning in 1736'. Beisswenger (2011, p.xxi) also notes increasing numbers of fiddle contests by the end of the 1800s, such as that held in Gallatin, Tennessee.

1.10 1900s - 1930s: The Fiddle Takes Hold in America

By 1900, a fiddle cost $3.95 from the Sears Roebuck catalogue (See Fig 1.8) (Haigh, 2009, p.145). Fiddles were also constructed using apple or pear woods, or in make shift form from cigar boxes and gourds (Anick & Reiner, 2000, p.18). By the early twentieth century, 'strong regional and ethnic fiddling traditions' (Beisswenger, p.xxi) had emerged across North America, evidencing styles based on settlement patterns and enduring links to the old country, but also some emergent traditions 'distinctive to North America' (ibid). The repertoire of the early American fiddler was European, mainly Irish and Scottish, and included tunes that had English heritage, such as those transcribed by Cecil Sharp collecting in the Appalachian region in 1916-1918.
According to Goertzen (1988, p.108), a 'large number of today's fiddle tunes can be traced back to the reel, strathspey and jig repertoire of mid-to-late eighteenth-century Scotland'. Anick and Reiner (2000, p.13) point to the typical early mountain fiddler as being a soloist 'responsible at dances for providing both melody and rhythmic accompaniment'. In particular, this emerging rhythmic responsibility would account for
initial stylistic deviations from the source music, with melodies becoming simplified to facilitate the cultivation of driving rhythms, and droning double stops employed for additional projection. It is further likely that the isolation of individual fiddlers would itself have been a catalyst of innovation, as song airs were translated into fiddle tunes when and as required for performances.

By the early twentieth century, the advent of broadcast radio and the recording industry would proceed to play a defining role in the development and commercialisation of American fiddling. The honour of being the first commercially recorded fiddle tune appears to be attributed to the tune *Arkansas Traveller* (Audio 1.1), recorded in 1901 by violinist Charles D'Almaine, with a monologue by Len Spencer (Beisswenger, 2011, p.xxii). Walser (1998, p.349) points to the ‘communications revolution of the 1920's’ and the first commercial recordings of hillbilly music in 1922 and the advent of the Grand Ole Opry radio broadcasts in 1925. These developments served to conserve the traditions and also disseminate them amongst other musical styles. Place and Crack (2007) suggest fiddler, Alexander “Eck” Robertson's 1922 recording of the tune, *Sally Goodin* (Audio 1.2) to be the earliest commercial recording of 'traditional American country music', though the recording of Robertson's included in their Smithsonian folkways 'Classic Old-Time Fiddle' collection' is a later version (2007). The term 'Old-Time' itself appears to have emerged from the 'Okeh' recording company in an effort to define the mountain/hillbilly music, in particular that of 'Fiddlin' John Carson, who recorded *The Little Old Log Cabin In the Lane* (Audio 1.3) in 1923, another early commercial release of American folk music (Haigh, 2009, p.147). Brooks (1998, p.45) also points to Appalachian music as having ‘suddenly acquired commercial importance’, as demonstrated by the Carter Family, drawing from the diverse Appalachian ‘jumble of widely disparate items unified essentially by consistencies in performance practice’. The Appalachian 'Mountain Music' according to Milnes (1999, p.7), draws on 'African and European rhythmic, melodic, and vocal traditions, while using melodic forms that display Celtic, Anglo, Germanic, and African emotion and influence'.

Walser (1998, p.346) encapsulates country music's multi-cultural origins as:

Incorporating the fiddle from Europe, the banjo from Africa, the guitar from Spain, the mandolin from Italy, the yodelling of the Swiss musical families who toured the United
States in the nineteenth century, and the Hawaiian steel guitar, which resonated with the bottle-neck playing of the Delta Blues.

The very fact, that by the 1930s there existed 'over fifty recorded Blues fiddlers' (Lieberman, 1997, p.8), indicates that the instrument played a large part in the development of the Blues as a musical form and shows that there were likely many more unrecorded Blues fiddlers playing music, particularly in the southern states. Lonnie Johnson appears to be amongst the most influential, described by Blues guitar legend B.B King as a major influence in the film, *Blues Masters: A Documentation of the Style and Technique of B.B King* (Eberhardt 2002, 2min.40). Johnson's recordings are widely available, including, from 1927, the instrumental *Memphis Stomp* (Audio 1.4), which, in just under three minutes, serves as an excellent example of the instrument in the Blues setting, with many of the parameters of improvisation that are particular to the violin in evidence.

According to Alyn Shipton writing in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, a string band is defined as '[a]ny ensemble consisting largely or wholly of string instruments' (1994, p.1166), citing 'blues, ragtime and society music' as the origin of the sound. According to Lieberman (1995, p.11), The Tennessee Chocolate Drops present a good example of the string band tradition, typically performing at square dances and other family and social events up to the 1930's. Such groups comprising of fiddle, guitar, banjo and mandolin performed a wide collection of country, Blues, Jazz and Popular music. The improvising fiddler, such as Howard Armstrong and Lonnie Chatmon, was a central figure in the string band musical line up. Shipton describes 'parallel developments in Europe' (1994, p.1166) in the 1930's led by the Quintette du Hot Club de France, featuring violinist Stephane Grappelli. Haigh (2009, p.272) describes the quintet as the first recognisable European string band, 'with a distinctively European rather than American voice', and refers to their use of the idiomatic musical vocabulary of traditional gypsy music.

### 1.11 1930s - 1990s: American Fiddle Music Explodes

American fiddle and folk music continued to evolve quickly during the twentieth century, particularly after the advent of recorded sound. Electric violinist Mark Wood (2008, p.8) describes the explosion of musical development across all American music from 1930 to 1979 as being as significant as 'Vienna in the 1700s, or Paris in the early
With the emergence of styles such as Western Swing and particularly Bluegrass, American fiddle music continued to develop creatively and commercially, supported through the depression by the popularity of live performance and radio broadcasts (Beisswenger, p.xxii). It is in these genres that we encounter the five-string fiddle's first appearances in American fiddle music, in the hands of legendary Bluegrass fiddler Bobby Hicks and Western swing player Johnny Gimble in the 1960s, discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

1.11.1 **Bluegrass: An American cultural export**

Like Jazz, it's an experimental art form that, at its best, balances on a knife edge, constantly pushing ahead musical frontiers while never turning its back on the centuries of tradition that gave it life (Earle, 2003, p.54).

So writes the American songwriter Steve Earle, positioning Bluegrass within the wider context of 'American music', in the Annie Leibovitz photo collection of the same name. Rosenberg (2005, p.3) suggests, that 'like Jazz and Blues, Bluegrass is an American cultural export', noting the widespread international following for the style. Bluegrass and related styles remain to the fore of contemporary American fiddle music and are very significant for this research, with some leading Bluegrass fiddle players adopting the five-string fiddle in recent years. Bluegrass draws upon the string band tradition, with an instrumental line up typically including fiddle, mandolin, banjo, guitar and bass. It is usually played at fast tempos and generally includes sophisticated musical material, incorporating a large amount of improvisation in a structure very influenced by Jazz. Typically, the ensemble plays a tune or song, and then individual players improvise solos on the musical form.

The origins of Bluegrass are widely attributed to the music of mandolinist Bill Monroe in the 1940s. Monroe formed his band Blue Grass Boys in 1938 in Atlanta according to Rosenberg (2004, p.95), who states that though the term had been used before that, Monroe's radio play success in the 1940's assured his historical association to the then emerging genre. According to Seeger (2004, p.101), 'Bluegrass describes a specific vocal and instrumental treatment of a certain type of traditional or folk-composed song', pointing in particular to high pitched harmony vocals based on minor and modal intervallic materials, a sound often described as the 'high lonesome sound'. In *High
Lonesome - The Story of Bluegrass Music (Liebling, 1991), Rachel Liebling presents a detailed historical analysis of the origins and subsequent development of Bluegrass music, situated around interviews and performance footage of Bill Monroe and others. The narration over the opening scenes refer to Monroe, suggesting that 'the story of Bluegrass is the story of his musical legacy' (1991, 3min.17). Monroe (1991, 7min.40) contextualises his own background, referring to his first hearing the fiddle at the age of six, played by his uncle Pen Vandiver and pointing in particular to the 'wonderful Scotch Irish sound'. He lists typical tunes to include titles such as Jenny Lynn, Sally Goddin, and Going Across the Sea (ibid).

![Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys, Bill Monroe far left, Bobby Hicks fiddle front left (1958)](image)

Addressing Bluegrass fiddle, Glaser (1999, p.10) points to Monroe's combining of 'elements of mountain, black, Irish and other musics', and credits Chubby Wise as being the first Bluegrass fiddle player. Seeger (2004, p.102) describes the Bluegrass fiddle style as being 'a smooth style initiated largely by the Florida fiddler Chubby Wise' on the early Bill Monroe recordings, using double stops and string slides drawing influence
from Blues and Breakdown styles. Liebling (1991, 9min.46) describes Bluegrass as embodying hillbilly styles, 'but with a high pitch and a fast tempo', elaborating that (ibid, 48min.30) 'Monroe combined musical sounds that were sacred and secular, urban and rural, hillbilly, ragtime, sentimental and Blues, his music had a driving rhythm that was modernised and streamlined'. Illustrating the typical performance mode of contemporary Bluegrass, as pioneered by Monroe, Liebling (ibid, 53min.) describes Monroe's approach as follows:

Monroe was the leader but not the star, he called upon the Bluegrass boys to step up and take solo breaks like a Jazz combo. Monroe encouraged each band member to develop their own style within his tight structure.

There are resonances here with the more recent collaborative musical projects of contemporary American five-string fiddler Darol Anger, such as Republic of Strings, where, while leading the group, Anger employs other fiddle players who are equally featured in performances, including many of the brightest young fiddle stars on the scene, and notably some five-string fiddle players including Brittany Haas, and Lauren Rioux.

Tracing the cultural impact of black railroad workers and their music as they laboured building rail lines in southern mountains, Liebling (1991,16min.38) suggests that 'southern industry changed more than just the land, it brought rural whites into contact with a new culture, and a new kind of music'. Monroe recounts stories of meeting and performing with Arnold Shultz, a black man who played the Blues on guitar and also on fiddle, explaining 'later on when I was putting my music together, I remembered how he played the Blues and everything you know, and so I was going to add some Blues to my music' (ibid, 18min.52). Liebling points to the emergence of Bluegrass festivals in the 1960's (ibid, 12min.27), with the convergence of large audiences and performers allowing the opportunity for musicians to study with the Bluegrass masters. One such student, Sam Bush, now a highly regarded fiddle player and mandolinist, discussing Bluegrass festivals and learning new musical styles at such events, states that 'Bill Monroe was the one who turned me on the most because he was the king of the Bluegrass mandolin, the guy that started the whole style' (ibid, 1.17min). According to Beisswenger (2011, p.xxiii), the folk music revival of the 1960s, fiddle contests and fiddle associations supported ‘an increased interest in the full range of fiddle styles’,
while at the same time, research began to emerge regarding North American fiddle music, with fiddlers being documented in fieldwork pertaining to ethnomusicology and folklore research.

### 1.12 Twentieth Century Developments in Violin Making

Returning to the instrument, Graesser (1998, p.16) states that 'the increasing virtuosity and brilliance of violinists, such as Archangelo Corelli, Antonio Vivaldi, Giuseppe Tartini and later Niccolò Paganini', evidenced between the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, was a direct consequence of the development and refinement of the violin as a musical instrument as demanded by the music and musicians of the day. Similarly, Lieberman (1995, p.62) regarding the more recent setting states that '[w]ith all the stylistic exploration taking place on the violin today, there has been an increasing demand on violin makers for an instrument that is capable of greater sound possibilities'.

Graesser (1998) presents a detailed history of the electric and amplified violin, from the 'Stroh violin' c.1900 (Fig 1.10) to contemporary designs that featured up to 7 strings, which appear in many styles of music, such as Blues, Jazz and Rock, where amplification is required. The majority of electric violin makers offer a five-string option, so suggesting a similar reaction by makers to the stylistic demands of the music typically played on the instrument as described above by Graesser and Lieberman regarding the development of the violin throughout its history.

![Figure 1.10: Advertisement for 'Stroh' violin in magazine 'Phonographische Zeitschrift' ca. 1910 (Graesser, 1988)](image-url)
Graesser (1998, p.23) credits Stuff Smith (see Fig.1.11) as being one of the first violinists to employ use of amplification. Lieberman (1997, p.15) also makes this distinction, pointing to Smith having to 'leave Jelly Roll Morton's groups because he couldn't be heard above the horns' as his inspiration for going electric.

The subject of electric violins is covered in great detail through various approaches by Graesser (1998), Wood (2008) and by Dan Trueman of Princeton University, including his PhD thesis, *Reinventing the Violin* (Trueman, 1999). The electric violin is also
addressed by Haigh (2009) and in various texts by Lieberman. Electric violins are of relevance to this research, as they have been available in five-string versions for some time. They are often used by musicians who perform in band contexts, where the acoustic instrument is just not suitable. The suitability of electric violins for use with electronic effects has also seen them present rich creative performance and compositional inspiration to musicians from all styles.

Perhaps the most notable of five-string electric players is French Jazz violinist, Jean Luc Ponty. Ponty moved into more commercial music in the early 1970's, working with Frank Zappa and the (second) Mahavishnu Orchestra. Ponty, who has stated, 'I wanted to help give the electric violin an identity of its own', has employed the use of the electric violin, electronics and amplification since 1969 (Glaser 1992, p.124). In this way, Ponty challenged perceived conservatism in Jazz, and also understandings of the role and limits of the violin itself; while 'developing a range of new sounds, grounded in electronic effects' (Kernfeld, 1994, p.993), he repositioned the violin in the context of modern Jazz.

According to Ponty's website (online http://www.ponty.com/equipment), he primarily plays an amplified electro-acoustic five-string violin made by Barcus Berry in 1980, an acoustic five-string by Eric Aceto and a collection of electric violins. Other Jazz players, who sometimes use electric violins, include Nigel Kennedy, Darol Anger, Mark O'Conner, Matt Glaser, Casey Driessen and John Blake (Graesser, p.29), while Haigh...
(2009, p.259) points to Boyd Tinsley of the 'Dave Matthews Band', Steve Wickham of 'The Waterboys' and Jerry Goodman as exemplifying the violin in a rock music context. Haigh (2009, p.260) states that 'one of the most seductive things about rock violin is the possibility of using effect pedals', and lists effects used by performers to include chorus, phasing, flanging, wah, delay, overdrive and distortion, pitch shifting and loop pedals.

Fig 1.13: Nigel Kennedy plays five-string electric violin (The Independent, 2009)

1.13 **Conclusion: The Instrument at the End of the Twentieth Century**

Beisswenger (2011, p.xxiii) suggests that, by the 1980s, a significant folklore research network across the States meant that ‘in the area of fiddle music scholarship, activity expanded rapidly’. He observes that fiddlers such as Mark O’Connor, Darol Anger and Matt Glaser ‘with strong roots in progressive Bluegrass and Jazz-based styles created new paths for fiddlers’ (*ibid*). It is such players that lead us to the contemporary fiddle scene, with its wide convergence of styles and influence in and around Bluegrass, and within which the five-string fiddle has emerged more recently in the hands of many high profile players. Chapter 1 has outlined the broader background to this research, presenting the violin as a very consistent physical form, yet demonstrating how it
evidences fluidity in adapting to changes required of it, being equally at home leading the orchestra as it is in the hands of folk and improvising musicians across the world. The instrument is particularly considered in the context of American fiddle music, a broad culture emergent from the folk music of immigrants, which quickly found various distinct voices and, by drawing on its many contributing influences, exploded in the twentieth century to give us such styles as Blues, Old-Time, Jazz and Bluegrass.

This literature review has also highlighted the margins, the violin instruments that do not conform to concepts of the 'true violin', such as the electric violin and those instruments that have occupied a similar position in the past, including many five-string violin-viola compromises. This chapter has introduced the emergence of the five-string acoustic fiddle in the music of a small number of professional fiddlers since the late 1960s, such as Johnny Gimble and Bobby Hicks. In the past ten years, the five-string fiddle has evidenced high profile adaption in the contemporary fiddle world in the United States. Chapter 2 will discuss how the five-string is increasingly seen in the hands of many of the most highly regarded American fiddle players. This phenomenon, when considered in the context of the relative consistency of the violin, since its emergence over 450 years ago, presents a very significant development for American fiddle music, for fiddlers, and for the fiddle itself. This, in turn, brings about this research, enquiring why the five-string fiddle has become so popular in American fiddling, particularly in the past ten years.
CHAPTER 2
ANOTHER STRING TO THE BOW

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, two primary developments in the physical evolution, or perhaps reinvention, of the violin in relatively recent times have been the emergence of the electric violin and the elaboration of the increasingly pervasive five-string acoustic violin, as observed in contemporary American fiddle culture. It is the evolution of the latter that is of specific relevance to this chapter. The fundamental aim of this chapter is to illuminate the five-string acoustic fiddle as a substantive presence within the contemporary American fiddle scene, particularly evident in high profile styles emanating around Bluegrass and Jazz but also in the work of musicians across all styles of vernacular music being made in America. This chapter traces the work of artist level performers with a view to establishing the five-string fiddle since it first appeared in the 1960s, focusing on the interest and development in its emergence in the past ten years. Informed by extensive listening research, Chapter 2 explores the world of the five-string fiddle through the musicians who play it, highlighting the most significant musical voices that emerge, through both the written and recorded literature. The five-string fiddle emerges in the hands of musicians from across many musical styles and backgrounds, suggesting those fiddlers as central to this research, as will be discussed in Chapter 4 in terms of research methodology.

2.2 The Five-String Instrument

The physical addition of the fifth string extends the lower range available on the instrument by the interval of a perfect fifth to \(c\) below the lowest open string \(g\) on the four-string instrument, effectively adding the lowest pitched string of a viola to the violin, though typically with a more violin like timbre due to the smaller body size compared to that of the viola. Five-string instruments vary considerably from builder to builder, depending on aspects of design and construction, such as rib height, arching and the bout width, with most designs appearing to opt to alter the dimensions of the classical form in some small way. Darol Anger's article, 'Five-string fiddles are on the rise' (2008), is one of the few places where the contemporary five-string instrument is
explored in detail. Anger (ibid, p.1) approaches his text broadly through the lens of American music and suggests that 'these days, an increasing number of fiddlers, Jazz, and pop players in every style are discovering uses for the tremendous sonorities possible with the extra string'. Whyatt (2006, p.11), writing with reference to a particular five-string, the 'Dahlia', designed by instrument maker Gary Bartig, draws attention to how the five-string instrument allows a performer to 'double melodies and play them an octave down, to provide backup to tunes with more chord options, and to improvise and support the higher melodies with passages in the low register', and also points to practical advantages for the doubling violin/viola teacher. Anger (2008, p.1) describes the five-string's current contextual position:

With all the current experimentation and even larger manufacturers offering a five-string option, it seems the idea has caught on and is likely here to stay. People who play five-string instruments seem to love them and don’t want to go back.

Regarding makers of five-strings, Anger (ibid, p.1) concludes that 'John Silakowski, in Indiana, has done more to populate the world with excellent five-string fiddles than anyone else', while according to his own blog, Anger himself currently plays various five-strings by Bob Kogut, Jonathan Cooper, Nathaniel Rowan and Barry Dudley, and is in possession of a selection of others, demonstrating his central interest in the developing phenomenon. Further to this, Anger has also been engaged in constructing an instrument himself in the workshop of Cooper. Five-string instruments made by John Silakowski are also played by leading fiddlers such as Brittany Haas, Mimi Rabson, Michael Cleveland, Mike Barnett and Casey Driessen amongst many more. Driessen's 2009 acquisition of a new Silakowski five-string is documented by the musician himself in the two-part short film, '5-String Fiddle Hunt' (2009). Driessen (online http://caseydiessen.com/who-knews-letter-11/), writing about the film on his online blog states:

In 1995 I acquired my first 5-string fiddle. My life and playing direction changed forever. It was #3 made by John Silakowski. In my senior year of college (2000), I “graduated” to his new- and-improved model — #22 if you’re counting. That’s been my main axe ever since, but I didn’t have an equivalent stunt double. This summer, I took a pilgrimage to see John and a batch of new fiddles.

In that film, Silakowski (2009, part 2, 3min.50) states that he began making fiddles in 1992. When asked by fiddler Randy Howard to make a five-string instrument, he
recounts that they 'went over and got the measurements off Bobby Hicks on the strings and stuff and then we just took that bigger Guarneri model and built it on it' (*ibid*). Casey Driessen describes his main fiddle as follows: 'The label reads “No. 3007-22-5,” meaning it is Silakowski’s 22nd 5-string of a total 73 fiddles at the time’, and '[t]he body is a Guaneri copy enlarged about 1/4” (online http://caseydiessen.com/gear/22-silakowski/) (See Fig 2.1).

Fig 2.1: Casey Driessen’s five-string fiddle, luthier John Silakowski (photo by Casey Driessen)

American luthier, and experienced five-string fiddle maker, Barry Dudley (online http://www.dudleyviolins.com/instruments.html), describes the five-string as 'not your standard concert classical instrument’, stating it is ‘most often used by Jazz, Rock, Bluegrass and Celtic players who want a broader tonal palette'. The slightly expanded body size featured in his design (see Fig 2.2) is described by Dudley as providing ‘a
larger air chamber to give a deeper voice and provide resonance for the added c string’ (*ibid*). Dudley has constructed five-string fiddles for Bobby Hicks and Darol Anger amongst many more professional fiddlers. Michael Richwine of Kansas City Strings produces five-string violins (see Fig 2.3) and violas in various sizes and design approaches, and in describing the appeal of the five-string, he suggests that 'the additional range and unique tonalities offer musical opportunities afforded by no other instrument' (online http://www.kcfiddles.com).
American string company D'Addario offer a five-string set of their Helicore violin strings (See Fig 2.4), including a violin scale length c string. C strings designed for the scale length of violin are also offered by Supersensitive Musical String Co and by Thomastik-Infeld. Choice of c string forms some of the extensive discussion regarding five-strings on online forums.¹

¹ See, for example, www.violinist.com/discussion/, www.fiddlehangout.com/forum/ and www.fiddlehangout.com/forum/
2.2.1 C changes: The contemporary 'extended' violin family

This study examines the significant rise in the use of five-string instruments in American fiddle music, however, it should be pointed out that the development is not exclusive to ‘traditional’ vernacular and improvised music. Todes (2013, p.39) writing about the viola, states that the current development of five-string instruments is largely driven by players – whether it’s classical violinists and violists who want to tackle the standard canon with a different tool; contemporary music players extending the repertoire; or Jazz, world and folk players wanting the best of both violin and viola worlds.
In the classical sphere, it appears that developments in five-string instruments are more often on the viola. Composer and researcher, Zoltan Paulinyi’s (2010) work on the viola pomposa, discussed in Chapter 1, considers why an instrument holding such promise, in his view, was almost forgotten, and why it has now re-emerged. He exercises the possibilities for the instrument and its repertoire in his own musical performance and composition. Paulinyi (ibid) notes historical five-string instruments and suggests that, after centuries of decreased popularity, a new repertoire for the instrument has emerged in contemporary music in Brazil, Belgium and America. He states that the 'viola pomposa surpasses the violin in some artistic and technical qualities, proposing it has a great value for both early and contemporary music’. Professor of viola at the University of Illinois, Rudof Haken, is a high profile performer playing on an instrument designed by David Rivinus, described as a “Pellegrina” viola pomposa. Haken has composed widely for the five-string viola, and has arranged and recorded six preludes from JS Bach’s cello suites (BWV 1007-1012) (http://www.rudolfhaken.com/manuscripts.html). Rivinus (online http://www.rivinus-instruments.com/pomposa.htm) states that his instrument design ‘is fast catching on, with players sometimes requesting elaborate, custom carvings and paintings, and he observes that ‘these days, there is quite a bit of music composed for five-stringed instruments’. The Prelude from Bach’s Suite No. 6 was originally composed for viola pomposa, as were eleven cantatas composed in the same period as the Cello Suites, (1714-1726) (Winold, 2007, p.32). Freiberg (2013, p.1), writing about the Sixth Suite, suggests that '[t]he addition of an “E” string gave Bach a much larger range to work with in the Sixth Suite and was the only one in which he ventured out of bass clef'.

2.2.2 Classifying the five-string instrument

In relation to the classification of musical instruments, the Oxford Dictionary of Music (online http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ditlib.dit.ie/subscriber/article/grove/music/20441?q=organology&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) defines Organology as ‘[t]he study of musical instruments in terms of their history and social function, design, construction and relation to performance’ (Libin, n.d.). Liben describes the work of the organologist as involving ‘the complex, ever-changing relationships among musical style, performing practices and evolution of instruments worldwide’ (ibid). Professor Dan Trueman of Princeton University (1999, p.49) describes 'the "violin" as an instrumental archetype - a superclass, or meta- instrument - that specifies little about the
instrument and nothing about the music it is used to play (or its sound!). In discussing the electric violin, Trueman observes subclasses of the violin, defined essentially by how they are played; for example the fiddle subclass, with its own further subclasses such as Bluegrass, the Irish and Hardanger fiddle. This research examines the situation of the five-string violin in such contexts. Trueman's (1999) thesis constructs a comparison of three violins and one fiddle. It considers the situation of the ‘classical’ violin in the work of Schubert, Corelli, and Bartok, and also the Hardanger fiddle of Norway, thus establishing a contextual framework within which to illuminate the electric violin and his own work on that instrument. The consequences of the relationship between aspects of the violin, such as design, development and possibilities, with the work of the composer, and concurrently the influence of the composer on subsequent developments of the violin, are explored primarily through concerns of acoustics and physical properties of the violin.

Trueman plays Hardanger fiddle and six-string electric violin. According to Norwegian luthier, Salve Håkedal (onlinehttp://www.fiolinmaker.no/en/instrumenter/5pluss5.php), Trueman also plays on a 5 string 'Setesdalsfele' built by Håkedal, described by Trueman (2012) as a '5-string Hardanger-inspired' instrument, (see fig 2.6). A Professor of composition, with a rich output of electronic based music, Trueman's acoustic work with his groups TROLLSTILT, QQQ and The Brittany Haas and Dan Trueman Band, and further, his written work around the extended violin, as outlined above, bring him to the attention of this research. As a researcher interested in the violin as a technology and as a performing musician, who plays on five-string Hardanger and other extended violins, and who works with other five-string players such as Brittany Haas, Trueman's perspective should prove invaluable to the research.
Trueman's work is discussed in ‘The Contemporary Violin’ (2001) by Patricia and Allen Strange, which explores the use of the violin in contemporary music, from both the perspectives of the violinist and the composer. This text details evolving instrumental technique, in addition to extended performance possibilities such as electric and prepared violins, and technology based interactions of the instrument, with, for example, the ‘Trueman-Cook R-Bow’ (2001, p.208). Strange and Strange (ibid, p.172) suggest that while the instruments of classic origin are perfect ‘to produce a rich bell canto sound’, if this is not of utmost concern to the performer or composer, then there are further possibilities available to the instrument maker. The writers note that ‘[s]everal luthiers around the globe have designed instruments with five, six, seven strings’ (ibid, p.172) citing electric violin builders such as John Jordan and Mark Wood as examples. Strange and Strange (ibid, p.175) point out that they concentrate on electric violins in their discussion of the extended violin, as ‘it is debatable whether such extensions could or do provide the tone quality and response of the traditional acoustic design’. However, the five-string acoustic violin is distinguished as being ‘the preference of musicians who perform ethnic music, such as Celtic and Scandinavian players’. Anger (1998, p.31) cites Aceto who similarly stated '[t]he only reason an acoustic violin can't have five strings is that the body generally doesn't handle it well .... You have problems favoring the low or the high string’ (1998, p.31). Despite Aceto's assertions regarding five-string acoustic violins, according to his website (online http://www.ithacastring.com/violins.php), he now offers acoustic 'Artist model' instruments with built in electronics for 'the most demanding players coming from the realms of acoustic music', with extended range instruments in the hands of Jean-Luc
Ponty and Dan Trueman, amongst many others. With regard to acoustic instruments, Strange and Strange (2001, p.155) also point to the work of luthier Dr. Clareen Hutchins, whose octet of instruments attempted to increase, in both directions, the range of the violin timbre.

2.3 Bobby Hicks: Ten Grammys and a c String

Contemporary five-string fiddler Darol Anger (2008, p.1) writes:

When Bluegrass fiddle legend Bobby Hicks decided he had to have a five-string violin, he sat down right there in the dressing room of the Golden Nugget in Vegas and drilled another hole in the pegbox and tailpiece of the fiddle he was using, and stuck a peg in there. That must have been about 1963.

Anger's reference to Hicks presents the legendary fiddle player as one of the first users of the five-string in American fiddle music, along with Johnny Gimble. However, despite numerous references in both Bluegrass a History (Rosenberg, 2005) and The Bluegrass Reader (Goldsmith, 2006), that situate Hicks at the forefront of Bluegrass fiddle, his use of the five-string instrument is undocumented in both texts. Hicks emerged in the 1950’s as a fiddle player in Bill Monroe's 'Bluegrass Boys', after initially joining the band as a bass player (Philips, 2003, p.5). In Monroe's twin and sometimes triple fiddle combinations, Hicks usually played the harmony part, typically in double stops thus facilitating the performance of Monroe's three part fiddle arrangements by two fiddlers. Hicks had absorbed the double stopping technique, by now ubiquitous in the Bluegrass style from the playing of Dale Porter (Anick, 2005, pp.5-7). Philips and Kosek (1992, p.39) point to the 1958 recording of Monroe's hornpipe (Audio 2.1) as exemplifying Hicks' style at this time. They observe that his 'smooth handling of the third position work at this rapid tempo is evidence of the increasingly higher standard of technique that Bluegrass musicians were required to possess by 1958' (ibid). Reviewing this recording and a transcription by Philips and Kosek confirms that Hicks was still playing on a standard four-string violin at this time.
Hicks, in an interview for *Fiddler Magazine*, states that he moved to Las Vegas in 1963 to work with Judy Lynn (Philips, 2003, p.8), a country and western singer, and he remained there until 1970. It is in this setting, it appears, that Hicks moved to playing a five-string instrument. In the 1980's, Hicks re-emerged in the Bluegrass scene, recording with the Bluegrass Band, in what Philips (1994, p.14) describes as 'a pinnacle of Bluegrass solo and backup fiddle', and later with Ricky Skaggs, a Bluegrass singer/musician who successfully crossed over to the mainstream country market in the 1980's (Rosenberg, 2005, p.360). Mention of Hicks in the literature is consistently centered on his Bluegrass work with Monroe and to a lesser extent on his work with Skaggs, yet he does appear to occupy a pivotal role in the emergence and development of the five-string fiddle, despite it being largely undocumented. Hicks continues to play five-string instruments to this day, evidenced by many photos and performance videos, and by his purchase of a new five-string instrument from luthier Barry Dudley in 2010 (Dudley, 2010). Dudley, interviewed in *Fiddler Magazine* (Merta, 2013, p.23), states that 'Bobby Hicks has one of my rosewood fiddles now. He says that it's the closest thing to his 'Golden Boy', the one he's been playing for over forty years' (see fig 2.8).
Fig 2.8: Five-string violin by Barry Dudley for Bobby Hicks (Barry Dudley, 2010)
2.3.1  Johnny Gimble: five-string fiddler

Western Swing master fiddler, Johnny Gimble\(^2\), offers an example of another early appearance of the five-string fiddle in the hands of professional musicians. According to Walser (1998, p.349), the Western Swing style can be attributed to Milton Brown and Bob Wills who, with the advent of radio and availability of recordings, developed 'a mixture of fiddle tunes, jazz, the duo harmonies of mariachi music, and the blues'. Boyd (1998, p.2) aligns Western Swing in particular with Jazz, noting, however, that while Jazz is typically understood as an urban art form, Western Swing originated in Texas translating 'the sound and techniques of Jazz on typically country instruments in a rural, working-class setting'. Gimble's work is detailed in Philips and Kosek's (1992, p.87) *Bluegrass Fiddle Styles*, where prefacing a transcribed solo from the album 'Fiddlin' Around', recorded in 1976, the writers say they have 'rearranged a few otherwise unreachable notes' (ibid) because the recording was made using a five-string fiddle. Despite Gimble's inclusion in this book concerning Bluegrass, Gimble belongs to the world of Western Swing fiddle, rather than strictly Bluegrass, highlighting the overarching inter-relationship of the various American fiddle styles. Gimble is described by Tuttle (1995, p.4) as the 'leader in his field - his playing has been the most studied of any fiddler in the western swing style'. According to Philips and Kosek (1992, p.87), Gimble has influenced 'a new generation of fiddlers', with many younger Bluegrass fiddlers increasingly incorporating a swing feel in their playing. Glaser attends to the technical aspects of this style in *Texas and Swing Fiddle* (2004). Thompson (1990, p.28) writes that Gimble 'mastered the art of playing simultaneous twin fiddle harmony parts', suggesting that he produced the effect of three fiddle players when only two were present. The five-string fiddle, for Gimble, would have extended the available note range and would also have facilitated increased possibilities for double stop playing.

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\(^2\) Early in the research it became clear that Gimble was unwell, and was not in a position to be included in the interviews.


**2.4 Multi-Stylistic Five-String Ambassadors**

In introducing his article series, 'The story of new acoustic music', Peter Anick (2011, p.4) attributes the origin of the term 'new acoustic' to Darol Anger. Anick describes how thirty years after the impact of Bluegrass 'a new generation of bluegrass instrumentalists, steeped in rock & roll, fascinated by jazz, and comfortable with formal training, sought to expand the boundaries of string band music even further' (ibid, p.4). Anger's influence on the development of the voice of fiddle in American music is central to the themes of this research, not only in terms of his work in the world of new acoustic music, modern Bluegrass and Jazz and improvisation, but also particularly because of his adaption, and high profile endorsement and promotion of the five-string instrument. Anger is the subject of extensive articles and interviews in the literature regarding his musical style, development and achievements, though, surprisingly, his
use of five-string violin is not particularly documented in print to date. Lieberman (2004, p.182) distinguishes Anger as 'one of the premiere string players and innovators of our time'. The 1977 instrumental album 'David Grisman Quintet' featuring Anger on fiddle is regarded by Anick as marking the arrival of the new acoustic genre (2011, p.4). The text describes Anger as an innovator, responsible for setting new standards in fiddle music, stating that Anger introduced Jazz improvisation into the string quartet format, 'expanding the fiddle's role as a percussion instrument', and promoting 'the cross-pollinization of traditional string musics from around the world' (ibid).

Anger (ibid) suggests that the contemporary emergence of a 'world style' of acoustic string music, is likened to the historical development of Bluegrass in being 'a radical synthesis of previous forms', a non-traditional music that was created very quickly by 'the confluence of incredibly creative musicians who were playing in very personal styles' (ibid, p.5). According to Anger, the 'David Grisman Quintet' rehearsed every day for a year before playing their first concert, and the 1977 album took three months to record, as they considered how 'to invent a whole musical language and grammar', and how to 'adapt other musical styles into the band's instrumentation' (ibid, p.6). Regarding the role of improvisation on that record, Anger says some short solos were composed in advance but his own long form solos were improvised (ibid). Lieberman (2004, p.6) writes that Anger, in describing himself as an 'American vernacular fiddler', before changing to 'freestyle fiddler', exemplifies a new stylistic paradigm that the American String Teacher Association (ASTA) termed 'Alternative Strings' in 2003, being of the view that 'this expansive movement within the string community should be recognized' (ibid).
Surveying the many recordings and ever expanding videos of Anger's various musical projects in performance, his consistent use and exploration of the parameters of five-string violin are readily accessible. Anger's work evidences a rich history of experimentation regarding choice of non-standard instruments. It is difficult however to pinpoint exactly when he moved predominantly to a five-string instrument. Anger established a website and discussion forum (now closed), dedicated to the five-string in 2007, (5stringviolins.com). On the masterclass DVD, *Chops and Grooves* (2005), Anger plays a four-string instrument, with Casey Driessen playing five-string. Simmons (1998, p.31) writes that on the formation of the David Grisman Quintet in 1976, Grisman gave Anger a copy of a Maggini violin which Anger strung as an octave (baritone) violin; Simmons confirms that Anger still uses this instrument. The opening track *Hosses in the Canebreak* (Audio 2.2) of fiddler Lauren Rioux's album 'All the Brighter' (2011) features Anger on baritone fiddle, with Rioux and Brittany Haas both playing on five-string fiddles. Anger (1992), regarding the baritone violin, states that '[e]xamples of the sound of this instrument appear all through the recorded work of the

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3 No longer online, but partially viewable using the web archive Wayback Machine
David Grisman Quintet, middle period Jean-Luc Ponty, my various solo, duet and group albums, the Turtle Island String Quartet and Psychograss⁴.

Interviewed by Tuttle in 1999, Anger (1999, p.24), having expressed previous frustrations with the sound of electric instruments mentions a violin built by Eric Aceto, an electric instrument that can 'react just like a violin'. Anger (1998, p.31) writes about that same instrument, confirming it is a five-string NV model instrument and suggesting electric violins often have five-strings. Graesser (1998, p.72), in turn, describes Aceto's Violect as 'an entirely new vehicle for musical expression' in that it is neither an acoustic violin with electronics nor an electric violin with some acoustic attributes. This instrument is pictured above (see Fig 2.10).

2.4.1 The contemporary groove: Five-strings abound

According to Jack Tuttle (2010, p.15), '[t]he world of fiddling has seen tremendous growth over the last decade, not only in numbers, but also from a technical and creative standpoint'. Tuttle points to Tristan Clarridge and Brittany Haas, cellist and fiddler respectively, in Boston band, Crooked Still, a group who exemplify the 'rapidly evolving world of neo-stringband music'. Tuttle's interview with the two musicians perhaps surprisingly does not enquire about Haas' seemingly exclusive use of a five-string fiddle in Crooked Still. In her solo work, and in her other projects Brittany Haas is one of many professional American fiddlers who have made the five-string their instrument.

Simmons (2004, p.4) points to Jack Tuttle as Haas' first fiddle teacher. After beginning to study classical violin, Haas then moved to lessons with expert Old-Time fiddle exponent Bruce Molsky, before taking some lessons from Darol Anger. This association leads us again to Darol Anger and the American Fiddle Ensemble's recording 'Republic of Strings' (Compass Records, 2004), featuring Anger and Haas on fiddle, with cellist Rushad Eggleston and guitarist Scott Nygaard. This ensemble was itself renamed Republic of Strings by the time of the group's subsequent recordings. The current line-up features Lauren Rioux on five-string fiddle, with cellist Mike Block and guitarist Scott Law. The group's website states that the band features 'a constantly developing

⁴ Five-string baritone violins are made by Barbera Violins, New York, in the form of acoustic instruments with built in pickup electronics, offering the low range of the cello (Barbera, 2007).
population of young excellent string players’ (2012). Other fiddlers to have performed and recorded in the group with Anger include Gabe Witcher of Punch Brothers and Sara Watkins, solo artist and member of Grammy award winning band Nickel Creek. Simmons comments that the playing style and technique required in her contemporary work are very different to Haas' roots in Old-Time fiddling. Interviewed in Fiddler Magazine 2004 (See Fig 2.11), the then sixteen year old Haas (Simmons, 2004) indicates that she was in possession, at that time, of two John Silakowski five-string fiddles.

Surveying Haas' continuing musical development, Haas and the aforementioned Dan Trueman (See Fig 2.15) combined forces on the 2012 album recording 'CrissCross' (Many Arrows Music), featuring primarily originally composed material described as ‘duo-tunes’, 'tunes that are complete when the separate "melodies" of the two instruments come together to make something new’ (2012, p.1). This project set out to explore '[w]hat happens when the grittiness of American Old-Time fiddle music meets the ethereal sounds of the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle?’ (ibid). Ultimately though, the musicians submit that the result is not a musical 'cross-over' but just what happened

Fig 2.11: Brittany Haas cover Fiddle Magazine 2004
'when two radically different but adventurous musicians come together to see what they can do, no holds barred' (ibid). The recording sees Haas and Trueman tuning their fiddles ‘in strange but complementary ways’ (ibid), allied with additional instrumentation cello, double bass and guitar. The musicians describe the complications at the outset, pointing out that 'the Hardanger fiddle is tuned higher than the "normal" fiddle, making it impossible to simply play the same tunes together in unison’ (ibid). Furthermore, they observe that since both Norwegian and American fiddle styles comprise frequent double stopping, thus integrating both instruments in one project; this is also noted as bringing additional difficulties (ibid). Extensive use of scordatura on both fiddles appear to be in play throughout, presumably in dealing musically with these issues and also occurring somewhat naturally in respect to the relatively wide use of cross tunings in both Old-Time American and Norwegian fiddle traditions. The tune Locust Tree (Audio 2.3), serves as a good example of this approach, a tune Haas also played as a song arrangement with Crooked Still, called Locust in the Willow (Audio 2.4).

All of this presents Haas as a top flight fiddler, who emerged quite early in her musical development as an exclusively five-string player. Her high level of multi-stylistic performance, her collaborations as band member, and work as soloist and composer
strongly promote her as a compelling musician in the context of this research, and one whose music presents a rich contribution to the development of the five-string fiddle and the wider interest in it.

Referred to above, in relation to her musical collaboration with Anger and Haas, Lauren Rioux began as a classical violinist and violist, before discovering fiddle music (Hersch, 2012). A member of Darol Anger's 'Republic of Strings' ensemble, playing five-string fiddle, Rioux also performs in duet with Brittany Haas; both fiddlers playing five-string instruments. On the website of violin maker Jonathan Cooper (online http://jcooperviolinmaker.com/instruments/five-string-viola-model/), Rioux writes:

I have Jon's fifteen inch, five string viola. The instrument is the answer to every musical situation, in any genre; classical to fiddle styles. I can play violin, viola, and cello repertoire on one instrument.

Reviewing the emerging collection of videos of Rioux in performance with Darol Anger and in her duo with Brittany Haas, she now plays on a violin size five-string instrument, smaller than the one she describes above (See Fig 2.13). Regarding the nature of the sound produced by two five-string fiddles, and the musical versatility that the fifth string presents, Rioux, in an article by Hersch (2012) states: 'It definitely helps us as a duo. That additional range is really important'. The previously mentioned recording Hosses in the Canebreak features Rioux's five-string on the left side of the stereo mix, with Haas placed to the right, while Anger's baritone fiddle is positioned centre of the mix. Pfeifle (online http://portland.thephoenix.com/music/126383-lauren-riouxs-hosses-and-regrets/) notes this recording as encapsulating Rioux's 'aggressive, sometimes squawking, playing, which is much grittier and raw, in a good way, than how many classical players approach fiddle-playing'. The album ‘All the Brighter’ features Rioux playing and singing a wide variety of material, such as traditional, American songbook and newly composed music, and including tunes by Anger and by Tashina Clarridge (Tashina’s Tune). Clarridge, sister to Tristan, of Crooked Still, also plays five-string fiddle. Rioux presents this research with the perspective of the classical musician who has come to the five-string through fiddle music.
Arguably one of the most high profile and innovative five-string players, Casey Driessen is described by Anick as 'a pioneer of the use of the five-stringed violin and a guru of advanced “chop” techniques which allow the fiddle to double as a percussion instrument' (2008, p.1). A graduate of Berklee College of Music, where he studied with Mimi Rabson and Matt Glaser, he has released two albums to date, 3D (2006) and Oog (2009); the production of the latter is documented by Craig Havighurst in ‘The making of Oog’ (2008). Driessen's recording of the classic Bill Monroe composed Bluegrass tune Jerusalem Ridge (Audio 2.5) was nominated for a 'Best Country Instrumental Performance' Grammy award in 2007 and featured extensive and progressive use of the chop bow stroke. According to Driessen, the recording features four multi tracked parts, all played on the same five-string fiddle (Anick, 2008). In relation to his own use of the chop, the fiddler says he was already working on bouncing the bow to contribute rhythmically to his first Bluegrass band when he was directed to the recordings of the Turtle Island String Quartet and subsequently met Darol Anger. He also attributes his own chop work to performing with funk and R&B drummers and bass players (ibid). Contributing to Angers Chops and Grooves (2005), Driessen draws particular attention to a 'triple chop' he has developed, and this technique is further developed in his own video series Techniques and Skills (2010). The chop technique will be discussed in
detail in Chapter 3. Driessen has contributed to many notable recordings, including those of Tim O'Brien, and Bela Fleck. Driessen features as guest soloist on some pre Brittany Haas Crooked Still recordings, such as the group's version of the Bob Dylan composition *Oxford Town*, which is arranged and interwoven with the fiddle tune *Cumberland Gap* (Audio 2.6).

Fig 2.14: Casey Driessen and five-string by John Silakowski
Driessen's most recent work has involved two projects. The first one, 'Fiddle/Sticks: The Drummer Project', has centred on the five-string fiddle as a percussive force, described as 'a collaborative exploration of rhythm which pairs Casey – the leading voice in percussive fiddle/violin technique (AKA The Chop) – with a list of the landmark drummers and percussionists of our time' (online http://caseydriessen.com/about/fiddlesticks/). This work is presented in film and audio recordings and discussed by Driessen on his blog. Driessen's 'Singularity' performances see the fiddler explore and interact with electronics in solo performance, drawing on use of effect pedals and extensive use of a loop pedal in allowing him to generate multi layered musical arrangements using his fiddle (Driessen 2011). 'Singularity' is discussed and demonstrated in detail by the musician in a TEDx Talk (2012 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1sJNaOfiJ8), where he illustrates the concept through his composition, Heartbeat Kid. The use of effects, more typically employed by electric guitarists, are demonstrated to allow the fiddle to sound timbres, replicating string sections and funky bass guitars, while percussive elements are cultivated by the hand tapping on the body of the instrument in various ways.

I've never been satisfied exploring the fiddle just from the fiddler's point of view. Rather, I've discovered my creative turning points through other instruments and genres – adopting the 5-string fiddle over the conventional 4-string to play bebop alto saxophone lines by Charlie Parker; learning odd-meter time signatures from syllabic rhythm practices of classical Indian music; incorporating funk slap bass lines; mimicking rhythm of a glass shard filled tin can shaker from Madagascar; and, of course, my pivotal watershed moment, imitating the mandolin chop in a childhood Bluegrass band lacking mandolin (Driessen, 2012).

So writes Driessen, in introducing his aspirations for his ‘Fiddle/Sticks’ project on the funding website 'Kickstarter'6. In many ways, this summation demonstrates his importance as a contributor to this research. As one of the most exciting and boundary pushing fiddlers on the American contemporary scene, Driessen's use and development of the five-string fiddle, and his use and further development of idiomatic extended technique in highlighting the instrument, suggests his insights would be very valuable to the research.

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6 See http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/960760498/fiddle-sticks-the-drummer-project
2.5 Boston: The Berklee Solos, a Five-String Melting Pot

Historically, and to this day, the city of Nashville, Tennessee is widely considered the home of 'country' music, and understandably it is home to many of the finest American musicians, such as Hicks and Driessen, as well as being the centre of the song writing and recording industry. However, as Anger (https://www.berklee.edu/people/darol-anger), on the Berklee College of Music website, states:

The acoustic music community is centered in Boston, because of Berklee and NEC [New England Conservatory]. Even the people who are not matriculating are still here. There are certainly tremendous opportunities to play together and exchange ideas and form bands. If you really want to be around people who are doing important stuff, you’ve got to go to Boston.

As mentioned in the introduction, Berklee College of Music has recently established the ‘American Roots Music Program’. Berklee is arguably the most active educational institution dealing with American music in all its styles, from Jazz and improvisation, to classical and various popular music styles, and particularly important in the context of this research, American roots music. The College demonstrates a strong concentration on musical performance, while also being engaged with scholarly approaches to musicianship. As head of the American Roots Department, Matt Glaser's work has emerged as central to the literature informing this research, through his writing and analysis of various styles of fiddle music, such as Texas Swing, Jazz and Bluegrass. He is perhaps the pre-eminent writer regarding the fiddle and improvisation in Jazz and Bluegrass. Glaser has extensive experience of, and links to, the current and historical leading lights of American fiddle playing, many of them having been his students. He is also an active performer and teacher of fiddle and improvisation, and he plays some five-string fiddle. Regarding his 'Dahlia' (See Fig 2.15) five-string made by Gary Bartig, Glaser (http://www.acousticelectricstrings.com/AESArtists.html) describes how 'it has such a great sound – warm, dark, alive – great for Jazz and fiddle music'.
Fig 2.15: Matt Glaser on ‘Dahlia’ five-string fiddle.

Fig 2.16: Casey Driessen (L), Matt Glaser (centre), Darol Anger (R), Bobby Hicks, (far right), Berklee College of Music (Still from performance video)
In February/March 2009, in Berklee, Mimi Rabson performed a series of newly commissioned works for solo five-string violin, some using electronic components and all presenting improvisational opportunities; ‘The influences run the gamut from rock to Latin to Jazz, but each item would be equally at home in small clubs and classical concert halls’ (Reel, 2009). The Berklee solos present a wide ranging perspective on the five-string. Rabson executes a range of violin technique, from virtuosic classical position playing, to Bluesy improvisations and funky chopping. She plays on a five-string made by John Silakowski and has written for the instrument in various stylistic settings, including her *String Trio No. 1* (Audio 2.7), which was recorded with another five-string player, Helen Sherrah Davies. Writing on her Berklee College of Music webpage, Rabson (https://www.berklee.edu/people/mimi-rabson) describes her music thus: ‘Over the course of my career, I’ve played a lot of different styles. What intrigues me now is learning how to blend these styles compositionally, to make a unique statement’. An established multi-stylistic performer, Rabson is also a widely published writer of string arrangements and articles regarding contemporary string performance, technique and improvisation, regularly published in *Strings*, and is co-author of the *Berklee Practice Method: Violin* (2004) with Matt Glaser.

![Mimi Rabson and her five-string violin made by John Silakowski](image)

**2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the emergence of five-string fiddle in contemporary American music. It has surveyed some of the most well-known professional players
who have adopted the five-string fiddle as their main instrument and who have drawn
attention to the instrument though their musical output, and in some cases through their
writing and filmed work. Each musician emerging in this chapter demonstrates
significant achievement within the field, to varying degrees multi-stylistic, though
centred in an overarching style, such as Bluegrass or Old-Time and, in some cases, from
diverse musical backgrounds. Reviewing the literature concerning these musicians, their
use of the instrument is explored to various degrees and many questions emerge central
to the five-string violin's role in their music and consequently its position in
contemporary American fiddle music. Anger and Driessen have contributed directly to
the literature concerning the five-string. Anger's writing about the instrument discusses
some historical details and promotes the potential of the instrument from his
perspective. Driessen's short film, 'Five-String Fiddle Hunt', and his development of
rhythmic technique that highlights his use of the lower range draw attention to the
instrument.

In surveying the existing literature, questions emerge surrounding the personal
experiences of the musicians who choose to play on five-string violin, and the musical
reasons why they have chosen to play on an alternative instrument to the one regarded
as being so close to perfection. The musical and technical approaches, the physical and
acoustic attributes of the instruments themselves, and considerations of what the future
may hold for the instrument and the music that is performed on it, all present as
inherently compelling, when considered in the context of the history of the violin
presented in Chapter 1.

While Chapter 1 overviewed the many and diverse strands of American fiddle music, by
way of contextual introduction, the central focus of this research is on a very particular
contemporary scene. The discussion above has demonstrated an explosion in the
adoption of the five-string fiddle and consequently has referenced the rich examples of
its influence on musical performance, composition, improvisation and on violin
technique itself that can be observed in the music of some of the most well-known
artists who are now not just 'fiddlers', but 'five-string fiddlers'. The literature regarding
the musicians who play five-string fiddle, as artists and personalities, is plentiful, and
this chapter has presented an in-depth survey of what is in the literature about the five-
string fiddle and what they have said about it. However, the instrument remains
surprisingly unaccounted for. This research asks the following question: why have so many American fiddlers adopted the five-string? What is it about this instrument that has encouraged such interest in recent years, and what does the five-string fiddle offer to music and musicians that has inspired many of the most highly regarded fiddle players to make it their ‘go to’ instrument?

The insights of the musicians emerging above from the literature regarding the five-string fiddle should prove invaluable in forming some considerations of what the future holds for the five-string fiddle and its practitioners and for providing understandings about the violin/fiddle and its capacity for change within its perceived perfection.
CHAPTER 3
THE LONESOME SOUND

3.1 Introduction

Having established the five-string fiddle in the hands of artist level musicians, and detailed the state of play in the fast developing musical world occupied by these fiddlers, this chapter considers the fiddle, as it is evidenced in American music, from a technical and performative perspective. Carlson (2001, p.27) states that ‘a variety of left-hand techniques are used by fiddle players which create sounds unique to American folk fiddling’. These sounds form the intersection of idiomatic and extended technique, repertoire and improvisation, which comprises the music of the contemporary five-string player. Equally important is the role of the right hand, given that ‘the rhythmic pulse, flow of notes, and overall liveliness of a fiddle tune owe much to the patterns woven by the fiddler’s bow’ (Anick & Reiner, 2000, p.36). In this regard, bowing will also be examined in this chapter.

The chapter concentrates on understanding what makes those uniquely American fiddle sounds, referred to by Carlson. The starting point for this chapter concerns repertoire, addressing where and how we hear the American fiddle, such as in the performance of tunes and songs and, furthermore, examining those musical forms as a structure for various levels of improvisation. Following on from this, this chapter endeavours to establish the stylistic essences of the sound of the American fiddle, engaging with literature regarding fiddle technique and performance, and referring to musical examples, contextualising particular techniques in the recorded work of the previously identified five-string fiddlers.

3.2 The Five-String Fiddle Repertoire

The repertoire and performance possibilities for the American fiddler are wide ranging, drawing on rich collections of instrumental music, ‘fiddle tunes’ and songs across various inter-related styles. It could be suggested that the five-string fiddle has no specific repertoire of its own; considering it extends the musical range of the fiddle, it can play anything the standard instrument can play, and more, inside the existing
material. The same is not true in reverse, as there are many examples in the music of the artists emerging in Chapter 2 that are not playable on the four-string fiddle. For example, the five-string's evolving role in chordal accompaniment, and the apparent close association of the instrument to 'groove-based' rhythm playing, while not exclusive to the five-string instrument, do appear to form a strong constituent of its contextual sound.

In approaching this study, it is necessary to outline the fundamentals of the overarching repertoire, the source musical material, and the underlying musical structures. According to Cantwell (2002, p.119), regarding the American folk repertory, '[t]he tunes and songs which come to us from the British folk tradition evolved largely outside the milieu of harmony'. He credits the guitar in particular, but also the fiddle and banjo, in the repertoire as evolving towards a 'chordal dress'. The role of the guitar in Bluegrass is distinguished by Cantwell (ibid) for having come to terms with the accompaniment possibilities of modal music, negotiating 'the shifting terrain of the mode, stirring its ancient roots to fresh life'. Reflecting on the music of Anger, Driessen, Rioux, Haas and Trueman, and others, the harmonic role is often played exclusively, or strongly supported, by low register rhythmic playing on the five-string fiddle. This explicit yet fluid harmonic framework found in American music, though now evolving and often implicit in the melodic material of Celtic music, did not travel to America with the European settlers; as Breathnach (1971, p.94) points out, 'Irish folk music is essentially melodic'. Cantwell (2002, p.118) suggests that American folk music is most frequently composed of the Ionian, Dorian or Mixolydian modes, accounting for the influence of its Anglo and Celtic ancestry, with frequent stylistic use of pentatonic and Blues scales. Furthermore, the music of Anger and Driessen, in particular, often draws on complex musical ideas demonstrating the use of Jazz influenced scale and chord choices.

### 3.2.1 The fiddle tune

Carlson (2001, p.7) suggests that, although 'early American fiddling was deeply indebted to the Irish tradition', it is clear that ‘identifiably American characteristics’ soon began to appear. The Celtic tune form, the 'reel', is highlighted by Carson as absorbing the driving rhythmic quality of traditional African music to become 'a unique American fiddle sound' (ibid). Goertzen (1985, p.450) presents a detailed historical
analysis of the fiddle tune, *Billy in the Low Ground* (Audio 3.1) (See Fig 3.1), stating that '[e]xamples of this tune are frequently encountered, yet vary in interesting ways'. He points out that "Billy" is relatively old for an American fiddle tune, ‘with ancestors appearing sporadically in 18th, 19th, and 20th century prints' (*ibid*). Place (2007) states that there are 'hundreds of recorded versions' of the classic tune. Regarding the musical form, Goertzen (1985, p.450) writes that 'like the vast majority of American fiddle tunes’, *Billy in the Low Ground* ‘consists of two strains, each eight measures in length'. The tune form though does exhibit some fluidity, Thede's (1967) transcription of *Billy in the Low Ground* (See Fig 3.2), features two nine bar strains, while the version recorded by Thile and Daves (Audio 3.2) (2011) has ten bar sections, essentially the same tune with alternative tag endings.

![Billy in the Low Ground](image)

*Fig 3.1: Billy in the Lowground (Brody, 2002)*
In exemplifying how the repertoire is typically musically arranged, Rosenberg (2000, p. 168) points to Flatts and Scrugg's arrangement of the tune *Cripple Creek* (Audio 3.3). Arrangement techniques include 'the structuring and situating of the vocal harmonies, the nature and sequence of instrumental breaks, choice of tempo and key, and beginnings and endings'. Lieberman (1999, p.57) uses her setting of *Cripple Creek* to demonstrate idiomatic approaches to developing the bare bones melody into how the tune would be typically performed, and then suggests a Bluegrass style solo break on the tune (See Fig 3.3-6).
Fig 3.4: *Cripple Creek* with shuffle rhythm (Lieberman 1999, p.57)

Fig 3.5: *Cripple Creek* with doublestops and shuffle (Lieberman 1999, p.58)
The 'fiddle tune' is a classic instrumental form played not just by fiddlers, but all instruments. Goertzen's (1985, p.448) study suggests that the most significant gap in the documentation of American fiddle tunes exists in 'the decades just before fiddling first carved out a modest niche in commercial recording'. With many examples of tunes evidenced in music notation from the 1800s onwards, Goertzen (ibid) states that ‘the publication of the tunes slackened, the penning of manuscript versions nearly ceased' in the decades before commercial recording began. General American fiddle tune anthologies offer insight into the idiomatic melodic language, the breadth of standard tunes, and in some cases, the improvisational processes within the various traditions. Amongst the most notable, perhaps, is the work of master performer Mark O'Connor, who has very successfully evolved from championship winning Old-Time and Bluegrass fiddler, to Jazz and, more recently, to the world of contemporary classical music. *Mark O'Connor: The Championship Years* (O’Connor and Philips, 1991) examines the musician's treatment of American fiddle tunes by means of musical transcription and interview, shedding light on his approaches and thought processes as he reinterprets the classic American fiddle repertoire during his years as a championship fiddler. O'Connor's approach will be discussed further below in the context of improvisation.
3.2.2 Song

The song takes a central position in most styles of American music. For the contemporary fiddler, the various song forms present a structure inside which to contribute arranged lines/parts and harmonies, improvised back up and fills, and, particularly in Bluegrass and Jazz, to perform improvised solos. 'An independent American song tradition emerged in the nineteenth century' according to Cantwell (2002, p.123), who, observing their historical basis in Anglo song, also notes the American song to be heavily influenced by the 'oral-formulaic methods of Afro-American singers'. This is evidenced in 'simplified repetitive phrases, recurrent melodorhythmic figures, formulaic refrains and gapped scales' (ibid), experienced in both vocal and instrumental Afro-American folk music. Many variant song forms can be observed in American music. Kingsbury and Nash (2006, p.14), for example, suggest that 'ballads were a common component of the repertoire of every ethnic group'. The Anglo-American ballad is typically categorised by folklorists as either belonging to the Child Collection (305 ballads collected by Francis Child 1882-1898), or otherwise is considered as one of the more common 'broadside' ballads. Many ballads such as The Wexford Girl and The Butcher's Boy were recorded by early hillbilly artists (ibid), while the ballad is treated in the contemporary context by many of the artists mentioned previously. The American folk song is perhaps most recognisable in the music of folk artists like The Carter Family, Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger, dating from the late 1920s onwards (Crawford, 2005, pp.597-618). In the contemporary context, the repertoire of the band Crooked Still features many re-imagined traditional ballads, such as Look On and Cry (2004), featuring Brittany Haas on five-string fiddle. The contemporary American folk style ballad style is exemplified by songs like Orphan Girl, written and recorded by Gillian Welch (Audio 3.4) (1996), and also recorded and dramatically rearranged by Crooked Still (Audio 3.5) (2004).

Pearson and Place (2010) outline various Blues song forms in the sleeve notes of the 'Classic Appalachian Blues' CD collection. They observe that, while discussions regarding the Blues forms may be formalised by their number of bars, such as twelve-bar Blues for example, practitioners typically consider Blues type songs in a more holistic fashion to include 'ragtime blues, rhythm and blues, and rock-and-roll blues' (ibid). They describe the song Railroad Bill as exemplifying a 'Blues ballad', and regard
it as a 'proto-Blues' song like *Don't Let the Deal Go Down* (Audio 3.6). Such songs are described as dance songs that were 'current before the term Blues came into common usage' (*ibid*). Pete Seeger (2012, p.396) acknowledges the song collection work of Alan Lomax, arguing that, '[m]ore than any single person he is responsible for starting off what has since been called “the American folksong revival”'. Lomax (2012, p.365) suggests that most traditional American songs 'can [be] considered songs of complaint or protest', concerning economic and social issues, typically involving writing new words for familiar tunes that were 'in the vernacular of everyday speech’. He points out that their style was ‘folk’, rather than literary. Lomax (*ibid*) notes that folk songs such as *The Factory Girl*, *The Buffalo Skinners*, and *Single Girl*, amongst many others, are distinctly traditional 'American' songs. Cantwell (2002, p.123) points to songs such as *Liza Jane* and *Shortnin' Bread* as further examples of typical American folk songs. Similar to many in the repertoire, both of these are also played as instrumental fiddle tunes in various settings and feature commonly in fiddle tune anthologies. To a fiddle student, observing Lauren Rioux's teaching of *Little Liza Jane*\(^8\), these structural elements are explicit and are drawn upon to teach the melody and harmony aurally to the student. The song/fiddle tune *Angeline The Baker* is another example of the song that is also played as a fiddle tune; the Crooked Still (Audio 3.7) recording of this traditional tune prominently features the five-string fiddle of Haas, and demonstrates many of the 'sounds unique to American folk fiddling', which Carlson (2001, p.27) points to. This recording particularly demonstrates the Old-Time roots of Haas' fiddling, rich in open string drones and driving rhythm, with a clear stating of the melody in the instrumental breaks, rather than taking an improvised Bluegrass style solo. Tunes such as these are typically in binary 16 bar form.

The popular song in its various forms, pop song to Jazz standard, increasingly takes its place in the repertoire of the contemporary musician. Crawford's *America's Musical Life* (2005) details the many styles of American popular song in contexts such as Tin Pan Alley, the American Musical, Broadway, Jazz, Rock and Roll, and Rock music. Looking to the recordings of Darol Anger, they typically comprise a mix of instrumentals and songs using a mix of traditional, contemporary and original material. The recording 'Republic of Strings' (2003) features arrangements of songs by Joni Mitchell (*Help Me*) and Stevie Wonder (*Higher Ground*), alongside Bluegrass fiddle

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\(^7\) Bill ‘Colonel’ Williams, guitar and vocal. 1971

\(^8\) See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-dHbQljWR0
tunes like Bill Monroe's composition *Old Dangerfield* (Audio 3.8), all encompassed in Anger's string band sound. Crooked Still and Haas, while drawing predominantly on traditional material, with some original material, have also addressed the popular song in their recording and live performance of the Beatles’ song *We Can Work It Out* (Audio 3.9), which includes a fiddle solo from Haas. Rioux too has drawn upon pop songs, featuring arrangements of the Roy Orbison song *Only The Lonely* and the Cole Porter composition, the Jazz standard, *Miss Otis Regrets*, found on her 'All The Brighter' album recording (2011). The significant presence of the song in the repertoire places particular emphases on the fiddler's (or any other soloist's) interaction with the harmonic structure, in contributing to musical arrangements and, in particular, in being able to improvise a solo break over the passing chord changes.

### 3.3 Improvisation

Improvisation occupies an important role in American fiddling repertoire. This section outlines overarching understandings of improvisation by way of an introduction, which then concentrates on the intersection of the violin, the idiomatic parameters of improvisation, and extended technique, as evidenced in contemporary American fiddle music. Musical improvisation, despite general understandings of the term ‘improvise’, is experienced to various degrees in most musical repertories and performances and occurs within a varyingly broad yet often finite set of musical parameters (Nettl, Randel ed, 2003, p.406). Paul Berliner (1994), writing in the context of ‘Thinking In Jazz’, compares musical improvisation to spoken language throughout his text, with both note and word decisions being made in real time and guided by the syntactic rules of the language. A similar analogy is also drawn by Nachmanovitch (1990, p.17), who states: 'As we listen and talk, we are drawing on a set of building blocks (vocabulary) and rules for combining them (grammar). In discussing Bluegrass, Rosenberg (2001, p.168) describes how 'creativity is expected in the form of improvisation, particularly in instrumental breaks, which are perceived as opportunities for self-expression'. The improvisational language of the fiddle in American music draws on the various music styles discussed in chapter 1, and shows extensive use of idiomatic techniques that will be discussed below. Though the amount of material concerning improvisation on the violin is perhaps small in comparison to instruments more closely associated with musical improvisation, such as guitar or saxophone, for example, there is an emerging collection of material covering the essence of improvisation and its relationship to the
violin. In addition to text based material, there is a select literature of audio visual material, such as educational (lesson based) presentations from high level practitioners, including those of Anger, Glaser, O’Connor, Driessen, Greene and others. There are also many concert performances, documentaries and interviews available on DVD, with relevant material becoming increasingly available online.

The musical role of improvisation is well documented, although there is an apparent limited understanding of the actual process of improvisation at performance level (Bailey, 1993, p.ix). In illustrating this, French Jazz violinist, Stephane Grappelli (Balliet, 1976), describes how, '[i]mprovisation, it is a mystery, you can write a book about it, but by the end no one still knows what it is'. Recent work in this area includes the PhD dissertation of Jazz violinist Martin Norgaard, entitled, 'Descriptions of Improvisational Thinking by Artist-level Jazz Musicians' (2008). Norgaard centres his research on the thought processes of seven improvising musicians interviewed directly after they have performed an improvisation on the 12 bar Blues form in the key of F. The research employs music technology to record and notate the improvisations as they were being performed, allowing immediate reflection on the realisation of the solo and the artist's thinking during the performance. Norgaard's work proves a useful guiding tool for researchers, as he set a methodological precedent in working with artist level performers.

### 3.3.1 Improvisation in contemporary American fiddle music

Improvisation in Bluegrass and contemporary fiddle music can be aligned in its broad structural function to many forms of Jazz where, following a statement of the song or tune, a soloist then performs an improvised solo over the musical form, addressing the harmonic changes of the tune. This is frequently referred to as a 'break' by Bluegrass musicians. The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (2003, p.122) describe the break in Bluegrass and related styles as, ‘an improvised instrumental solo occurring within the framework of an ensemble performance’. Lieberman (1999, p.59) describes how Bluegrass fiddlers take ‘the bare bones’ of a simple tune, and ‘dress it up, using slides, syncopation, and “blue notes”’. Discussing the improvisatory process within Bluegrass, Glaser (1999, p.29) places a great significance on the 'construction of the break', a primarily cognitive transaction relying on melodic and/or harmonic decision making. Taruskin (2009, p.17) differentiates improvised solos from those performers in
oral music traditions, who 'work out compositions without notation yet meticulously, in
detail, and in advance', drawing on rock music by way of example. This concept of the
learned or prepared solo is also common in Bluegrass and particularly in competition
fiddling, and is an extension of variation and arrangement techniques. O'Connor,
(Philips, 1991, p.25), discussing his early championship fiddling, describes a middle
ground of 'controlled improvisation', preparing harmonic based melodic shapes, or
'licks' which he may or may not use in the moment. The use of pre-learned motifs,
commonly referred to as 'licks' or 'riffs' is widespread in contemporary fiddle soloing
and backup playing. Philips (1984, p.9) notes that 'fiddlers are always quoting and
restructuring riffs. It is all part of the game'. In Hot Licks for Bluegrass Fiddle, Philips
presents 450 short idiomatic phrases in various keys which he discusses in terms of
harmonic function and intervallic relationship, fingerings, bowing, articulation and
notes, and what fiddle player he originally learned each riff from. Absorbing these ideas
facilitates the development of the idiomatic language. As Philips derives his examples
from the 1950s 'up through the Jazzy efforts put forth by the latest generation of players'
(ibid, p.9), useful and challenging material that delineates the development of Bluegrass
fiddle is mobilized for use and adaptation in break playing and in playing short
improvised fills in song accompaniment. Of course, as this text approaches being 30
years old, there have been many new players, developments and reinventions, including
the emergence of the five-string fiddle. In acknowledging Philips' work, Casey Driessen
(online http://caseydiessen.com/day-3-swannanoa-fiddle-gathering/) writes on his blog
that he 'would take one of the licks and move it through all 12 keys, trying to keep the
fingerings as consistent as possible', citing an example from Bobby Hicks featuring a
double stopped b7 and 9th interval, which Driessen transposed 'all over the fiddle' (ibid).

Glaser (1999, p.30) distinguishes fiddler Vassar Clements as exemplifying the modern
harmonic approach to improvisation, with Kenny Baker typifying a more melodic
approach, the approach more representative of improvisation within early Bluegrass.
According to Glaser, the improvised solo breaks of Wise typically consisted of the main
melody integrated with stylistic characteristics such as slides, double stopping and use
of approach notes, while Jazz influenced harmonic style soloists tend to disregard the
melody in favour of outlining the moving harmonic structure. According to Glaser, it is
the influence of the Blues that delineates Bluegrass from other and earlier American
folk styles such as Old-Time, while it is the improvisational opportunities afforded by
Bluegrass that align it with Jazz as 'both musics emphasize chord-oriented improvisation' (*ibid*).

Lieberman (1997, p.47) encourages development of refined aural skills, pointing to 'how you learned to speak as a child' by way of demonstrating potential effectiveness. In this context, she suggests the study of experienced improvisers as a way of absorbing concepts of how to approach a tune. This could be as detailed as transcribing a solo or, in a more general sense, listening to unearth the possibilities within a tune. The transcription and learning of solos from recordings is commonplace amongst Jazz and Bluegrass musicians. Levine (1995, p.251), in *The Jazz Theory Book*, writes that 'the best way to learn a tune is to transcribe it off the record', as, while a lead sheet typically offers just the melody and chords, listening and analysis of particular performances allows for hearing everything that can be absorbed from the recording. The evolution of Bluegrass fiddle up to the mid-1970s is viewed through the lens of transcription by Philips and Kosek's *Bluegrass Fiddle Styles* (1978). Introducing the 2nd (revised) edition, Kosek points to the need for many of the original transcriptions to have been rewritten due to the complexities of 'note patterns and bowings' involved in the original notation of the source material. The transcription of fiddle music is not without its difficulties however, though this is not surprising considering the often very fast tempi and highly accomplished displays of idiomatic technique involved. Contemporary software such as 'Amazing Slow Downer' and 'Melodyne' is very helpful in such work, facilitating the slowing down of audio recordings with the pitch remaining unaffected.

### 3.3.2 Improvisation methods for the fiddle

There is a limited though evolving literature resource available, dealing explicitly with the interaction of improvisation and the violin. While the material surveyed here is further circumscribed by the research focus, some wider works are mentioned, specifically regarding Jazz violin and its influence on contemporary American fiddling. Lieberman has published a wide range of pedagogical material directly exploring approaches to improvisation on the violin and she may be considered one of the most active contributors to the field. In general, Lieberman's literature surveys improvisation from the perspective of having some formal classical music background and the work is expanded upon by the inclusion of interviews and quotes from leading exponents of the various improvised styles concerned. In particular, three of Lieberman's texts are of
relevance to this research, Improvising Violin (1997), The Contemporary Violinist (1999) and Rockin’ Out with Blues Fiddle (2000). In addition, the instructional DVD Techniques for the Contemporary String Player (2005) elaborates on The Contemporary Violinist in an illustrated video presentation of practical violin techniques. Lieberman (1997, p.25) advocates that the violin ‘can do everything a voice or horn can do’, with regards to its versatility and potential in musical improvisation, while suggesting that from the classical perspective, the typical training of a string player focuses attention primarily on notated music to the detriment of aural skills. Lieberman (ibid) describes musical improvisation as requiring ‘the ability to hear a musical line in your inner ear and instantaneously reproduce it on your instrument’, placing emphasis also on detailed understandings of the melodic and harmonic workings of a tune. Regarding American fiddle technique, stylistic improvisation is explored in Bluegrass Fiddle (1974), by former Bill Monroe fiddler Gene Lowinger, in Philips and Kosek’s Bluegrass Fiddle Styles (1978), and Glaser’s Teach Yourself Bluegrass (1999). Glaser's Bluegrass Fiddle and Beyond: Etudes and Ideas for the Modern Fiddler (2010) offers the most contemporary perspective on improvisation and the fiddle.

3.3.3 Glaser's five levels of improvisation

Glaser (2010, p.1) attends to improvisation in contemporary American fiddle, in presenting his 'five levels of improvisation'9. This work, the most recent and closely aligned to the contemporary fiddle scene, systematically and contextually deconstructs the process of melodic improvisation in what is described by Glaser as a ‘reduced version of Jazz saxophonist Lee Konitz' 'Ten Levels of Improvisation' teaching system. 'Learning to improvise on a melody' (2010, p.1) is the fundamental aim expounded by Glaser throughout. He identifies the musical capacity to reduce a tune to its 'skeletal melody' as being vital to subsequent elaboration and improvisation. Glaser demonstrates this concept using the folk melody, Mary Had a Little Lamb, suggesting that melodies such as this one are already free of 'every extraneous element' (ibid).

9 Glaser’s (ibid) success in applying his five levels of improvisation system on American fiddle music, Jazz standards and on Bach violin sonatas was demonstrated during a Berklee College of Music workshop in The Conservatory of Music and Drama Dublin in 2009, using Mary Had a Little Lamb and the Jazz standard Fly Me to the Moon.
The five levels of improvisation are outlined below:

Level 1: Introduces the concept of 'constantly moving quarter notes' (ibid, p.2); crotchets are employed to join up the essential melody of the tune using an improvised line. Further limitations are imposed on the process:

Level 1A: Connecting the ‘bare bones’ melody only by means of step motion, 1B, connecting only on leap motion and 1C, using a chromatic approach to connect the skeletal outline.

Level 2: Reuses the three melodic approaches outlined above but now in constantly moving eight notes.

Level 3: Introduces rhythmic variation. The improviser is allowed to play any rhythm they want, but must include the original ‘essential’ melody in their statement.

Level 4: Glaser recognises the importance of counterpoint in the construction of an improvisation, drawing on the idea of hearing the original melody in your head while simultaneously improvising an alternative line on the instrument.

Level 5: Described by Glaser as ‘Abstraction’ (ibid, p.5), level 5 requires the improviser to use the structural form of the tune as a basis within which to improvise, with no further melodic or rhythmic rules imposed.

3.3.4 Lieberman's improvising violin

Introducing the technical requirements of improvisation on the violin, Lieberman (1997, p.25) holds that many 'folk, pop, Blues and Jazz melodies' are often easy to play on the instrument, but points to the underlying harmonic structures as a source of difficulty for many violinists. This may be attributed to the fact that the violin is primarily a monophonic instrument, which is how it is treated in orchestral repertoire particularly. Thus, an understanding of harmony and harmonic function is not particularly high on
the agenda when learning the instrument in classical or many folk melody based styles, compared to a saxophone player learning Jazz, for example. With this in mind, Lieberman details common chords structures (major7, minor7, dominant7, diminished7, augmented7, minor (major7), major7b5, minor7b5, dominant7sus4, dominant7b9, dominant7#9) in all twelve keys in music notation as the starting point of study, acknowledging that this is a large undertaking. Lowinger's (1974) study of Bluegrass fiddle makes frequent use of different musical keys as chapter beginnings, presenting idiomatic double stops and tune examples in commonly used keys of A, D, and G, and also giving examples in C, E, F, B and Bb. Lowinger (ibid p.54) highlights B and Bb as keys often used by Bill Monroe, though he notes 'these keys are the most limited in fiddling' and are approached in closed position. Closed position is described by Lowinger (ibid, p.28) as the place where 'the index finger is placed on the tonic of the key', creating a movable shape comprising an octave across any two strings, allowing for melodic transposition of 'licks'. For example, 'the key of A can be transposed to keys of Bb, B, C and D on the a string, and to Eb, E and F on the d string. Philips (1984, p.22) suggests that the most commonly used keys in Bluegrass are A, Bb, B, C, D, E, F and G, stating that '[m]ost licks can be transferred to all keys, but they usually sound best in a selected few'. This is typically due to the lack of available open strings that present difficulties with fingerings and consequently issues concerning intonation and tone.

With regard to preparing and learning a tune upon to which to later improvise, Lieberman (1997, p.40) lists a nine point approach, placing emphasis on memorization rather than sight reading of the melody, and the harmonic changes. This approach is summarised below:

1. Committing the melody to memory, so it will be available in the ‘inner ear’ later.
2. Metronome practice, involving dropping in and out of the melody at various points while the metronome outlines the passing form of the tune, reinforcing knowledge of the core melody.
3. Learning of the root movement of the harmonic structure.
4. Singing the melody while playing roots of chords on the violin.
5. Playing of all chord tones melodically with the metronome.
6. Playing the above exercise reversing the order of the chord tones.
7. 'Scrambling' of order of chord tones.
8. Playing each scale suggested by the harmonic changes of tune.
9. Playing each scale in order of appearance in harmonic changes of tune.

Lieberman (1997, p.47) makes a number of interesting suggestions regarding the practicalities of engaging the instrument in the improvisatory process, and acknowledges that 'certain elements of Blues, Swing, Rock, and even Jazz technique' have commonalities on the instrument. According to Lieberman (ibid), amongst the criteria for evaluating mastery of these concepts is 'knowing where you are at all times' and performing with a good violin tone. Further development of these exercises would include transposition through the cycle of fifths or other intervals. Discussing the development of harmonic based improvisational skills, Lieberman (ibid) uses the first four bars of a (Jazz) Blues to address use of chromatic approach notes from below, the scale tone above and then both in combination, resolving on the root of each passing chord. With this in place, the exercise can also be used to address the third, fifth and seventh of the harmony.

3.3.5 Jazz violin references

To give some examples from the wider literature, in Jazz Violin (1981), Matt Glaser and Stephane Grappelli dissect the evolution of the instrument in Jazz by means of transcription, commentary and interview. The work gives an in-depth analysis of the playing of Grappelli himself and five other Jazz violinists: Joe Venuti, Eddie South, Stuff Smith, Svend Asmussen and Jean-Luc Ponty. While offering detailed transcriptions of improvisations by the featured players, Glaser and Grappelli do not analyse the actual improvisational process. Philips and Kosek (1992, p.6) acknowledge the influence of Jazz and Swing violin, as exemplified by 'the tremendous effect on Bluegrass fiddling' made by Joe Venuti. Further literature regarding the violin in Jazz includes: Didier Lockwood and Francis Darizcuren’s (in the French language) Cordes et ame: Méthode d’improvisation et de violon Jazz (1988), Martin Norgaard’s Jazz Fiddle Wizard series (2000), Laster’s Getting into Blues Violin (2007), Kliphuis’ Stephane Grappelli Gypsy Jazz Violin (2008), and Cohen and Dix’s Swing Jazz Violin (2008). The published PhD thesis of Ari Poutiainen, Stringprovisation (2009), details approaches to violin fingerings in the context of Jazz performance, contrasting classical approaches such as that of Carl Flesch with the literature of Lockwood and Darizcuren,
in formulating his own Jazz violin fingering system.

### 3.4 Contemporary Idiomatic American Fiddle Articulation

American fiddling evidences a wide variety of idiomatic techniques that are used to shape a single note or musical phrase beyond its existence in music notation. Cantwell (2002, p.219) observes the eclectic nature of the Bluegrass fiddle style, 'drawing as it does upon both jazz and classical techniques, and at the same time upon traditional southern sounds as the shuffle, the double stop, and the drone'. Discussing Jazz fiddling, Harrison (1992, p.249) similarly recognises the role of idiomatic technique in the development of the violin in Jazz, stating that ‘European techniques of expression and execution’ are both ‘modified by other requirements in realisation of stylistic goals’.

Rosenberg (2000, p.166) encapsulates the technique of the modern Bluegrass fiddle player very well:

Bluegrass fiddling ranges from pop-influenced use of long sweeping phrases to Jazz-tinged shuffle rhythms involving rocked bows and double or triple stops, to melodic, harmonic, and chromatic single note arpeggios. Bluegrass fiddle solos often place such available techniques in contrast. One might open with a flurry of single note phrases, then shift to a shuffle, and close with a series of long held chords.

#### 3.4.1 Slides (Glissandi)

Glaser (1999, p.15) identifies the slide as 'probably the most important left-hand technique in Bluegrass fiddling', pointing to its use by exponents such as Vassar Clements as being a defining element of their approach, making particular reference to the use of slides in targeting the third degree of the scale to create the Bluesy feel, often referred to as a 'blue note'. Lowinger (1974, p.25) exemplifies this in the context of slides in the key of A, indicating that 'slides occur most commonly on the third' with a lowering of the third, c# to c creating a 'Bluesy effect' (ibid), and gives example licks demonstrating slides up to and out of the third. Laster (2007, p.9) also sustains such claims in regards to the Blues, describing how '[g]etting the true sound of the Blues on the violin depends in part on your ability to slide your fingers in a certain way'. Philips (1984, p.17), in presenting a music notation overview, points to slides or glissandos as 'a basic Blues and Bluegrass touch', noting that, in a slide from one note to another, 'normally the slide should be completed just in time for the second note to begin'. Two approaches to notating slides are presented by Philips. Carlson (2001, p.34) notes the vocal like quality of expressive slides on the fiddle, suggesting that they 'reflect the
plethora of musical styles which have influenced the genre’. Further elaborations on the slide include what Lieberman (1995, p.56) describes as the ‘fall/spill’, sliding out of a note, ‘shooting star’ like and a ‘smear’, to bend from one pitch to another, usually neighbouring tones (ibid, p.55).

3.4.2 Double stops

Adler (1989, p.13) describes ‘two notes on adjacent strings played simultaneously’ as a double stop. He identifies two types, firstly where one of the two notes is an open string and, secondly, where both notes are stopped. Double stops are possible on any string instrument. Three and four note chords are also possible with use of correct bow pressure, with the chord taking on a slightly arpeggiated feel. Use of double stops is a defining characteristic of Bluegrass fiddle and Glaser (1999, p.16) regards Benny Martin as being the first Bluegrass fiddler to develop the use of double stopping in his playing, typically using one open string and a fingered note in unison or harmony. Philips (1984, p.47) also observes that a 'major distinguishing feature of the Bluegrass fiddlers is their preoccupation with double stops'. Further, he differentiates Old-Time fiddlers use of double stops as typically involving one open and one stopped string, while 'Bluegrass players usually fret both' (ibid). Philips (ibid, p.49) presents fingerings for double stops in sixths, fifths, thirds, and fourths. Laster (2007, p.59) presents double stops exemplifying ninths and diminished fifths, describing how the latter 'finger twister brings out the tension and angst of the Blues', typically voicing the third and (lowered) seventh of a dominant chord.

The double stopped unison is a ubiquitous sound in American fiddling, the open a string and an a fingered on the d string for example. Lowinger (1974, p.33) remarks that 'it may be desirable sometimes to slide into a double stop with either one or both of the notes'. A very typical use of this would be the unison a outlined above, with the fingered note reached from a slide from below, usually on the fourth finger. This effect can be similarly created on d and e unisons and on octave double stops. Laster (2007, p.59) points to the tension created by 'beginning slightly out of tune' and 'oozing' into the unison. Combined with a 'shuffle bowing' (see below), this sound becomes a rhythmic device, often used to begin a tune in Old-Time music and to contribute to the rhythm section when not playing the melody or soloing. Lieberman (1985, p.55) describes 'unison variation', as changing fingers or finger to open string on repeated
notes. This concept is demonstrated very well by Anger (2001, 38min) in relation to Blues fiddling where he alternates between $B_b$ 1st finger on the $a$ string and $B_b$ extended 4th finger on the $d$ string, the $B_b$ functioning as a lowered fifth in an E Blues, a technique he likens to the guitar sound of Chuck Berry. Fingered unisons are less common in violin playing in general, perhaps due to the stretching involved, and get little mention in the literature informing this research. A noteworthy recorded example of the fingered unison is featured on the fiddle solo by Gabe Witcher on the Punch Brothers recording 'Missy' (2010, trk. 6). Anger (2001, 40mins) provides a brief demonstration of this technique, adding that one should try it, 'if you really want to hurt yourself'.

### 3.4.3 The blue notes

Anger's (2001, 34mins) discussion of Blues fiddling draws attention to the significance of the blue note and its relationship to the violin, (ibid, 36 min) describing the blue third as 'the first seriously blue note in the Blues scale' (ibid, 34.20). He demonstrates a sliding or smearing movement between the minor and major third, observing 'there's a lot of increments, fine increments of intonation going on here' (ibid, 35.25), and suggesting it is common in Bluegrass to slide downwards towards the minor third. The Blues fifth, the lowered fifth, is another very important note in creating a Blues sound according to Anger, as is the lowered (minor) seventh, adding that both of these scale degrees are typically articulated with slides in and out of the centre pitch (ibid, 38.30). The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (2003, p.104) suggests the 'degree of inflection may vary considerably' on the intonation of the third, fifth and seventh scale degree in African American music. Cantwell (1992, p.121) in discussing the influence of Southern song on Bluegrass similarly comments on 'the blue tonality in the third and the seventh' and states:

The Blues singer, like the spiritual singer who preceded him and the many mountain, country, and Jazz singers who have followed him, sings "flat", producing a tone somewhere between major and minor.

Lieberman (1997, p.72) encapsulates the significance of the sound of the Blues in American fiddle playing, pointing out that it is particularly suited and historically linked to the Blues idiom because of its vocal like qualities. This allows the instrument to portray many of the characteristics of a typical Blues vocal performance, such as sliding
in, out and between notes with wide dynamic range and expressive vibrato. Lieberman *(ibid)* also points to how Blues demands the ability 'to go beyond the “composed” notes’ in an attempt to make an individual musical statement. Anger (2001, 8mins) points to the influence of the Blues in Rock and Roll, Popular music, Bluegrass, Gospel, Jazz, Country, Folk, Texas fiddle music, stating that the Blues:

...is a musical style that is in every kind of music, it can be found in just about every kind of vernacular contemporary music now, if you can play a little Blues you can pretty much get by in any kind of contemporary style.

Haas (2008) makes frequent use of the Blues sound throughout much of her work with Crooked Still, particularly on the song Baby, *What's Wrong With You?*, in the key of E, a key very closely associated with the Blues.

3.4.4 Vibrato

Auer (1980, p.22) describes vibrato as 'the waverieng effect of tone secured by rapid oscillation of a finger on the string which it stops'. Its usage in classical violin performance, according to Stowell (1992, p.130), 'has passed in and out of fashion during the violin's history' suggesting that it was used more selectively and as 'an expressive ornament' *(ibid)* until the early twentieth century; since then, it remains in consistent use. A thorough discussion on the practicalities of the cultivation of vibrato is presented by Simon Fischer in his technique book *Basics* (1997, p.213). According to Glaser (1999, p.17), vibrato is not used in such a similar, continuous way in Bluegrass, where it may be used on slower tunes to create a 'richer, fuller sound', but not really required in up-tempo performances. Philips (1984, p.19) discusses a similar approach, stating that 'a very occasional wide, near hysterical vibrato' is sometimes used, tracing that technique back to the playing of Stuff Smith and Joe Venuti. Similarly, contrary to its now consistent use in classical violin performance, vibrato use in the Blues is considered by Lieberman (1995, p.72) to be a vital parameter of stylistic expression, sometimes not used at all, other times used hysterically, with two elements in flux, width and frequency, a technique she refers to as a 'shake' *(ibid*, p.57). Anger (2001, 41.30) differentiates a Blues vibrato from the typical classical approach in that 'you want the note [pitch] to be going up and down from the note', rather than just going down from the centre pitch, aligning it more with guitar technique than classical violin. Anger suggests that, in vernacular music, vibrato should not be used consistently but
rather as a special effect. His own music consistently reflects this, from direct unmodulated tones, to notes expressed with wild and fast vibrato and everywhere in between commonly heard.

### 3.5 Bowing

The subjects of bowing and sound production are extensively written about in the wider violin literature. Lieberman (1995, p.58) makes some general observations regarding the use of the bow, contrasting the typical situation in classical, Jazz and folk music. She suggests that classical performance typically requires uniformity of bow use and sound quality, usually cultivated by use of long bow strokes. Lieberman comments that the typical eight note feels of Jazz and folk music appears to be often centred on accents on the off beats of the phrase, and so are often problematic when approached with regimented classical bow divisions. Glaser (1999, p.13) points to three bow variants that contribute to sound production: the speed of the bow, bow pressure, and string contact point. He suggests that Bluegrass requires a 'rich, intense sound' and he encourages the practice of unsymmetrical bow patterns to emphasize the rhythmic drive and improvisational nature of Bluegrass. This last point is reiterated by Glaser when writing about bowing in his Bluegrass *Fiddle and Beyond* (2010, p.v), where he advocates experimentation with combinations of single note, two note and three note slurs, ultimately with the intent to be of service to 'the shape of the line and its articulation and dynamics'. Bow pressure facilitates a wide variety of timbral and textural variations in all violin performance and, according to Lieberman (1997, p.73), when combined with various bow speeds and lengths, and in conjunction with other stylistic characteristics such as slides, allows for the addition of 'colour, texture, and expression to your sound'.

Lowinger (1974, p.11) states that 'most fiddlers develop their own patterns for bowing', explaining that this may involve just what is comfortable for an individual, possibly using all single strokes on a fast tune, resulting in a potentially rough sound, such as that often heard in Old-Time fiddle music. This single stroke approach is referred to as the 'saw stroke' by Anick, and Reiner (2000, p.37). Lowinger (1974, p.57), further specifies a two slurred, two separate approach, known as 'shuffle bowing' when playing, what he describes as, 'running sixteenth notes', the typical rhythmic material in 2/4 time in Bluegrass. Another version of this involves slurring two notes to a bow, accenting the first note of the second group, described as the 'Nashville shuffle' (Anick, Reiner, 2000, p.37), placing the accent on the 2nd and 4th beat. The 'shuffle' bow stroke is identified
by Lieberman (1995, p.108) as being 'at the heart of the country or folk fiddle sound'. Though often not actually notated in transcriptions, the rhythm divides a crotchet note into a quaver followed by 2 separate semi-quaver notes, with the accentuation generally placed off the main beat. Such accenting of the offbeat is consistently found in American vernacular music, Folk, Blues and Jazz. Typical bowing patterns tend to highlight this rhythmic feel by slurring from the end of a beat into the next main beat. 'The shuffle is perhaps the most complicated right hand technique in country fiddling' observes Lowinger (1974, p.57), who identifies three basic shuffle bowing patterns, single, double and triple.

'Cross' bow patterns are also prevalent, used in displacing the symmetry of string crossings throughout a melody, and, according to Lieberman are an effective tool for improvisation (1997, p.109). Lieberman uses the term 'dip' to encapsulate a weighted drag placed to accent a note, as used by Mark O'Conner for example. Anick and Reiner (2000, p.39) attribute the term 'mid-bow pulse' to describe this technique, indicating that the bow speed and weight is increased to accent a note. For Carlson (2001, p.21), the transcription of specific bowing patterns for performance is very useful in developing an authentic sound but ultimately very difficult, as bowings are typically 'improvised by the performer', and are never, in his experience, played the same way twice.

3.5.1 A new bow stroke: 'The chop'

Anger, (Anick 2011, p.8) regarding the formation of the Turtle Island String Quartet in 1985, describes how the group had taken what they knew and 'had helped invent about the string band tradition and combined it with another illustrious tradition, the string quartet'. In doing this they concentrated on use of contemporary techniques such as the chop to reproduce the percussive elements, which are otherwise missing from the typical string quartet sound. In this regard, Anger refers to the Kronos Quartet's treatment of contemporary and Jazz music at that time as missing the key rhythmical and improvisatory ingredients of Jazz (ibid). Anger credits the chop as having been invented by Richard Greene and he discusses and demonstrates the technique in detail on the instructional DVD, Chops and Grooves (2005), along with other contemporary techniques such as 'scraping, bouncing the bow, left hand pizzicato, rolling bass lines ... to get a variety of “feels” for providing a strong rhythmic groove' (ibid). The film also illustrates the techniques on cello, performed by Rushad Eggleston, who at that time
was a member of Boston band Crooked Still, and, importantly for this research, on a five-string fiddle, demonstrated by Casey Driessen. Cellist Natalie Haas discusses her rhythmic approaches on the cello in *Grooves, Rhythms and Accompaniment Techniques for Celtic Cello* (2013).

Lieberman (2004, p.60) describes the chop as a ‘percussive stroke used to emphasize each upbeat’, pointing to Anger and Richard Greene as players who have developed this technique beyond the technique’s original intent, in order to ‘turn their fiddles into mini-percussion hubs’ (*ibid*). Richard Greene, a classically trained violinist, credited with involvement in developing new acoustic music with Grisman, began to play with Bill Monroe in 1966. Greene (Anick, 2005, p.12) regards the chop as having been absorbed from the mandolin rhythms of Monroe, describing how ‘there’s the backbeat but there’s also the stuff just before the note and after it’. Glaser (1999, p.31) refers to this in its historical form as the ‘chunk’, a technique ubiquitous in Bluegrass, used with a double or triple stop derived from the passing harmony of the moment. The evolution of the technique, and its diffusion from the ‘mid-1990s until the present’ is chronicled by American fiddle music researcher Laura Risk (2013), who describes:

...dropping the bow vertically onto the strings to make a crunchy, percussive noise and then picking it up off the strings with a forward motion to make another sound. This latter sound is pitched, though in practice it is possible to play it without pitch by muting the strings with the left hand.

Darol Anger’s *Chops and Grooves* DVD (2005) was the first in-depth examination of the rhythmic possibilities presented by the chop technique, for string instruments in American music. It is interesting to align it with Driessen’s more recent series of instructional videos (catalogued 101- 105), ‘Techniques & Skills with Casey Driessen. Series One: The Chop’, giving some insight into how Driessen has systematically developed the chop technique to his own end since his contribution to Anger’s DVD. Anger (2005, 4.30mins), introducing his approach to string groove, string rhythm and the chop, suggests that such techniques will enable the fiddle player ‘to play more musical roles in different kinds of contemporary music’. Similar to any bow stroke, mastery of the chop is dependent on right hand control. Anger (*ibid*, 7mins) describes how to ‘roll the bow into our outer knuckles using the thumb to push the bow’, contrasting the resulting hold to a “correct” bow hold while accounting for the necessity to maintain the ability to move from one position to the other with ease. This bow position creates a situation where the hair is facing outward away from the player.
Fischer's (1997, p.38) picture regarding classical violin technique is that a tilted bow positions the wood 'tilted against the fingerboard' which is the opposite to the position demonstrated by Anger in order to cultivate the chop stroke. Fisher (ibid) indicates that 'in the lowest quarter of the bow, many strokes work more easily with slightly tilted hair'. Driessen (2011 (101), 1min 30) states that the chop occurs in 'the three inches above the frog' and recommends using plenty of rosin in that area of the bow, pointing out that he holds the bow with his thumb underneath the frog as opposed to on the stick; either way, he advocates the straightening of the thumb to push the bow outward. This positioning creates a resistance to push the bow against on the string. Driessen (ibid, 3mins 30) states 'you let gravity do it for you', indicating that the chop sound is made by letting the bow to fall on the string which is stopped/muted, so as not to ring as an open string but neither to produce a pitched sound.

Anger (2005, 9mins 40) distinguishes the chop from its precursor the chunk in that 'we get a sound on the down and we get a sound on the up'. The early Bluegrass chunk was a downstroke only, whereas the contemporary chop generates two distinct sounds: the first when the bow close to the frog is hit and stuck to the string, and a second when the bow is lifted off the string again, usually on the next beat. Risk (2013) states that 'Anger added to the chop a horizontal motion in which the bow moves back and forth along the line of the string. (Richard Greene's chop was, and remains, perpendicular to the string.)'. The down stroke is referred to by Anger (ibid, 17mins 40) as the 'hard chop' or 'dead stroke', and is likened to a drum. He describes the 'soft chop' as a softer down stroke or the sound achieved on an upstroke, lifting the bow from the string. A 'ghost chop', according to Anger, is the lightest sound of all, but nevertheless important, as it creates a continuous motion in a rhythmic groove pattern. Anger, demonstrating on a four-string violin remarks that 'we like to stay to some extent on the lower strings because they have a little fuller sound' (ibid 14mins 40). Explaining a 'downstrike' to be a downstroke, where an actual pitched note is sounded from the string (ibid 19mins 20), beginning with the bow on the string or alternatively with the bow in the air like a downstroke (ibid 44mins).

3.5.2 What's in a groove?

Kernfeld explains that a groove in Jazz is 'a persistently repeated pattern' (Grove Music Online), and that 'the term “groove” or “groove-based” refers herein to group
performances or recordings in which the achievement of a groove seems to be the single foremost musical quality’. According to Anger (2005, 6mins), a ‘groove is a constant rhythmic motion that happens usually between more than one musician’. He identifies the 'backbeat' as giving modern music ‘its propulsive force' (ibid, 20mins 30), for example, typically heard as a snare drum hit on the 2nd and 4th beat of a 4/4 rhythm in popular music. In Driessen's 'Techniques & Skills' (2011 (101), 5mins 20), he explains that 'beats two and four are the money beats, that's the chop', reiterating the significance of those two beats in groove based music.

Driessen (2011 (102), 1min 30) has developed new concepts and terminology around string groove playing since his participation in Anger's masterclass DVD, describing the 'cyclical slant' as the technique of pivoting the bow outward for every second chop, facilitating faster grooves and also timbral variation. Anger (2005, 54mins) also points to his moving of the bow back and forth between the bridge and the fingerboard as the technique is speeded up, commenting that it developed in his playing over a two year period, for musical reasons, and ideally would be experienced as a natural property of the bow rather than a forced stroke.

In recreating the function of the bass drum in a typical Jazz or popular music groove, Driessen (2011 (103), 3mins) suggests working mainly on the two lowest pitched strings of the fiddle, in his case the 'c and g strings of the five-string, where the timbre 'sits under the fabric of the music', using the higher strings when needing to cut through more. In a discussion regarding the chop, as used by Crooked Still, five-string fiddler Brittany Haas and cellist Tristan Clarridge each compare the attributes of their own instruments. Haas (Tuttle, 2010/11, p.16) suggests that the depth of tone of the stroke on the cello is 'more what the chop is trying to do, in terms of embodying a drum-like sound', while Clarridge, who also plays (four-string) fiddle, points out that there are some textural attributes of the stroke on the fiddle that are difficult to cultivate on the cello. These observations suggest that the added lower register may contribute to the chop being more successful on five-string fiddle. In further developing the groove, Driessen employs a bass line to move through chord sequences, in combination with the chop to create a rhythm section sound on the violin. His triple chop is a sweeping bow stroke that at fast tempi creates a percussive triplet sound as the bow bounces on the string (2011, 104). This technique is exemplified by Driessen's recording of the song
footsteps so near (audio 3.10) and the monroe tune jerusalem ridge (2006).

3.6 scordatura or cross-tuning

Bruce Molsky's 'Old-Time Southern Fiddle Tour' (2001), analyses six Old-Time fiddle tunes in terms of the familiar musical parameters: melody, bowing, phrasing, double stops but also in this case, cross-tuning, the retuning of the standard violin tuning. Fontane (2003, p.764), in explaining scordatura observes '[u]nconventional tuning of string instruments, particularly lutes and violins, used to facilitate or make available otherwise difficult or impossible pitch combinations'. The scordatura also cultivates changes in the actual timbre of the instrument by reinforcing certain otherwise unavailable pitches by having them accessible as open strings, thus creating resonances otherwise unavailable. Molsky (2001) addresses five alternative tunings for four-string fiddle: d d a d, g d a d, a e a e, a e a c# and a d a d. According to Fontane, 'folk musicians of the southern Appalachian and Ozark Mountains of the U.S often employ scordatura for traditional dance tunes and ballads' (Randel, 2003, p.764), suggesting that a e' a' e'' is the most often used. Anick and Reiner (2000, p.43) note that with the a e' a' e'' tuning 'there are just more open string drone notes available to give automatic harmony when strings are doubled or just brushed with the bow'. They suggest further cross-tunings to include d' g' d g used in Cajun fiddling, a d' a' e' offering low drones in the key of D and e e b' e', which can imitate a bagpipe in the key of E. Carlson (2001, p.27) writes that 'the addition of drone strings to a fiddle tune is one of the most basic techniques used by American fiddlers', arguing that the strong association of the bagpipe with Irish and Scottish music may have resulted in its exclusion in early American music, with fiddlers then recreating the drone effect with use of double stops, which add projection to the sound of the instrument. Considering its overall position within fiddling, Shull (1994, p.4) holds that '[n]owadays cross-tuning the fiddle is considered something of an eccentricity', pointing to the tune black mountain rag as exemplifying the sound of cross-tuned fiddle, which according to Anick and Reiner uses the a e a' c# tuning (2000, p.43).

Looking outside of the American traditions, the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle is described by Trueman (1999, p.41) as having 'hundreds of known tuning variations' and the influence of this is apparent in Trueman's music. The Haas and Trueman recording discussed in Chapter 2 also features extensive use of cross-tunings in duet, highlighting
the complications that arise. For example, in studying the five-string fiddle playing of Brittany Haas on the Crooked Still songs *Oh, Agamemnon* (2008) and *Locust In The Willow* (2010), it is clear that Haas is using cross-tunings, however, even after taking on board a selection of the most widely used cross-tunings in American fiddle music, it is difficult to be definitive as to the exact tuning. Furthermore, the tuning of the low *c* string remains undocumented in the literature regarding cross-tunings. There are many examples of scordatura in classical violin literature. Stowell (1992, p.132) states that the technique 'has been in and out of fashion, but was particularly popular with violinists between c.1600 and c.1750', while later examples include the Violin Concerto in D op.6 by Paganini and the tuning of *g♯ d a’ e* employed in Bartok's *Contrasts* (Sz 111) (Fontane, Randel ed, 2003, p.764). Concerning notation, the most common approach is explained by Oxford Music Online, to be that '[t]he required tuning is usually indicated at the beginning of a piece, the notation of which is generally such that the player reads and fingers it as if the violin were in the normal tuning' (Boyden *et al.*, n.d.). Examining the literature referred to above, this approach seems very consistent with the notation of cross-tuned fiddle tunes in the American collections, such as Molsky's work. However, Anick and Reiner (2000, p.75) do present transcriptions such as *Three Forks of Cheat*, where 'the notes are written as they sound, but you have to finger the instrument differently than usual to get them'.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the fiddle as it is played and heard in American vernacular music. Identifying the idiomatic performance and extended instrumental techniques, and overarching musical approaches that together encapsulate the sound of the American fiddle, the chapter also discussed the fiddle in the context of the repertoire of the American fiddler, and examined the role of improvisation in American fiddle music. This chapter highlighted again five-string fiddle players that emerged in Chapter 2 in the above contexts, pointing in particular to the five-string’s association with rhythmic groove playing, and the chop in the literature.

Chapter 3 concludes a review of literature, concentrated on establishing the now significant presence of five-string fiddle in contemporary American fiddling playing. Chapter 1 pointed to the extensive nature of the literature, regarding the development of the violin, and its central role in the hands of the fiddler in a wide range of American
vernacular music. With the contextual history of the fiddle reviewed, the five-string fiddle itself was illuminated in Chapter 2, which focused on a select group of musicians whose work evidenced itself as representative of the instrument and its emergence and influence to date.

However, in reviewing the literature presented in the first three chapters, it becomes apparent that the five-string fiddle remains largely undocumented, though its extended musical range can be heard in the recordings and performances of many highly regarded fiddlers across American music. In consideration of these shortcomings, Chapter 4 will proceed to consider the most appropriate methodological approach in working with the distinguished musicians above in order to cultivate new understandings around the emergence and use of the five-string fiddle in American music.
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This study initially emerged from considerations central to the development of my performance skills on the five-string fiddle. The research proceeded with the intention of constructing a scholarly account of the emergence of the five-string fiddle in contemporary American fiddle music, concerning itself with the experiences and thought processes of artist level musicians, all sharing the key distinction of being actively engaged in professional performance on the instrument. As Bryman (2008, p.xxix) states, ‘research is typically instigated when a gap in the literature or an inconsistency between a number of studies or an unresolved issue is apparent, or when there is a development in society that provides an interesting point of departure for the investigation of a research question’.

The previous chapters, having demonstrated such gaps in the literature, regarding the five-string fiddle, and having detailed new developments in the use of the instrument, as referred to by Bryman, this chapter will explain the epistemological perspective and will also describe and justify the methods adopted throughout the research. The decision to employ the qualitative interview, incorporating elements of musical analysis, is explicated in part one. Part two will explain the sampling procedure, data collection and analysis process as it was actioned in this research.

Part One

4.2 Epistemological Foundations

In undertaking this research, engaging with philosophical and theoretical considerations, regarding the most appropriate methodological approaches to adopt, I was naturally confronted with reflecting on my personal epistemology. Pickard attests that 'in the research hierarchy there is no doubt that a research paradigm implies a research methodology', highlighting the necessity for such contemplation. Pickard (ibid) discusses the three areas outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in defining research
paradigms; questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology. In guiding my ontological position, I would commit to the view of the ‘social world continually being constructed through human interactions’ (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), and assume, regarding social reality, the perspective that there is inherent meaning in human action (Schwandt, Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.191). I would recognise that ‘multiple realities exist, such as the realities of the researcher, those of the individuals being investigated, and those of the reader or audience interpreting the study’ (Creswell, 1994, p.76), and seek to systematically represent these perspectives in my research.

Bryman (2008, p.13) states that epistemology 'concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline', focusing on a central issue of 'whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences'. In reflecting on my own research aims in this context, I would regard methodologies that consider the 'subjective meaning of social action' (ibid, p.16) to be most applicable to my work and epistemological stance, and so am inclined to draw influence from the interpretivism orthodoxy. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p.5) consider that:

The interpretive position assumes the social world is constantly being constructed through group interactions, and thus, social reality can be understood via the perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities.

In describing constructionism, Bryman (2008, p.19) writes that 'social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision'. This position presents considerable appeal as a philosophical perspective for my work and is a convincing situation from which to address the exploration of my research questions. Constructivists are, according to Lincoln and Guba (2011, p.92), 'oriented to the production of reconstructed understandings of the social world', an aim I very much identify with. The focus of an inquiry framed in constructivism centres on understanding. The nature of knowledge produced is typically based on ‘individual or collective reconstructions’ voiced through a ““passionate participant” as facilitator of a multivoice reconstruction’ accumulated through experience, under criteria of trustworthiness, and authenticity, and ‘including catalyst for action’ (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 1985, p.99).
4.3 Research Design

'Methodology is the bridge that brings our philosophical standpoint (on ontology and epistemology) and method (perspective and tool) together' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.6). As the primary concentration of this research involves an investigation around the impact of new developments of a very established musical instrument, and its role in the musical practice of artist level musicians, it is ultimately formulated as exploratory and open ended in nature. Reviewing texts regarding academic research and having attended the 'Epistemic Practice' seminar course (GradCAM, 2010/2011), established my inquiry to be appropriately addressed using a qualitative research framework. Mason (2002, p.3) describes qualitative research as 'broadly “interpretivist” in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced, or constituted'. McNiff and Whitehead (2002, p.32) note that the interpretive approach ‘acknowledges the existence of practitioners as real-life participants in the research’, as distinct from their existing solely as data in the researcher’s observations. Denzin & Lincoln (2011, p.3) write of the challenging definitional issues implicit in qualitative research, observing that a ‘complex interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term’. However, they do offer an initial overarching definition that I draw on:

Qualitative Research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative Research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.3).

This contrasts with Bryman's (2008, p.140) broad description of quantitative research as:

...entailing the collection of numerical data, as exhibiting a view of the relationship between theory and research as deductive and a predilection for a natural science approach (and of positivism in particular), and as having an objectivist conception of social reality.

Quantitative research frameworks offered no means of data collection that would meaningfully inform the aims of this research, or that aligned with my own
epistemological perspectives, concerning my research. Pickard (2007, p.13) states that 'it is impossible to examine multiple, individual realities in any depth using quantitative methodology'.

This exploration is derived from my own sustained interest in playing and listening to American fiddle music, an engagement I have maintained since I began to play fiddle as a teenager both in the folk and classical realms, and from my own consuming interest in and adoption of the five-string violin over the past five years or so. There are two voices central to my research, that of the participants themselves and also the voice of five-string violin within the participant’s musical practice. In qualitative research, Creswell (1998, p.15) suggests that the inquiry ‘builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting’. With all of this in mind, the use of qualitative research methods presents as the most appropriate strategy in capturing the individual voices central to the research. ‘Qualitative researchers do not approach research problems with a pre-established method. Instead, they draw on multiple methods’ (2005, p.79). So writes Ferrara, with particular reference to music research, suggesting that ‘qualitative researchers can be methodologically flexible and responsive to the actions and meanings of the person or group they are studying’ (ibid). There are two ‘primary data gathering tools for fieldwork’ that can be employed in qualitative research, according to Ferrara (ibid, p.80), in speaking of participant observation and participant interview.

4.3.1 Methods

Discussing participant observation, Bryman (2008, p.403) observes a difficulty that became apparent in the formative stages of this research, 'one of the key and yet most difficult steps in ethnography is gaining access to a social setting that is relevant to the research problem in which you are interested'. Though my research was not ethnographic, the difficulty highlighted by Bryman certainly was an issue I encountered in approaching a select group of top professional fiddle players, independently located across the United States. Firstly, I had from the outset acknowledged that the request I was making of the participants was time consuming. This was something I did not underestimate at any point throughout the research. It was very clear just how busy these people were as professional musicians on the national touring circuit, with active recording careers and some with heavy teaching commitments, and so I endeavoured
always to be fully respectful of their time. Geography was an immediately obvious potential obstacle. As I was living and working in Dublin, the location of the participants in different locations across the United States presented a significant dilemma. I decided to investigate the possibilities offered by online conferencing software, and set about conducting some trials using Skype, the free 'Voice over Internet Protocol' (VoIP). I was already experienced using the software in my personal life and also I was aware of its use by some musicians to give online music lessons. Bryman (2008, p.642) engages with the possibilities of qualitative research using synchronous online personal interviews, suggesting that developments in webcam technology 'would make the online interview similar to a telephone interview, in that it is mediated by technology, but also similar to an in-person interview, since those involved would be able to see each other', pointing out general advantages of online research to include it's being economical regarding time and financial cost, with barriers of distance removed and fast collection of data possible (ibid, p.632).

Disadvantages according to Bryman include accessibility to the Internet, potential for invitations to be involved in research to be dismissed more easily, issues around confidentiality, and of most relevance to this research, the 'loss of the personal touch-lack of rapport between interviewer and interviewee' (ibid). The last point was a potentially critical issue, however, upon reflecting on the interview process, I can attest to none of these problems evidencing during my Skype based interviews. All participants appeared to be very at ease, and their own personalities certainly emerged strongly, leading to warm and friendly interactions, often interlaced with moments of good humour. I feel this can be attributed to the openness and interested and helpful attitude of all the interviewees. This was not the first time any of them had used Skype, and I feel safe in suggesting that they all felt somewhat proud to be asked to participate in the research, and all remarked on the interesting nature of the enquiry and their willingness for my revisiting them for further detail at any time during the research.

The voice of the instrument is observed of course by detailed listening; in this regard, my research, since its inception, has involved extensive and thorough analytical listening and also viewing and analysis of a wide range of filmed material. The nature of the professional level of the participants attaches a public visibility and accessibility to their practice, and this in context of the contemporary setting of the enquiry aligns the
research very well with the employment of aspects of social media, in particular an ever increasing archive of professional quality performance videos on YouTube, and the dissemination of recorded music on iTunes amongst other similar sources. Gatson (2011, p.515) suggests that ‘online research can provide either the same level of depth as a one-shot, one-hour interview, or the same level of depth as that produced by the daily participating, embedded offline ethnographer’, which seems to support the general usage of online observation as employed by my research. St.Pierre (2011, p.636) does note the challenges for qualitative researchers, who are ‘faced with an avalanche of unstructured data-words, images, video’ now available to anyone on the Internet. My use of YouTube (and to a lesser extent, Vimeo) videos were generally initially informed by my review of material from more traditional recorded sources such as CD albums and anthologies and from my review of literature, in particular, informing Chapter 2. Nettl (2005, p.165) suggests that while sound recordings have become a standard method of preservation within ethnomusicology, ‘films and videos and DVDs now accompany and may begin to replace them’, though noting that more traditional collections of musical transcriptions would typically ‘undergo far more filtering’. In this regard, I note the professional standing of the participants and attest to the enduring artist level performances consistently evidenced in my reviewing of video material, typically uploaded to sites such as YouTube by the artists themselves and also by concert promoters and fans.

This work began as note or memo based, annotating any potentially relevant details of technique and over all stylistic approach on the five-string instrument, moving quickly to compiling playlists of audio and video examples in iTunes, which are refered to throughout the text. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, this detailed audio visual review was used to identify and confirm a significant scene or field around the emergence and sustained use of the five-string fiddle. It was then brought into sharper focus as a way to enrich the fieldwork. This essentially involved me learning to play and understand examples of the participants’ work. This would later inform discussions with the interviewees about their practice, placing particular emphasis on the use of the instrument, idiomatic technique, use of the c string, and improvisation. Considering the aurally transmitted nature of the music, there were few available resources to draw on, so this ongoing engagement with the practice of the participants was fundemenatal in illuminating my understandings, and in turn my own practice on the five-string.
4.4 Considerations on Action Research/Practitioner-Based Research

McNiff and Whithead (2002, p.150) describe action research as a ‘particular way of researching your own learning … a practical way of looking at your own practice’. In research design, I draw some influence from aspects of action research traditions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.29), ‘[a]ction researchers link praxis and theory in social research’ and in that regard I endeavoured to engage with the practice of participants, and reflect on my own practice in that context while maintaining my research within social science approaches, distinct from that operating inside lexicons constructed primarily around practice. Early in the research, I investigated the examples of practice-based and practice-led (Candy, 2006) research as potential research strategies in which to frame my work as it was an ambition to reflect on and inform my own music making whilst engaged in the research. Wisker (2008, p.227) writes that ‘[p]ractitioner-based research can take many forms and is not a methodology but a focus’, suggesting that with practitioner-based research ‘you can have real impact and ensure sustainable development’ (ibid, p.228). My research goals find some resonance here, in so far as I am a five-string fiddle player concerned with mobilising information about the instrument in the hands of professional fiddle players, having identified a field of significant yet broadly undocumented research interest. Finley (2011, p.435) writes that: ‘Critical arts based inquiry situates the artist-as-researcher (or researcher-as-artist) in the new research paradigm of qualitative practitioners committed to democratic, ethical, and just research methodologies’. He further suggests it to be an activist research approach ‘in which the ultimate value of the research derives from its usefulness to the community in which the research occurs’ (ibid).

Incorporating reflection on my own practice presented a method of distilling the interviewees' responses, and of comparing the nature of their observations and reflections about playing the five-string fiddle. Drawing influence from the interviewees' music, words, and experiences in my own practice offers insights to understanding the responses made regarding details of, for example, idiomatic technique. This allows further consideration of the approaches taken to the five-string, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, such as: How are they similar? How are they different? How does Casey Driessen's description of his own use of the chop stroke compare to how it is described by Brittany Haas, or Lauren Rioux?
4.5 Interview as Research Strategy

The previous chapters evidenced both the sustained emergence of the five-string fiddle in the hands of many noted professional fiddle players and the lack of a serious study or resource encapsulating this. Reviewing the 'state of play' presented by that work, I was guided toward the best methodological stance, and methods of data collection that I believed would answer my research questions, establishing the conviction that the musicians themselves would provide the richest data to inform the enquiry. As outlined above, thoroughly accessing the musician’s practice output was essentially unproblematic and while my early research could deduce some generalities regarding the instrument’s role and possible impacts on their practice, there were many central questions that simply could not be answered. Ultimately, the qualitative interview presented itself as the most appropriate main method of data generation.

Burgess (1984, p.101) outlines two divergent interview strategies in the context of field work: the structured interview, ‘a data collection device involving situations where the interviewer merely poses questions and records answers in a set pattern’, and the less formal, ‘unstructured or semi-structured style of interviewing, which employs a set of themes and topics to form questions in the course of conversation’, describing this approach as ‘conversation with a purpose’. I ruled out the structured interview approach based on the apparent lack of flexibility inherent in it, feeling it would not put the participant at the heart of the research. ‘In qualitative interviewing, there is much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view’ Bryman (2008, p.437). Furthermore, by using structured interviewing, the participant will typically be interviewed only once, again not supporting the flexibility required by my research. Bryman (ibid, p.438) differentiates the unstructured interview as the researcher employing 'at most an aide-mémoire as a brief set of prompts to him-or herself to deal with a certain range of topics'. This appeared a little vague in the context of my work. Having conducted an extensive literature review around each participant, I felt it was important to have a carefully considered set of topics based on apparent gaps in information that this review highlighted, which could be then nuanced and developed as each individual interview evolved. As Pickard (2007, p.60) notes, 'we are talking about in-depth rich pictures, not short anecdotal snippets of detail'. I also drew from the 'shared understanding' model (Ryan, 2006, p.77), which is described as including semi-structured interviews, and echoing Bryman’s view in drawing on an interview guide, (see Appendix A), rather
than an exact set of predetermined questions. Qualitative research interview techniques, as outlined by Bryman (2008, p.438), suggests that, in conducting a semi-structured interview, the researcher 'has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply'. This facilitates flexibility in the further development of ideas discussed by the interviewee during the course of the interview. The shared understanding model also allows for the interviewer to clarify, interpret and paraphrase during the course of the interview, thus 'encouraging the interviewee's responses and corrections' (Ryan, 2006, p.77). One further point in presenting the shared understanding model as the most suitable mode of data collection concerns revisiting, by means of follow up interview where necessary 'to corroborate further interpretations' (*ibid*).

This approach appeared to be most flexible and suitable in facilitating the assimilation of possibly very different personal viewpoints and experiences while maintaining some comparability across the multiple interviewees. This approach also presented itself as very appropriate in the consideration of the participants' position as expert practitioners in the field and in allowing their voices to prevail in the research.

Central topics, as discussed in the first Chapters, such as the encompassing of the personal experiences of the musicians who choose to play on five-string violins, why they choose to make it their primary instrument, the particular musical, technical, physical and acoustic attributes of the instrument within the practice, and considered projections on what the future may hold for the five-string fiddle, and the music that is performed on it, all present themselves as yet under researched.

In consideration of the varying and non-standard classical backgrounds of the proposed interviewees, I decided that it would be informative to attach an element of life history to the interview. Described by Bryman (2008, p.440) as inviting 'the subject to look back in detail across his or her entire life course', the concept's advantage for the qualitative researcher is:

...unambiguous emphasis on the point of view of the life in question and a clear commitment to the processual aspects of social life, showing how events unfold and interrelate in people’s lives.
Ferrara (2005, p.97) describes the underlying reasoning of ‘career of life histories’ as allowing that:

> Overall observed actions can be better understood when a researcher can balance the intersubjective actions of the group with more private and biographic information specific to a particular subject or participant.

Therefore, I identified that the inclusion of elements of life history could significantly enhance understandings of each subject’s personal pathway into music and ultimately to their adoption of the five-string fiddle, and taking account of the social and aural nature of vernacular music, this perspective appeared very appropriate to this research. In considering my use of the term here, I do note that a biographical study, a life history, typically, ‘will be gathered over a number of years’ (Creswell, p.49).

Ultimately, the qualitative interview presents itself convincingly as the most viable and reliable research method in approaching these areas of enquiry in what is a contemporary and rapidly evolving phenomenon within American vernacular music culture. The interview allows the researcher to ‘reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes’ (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, 2011, p.529) and in this context I considered the necessity to engage with the potential ethical issues arising from the interview situation and those around the emergent data.

### 4.5.1 Ethical issues

Bryman (2008, p.115) writes that it is 'crucial to be aware of the ethical principles involved and of the nature of the concerns about ethics in social research' and this was an important guiding principle in all my work. I familiarised myself with DIT codes of practice and obtained the approval of the Institute’s ethics committee before engaging in research activity. Christians (2011, p.65) writes that ‘codes of ethics for professional and academic associations are the conventional format for moral principles’, listing informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy as the four primary guidelines. On receiving positive replies confirming interest from participants, I replied, thanking them, and set about agreeing a date for the interview. I also sent them

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10 See [http://www.dit.ie/researchandenterprise/ethicsindit/](http://www.dit.ie/researchandenterprise/ethicsindit/)
a formal DIT consent form (see Appendix C) including all relevant details regarding my research and the Institute. In some cases, where digital signatures proved unavailable, I asked participants to confirm consent via email. Pickard (2007, p.74) outlines that when participants give informed consent ‘they understand what they are agreeing to, accept what is being asked of them and are comfortable with the purpose of the research and the intended use of the data they are providing’. I felt the artistic and somewhat holistic nature of my research did not necessitate the use of pseudonyms or of the altering of details regarding the participants, as called for in research of a more personal or sensitive topic, and while there were elements of life history included, these were not of a private nature, but more relating to the participant's formative engagement with music and learning the violin. Lee (1993, p.2) notes that sensitive topics ‘raise wider issues related to ethics, politics and legal aspects of research’ more acutely than how they may impinge on more non-sensitive work. I did assure the participants that I would, on having transcribed the interviews, check back with them regarding the use of any data that appeared to be of a personal or potentially harmful nature. Throughout my research, I endeavoured to treat all participants with respect and always dealt with them honestly, cognizant that one should ‘continue to consider ethics in your research and to revisit the rules of confidentiality, consent and harm should problems arise’ (Wisker, p.92). I was satisfied that my research illustrated no invasion of the privacy of the participants or deception as to the nature of the research (Bryman, 2008, p.123).

Writing about the use of ‘repurposed copyrighted material’ such as online video that ‘aptly illustrates an argument or a point’, The Code of Best Practice of the American University Washington, DC (2008) states that such usage ‘should be considered fair use and is widely recognized as such in other creative communities’ (ibid). Chapter 6 in this way, uses video examples in creating a rich picture of the practice of the participants on the five-string fiddle, drawing on a small but apt selection of the examples available online.

4.6 Selecting Participants: Purposive Sampling

The interview subjects were nominated based on the literature and listening review undertaken in setting out this research, which evidenced them as being leading and oft cited figures in American fiddle culture and as being high profile professional practitioners playing on five-string instruments, as discussed in Chapter 2. Sampling,
according to Pickard (2007, p.59), is 'the process of selecting a few from the many in order to carry out empirical research'. Regarding the selection process, Bryman (2008, p.470) makes a key point that '[a]s with ethnographic research, investigations using qualitative interviews tend not to employ random sampling to select participants'. Pickard (2007, p.88) suggests that 'one way of identifying who should be included in the sample is to draw up broad profiles of potentially information-rich sources'.

According to Bryman (2008, p.415), 'the researcher needs to be clear in his or her mind what the criteria are that will be relevant to the inclusion or exclusion of cases'. I discounted various probability and random sampling strategies as being completely inappropriate for my work based on the nature of the research, its overarching interaction with practice, the specialist complexion of the field and critically, the existence of identifiable professional artists practising on the instrument, as described in the previous chapters. For Bryman (ibid, p.415), 'the goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed', and, having considered the field as discussed in Chapter 2, I established a list of participants I believed would offer the richest data to the research.

My ‘five-string wish-list’ comprised eight American fiddler players. Each a high profile musician in their own right, they emerged naturally during the course of my literature review, and listening research, as particularly strong sample cases, all very ‘relevant to the research questions that are being posed’ (ibid). All participants were identified as leading exponents of the diversities encompassed in American fiddle music, with extensive professional recording and performance experience, and all playing on five-string instruments. The names included were: Darol Anger, Brittany Haas, Lauren Rioux, Casey Driessen and Mimi Rabson, all of whom, for which I was very confident, represented a detailed cross section of the contemporary American fiddle, and crucially, the ‘sound’ of the five-string fiddle. Dan Trueman of Princeton University, and Matt Glaser of Berklee College of Music, in addition to their own musical merits, brought a comprehensive academic perspective, both being experts in the performance of a wide variety of fiddle music styles, and having emerged to the forefront of those writing about the instrument in that setting. Furthermore, I included Bobby Hicks, as he was still actively making music; I felt his story would add significantly to the richness of the
research, as, despite playing five-string fiddle for over 40 years, and winning multiple Grammy awards, very little was written, or known, about his five-string fiddle playing.

Baxter et al. (2001, p.163) refer to ‘handpicking supposedly typical or interesting cases’ and I regard my selection process to have involved well informed handpicking. It also fits Flyvbjerg's description of (2011, p.307) ‘[i]nformation-oriented selection’, where ‘cases are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content’.

As the research was undertaken, unfortunately it became clear that Darol Anger was unable to take part. We exchanged emails, and I had the pleasure of meeting him in Berklee College of Music in 2014, and we even swapped five-string fiddles for a tune, but ultimately Anger did not become a participant.

4.7 Research Strategies Not Undertaken

In forming my methodological approach, I investigated the potential of many possible data collection instruments for my research. While Pickard (2007, p.183) identifies the questionnaire as 'the single most popular data collection tool in any research involving human subjects', having explored the possibilities it offered my work, I deemed it as unsatisfactory in the context of my aims. Wisker (2008, p.187) outlines that a researcher is likely to employ questionnaires in seeking 'responses from large numbers of respondents, as they can be counted, measured and statistically analysed'. I, however, was focused on a select group of professional musicians who in their own practice had demonstrated their engagement with the subject of my research and so felt that while the questionnaire approach could perhaps offer some general insight, it would not offer credibility in terms of research regarding the generation of information rich data.

Candy's (2006) document, 'Practice Based Research: A Guide', identifies two approaches to practice related research suggesting that '[i]f a creative artifact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based, while '[i]f the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led'. It became clear early in designing my research that the exclusively practice-based lexicon such as Candy's was not compatible with the aims of my work. As, while it was intended to look at my own practice on the instrument, I felt that the research hinged significantly on the professional practitioners identified as leading exemplars of the instruments
emergence. This view was formed by the lack of research concerning the instrument to date, and with this in mind, construction of the research, primarily around means of my own practice, appeared to lack rigour in establishing new knowledge.

Part Two

4.8 Research Procedures: Data Collection

Having established a comprehensive list of potential participants and developed and revised my interview guide, I began to instigate some initial formal contact with the candidates I wished to interview. While it had become clear that the possibility of interviewing each participant face to face was unlikely, I believed it was important if possible that the first interview be conducted in person, in providing a bench mark to consider subsequent online interviews in terms of richness. Regarding online research, Pickard (2007, p.83) states that a 'research method follows the process and structure of that method regardless of the environment in which the method is applied'. She states that, in her experience as a research supervisor, 'on every occasion the basic axioms of the method hold true' (ibid) in all cases of online research. I composed a general initial contact email (included in Appendix B) including details outlining the nature and aims of my research, what I was asking of participants and offering to answer any questions or concerns they may have had (Wisker, p.196).

I felt that it was vital to record the interviews. For this, I used a Zoom q3HD portable audio recorder and a software add-on for Skype, 'Call Recorder'. Recording the interviews presented many advantages. It allowed me to develop and maintain a close familiarity with the data, to re hear what was said, and the nuances of how and in what context it was said. This closeness would not be possible from note taking during the interview. I also felt that taking detailed notes during the interview would significantly detract from the experience and be a distraction from the semi-structured, 'conversation with a purpose' approach I felt most appropriate to my work. I personally transcribed each interview as soon as possible after the interview had taken place, an undertaking I found to be very time consuming but also extremely worthwhile. Pickard (2007, p.182) encourages the researcher to '[t]ake your transcription of the interview back to the interviewee and confirm how much accurate data you have gathered from the interview'. Having transcribed and reflected on the interview, I sent the transcription
back to the participant, to ensure they were happy that they had been accurately represented, and to give them the opportunity to add or develop what they had said. It also allowed me to clarify details, and to keep the participant involved in my research.

At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself and again thanked each participant for their co-operation, I briefly outlined the aims of my research and the role of the participants in it, and again checked for consent to record the interview. All participants were happy to be recorded. The resulting recordings were stored securely as digital audio/video files on a hard drive accessed only by me, and I kept a back-up copy on my private password encrypted cloud storage account, complying with DIT ethics considerations.

All interviews in this thesis, specifically Chapters 5 and 6, were recorded in a single session, and when quoted from, will be denoted by the reference (Driessen, *Skype Interview*, March 11th, 2012), for example. Subsequent quotes related to the interviewee, in the same chapters, will be referenced by (*ibid*), unless an overlap occurs which may otherwise cause confusion.

### 4.9 Data Analysis

Kane and O'Reilly-De Brun (2001, p.365) summarise the analytic process thus:

> Analysis of qualitative data involves getting the information (collecting), boiling it down (reducing), organizing it in various ways to help you to see patterns and relationships (displaying), deciding what you have got (drawing conclusions), and satisfying yourself and others that you have found what you think you have (verifying).

As Pickard (2007, p.239) recognises, it is important to note that, despite being discussed sequentially here, in qualitative research, 'the gathering and analysis of data occurs concurrently; it is a constant interplay of data and analysis, data informing analysis, and analysis informing new data collection'. I will firstly discuss the methodological concepts influencing my approach to managing and understanding the data, and then proceed with a detailed account of the actualities of how I integrated those concepts in my analysis using CAQ-DAS. I engaged widely with the literature regarding qualitative data analysis as my own data emerged, in forming what I believed would prove the most appropriate approach to working with my material. I had transcribed each interview as soon as possible after it had taken place and initial analysis also began
immediately, primarily in developing my earliest understandings that would in turn inform and justify subsequent data gathering.

### 4.9.1 Coding

According to Bryman (2008, p.550) ’[c]oding is the starting point for most forms of qualitative data analysis’. He advises beginning the coding of the data as soon as possible after collection as being helpful in understanding the data and useful in avoiding 'being swamped', by leaving analysis until all data is collected. Saldana (2009, p.3) describes a code as follows:

> A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, literature, artifacts, photographs, video, websites, e-mail correspondence, and so on.

Wisker (2008, p.315) indicates that, in the case of open-ended interviews, the researcher must 'read through them carefully and code them after the event, that is, in relation to the kinds of answers, themes and issues, and categories of response'. Once each interview was completed and transcribed, I immediately began initial consideration of the material, making hand written memos of basic first thoughts and ideas. I also engaged continuously with the practice of the interviewee through video and audio material to hear performances and techniques that exemplified musical issues they had discussed. The use of memos will be discussed in detail below. Bryman (2008, p.550) proposes beginning the analysis process by taking general notes after reading through the transcripts, then reading again and beginning to make 'marginal notes about significant remarks or observations', holding that these be initially of a basic nature, identifying keywords used by the interviewees. This process will result in 'generating an index of terms that will help you to interpret and theorize in relation to your data', which can then be reviewed and refined in the context of the transcripts themselves, codes pre-existing in the literature, interconnections between the codes, and 'more general theoretical ideas in relation to codes and data' (ibid).

It is important to distinguish that coding in itself is not analysis. Bryman (ibid, p.552) points to Huberman and Miles (1994) in understanding it as 'a mechanism for thinking about the meaning of your data’. The researcher must then engage with analysing and
interpreting the data. The literature offers various manual techniques for the coding process, however, Saldana (2009, p.22) points out, when the research 'will require multiple participant interviews or extended fieldwork and extensive field note-taking, then CAQ-DAS becomes a vital and indispensable tool'. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, according to Bryman (2008, p.565), typically operates on 'code-and-retrieve theme', so when working with a large collection of interviews the software can retrieve all of the text associated to a particular code or codes. However, it is crucial to note that while such software adds efficiency to labour intensive aspects of coding and analysis, it does not aid the actual decision making processes of coding or analysing of the data.

Having completed three interviews (Dan Trueman, Casey Driessen and Lauren Rioux), I paused to evaluate the emerging data, examining the interview transcripts and establishing tentative links between emerging themes and my on-going interaction with the practice of the interviewees. Through listening to and watching their performances. It became clear that while the use of hard copy manual techniques such as note taking and memo writing were essential in developing understandings of basic principles, as Saldana (2009, p.22) attests, the process ultimately could be managed more effectively and more critically using software. Saldana in this regard submits that CAQ-DAS systems 'permit you to organize evolving and potentially complex coding systems into such formats as hierarchies and networks for “at a glance” user reference'. Such software appeared to offer me a way to credibly align connections between the textual, audio and video aspects of my research during the coding and analysis process. There are various software packages available for such work. Bryman (2008, p.568) writes in detail regarding the use of NVivo, while other suitable software includes ATLAS/ti, MAXQDA, and Transana. Bryman (2008, p.566) notes that while a use of software is typically considered necessary in quantitative research, 'amongst qualitative data analysts its use is by no means universally embraced', referring to Weaver and Atkinson's (1994) considerations concerning a possible loss of 'the narrative flow of interview transcripts'. I felt however, that the benefits of engaging with analysis software were very much worth pursuing in my case for reasons expressed above.

\begin{footnote}
11 'There is something about manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil that give you more control over and ownership of the work'
\end{footnote}
4.9.2 Choosing Transana

Transana is a CAQ-DAS system that allows researchers to organise large amounts of video and audio material 'into meaningful categories, as a mechanism for developing and expanding the theoretical understanding of what the video [or audio] shows' (Woods, 2013). Bryman (2008, p.538) notes that 'one of the main difficulties of qualitative research is that it very rapidly generates a large, cumbersome database'. I investigated various CAQ-DAS options before deciding in favour of Transana. In particular, I liked its effective management of audio and video and the relatively straightforward yet comprehensive nature of its memo and coding management. Keywords or codes can be attached to segments of data called 'clips', which then form a searchable 'collection' of clips from across the full database. This allows for analytical data mining while maintaining closeness to the data itself. I felt it very important that I remain closely engaged with the voice and context of the interviewee throughout my work in order to avoid the possibility of fragmentation of the data. The clip facility (which will be discussed further below in the context of coding in Transana), is described as the 'electronic equivalent of cutting text documents into analytically meaningful strips' (ibid) and it allows for in-depth cross interview comparison in identifying emerging themes and concepts. The software enabled me to isolate and 'keyword' or code clips of responses to similarly themed responses across each interview, so it was possible to efficiently revisit and consider what each participant felt on any one topic of discussion. I could also identify and delineate all mentions of a particular topic throughout all of the interview. Similarly, I could also align segments of an interview to a musical performance or other relevant video or audio collected during my literature review (See below), for example, in comparing the use of the chop bow technique and how interviewees described their own use of it on the five-string.

In addition to many hours of interview material, and the corresponding transcripts, my research also comprised a substantial video and audio collection, which I had developed during the course of the literature review and in surveying the five-string fiddle in action. I created a media folder for each musician that had emerged as demonstrating extensive and high level use of the instrument. Ó Dochartaigh (2012, p.117) states that in recent years 'hundreds of thousands of individuals have put their own video footage online', and he acknowledges the proliferation of mainstream online video dissemination by television and academic institutions, attesting that 'a wide variety of
commercial and non-profit organizations have begun to make video materials, and video archives' freely available. Online archives proved a particularly rich data source in this regard, providing access to high quality performance videos of all the emerging artists as the research progressed. This was perhaps unsurprisingly the case for the high profile contemporary fiddlers such as Driessen, Haas etc., but it also presented rich historical insight into the work of Gimble and Hicks, with archive material dating back to their early careers which had been made available by the artists themselves and by various media sources and archives. I aspired to use this material to remain close to the data and the artist's practice by, when relevant, linking interview comments and themes to video and audio examples.

Learning to use Transana is well supported by a set of online tutorial 'screencasts'\(^{12}\) and written documentation. I began by preparing and importing the audio files recorded during each interview and importing my transcriptions of each interview. Transana itself offers manual transcription facilities, which I used to transcribe interviews undertaken after I had begun to use the software. With the relevant audio and text imported, I undertook the task of creating a timecode marker for every question and response in each interview, which I would later delineate in finer detail as needed. This initially took some time but it was extremely worthwhile in allowing for fast, accurate and detailed navigation of each interview. For example, the positioning of a timecode marker on each interview at a question each interviewee was asked; 'where did you first encounter a five-string?' With this work completed and Transana in 'analytic mode', the software moves the media file playback to wherever you click on the transcript, highlighting the text that is heard on the recording at that moment in the interview. Similarly I could navigate video and audio files of the participants practice to identify relevant segments. I felt that the learning curve involved was not that steep, and with its concentration of video and audio files Transana presented itself as very appropriate to my work. I felt that considering and comparing emerging themes in conjunction with the qualitative research literature had become more immediate and manageable using CAQ-DAS than it may have been if approached manually.

I created a 'database' in Transana and imported my audio files. The organisation of files comprised in the database is structured in what Transana calls 'episodes', which are

\(^{12}\) See http://www.transana.org/support/screencasts.htm
placed inside a ‘series’. I created a series named 'interviews' and imported all of my interview audio files, each of which is then an episode in Transana terminology. The program allows for the creation of timecodes, which then link a position in time on the audio or video to a particular part of the transcript. This allows the media file and the transcript to work together, with timecode locations delineating units of analysis through the creation of clips.

4.9.3 The coding process in Transana

In Transana terminology, a 'clip' is a segment of the media file, which is identified as being of analytic importance, and can be attributed multiple 'keywords', that each directly represents a code in the coding system. Woods states that clips are 'the basic unit of analysis in Transana and 'all coding is done at the clip level'.13 There are two variants, the 'standard clip' and the 'quick clip'. Clips are named and stored in 'collections' which are created and named in advance. For example, in order to understand and compare the interviewees first interests in fiddle playing, I created a collection entitled 'First Lessons' and then created clips identified from each interview that evidence insights to the musicians backgrounds and introduction to the fiddle. Each clip can be named and keywords can be attached to them. Continuing the example, the Suzuki method emerges as the first lessons taken by some participants and so the code 'Suzuki' is attributed to the relevant clips. During the data analysis, I can call up all clips that are coded 'Suzuki' from the collection. Clips can be attributed more than one keyword and so can be constituent to multiple collections, for example the 'Suzuki' student who also had lessons in 'Old-Time' fiddle at the beginning.

The coding process initially centred on the questions prepared in my interview guide that I had ensured to ask all interviewees. At first coding involved isolating thematic material from each interview in Transana. The interview guide presented a set of broad themes and I created an initial overarching keyword for each, and developed the relevant collection of clips from each transcript under headings such as 'first lessons', 'first encounter with five-string', 'techniques easily performed on five-string', 'techniques more difficult on five-string than on four'. During this process, additional themes emerged and were added to the keyword list. For example, regarding the interviewees

13 See http://www.transana.org/support/ScreenCasts/StandardClips.htm
'introduction to improvisation', additional themes such as; variation, influences, teachers, genre, personality, electric violins, playing in bands, and composing became apparent. Reviewing the response of each interviewee typically suggested common themes and also the need to add further keywords. This diminished as I worked through all the data, yielding a rich, complex and complete set of themes that will form the discussion of the next chapters.

4.10 Memos

Pickard (2007, p.245) states that it is 'essential that any qualitative researcher maintains a running commentary on themes emerging from the data'. From my earliest engagement with the data, memo writing formed a very important and informing part of the interaction process. Initial memos made during the transcription process served to allow provisional thoughts and points of interest regarding the data to be explored informally. Memo writing became a vital basis of my analysis and this was effectively managed by Transana. The software allows 'analytic memos' to be attached to series, episodes, transcripts, clips, and collection records for documentation of the analytic process.

4.11 Conclusion

Chapter 4 has detailed the epistemological perspective and research methodology adapted throughout this work. The qualitative focus of the research has been explained, and the use of the interview as a primary means of data generation discussed. I feel the combination of the interview and engagement with the practice of each participant allowed for rich pictures of the five-string fiddle in the musical work of each musician to emerge. The decision to employ the use of the CAQ-DAS Transana has been documented and discussed in the context of the qualitative data analysis methodology literature and in how it is used in this research.

The research's interaction with the leading professional fiddle players, who have made the five-string instrument central to their practice, proved to be extremely worthwhile in yielding rich data that will be presented in the following chapters, in allowing their voice to describe the phenomenon of which they and their music is central.
CHAPTER 5
THE VOICE OF THE FIVE-STRING FIDDLER

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the data emerging from the interview process, focusing on the personal experiences of the participants with the five-string fiddle. Bernard and Ryan (2010, p.5) describe qualitative data as 'when we reduce people’s thoughts, behaviours, emotions, artefacts, and environments to sounds, words, or pictures'. The overarching understandings of each participant concerning their own experiences with the five-string fiddle in their music, and in the music around them, are central to this discussion. The data is divided into three main sections within this chapter.

The first section will focus on the personal musical journeys that brought each of the seven participants (already introduced in Chapter 2) to the five-string fiddle. The second section outlines the participants’ interactions with the five-string fiddle, where they first saw and played one, and what it was that inspired such interest for them. Finally, the third section will detail the five-string fiddles owned and played by the participants, presenting data emerging around the instruments themselves, such as elements of design and set-up, as well as string and bow choice. The discussion draws on direct quotation when presenting the personal voice of each musician, the five-string fiddle practitioners that occupy the centre of this research.

Issues regarding performance technique and approaches to playing the five-string fiddle will form the concentration of the next chapter. It is discussed in the context of each of the participant’s own music, aligning the key responses with musical examples from the participant’s practice.

5.2 Coming to the Five-String

As discussed above, particularly in Chapters 2 and 4, all of the participants in this research are very successful professional musicians, active in performance and recording, and all playing five-string fiddles. All demonstrate a high profile within the existing literature. While some, such as Glaser, Rabson and Trueman, are more
concentrated in the education sphere, all evidence a rich musical background, and bring insight in terms of performance technique, history, composition and education itself, attaching expert perspective and rigour to the work.

I began each interview by asking the participants about their early background in musical life. By mapping their musical journey towards the high levels of their musical achievement, I felt it would allow the musicians’ use of the five-string to be considered in the richest possible personal context. While many of the research questions posed are ventilated through comparative discussion, I initially introduce each participant individually, drawing on their own words from the research data. This contributes further to the picture that emerged in Chapter 2, drawn from the existing literature concerning each musician. I aim to let the naturally occurring conversation emerge here, allowing each musician to focus on areas of personal interest.

I introduce each participant with a short quote from the research, which is intended to capture the significance of the five-string fiddle for each musician.

**5.2.1 Bobby Hicks**

‘I’ve never seen one like the one I play, the one they call ’Goldenboy’, yeah, that’s the one’!

So states five-string pioneer Bobby Hicks about his five-string fiddle, the same fiddle he has played on for over 50 years. From North Carolina, Hick’s experience with music began at home: ‘There were people in my family that played a little bit, and I just picked it up from them’ (Hicks, Skype Interview, 20th May, 2013). Hicks considers himself to be a self-taught musician: ‘I never had any teachers or anything, I just learned what I know by myself’ *(ibid)*. The fiddler states that he listened to, and absorbed as much as possible from the emerging Bluegrass recordings of the day. He looked in particular to the recordings of Bill Monroe’s Bluegrass Boys as they became available, and he just ‘tried to play what those fiddle players were playing’ *(ibid)*.

It was a successful approach. By the time he was twenty-one, he had ‘worked with a few local no-name bands around home’ *(ibid)*. Hicks explained how he moved to
Nashville to work for Bill Monroe’s band at the Grand Ole Opry, joining the band initially as double bass player in 1954, before quickly assuming the role of fiddler. During this time Hicks emerged as, and has remained, one of the most celebrated Bluegrass fiddle players of all time. Over the course of this research, the extent of his influence and reputation is mentioned in high regard by many of the other participants.

Regarding improvisation, the cornerstone of Bluegrass, Hicks described an apprenticeship of learning on the job. He states that in his early career he ‘didn't really know how to do that stuff [improvise solos]’ (ibid), but says: ‘After I got to Nashville and was with some of the better players, you know, I learned a lot of stuff from them’ (ibid). While working with Monroe in the mid-1950s, Hicks played fiddle on classic Bluegrass Boys recordings such as Big Mon, Scotland and Wheel Hoss, amongst others. Hicks led a performance of the tunes Scotland and Wheel Hoss in Berklee College of Music, with Matt Glaser, Casey Driessen, Darol Anger and others in 2012 (online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfW55Yp63AU). I have used this video on many occasions throughout this research to present an overarching picture of the American fiddle scene, and the five-string fiddle in practice.

Outlining his musical life history, Hicks describes leaving The Bluegrass Boys to play in various bands, firstly in Iowa, and later Montana, before ‘working with a Country and Western Swing band out there in Vegas’ (ibid). Following an eight year stay in Las Vegas working for the singer Judy Lynn, Hicks recounts that he returned to Bluegrass in 1981, playing with the American star Ricky Skaggs for 22 years. Speaking about his later life the musician states: ‘I married a sweet little girl from the mountains here in North Carolina, and we moved here, and that's where I live now, in Marshal, North Carolina’ (ibid). Hicks maintains an active performance schedule, stating that ‘just this past Saturday night the 18th (May 2013) we did a show in a little town called Sevierville, Tennessee’ (ibid), with The Bluegrass Album Band.

About his musical partner of 52 years, the five-string fiddle, Hicks states ‘it was unusual to begin with, no one back here in this part of the country had ever heard of a five-string fiddle’ (ibid). Hicks recounts: ‘the more I played it, the more it got to be a part of what I was doing’, and says ‘if I play a four-string fiddle now I'm lost without the fifth string’
Hicks elaborates: ‘I find a lot of places that I do use it that I don’t even think about until I pick up a four-string and I start playing’ (ibid).

5.2.2 Casey Driessen

‘It’s a central part of the music that I’m playing’

Casey Driessen, based in Nashville, is a professional fiddle player and singer. As discussed in Chapter 2, he is a key figure in the recent literature regarding American fiddling, and is particularly renowned for his use of the chop technique. Driessen states that he began playing fiddle when he ‘was about 5 or 6’ (Driessen, Skype Interview, March 11th, 2012), and studied the Suzuki Method for 2 years. In addition to the Suzuki Method, Driessen warmly recalls the simultaneous influence of his father on his early music education:

My Dad is a musician, he was mainly a pedal steel guitarist and a five-string banjo player, but he also played some guitar as well, so he got me started on music and was teaching me fiddle type things or things that weren't Suzuki, like beginning fiddle tunes (ibid).

Reflecting on his early music lessons, Driessen explains that he read music notation, ‘a little bit, through Suzuki’, but that his father ‘developed some sort of fiddle tablature’ (ibid) for him to use. Driessen says: ‘I learned that way for a long time… I’m not sure why he chose to do that over regular music notation’, suggesting that his father probably thought it ‘would be easier for a kid to associate numbers of fingers’ (ibid). Driessen outlines the teaching system designed by his father as follows:

He used numbers for the fingers, 1, 2, 3 and 4 and the standard 0, and I think he basically decided that 1, 2, 3, 4 like you are going to play like an E major scale starting on the d string, those placements of fingers were the standard 1, 2 that’s where your first, second, third and fourth fingers went, and then if it was different than that he would put a flat or a sharp, if it was for a g natural for example, it would be a flat third on the d string. So, rather than using a tab based on what fret you would use it was tabs based on what finger you used (ibid).

Driessen explains that, with the basics of fiddle technique underway, he moved quickly to learning the various roles of the fiddle in Bluegrass: ‘You’d be required, you know, to kick off the song’, and to ‘know the melody enough or being able to work your way through a kick off, and then you would take a solo within that’ (ibid). In the ‘jam session’, according to Driessen, if you didn’t know the song, ‘you had to sort of figure it

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out enough by the time your break came, your solo came, and you could get the job
done’ (ibid). Regarding instrumental tunes, he states that growing up, instrumentals
typically involved ‘playing the melody, and having some sort of variation that either
you had memorised or you were able to kind of figure out something to play on the
spot… improvising’ (ibid). Driessen also describes how he joined a Jazz band, ‘and had
to play a Bb scale for the first time’, recalling that ‘all that stuff was kind of happening
at once … maybe it was fifth grade, something like that’ (ibid).

Driessen describes that he is ‘at the core, a fiddle player’ (ibid). He elaborates: ‘When
folks ask what kind of music, I would say, I come out of the Bluegrass world and I am
interested in, dabble in Jazz, and things where I am electrified’ (ibid). He encapsulates
his musical interests to include ‘any sort of music that allows for improvisation and
interpretation’, which according to the fiddler himself, ‘covers a lot, a wide range’
(ibid). Driessen states that improvisation is one of his ‘main tools’ and forms a
significant part of his background (ibid).

Driessen speaks about two five-string players amongst his early influences, though he
pays attention to their musical and stylistic influence, rather than the fact that they,
Bobby Hicks and Jean-Luc Ponty, played five-string instruments. Firstly, pointing
firmly to his Bluegrass roots Driessen accounts: ‘I was listening to Kenny Baker, Vaser
Clements … listening to Bobby Hicks’ (ibid). Driessen also attaches significance to the
then younger, contemporary, generation of fiddlers such as Mark O’Connor and Stuart
Duncan, and points to: ‘A couple of records that Tony Rice put out called ‘Backwaters’
and ‘Still Inside’, on which ‘Fred Carpenter was the fiddle player’ (ibid). Listening to
Driessen’s work, and as he indicates above, there is clearly much more at play than
straight ahead Bluegrass, and to this he also notes the influence of Jazz: ‘I was listening
to a bunch of Stephane Grappelli, he was kind of the main guy, and then through
listening to him, I kind of became aware of Jean-Luc Ponty’ (ibid). Driessen recounts
his first exposure to electric five-string explorations of Jean-Luc Ponty:

I didn't understand it, it didn't do anything for me, my Dad got me a couple of his
fusion records and they didn't do anything for me, but I kept them around and about
two years later I probably listened to them and then was like oh wow! These are
awesome. So it took me and whatever studies I was doing at that time to be able to
appreciate that stuff later (ibid).
Driessen, in elaborating on his influences draws attention to the impact of Blues fiddle on his music, stating: ‘I love that old black violin music, it's awesome’ *(ibid).* He pays tribute to the impact of two records in particular, ‘Violin Sing the Blues for Me’, and ‘Folks He Sure do Pull Some Bow’ *(ibid).* He also comments: ‘You know who I love? … Stuff Smith, or should I say Hezekiah Leroy Gordon Smith, that's his real name … he is probably my favourite’ *(ibid).* Driessen says that he found out about Smith after spending time listening to the music of Darol Anger.

For Driessen, The five-string fiddle has been with him for most of his musical life, he recounts: ‘I just immediately fell in love with the idea of having the lower string, it was so cool’ *(ibid).*

### 5.2.3 Matt Glaser

‘It's really become the axe for improvisers’.

Matt Glaser is a fiddle player, and educator, based in Berklee College of Music, Boston. His extensive writing, regarding American fiddle music and improvisation across various styles, was frequently referenced in earlier chapters. By way of introduction Glaser states: ‘I come from a Classical music family, my mother is an opera singer’ *(Glaser, Skype Interview, 15th May, 2013).* Before beginning to play the fiddle he ‘played Classical piano as a young boy, so knew how to read music’ *(ibid).* Glaser started playing the violin when he was thirteen years old. He recalls:

> I heard the fiddle on a commercial for corn chips here in the United States, and my parents bought me a violin for my thirteenth birthday and they also got me a record called *Hell Broke Loose in Georgia*, which was of Georgia fiddle bands. I started taking fiddle lessons from a man named John Burke who thought Old-Time fiddle, but I’ve never really learned how to play Old-Time fiddle properly even though it's something that's been in my background since the beginning *(ibid).*

Glaser, in reflecting on his journey into fiddle music, recalls: ‘I started taking some classical lessons, but I stopped after a couple of years of that, and got into Bluegrass, and from Bluegrass I got into Swing’ *(ibid).* Swing is a big word in Glaser’s world: ‘The first professional band I played in was a Swing band, and I would define myself predominantly as a Swing fiddle player, Swing and early Jazz and also Bluegrass’ *(ibid).* Glaser is adamant: ‘I really just want to work on swinging on the fiddle, I want to
be able to swing, that's my main thrust’ (ibid). In that regard, according to Glaser, ‘Johnny Gimble is the pre-eminent guy’. He observes that Gimble’s ‘greatest playing is really an extraordinary thing of poetry in which he swings really hard and makes up improvised melodies that are tremendously memorable’ (ibid).

Glaser demonstrates a particular interest in improvisation. He points to how the fiddler Vassar Clements was an important influence regarding improvisation: ‘Improvisation was an important component in Bluegrass… I must have realised at that point that I needed to make up my own solos’ (ibid). Glaser suggests that when he initially started to play in bands in which he had to play ‘something on a tune’, he was improvising variations even though he hadn’t studied it ‘as a special musical process’ (ibid).

During the course of this research, I had the opportunity to visit Berklee College of Music, through the invitation of Matt Glaser, and the assistance of the DIT Fiosraigh Internship Award. Glaser, the staff, and the students of the String and American Roots departments in Berklee, were an inspiration. The newly established American Roots program is clearly a labour of love for Glaser and a testament to his lifelong contribution to the American fiddle. Glaser does not play exclusively on five-string, but his overarching insight proved extremely valuable to this research, bringing the interest and thoughts of the most eminent contributor to the literature around the American fiddle. Glaser states that he uses his five-string fiddle for playing Jazz: ‘Whenever I want to have some dark low Bluesy thing I always reach for my five-string, so I can get the notes on the c string’ (ibid).

5.2.4 Dan Trueman

‘I’m playing this new fiddle … I mean all the time, it's just incredibly inspiring’.

Dan Trueman is a Hardanger fiddler and electric violinist, and, as described in Chapter 2, is also a highly regarded composer and educator, based in Princeton University, New Jersey. Trueman, introducing his early musical background states: ‘I started playing violin when I was four and I begged my parents for lessons for a long time’ (Trueman, In Person Interview, June 2nd, 2011). Trueman shares that he only recently discovered the reason why he wanted violin lessons:
I had known this story about this friend of my family who played violin and he used to come over and play, and I saw him play and I really wanted to do it. And then he moved away and I didn't have really any contact with him, but I found out literally this summer that he came over and actually was playing fiddle music, he wasn't playing Classical violin, he was playing fiddle music and that's what I fell in love with (ibid).

Trueman points out that growing up on Long Island, there wasn't much fiddle music around and ‘if you wanted to play violin you took Classical violin’ (ibid). He occasionally still plays some Classical music, explaining: ‘Bach unaccompanied or something like that, but I don't really play the Classical violin any more’ (ibid). Truman describes ‘trying other things, playing in bands and studying some Jazz’ (ibid) in College, led him to the electric violin, and later the Hardanger fiddle:

I went to a camp, a Turtle Island String Quartet camp back in 1992 or something like that, and then I got the most radical electric violin I could get. This Mark Wood six string fretted electric violin, then I was playing in bands and singing harmonies, I wanted that instrument because I wanted the most outrageous thing I could possibly get. Something that was completely different than the Classical violin, and that certainly is, but then in the midst of that I had this experience where I heard the Hardanger fiddle for the first time’ (ibid).

When reflecting on his musical development, Trueman states that he played Jazz in College in Cincinnati ‘because that was what was around … there was a lot of Jazz players around, a lot of people teaching Jazz’ (ibid). Recognising that, by then, he ‘wanted to do something other than Classical violin’, he recounts: ‘I wanted to improvise more, and so, Jazz was the way in’ (ibid). Long term, playing Jazz held no attraction for Trueman. He states that he liked Stephanie Grappelli, but admits: ‘Grappelli was so far beyond anything I would be able to do, it's not an option’ (ibid). Trueman also says that he ‘didn't particularly like what Jean Luc Ponty did’, and so, while his first interest outside Classical violin was in Jazz, Trueman concedes that ‘it’s just what was there’ (ibid).

Trueman traces his interests in improvisation to the time when he ‘started playing violin and electric violin in some bands’ (ibid), when he was twenty/twenty-one years old. In discussing improvisation and composition, Trueman observes that ‘both were ways of just trying to reinvigorate the whole space’. He states that he started writing his own music, ‘as a way from getting away from the page … to do something that is not just prescribed’, but is something that is his own (ibid).
As stated above, Trueman is a Hardanger fiddler. In discussing this aspect of his work he states: ‘As a fiddler I have played Norwegian fiddle music more than any other and I'm not sure I am most comfortable there, but I know the most tunes there’ (*ibid*). He also reflects that he has been ‘playing some Old-Time, and learning a little bit of Irish’ in recent years, but states that ‘in the end most of the fiddle music that I play is my own, stuff that I write and play with other people’ (*ibid*).

I play with my wife [Monika Mugan], stuff that I play with Brittany [Haas], tunes that I've written, stuff that I play with Caoimhin [Ó Raghallaigh] where I write it or he writes it and we work out ways to play together (*ibid*).

Trueman reflects: ‘My whole story is in part about education, and about exposure’ (*ibid*). He observes that ‘it used to be that there was one way of doing things’, explaining ‘there's a violin, go to a teacher and they show you how to do things, and this is the music you play’ (*ibid*). However, he comments that ‘having the five-string there, it's like woah, this is not the way it has to be, we can do all sorts of other stuff now’. Implicit in this Trueman finds that ‘there's a certain kind of invitation to explore and just this sense that there are other possibilities’ (*ibid*). He states that the emergence of the five-string and the inspiration he draws from it demonstrates that the instrument isn't set in stone, and that ‘this is something that can be reinvented, can be changed, there's new ways of doing things’, concluding, ‘I think that's real important for education’ (*ibid*).

For Trueman, the five-string instrument presents ‘richness in the ways you can participate in a musical situation’, where it might not be ‘just playing the tune’, but may include playing the bassline, or ‘doing something kind of choppy or rhythmic’ (*ibid*). He describes the five-string as ‘a continuous space where you can kind of move between all of those’ (*ibid*).
5.2.5 Brittany Haas

‘I feel really connected to it, like it's my sound’.

Brittany Haas is a professional fiddle player, who grew up in California, now primarily based between Boston/New York area, and Nashville. Describing her early musical life, she states:

I was nearly five years old and I went to Suzuki violin lessons, we just went for fun, my Mom played the piano, which was the only musical thing in the family at that point. (Haas, In Person Interview, November 6th, 2013)

After taking Suzuki lessons for three years, Haas was introduced to fiddle music. She recalls: ‘My violin teacher gave me these fiddle tunes to work on, just for fun, a sight reading exercise’ (ibid). Haas recounts that her mother felt that this burgeoning interest in fiddle music was worth pursuing, however her violin teacher at that time was unable to help: ‘I don't know anything else about that kind of stuff, so I can't show you, you'll have to find a fiddle teacher’ (ibid). This led Haas to Californian fiddle teacher and writer, Jack Tuttle. Haas discusses the difficulties she encountered in attempting to integrate studying both formal and folk music:

I went for Bluegrass fiddle lessons from him, and then my violin teacher was like, ‘oh your technique is going down the drain, blah blah blah’, and she said that if I was going to play fiddle music, I had to check out Alasdair Fraser (ibid).

This recommendation proved to be fateful. Fraser had a fiddle camp (Valley of the Moon: Scottish Fiddling School) close by, and Brittany and her sister Nathalie, a cellist, went along. Haas describes this as a pivotal moment in her development:

I met Bruce Molsky there, and totally fell in love with Old-Time music, and then he would come to town and I would go to his workshops and I would learn tunes from him (ibid).

Haas describes the next milestone meeting in her young career:

I met Darol [Anger], I went to see him play a concert in Berkley, and I went up to him and asked him if he knew any fiddle teachers in the area that might be able to teach me, and he was like, I will! Which was amazing, and Bruce had told him about me and he had some free time and offered to give me lessons, and so I didn't get a new classical teacher at that point, and I just went to Darol (ibid).

Haas recognises that growing up, she ‘had a Celtic background, from the Scottish fiddle camps’, and while she ‘loved that stuff’, she reflects that she has always considered
herself to be an Old-Time fiddle player: ‘For whatever reason I connected more with what I heard Bruce playing, and I was like, that's what I want to do’ (ibid). Haas states that at Valley of the Moon and other similar fiddle camps, she learned music ‘totally by ear’ (ibid). She explains that learning ‘with Bruce, it was all by ear, and with Darol, it was a little bit of both’ (ibid).

Haas describes how her teacher Jack Tuttle, while teaching her Bluegrass fiddle tunes, was also teaching her ‘how to improvise in that style’ (ibid). Haas states that later: ‘Darol was pushing me further in that direction, he was trying to teach me Jazz, which I never fully felt like I got, but it was good to try (ibid). Haas considers her time with Anger as significant in terms of developing her improvisational skills:

> He hired me into this band he was forming at the time with Scott Nygaard, The Republic of Strings, and he basically just took me under his wing and taught me everything (ibid).

Haas, as discussed in Chapter 2, and widely referred to in the relevant literature, has emerged to the forefront of young American fiddlers, through her work with Crooked Still, Dan Trueman, and many others. At the time of our meeting in Boston, she was preparing to record an album with her latest project, ‘Haas Kowert Tice’, described by the group as being built around a ‘body of work containing flights of improvisation and interesting compositional turns all grounded by memorable melodies and driving rhythms’ (Haas Kowert Tice, 2014). Within all these experiences, Haas states: ‘I guess I would think of it as some kind of hybrid of Bluegrass and Old-Time mainly, but it's hard to define’ (ibid), saying that ‘people call it New Acoustic’ (ibid). In performance Haas describes the role of her fiddle as usually ‘kind of fluid’ (ibid). She states that ‘sometimes it is just to play the tune, it sort of depends on who you're with, and if you feel like taking a solo or not’ (ibid). Haas believes that for her, ‘the melody is the most important thing’, and she points to the physical limitations of playing chords on the fiddle, in saying that typically she is more of a ‘melody player’ than a ‘chordal player’ (ibid).
About her five-string fiddle, Haas reflects:

I've had it for more than ten years, so I feel really connected to it, like it's my sound you know, like in the way that when somebody picks your fiddle and they play on it, your almost like they kind of sound like me, it's so connected to your musical identity. 

(ibid)

5.2.6 Mimi Rabson

‘Clouds parted, angels sang, and there it was, and I immediately called up the maker John Silakowski and had him make one for me, and I have never gone back’.

Mimi Rabson is a professional violin player, and professor in Berklee College of Music, Boston. By way of introduction she states: ‘I was classically trained when I started but I've always been interested in other kinds of music’ (Rabson, Skype Interview, July 5th, 2013). The musician describes how she ‘began to play the violin in the third grade’, but states that it was the viola that actually first caught her attention: ‘I just thought it was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard’ (ibid). When asked about her background in music, she reflects: ‘I have grown up with it, it was in the family’, noting that she ‘could read music already’ by the time she came to the violin, having played the recorder with her parents, who ‘were into renaissance music’ (ibid). Further regarding her family, Rabson states: ‘My sister was a Jazz, was a Blues singer and guitar player so whenever she came through town we would always play’ (ibid). Concerning her own experience in formal violin education, she expresses some frustrations:

You know when you’re a kid and you start the violin in school this is what you learn, and I kept thinking 'well all right, I'll learn to shift and then they'll teach me something about improvisation, ok, I'll learn vibrato and then they'll teach me about the music that I'm listening to for fun. Ok I'll learn how to play this piece and then I get to do the fun stuff', and it just never happened (ibid).

Rabson outlines that she went to study music at the New England Conservatory of Music, in Boston. According to Rabson she ‘chose the Conservatory because they had what they called at the time the ‘Third Stream’ programme, now it's called Contemporary Improvisation’ (ibid). Rabson was a student in the Classical Department. However, she states: ‘I tried to do as much as I could in these other departments as well and that was wonderful’, but laments that she had to pursue these interests on her own, and ‘wasn't able to have any formal training doing other things’ (ibid). According to
Rabson, her interests increasingly lay in ‘Rock and Fusion and Jazz and Blues and things like that’ (*ibid*). When reflecting further about this she states:

I tried to pursue it as much as I could and it's fair to say that as soon as I got out of the Conservatory I really have not pursued Classical music as much as the other things (*ibid*).

Regarding ‘fiddle music’, Rabson says she ‘played Klezmer music, Eastern European, Yiddish folk music’, but had ‘never really gone the other ways’ (such as Bluegrass) (*ibid*). Rabson notes the influence of Hungarian fiddle music on her approach to music: ‘I think that is where I learned all my harmony’ (*ibid*). She traces her underpinning interest in rhythm violin to Klezmer music. Rabson describes working on the idiomatic elements of these styles, playing the melody on the violin, and also ‘the Kontra, which is a viola with a sawn-off bridge so you can play the bottom three strings at the same time, so you can play triads’ (*ibid*). She describes the Kontra:

That guy is the rhythm section, he is keeping the time, he is playing the harmony, he can add harmonic interest if he wants, so I was working on those two parts of music (*ibid*).

Rabson, sharing some influences with other participants, notes that she ‘came up listening to stuff like Jean-Luc Ponty and Stéphane Grappelli and Papa John Creach’, stating ‘obviously they influenced my playing’ (*ibid*), though she also states that she equally looks to music outside of the violin for inspiration. This she attributes to always having ‘this dual personality thing going on’, describing how she listens to ‘lots of other types of music that don't have strings in them’. She says ‘somehow that is my quest, to figure out how to join up those two things’ (*ibid*).

Ultimately Rabson draws on a somewhat different set of influences than other participants, pointing in particular to Jazz violinists:

My hands down favourite would be Mark Feldman, amazing! After him there's Zbigniew Seifert who was only around for a little bit, he died very young, Michal Urbaniak, Andy Stein… he is just an unbelievably amazing improviser with a very large vocabulary (*ibid*).
Rabson describes herself as ‘a kind of a style iconoclast’ (ibid), stating:

I like to take things from a lot of different styles, and when I hear someone that uses something in one style of music that I recognise oh that's an idea from something completely different, and look how smoothly they put it in here, that's very interesting to me (ibid).

Rabson discusses the renowned American Jazz violinist Regina Carter, recalling their student days in New England Conservatory Boston and seeing Carter play in a Funk band.

I think one of the most inspiring moments of my life was watching her playing the rhythm section. I love this idea of being able to be in the rhythm section as a violin player, and watching her play that funk stuff I hope that she will make 'Regina the funk album', that would be spectacular (ibid).

Rabson explains why for her ‘improvisation has always been really of paramount interest’ (ibid). She states that she grew up listening to her parents ‘playing Renaissance music and Baroque music, which in its true form involves quite a bit of improvisation’ (ibid). Reflecting on her own Classical music training, Rabson describes being ‘surprised’ when she got older ‘to find that a lot of music does not require improvisation of some kind or another’ (ibid). She recalls:

As I was coming up in the strict Classical tradition, I kept thinking Ok, I'll learn to shift then I'll be able to do this, I'll learn to improvise, I'll be able to do that, and that's not the case (ibid).

Rabson, in speaking about her move to the five-string states: ‘I never play my four-string anymore, I never play it, ever’ (ibid). She sees this as ultimate validation of the five-string instrument. Rabson describes: ‘If there were pieces where I want to get that kind of sound, then I guess I would have to go back to my four-string’ but, she states, ‘I haven’t done it yet’ (ibid).

5.2.7 Lauren Rioux

‘I love playing this instrument, it's just like he nailed it’!

Lauren Rioux is a professional fiddle player from Portland, Maine. She is also an active educator, and in 2014 launched her teaching oriented website (online www.jamwithlauren.com), which she describes as being designed to guide students
through learning tunes, while creating their own ‘left hand and right hand variations’, and ‘hearing and playing chord progressions’ on the fiddle (Rioux, Skype Interview, May 7th, 2012).

Rioux says that her early musical world ‘was Classical, all the way’: ‘My Dad played the violin when I was really little’, she recalls. Although her Father didn’t keep it up, ‘the violin was always in the house, he would pick it up occasionally’ (ibid). She began playing the violin when she was six years old:

> There was a Suzuki violin program in the school that I was at, and the violin was something that I was familiar with and so when they came and demonstrated it at school I was like ‘of course I want to play that’ (ibid).

Rioux speaks positively on the ‘emphasis on learning by ear’ that she experienced in the Suzuki Method: ‘Ultimately that was a good thing when I wanted to transfer into folk styles, because I had a good ear and so I could pick things up’ (ibid). She states that she considered herself a violinist right throughout college, but notes that she did play in a band in high school: ‘I was really a Classical violinist, I went to college for violin performance and music education and I studied for five years in that realm’. Admitting that she ‘wasn't really in the fiddle world at all’, she states: ‘I hadn't heard a fiddler that I really liked … I had only heard scratchy fiddling. Coming from a Classical background … why would you want to sound like that’? (ibid). However, Rioux acknowledges that she ‘just hadn't been exposed to really great fiddling’ (ibid) while growing up, and so was more interested in Jazz, in looking towards expanding out of the classical realm. She states that there was ‘a good Jazz programme at the school and that she was ‘involved in Jazz combos and Jazz orchestration classes’. However, she says: ‘I would never ever consider myself a Jazz violinist, other than some educational knowledge in that sense’ (ibid).

Rioux states that she really started fiddling at ‘twenty-one or twenty-two’, and regards Brittany Haas as ‘a huge influence’ (ibid):

> She was the first person who I heard playing fiddle music, with her mentor Bruce Molsky. It was a completely life changing experience for me to hear that style of music and to be aware, oh my gosh! I'm at music school and I've never heard this kind of music before, this is what opened up my heart and I want to play this (ibid).
From that time on, Rioux ‘predominantly started studying Old-Time music … American Appalachian music’ (ibid). She describes how she remains ‘really influenced by Old-Time stuff, the groove, the bowings, the melodies and the double-stops’ (ibid). She states: ‘even if I’m not playing Old-Time music, I still find myself doing things that I’ve gotten from the Old-Time tradition’ (ibid). Regarding another significant influence on her fiddling, Rioux recounts: ‘Darol [Anger] was a huge mentor of mine, I learned a tremendous amount from him and continue to learn from him’ (ibid). While listening primarily to fiddle players, Rioux also looks to the increased prominence of the cello in American folk music: ‘Somebody who has had a huge influence on me musically is Natalie Haas, Brittany's sister, for her style of back up playing’. In this regard, Rioux points to her own particular interest in using her instrument in an accompanying role, commenting as follows: ‘back up playing is one of my favourite things to do; I really enjoy to be a supporting character rather than being in the spotlight’ (ibid).

Yet Rioux is conscious that she does not ‘necessarily know the thousands of tunes for the repertoire’. She adds: ‘If I were among a crowd of Old-Time musicians I would hesitate to call myself an Old-Time fiddler’. She is also influenced by ‘Scottish and Cape Breton music as well as Bluegrass’. Speaking about the complexities of learning Bluegrass, she states: ‘I am trying really hard to work on Bluegrass music right now, it's a struggle, it's a totally different beast’ (ibid). About her five-string fiddle, Rioux concludes: ‘I see my instrument as a tool for my musical journey, so I am lucky that I have found the instrument that lets me have my voice’ (ibid).

5.3 Exploring Themes

When reflecting on the musical development of the participants, as discussed by themselves, as is to be expected, themes emerged around the role of family in early musical development. Equally important is the impact of, and approaches to music education, and also the reaction to it. Themes concerning learning by doing, learning by ear, improvisation, searching for something different, and getting off the page are shared amongst the participants. Issues of style and genre were also central to the discussions, and similarly, conversations concerning musical influences present a recurring theme.
5.3.1 Family

Varying roles of family present a significant if unsurprising recurring theme in the early musical experiences of participants. Several of the participants mention the importance of music being ‘in the family’ in the context of their own musical development. Hicks stated that he ‘picked it up’ from members of his family. Glaser and Rabson both describe having learned to read music at a young age, even before even taking up the violin, through the influence of music being in their families. Glaser, Trueman and Rabson all recounted wanting to play the fiddle and asking for lessons. Trueman recalled how he recently discovered that a family friend had played fiddle music in his home when he was a young boy, stating that fiddle music was what he ‘fell in love with’. Driessen spoke of the very direct influence of his father, also a musician, who developed his own teaching system for the young fiddler. Haas and Rioux had no strong direct family connections to music; Haas described the important role of her mother in identifying and developing her interest in fiddle music however, and in finding suitable teachers. Rioux described growing up with a fiddle in the house, which her father had started to learn to play.

5.3.2 Education

It is interesting to note that many of the interviewees speak of early formal violin lessons. Rabson, Glaser, Trueman and Rioux all state they studied classical violin. Haas and Driessen moved from some early Suzuki study to fiddle lessons with teachers and in festivals and fiddle camps. Chapter 1 discussed the differences between the ‘fiddler’ and the ‘violinist’, understood through how and what they play, and also how they learn to play. There are also many variations on how fiddlers learn to play the instrument. Not all begin as fiddlers, but in some cases with classical training, before later developing an interest in fiddle music. The participants in this research provide evidence of such variations.

Rabson draws attention to the frustrations she experienced with her violin education. While pursuing her formal training, she describes searching for alternative ways to approach the instrument stylistically, and in particular, in terms of improvisation, while yet still engaging with the canon of technique. This desire for ‘getting away from the page’ (Trueman) is also evidenced in the words of Trueman, who describes looking to
Jazz improvisation, and composition during his time in college to reinvigorate his relationship with his music, and his instrument.

The Suzuki Method emerges as important in the early musical lives of Driessen, Haas and Rioux, evidence of its prevalence in American string instrument education in the last thirty years. The Suzuki Method has recently attracted considerable criticism from fiddle star Mark O’Connor, who has repeatedly questioned the system itself, and the credentials of Suzuki in a series of posts.14

### 5.3.3 Influences on the influential

The significance of the role of ‘influences’ on musicians is well recognised, and while the participants are all very influential musicians in their own right, they in turn point to musicians that have been important to their own development. While apparent across all performance styles, drawing on influences is typically very significant in aural and improvised music. Musical influences play an important part of a musician’s musical development, and so in turn, impact on the on-going development of the music itself. In American fiddle music, this is typically encountered through aural means, such as listening to records, and through the wealth of video material available online. This too is something referred to by Trueman, who states ‘I really think that YouTube is at the centre of it … an explosion of awareness’ (Trueman). Teachers, and ‘mentors’, a term used for example by Rioux to describe Darol Anger, also formed a relevant part of the discussion with some of the participants. Furthermore, the Bluegrass camp/festival scene is referred to by participants, allowing for close up interaction with top musicians in formal teaching workshops, and informally in ‘jam sessions’.

### 5.3.4 Style and genre

Chapter 3 surveyed the stylistic aspects that underpin contemporary American fiddle music across the many sub-genres identified in Chapter 1. In these discussions, themes emerge also, relating to style. Many of the participants describe being influenced by players from across many styles. For example, the influence of Jazz is noted by a number of interviewees, as described by Trueman, Haas, and Rioux for example,

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14 See [http://markoconnorblog.blogspot.ie](http://markoconnorblog.blogspot.ie).
though they do not consider themselves as Jazz musicians. Many of the participants state that they are coming from one style, but are involved in many. Driessen exemplifies this, in stating that he is coming ‘out of the Bluegrass world’ but pointing out that he plays ‘any sort of music that allows for improvisation and interpretation’ (Driessen). Similarly Haas, describes how she is orientated towards a fluid ‘hybrid of Bluegrass and Old-Time’ (Haas), stating that ‘people call it New Acoustic’ (ibid). Exploring where the participants situate themselves presents a chance to consider the five-string fiddle across various styles. Yet, it also appears to demonstrate the multi-stylistic approach to music adapted by the majority of the participants, with the five-string fiddle itself presenting opportunity and inspiration for stylistic exploration, as well as being the result of such pursuits.

5.3.5 Improvisation

The significance of improvisation to the participants emerges strongly in the discussion above. As stated in Chapter 3, improvisation at various levels occurs across American fiddle music, and is most apparent in Jazz and Bluegrass. The musical possibilities for the five-string fiddle in many ways can only be discovered through an improvisatory approach, given that the popularity of the instrument is recent, and evolving, and as Trueman suggests, improvisation presents the possibility to ‘reinvigorate the space’ (Trueman). The role of improvisation in the musical practice of the participants, is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

5.3.6 Concluding the personal journeys

The discussion above presents the participants personal accounts of their own musical journeys. It reinforces their emergence in Chapter 2, as very suitable participants in addressing the questions that concern this work, regarding the five-string fiddle in American music. As described in Chapter 1, there have been five-string instruments before, dotted throughout the history of music, yet they are for the most part not with us today, and certainly do not occupy any mainstream attention, when compared to the subject of this research. We must wonder why this is, and what has now changed? For any instrument to succeed in musical society, it needs a rich and evolving repertoire, as discussed in Chapter 1. This in turn can only develop through long term musical
investment and engagement on behalf of performers and composers. Previously, five-string instruments were shown to be typically championed by one, or a very small number of interested parties, such as Woldemar's 'violin-alto', and the 'viola pomposa', composed for by a few, including most famously, Bach. Again, we can ask, why is it different here?

The discussions above point to an over-arching fluidity concerning many aspects of the musical life and inherent attitudes of the participants. Largely unbound by formal stylistic concerns, or as Driessen so considerately put it, being 'at the core, a fiddle player' (Driessen), appears to be representative of the emerging message from these musicians. The musicians above are concerned with ‘trying other things’, as Trueman puts it, or incorporating 'from a lot of different styles’, as described by Rabson, herself a violinist with virtuosic classical technique, who describes seeing the supreme Jazz violinist Regina Carter playing in the ‘rhythm section’ as ‘one of the most inspiring moments’ of her life. The participants within this research demonstrate utmost attention to detail regarding their understandings of their work, and it is this attention to detail that is at the heart of evolution. Rioux described holding on to ‘the groove, the bowings, the melodies and the double-stops’ of Old-Time fiddle, in all of her work. Chapter 3 examined the repertoire, and it was shown too, to be fluid, comprising equally of fiddle tunes brought to America by the Irish and Scots, to grooving versions of all types of folk and popular song, including large amounts of improvisation. At the centre of all this, lies perhaps the heart of the matter. What type of person decides to play a five-string fiddle, in the face of the stature of the classic four-string instrument? Well, all of participants introduced above, and increasingly, many more musicians who are searching for a new musical voice.

5.4 First Encounters with the Five-String Fiddle

Chapter 2 described the increased prominence of the five-string fiddle in recent years, though as previously stated, very little detail about the associated musicians’ histories or interactions with the instrument is on record. So, when and where does the story begin for the participants; when did they first encounter the five-string fiddle? By setting this scene, detail is added to the picture surrounding the rise of the five-string in the past ten years. Although, as described in Chapter 2, the story begins many years earlier:
Johnny Gimble if you know who that is? He was the first five-string fiddle player that I knew and that's where I got the idea from, yes that's where I got the idea of five-string fiddle (Hicks).

So recalls Bobby Hicks. He states the year was 1963, reaffirming the story related by Anger’s (2008) text ‘Five-String Fiddles are on the Rise’, discussed in Chapter 2: Hicks States:

Yes, the dressing room at the Golden Nugget in Las Vegas, and at that time I only had one fiddle, if I messed it up I would have been up the creek! I've got a house full of fiddles now! (ibid).

With this, Bobby Hicks and the year 1963 represent an important milestone in the evolution of the five-string fiddle in America, with Hicks still playing five-string fiddle 52 years later. In turn, Hicks, explaining how he had first seen a five-string instrument in the hands of his contemporary, Johnny Gimble, demonstrates that the five-string has been present in artist level American fiddling for over 50 years, though, in the hands of a select few until recent years. Concerning the ‘idea of the five-string’, Hicks states that Gimble ‘got it from somebody else, I don't know who’ (Hicks). Glaser also points to Gimble and Hicks representing his first awareness of the five-string fiddle, stating: ‘Gimble … I think he was the first cat’ (Glaser). Glaser refers to Gimble’s album recording, 'Fiddlin' Around':

…made in nineteen seventy-something and on the back of the record Gimble refers to his five-string fiddle and that maybe the first time that I ever became aware of it because he, or maybe Merle Haggard wrote the liner notes, and says 'Johnny plays on two fiddles, one is his four-string and one is his five', and on that record you can hear him play, he plays a hymn What a Friend We Have in Jesus and he also plays Fiddlin’ Around and certainly he plays them on his five-string’ (ibid).

Driessen also refers to the ‘Johnny Gimble and Bob Wills era’ (Driessen) in his considerations around the history of the five-string:

I heard that Johnny was a violist, or could play some viola and he chose to play viola at times in that group to provide lower harmony to mix with the pedal steel, and that he then maybe combined the two or maybe found a five-string fiddle or had somebody put an e string on there (ibid).

Glaser notes that ‘around the same time [as Gimble’s 'Fiddlin' Around], in the Seventies, Bobby Hicks was recording on five-string’ (Glaser). Driessen too describes how he was aware of Bobby Hicks, and ‘that he had a five-string fiddle’ (Driessen). He recalls that he and Hicks had recently ‘traded fiddles, to play each other’s five-string’ in a jam session (ibid). Rioux also suggests that ‘the five-string range has been in
Bluegrass for a while ... because of Bobby Hicks’ (Riou). Glaser pays tribute to both Hicks and Gimble as ‘very smart and funny guys’ (Glaser).

5.5 The Electric Avenue

Relating his own journey from electric to acoustic five (and more)-strings, Trueman observes: ‘there is a lot of people coming at it from the electric violin side’. (Trueman). Matt Glaser, describing his history with the five-string, says that although he has mostly played four-string violin, he has had a breadth of experience with five-strings: ‘I probably got my first five-string fiddle fifteen years ago or something like that, maybe in the early nineties … I’ve had a variety of five strings’ (Glaser). Glaser traces his first personal encounter with a five-string to an electric instrument made by Tucker Barrett:15

I have had five-string violins for many years. I think now the first one I had was a solid body one that looked like an anchor [See Fig 5.1], you know, it had no body … made by Tucker Barrett … That one I must have had in the early nineties, because I gave that to Casey [Driessen] when he was a student to play on. So certainly I think I must have been aware of them as soon as they were out, although it wasn’t until the early 2000s that I really got into it and started to play them on gigs frequently (ibid).

15 According to http://www.electricviolinshop.com ‘Tucker Barrett is a revered name from the previous generation of electric violin makers. Having retired from violin making in 2006, his already sought-after instruments have now become collectibles. We occasionally have a few used instruments on hand. His two most popular designs were the Luma and the anchor’. Barrett’s own website (http://tuckerbarrett.com) states: ‘After nearly 25 years of designing and building electric violins, violas and cellos, T. F. Barrett is no longer accepting orders for new instruments’. 
Reflecting on his own history with the five-string fiddle, Glaser states:

I’ve always used my five-strings on Jazz gigs, you know the ones that have pick-ups built in to them are really great as Jazz horns because you can plug them in and the c string then allows you to play in the range of the tenor saxophone. So, I use my five-string fiddles all the time on Jazz gigs, all the time, whenever I have a Jazz gig which you know I play Jazz gigs a couple of times a month (ibid).

Trueman and Rabson also describe how their first five-strings were actually electric instruments. Trueman sets the scene before the rise of acoustic five-string had taken hold, stating ‘in the early 90s the only five-strings I knew about were electric violins’ (Trueman). Rabson similarly describes having a five-string electric violin, in and around the same time frame, some years before having her current acoustic instrument:

I had a five string Zeta in the late eighties, maybe it was the nineties… but I had already had a five-string instrument so this was not my first five-string instrument, it was my first five-string acoustic instrument. So, in the 80s I got one from Zeta, same model as Jean Luc Ponty uses (Rabson).
Rabson also states that she had a six-string electric violin, and ‘had also been playing bass in a band on that instrument’, using an octave pedal: ‘I was the bass player playing on the violin’ (*ibid*). Trueman states that he is ‘sure there were people playing five-string [acoustic]… but, it really wasn’t out there as much’ in the 90s. However, he points out that the electric violin was also relatively new at the time:

This is early days for you know Zeta and stuff like that and there were a handful of makers out there, and most of them were making five-strings and four-strings, and so my first exposure was to the five-string electric violins (*ibid*).

The electric violin, as discussed in Chapter 1, was and continues to be, in many ways, a blank canvass for instrument designers. Significantly, due to the non-acoustic nature of its design, it is not constrained by the acoustic principles required to make a great sounding acoustic violin. So, makers were not faced with issues of tone when adding an extra string. This is a point made by Driessen, when speaking about Jean-Luc Ponty’s electric five-string, stating that it was:

… difficult to make an acoustic five-string. For a plugged in musician type of stuff it worked great, but to have an acoustic one that could support the e string it was, that was difficult to do (Driessen).

Yet, it is not surprising that musicians who had adopted five-string electric fiddles, would in turn be drawn back toward experimentation and developments in five-string acoustic instruments. While the electric instrument presents versatility for live amplified performance, and incorporation of electronic effects, musicians such as Rabson, Trueman, and Glaser are acoustic musicians, and therefore, it is understandable that they would want to play on the best possible instrument when performing in the acoustic domain. While it is interesting to note that both of the electric violin designers mentioned above, Tucker Barrett, and Zeta are no longer producing electric violins, this is not to suggest that electric violins are any less popular now. There is though, the sense that for the participants involved, the acoustic five-string has replaced their use of electric instruments. Trueman describes his experience in that regard:

I regularly get emails from people about electric violin stuff, and all they want to do is five or six-string electric violin stuff, and they ask me questions about it and at this point I basically say oh don't bother, it's terrible but I say you might as well get a good five-string acoustic and put a mic on it, or a pick up on it and do that. So, it's interesting, I do think that some of the people doing five-stringing are coming from “oh I heard ... I want to do...” they say a five string or six-string electric violins, and are realising you can do this acoustically now too (Trueman).
Driessen, Rioux or Haas make no mention of electric violins as part of their own five-string story, though, as discussed in Chapter 2, Driessen uses a pick-up to ‘electrify’ his acoustic fiddle, and he plays a CR series five-string electric instrument by NS designs (See Fig 5.2).

![Five-string CR Series electric violin, NS Designs](image)

Rioux ‘played an electric Zeta violin’ in her early teens in an ‘acoustic folk rock’ band (Rioux), but it was a four-string, though she draws no connection from it to her later adapting the five-string.

### 5.6 Moving to Acoustic

With the important historical exception of Hicks and Gimble, this research focuses primarily on the past ten years, and the very strong rise in the popularity of the acoustic five-string fiddle during that time. As pointed to by Trueman, Glaser and Rabson, the electric violin, with five and sometimes more strings played a significant role in their journey to the instruments they discuss below, their acoustic five-string fiddles. The participants typically describe how they saw an acoustic five-string, and wanted one. Trueman recalls the first time he saw an acoustic five-string instrument:

> The first five-string violin I saw was actually at a Norwegian/Scandinavian fest in West Virginia, and this Hardanger fiddle player, he was a violist, David Code, he had a five string viola. I don't know who it was made by, that's the first one that I ever saw. I guess that was probably, that was ‘97 (Trueman).
Having used an electric five-string extensively, Mimi Rabson describes her first encounter with a five-string fiddle, highlighting the work of the Indiana based fiddle maker John Silakowski:

When I started working in Berklee one of my first students was Casey Driessen and he walked into his lesson and he opened his case and there was a five-string violin, and I had a Simpsons moment, you know ... the clouds parted, angels sang, and there it was and I immediately called up the maker John Silakowski and had him make one for me, and I have never gone back (Rabson).

Rabson, having developed her five-string electric violin playing states that ‘to be able to play that stuff on an acoustic violin too was a great revelation’, adding: ‘I just hadn't seen anybody doing it and I think at the time, this was almost seventeen years ago, I think at the time, I don't think anyone else was doing it’.

Driessen states that he got his first five-string in 1995. He explains how he came to this instrument as follows:

The maker of my violin John Silakowski, he was in Indiana and my family was in Illinois so we ended up at the same fiddlers conventions, contests and Bluegrass festivals basically, and somehow came to know him, maybe my Dad got in touch with him somehow, he's a guy that would hang out at the festivals, he's into fiddle players. So somehow we came in touch with him and he had a five-string fiddle that I played at a Bluegrass festival, it may have been the first time [to play one] (Driessen).

Haas recalls her first five-string experience, in around 2002:

It was at Mark O'Connor's fiddle camp in Nashville, probably about twelve years ago, I think I was about fourteen, and I think it was Tyler Andel's fiddle, but I think both he and Mike Barnett had five-string fiddles, and Casey [Driessen] was probably there teaching that year also. I was just hanging out with some guys and they had them and I thought it was really cool! I tried it out and I was just totally blown away by that sound, and then I really wanted one! (Haas).

Regarding the five-string Rioux enthuses, ‘the first time I had seen one, I thought like wow! What an amazing idea’ (Rioux). Rioux observes that meeting Brittany Haas was ‘inspirational and motivational’, stating: ‘She had the five-string, which I'd never seen and I was playing violin and viola and I thought that was a really cool idea’ (Rioux). She further describes how ‘Darol [Anger] was playing five-string, he was digging into the realm of five-string when I was getting one’ (ibid). Rioux states that her first five-string instrument was a five-string viola:
I met Jonathan Cooper who is the maker of my instruments, and he lives in Maine actually, and he had just made a five-string viola and so I was really interested in seeing that, and I actually purchased that instrument that was my first five-string (ibid).

5.7 Roads to the Contemporary Five-String

Bobby Hicks recalls how, when he added an extra string to what was then his only fiddle, in the dressing room of the Golden Nugget, Las Vegas, he became one of the first five-string fiddle players. The discussion above indicates that, in the experience of the participants, Hicks’s intervention did not appear to inspire others at that time, and it is in much more recent times that the five-string acoustic fiddle has become a realistic option. The five-string electric violin is referred to by Trueman, Glaser and Rabson in particular as being the first five-string fiddle that they saw/played. Trueman comments on ‘a lot of people coming at the five-string from the electric violin side’ (Trueman).

For the younger generation of fiddlers such as Driessen, Haas and Rioux, the five-string acoustic fiddle emerged within the scene, at fiddle camps and festivals, for example. Driessen and Haas both describe their first encounter with a five-string at a fiddle camp. Haas describes how some fiddlers, including Driessen, at Mark O’Connor’s fiddle camp in Nashville, which she attended when she was fourteen, had five-string fiddles. Instrument makers also frequent such festivals, and it was in this context that Driessen described first seeing and playing a five-string fiddle, made by John Silakowski. Many of the participants describe their reaction to seeing and playing a five-string, the majority of them wanting one immediately. In some cases, the first encounter with a five-string was in the hands of a fellow participant. Rabson recounts the ‘Simpsons moment’ when Driessen opened his fiddle case for his first lesson with her in Berklee College of Music, while Rioux describes as ‘inspirational and motivational’, her seeing Haas’ five-string fiddle for the first time.

5.7.1 The five-string fiddles

With the five-string established in the musical history of the participants, the next section explores the instruments owned and played by the participants themselves. Chapter 1 outlined the rich history of the violin, and the cultural stature of the instrument. As the discussion above has demonstrated, and as seen in Driessen’s film ‘Five-String Fiddle Hunt’, the relationship between violinist and violin, fiddler and
fiddle is an important one. This section presents an insight into the instruments owned and played by the participants, and takes the opportunity to draw some conclusions regarding the state of play around five-string fiddle making, as discussed by the musicians in this research. The participants’ fiddles are discussed individually, though there is some crossover; for example, a number of participants play on instruments by the same maker, and further, some participants spoke about having played on each other’s instruments and in comparing them to their own. The discussion also includes details regarding how participant’s individual instruments are set-up, their string choices, and their bows.

5.7.2 Bobby Hicks: ‘Goldenboy’ made by Harvey Keck (U.S) 1976

Hicks tells the story of the five-string fiddle he has played for close to 50 years, ‘the one they call Goldenboy’: (Hicks)

> When I quit Las Vegas, when I came back to North Carolina I met a guy that wanted to build a fiddle for me, and so he built the five-string that I play now, and it's the best one that I know anywhere. The guy's name was Harvey Keck, he has since passed away (ibid).

An article on the ‘Bluegrass Today’ website refers to another five-string fiddle made by Keck, described as ‘the brother fiddle to the one and only Bobby Hicks’ fiddle’\(^{16}\) That fiddle is owned by a Bluegrass fiddler, named Johnny Ridge. *Brompton’s Book of Violin & Bow Makers* contains a short biography of Keck, noting that he made 40 violins and 2 violas.\(^{17}\)

Hicks explains that he also owns a five-string fiddle made recently by Barry Dudley, as pictured in Chapter 2, but he states that he does not play it much. According to Hicks, ‘it's a pretty good fiddle’, but he says: ‘I've never seen one like the one I play, the one they call “Goldenboy”, yeah, that's the one!’ (Hicks). Hicks suggests that on most of five-string fiddles he has seen, ‘the fifth string is either not strong enough, or it's too strong’, stating: ‘The one that I play is just even all the way across. I’ve never seen another one like that’.

\(^{16}\) http://Bluegrasstoday.com/preddyfest-2013/?pgpapge=2

Bobby Hicks adopts a hands-on personal approach to the physical workings of his own fiddle in describing how he approaches setting up the bridge curve that works best for him. He states that, for him, the optimum set up involves setting all the strings at ‘equal height from your fingerboard’ (ibid). This is not a standard fiddle set up, where typically string heights are lower to higher, from the highest to lowest pitch string. Hicks outlines that when he cuts a bridge he looks down from the scroll, down the fingerboard, stating: ‘I try to cut my bridge even with the end of the fingerboard, where everything is the same, the g string is not higher than the e, they're all equal’. He describes his process:

If you take a pencil and lay it on the fingerboard and mark the bridge, just the width of that pencil is just what I use, just mark the bridge on the inside, all the way across and just cut it to that. And that makes all your strings equal height from your fingerboard (ibid).

Describing how he deals with string spacing, Hicks says:

I just place the e string and the c string as close to the edge of the bridge as I can get, you know, for it to be safe and not come off the bridge, and then I place the d string as close to the centre of that as I could, then the g string and the a string is equalled out between the other two you know, that's how I figured it ought to be (ibid).

Regarding strings, Hicks states: ‘I use D'addarrio Helicore, heavy [tension]’, explaining that his c string is ‘the fourth string of the viola set’. About his bow, Hicks states that ‘the bow itself is not heavy’, but specifies: ‘I play with pretty much a heavy bow… I put a lot of pressure on it. I guess that's what pulls the tone out’ (ibid).

5.7.3 Casey Driessen: Five-string by John Silakowski (U.S)

Casey Driessen owns three five-string fiddles, all made by John Silakowski, from Scottsburg, Indiana. For Driessen, Silakowski ‘seems to be the first person that made a great acoustic’ (Driessen). He points out that ‘there's a huge difference between his no. 3 and his no. 22 five-string’, when comparing the first five-string he got from Silakowski to his later model. Driessen describes his no. 22 five-string, as his ‘main axe’, suggesting that that particular fiddle demonstrates how Silakowski has concentrated on refining his five-string design, ‘developed it’, and in so doing has ‘made a difference’ for fiddlers (ibid). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Driessen’s visit to Silakowski’s workshop to buy a new fiddle, is the subject of ‘Five-string Fiddle Hunt’ (2009), a short documentary by Driessen. About the new fiddle, his third Silakowski,
and Silawkowski’s seventy third five-string, Driessen states: ‘The new one is very similar to what I have now, he’s sort of found what works and will continue on that path’ (ibid). About the new fiddle, and the reasons for acquiring another Silakowski instrument, he explains:

I'm not playing it at all honestly right now, just because I'm so satisfied with what I have, it's kind of about knowing. I got worried one year, I thought oh, I have one that I'm excited about playing if something happens to my instrument then... And so I decided I really need to get a spare just something ever happens (ibid).

Driessen states that he is endorsed by the D'Addario string company, but despite this, he ‘for a long time was using a Spirocore c string by Thomastik’ (ibid). Driessen explains: The c string options I had from D'Addario at the time weren't speaking the same as this Spirocore’. He recalls:

I remember specifically I went to a violin shop in Boston by a guy named Rutman, it was during my college time and I think I had a D'Addario c string on there he played it, he didn't like my five-string just on principle, but said if you're going to play this you should use this for a c string because this string will speak, it will sound more even with your instrument so he's the one that told me to use the Spirocore and so I used on ever since then (ibid).

Driessen has been involved in the development of a new c string, and has met with the string designers at D’Addario. He reveals that:

They've been experimenting with developing a c string that will work better on a violin body and so I actually have one right now, a prototype c string, they sent me home with a couple of c strings. It's kind of exciting actually, a prototype string. So what I have on there right now is one that they are experimenting with, so I'm giving them some feedback (ibid).

Driessen says that after working with the D’Addario string designer engineer and just ‘trying out a bunch of different strings’, he has ‘decided to try the D’Addario Zyex for a little bit’, explaining:

I used the Helicore for a long time and I think that I still like them as well, but maybe the Zyex allow for, maybe there's a little bit more, maybe there's just this much more tonal variation that I can get from the string (ibid).

Similarly to Hicks, Driessen states that he uses ‘heavy tension on this instrument in order to get the projection’ that he needs (ibid).
5.7.4 Matt Glaser: Barbera Five-String/Five-string by John Silakowski (U.S)

Glaser says that he plays an acoustic-electric five-string made by Rich Barbera. He states that ‘it’s very comfortable, and sounds great on Jazz gigs’ (Glaser). He is also very enthusiastic regarding his experience with a Silakowski five-string owned by Berklee College of Music, on which he was playing regularly at the time of our interview.

This Silakowski that I’m looking at right now really sounds awesome to me, it took me a while to get used to the sound, but I really dig it. I like the feel and the sound of it better than any acoustic five-string that I’ve played (ibid).

Glaser describes what is important to him regarding his choice of fiddle: ‘Part of this stuff is also so physical for me, I have a lot of physical ailments from playing, so I have to play something that’s very comfortable’ (ibid).

Fig 6.1: Matt Glaser and Silakowski five-string fiddle.
5.7.5  **Dan Trueman: '5x5' by Salve Håkedal (Norway)**

Trueman, in describing his instrument, a five-string instrument that also has five sympathetic strings for additional resonances, states: ‘This five-string is not a Hardanger fiddle, but it’s inspired by the Hardanger fiddle and it comes more closely out of the tradition in Setesdal, south central Norway’ (*ibid*). As discussed in Chapter 2, Trueman is well known for his Hardanger fiddle playing, in addition to his electric violin and electronic music work. The Hardanger fiddle is typically tuned higher in pitch than the standard violin, and about this Trueman notes that: ‘I didn't want a five-string Hardanger fiddle, there are those, there are a bunch of people who do those’ (*ibid*). He states: ‘I want a five-string Setesdal style fiddle but I want it to be tuned at a 440Hz’. This would allow him to ‘play with Brittany and Darol and Bruce and all these folks, and not be in the wrong key’ (*ibid*). About the maker, Salve Håkedal, Trueman says:

He came up with this design, which is all his own, and he won't call it a Setesdal style fiddle, which I thought I could call it a five-string Setesdal fiddle, that's fine you know, he lives in Setesdal, he makes the five, he makes the Setesdalsfele so I'm not going to tell him, say that I want to call it that, so we've been calling it the 5+5' (*ibid*).

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*Fig 6.2 Dan Trueman 5+5. (Photo Patrick Daly)*

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18 Trueman elaborates, ‘they got this centuries old tradition of making, of taking western violins, violins that they bring from Germany or where ever, Germany, France and Denmark, retrofitting them to be like Hardanger fiddles, so they have the bigger body than the Hardanger fiddle, they're just a bigger instrument than the Hardanger fiddle but they get retrofitted to have the sympathetic strings and the flat bridge. So the result is a tradition and a sound that is tuned actually somewhere between the violin and the Hardanger fiddle, so they're often tuned around B flat instead of A whereas a Hardanger fiddle is normally at B or C or sometimes even higher, and so it's a bit more of a powerful sound’. (Trueman)

19 According to Trueman ‘there's this great group called Gamaltnymalt, 3 five-string Hardanger fiddle players, this glorious sound, but the low string is a low Hardanger fiddle string and it's still quite high and it doesn't have, it's not really a low string. (Trueman)
Trueman also discusses his ‘newest electric violin…a six-string Eric Aceto instrument’, which, according to Trueman ‘is more like an acoustic instrument ’cause it's got the resonating body’ (*ibid*). For Trueman, the five-string represents a bridge between his very different lives as a Hardanger fiddler, and as an experimental electric violinist/composer. He speaks of the ‘weird trajectory of having these split types of fiddles, that really don't talk to each other’ (*ibid*), describing how the five-string now creates a coherence between the two for him. Trueman states that as a result of the five-string ‘there's a whole bunch of tunes that I written for the six-string fiddle that I've been able to resurrect and play’. While he is still playing the Hardanger fiddle, Trueman comments ‘I'm playing this new fiddle I mean all the time, it's just incredibly inspiring’ (*ibid*).

5.7.6 Brittany Haas: Five-string fiddle by John Silakowski (U.S)

Haas owns two five-string fiddles, both made by John Silakowski. Haas describes how she got her first Silakowski five-string ‘through Fred Carpenter, who has a violin shop in Nashville’ (Haas). She explains the history of that particular fiddle:

> He had an instrument of John's [Silakowski], it had a previous owner, somebody had had it, and they turned it in, back to the shop because they wanted a different one of John's instruments that has the carved scroll on it, so it was maybe a couple of years old when I got it (*ibid*).

Haas currently plays on another Silakowski five-string. She explains that:

> This fiddle I play now is the second one that I got made by John, maybe two years after that… John had just made this one and sent it to me to check out and I totally loved it, even more than the other one, and since then this is the one (*ibid*).

Haas states that for a while she ‘travelled with a double fiddle case, and just took both of them’, using the second fiddle for ‘cross-tuning’, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Haas states:

> I've had it for more than ten years, so I feel really connected to it, like it's my sound you know, like in the way that when somebody picks your fiddle and they play on it, your almost like they kind of sound like me, it's so connected to your musical identity (*ibid*).

Speaking about her Silakowski Haas states: ‘I don't get work done on my fiddle very often, only when I feel like it really needs it’ (*ibid*). She continues: ‘Jon Cooper has
moved my sound post a couple of times’ and that she had a new bridge fitted a year ago, by Brian Christian in Nashville, because her d string ‘was just sinking into the bridge and so it was almost impossible to play only on the d string’ (*ibid*). Haas feels that ‘because of having five-strings on it, and the extra tension, and also tuning differently a lot’ the five-string can develop bridge problems, such as warping. Haas sums up her relationship with her fiddle as follows:

> I think it’s that I am so used to this fiddle, that it feels like such an extension of me that even if something changes just slightly I just adapt to it. And traveling a lot, you know, it’s been through a lot, so it seems pretty adaptable also (*ibid*).

Haas uses ‘a normal violin bow, kind of heavy’, but notes that she has seen ‘some people use viola bows’ (*ibid*). She comments she uses Helicore strings: ‘the five-string set, but then the Kaplan e, they are medium gauge, but the non-whistling e\(^{20}\), those are good’ (*ibid*). Haas points out that she is sponsored by D’addario: ‘It was through Crooked Still, it’s really nice. I definitely swear by them though, I love them, they seem easy and responsive’ (*ibid*). She states that ‘ease of playing’ is ‘such a big thing’ for her, noting that in her experience on the five-string, Helicore strings respond very well ‘to the cross-tuning stuff … they don’t go out of tune too much’ (*ibid*). Haas, like Hicks, says she used Helicore viola c string, as she had her five-string ‘before Helicore made a five-string set’, adding that she doesn’t remember ‘what that sounded like and how different that was to this’ (*ibid*).

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\(^{20}\) The Kaplan e referred to by Haas, is designed by D’addario to eliminate the issue of the open e string ‘whistling’, as encountered occasionally on some violins.
5.7.7 Lauren Rioux: Five-string fiddle by Jonathan Cooper (U.S)

About her five-string, Rioux is emphatic: ‘I love playing this instrument’, stating about the maker Jonathan Cooper, ‘he nailed it’ (ibid). For Rioux, the weight of the instrument is an important aspect of design, noting that in her experience, ‘the bigger instruments sometimes can be quite heavy … I pick it up it feels like kind of a weighty thing’ (ibid). About her own instrument, she states ‘it's an incredibly light instrument’, describing: ‘When I pick it up it feels the way it sounds, it feels very light and open’, and so, she says, ‘it's not going to require a lot of effort to get it to speak’ (ibid). Rioux also points to the importance of the size of the neck, saying that on the Cooper five-string ‘the width of the neck is just right’ for her. About the bridge set-up, Rioux elaborates:

We worked a lot on the shape of the bridge and actually. I don't want to say that we designed it together, but the one that we came up with that I really liked is now his blank, the one that he uses for all five-strings now, because we spent so much time figuring out what would be best (ibid).

Rioux specifies that she ‘uses a light viola bow’ on her five-string (ibid). She is sponsored by D’Addario, and she explains about her choice of strings: ‘I use Pro Arte on my fiddle, I use a violin a, d and g, and I use a [viola] short scale length on the c’ (ibid). She describes them as ‘warm and … stable enough to cross-tune’. She says that she also likes Zyex strings, and uses them on her five-string viola, but on the fiddle she states: ‘I like that string but I don’t really like cross-tuning them’ (ibid).
5.7.8  Mimi Rabson: Five-string fiddle by John Silakowski (U.S)

In speaking about her five-string instrument, made by John Silakowski, Mimi Rabson notes that ‘there are some really nice ones out there, but I haven’t found one I like better than this’ (*ibid*). Rabson recalls her decision to commission a five-string:

> I called up the guy that made my four-string that I love very much, and I said I’m going to get one of these, would you make it for me. And he said, “no, it can’t be done”, and I said, well “Ok, I offered you the chance”, and so he didn’t want it and I went to John, John Silakowski, who is a genius (*ibid*).

Yet Rabson understands the other makers’ stance, saying ‘that guy makes beautiful [four-string] instruments and he wants to do that’. Similarly to how she recognises that for some violinists the five-string ‘is not for their repertoire, the repertoire requires a four-string instrument’ (*ibid*).

Rabson is pragmatic in her views regarding the set-up of her instrument, about which she states, ‘I took what I got … I just want to get to work’, pointing to Django Reinhardt, who ‘played with these three fingers’ (*ibid*). Rabson says that ‘you can work yourself into a lot of mind problems if you start worrying about this millimetre or that millimetre’, and she suggests that ‘of course there is always going to be a problem right before the big concert’ (*ibid*). She does wonder if maybe she ‘should try to be a bit pickier about it’ (*ibid*), and says she does sometimes experience difficulty playing in higher positions on the fingerboard when looking to make a rich classical sound.
Concerning her bow, Rabson states: ‘I’ve always liked a heavy bow ‘cause it’s better for chopping and I haven’t changed because of the instrument, but I already had a pretty heavy bow’ (ibid). About strings, she states: ‘I asked the guy who takes care of my instrument what I should use and I told him what kind of playing I do, and he told me to get Larsens’ (ibid). Rabson explains that ‘the c string is a Larsen viola string’ and as ‘those Larsens are still working’ she has not experimented much with strings. She says: ‘I guess I am a little picky about it. I don’t like the sound of Thomastiks, Helicore I haven’t tried, I got on these Larsens and I have been happy’ (ibid).

5.8 Discussing the Instruments

All the participants speak very positively about their own instrument, and the role of instrument makers is clearly significant in this regard. As described in Chapter 2, John Silakowski has emerged as one of the most active and influential five-string fiddle makers. In the context of this research, Silakowski’s instruments are played by Driessen, Haas, Rabson, and Glaser (who plays on one owned by Berklee College of Music). Glaser comments on the widespread take up of Silakowski’s fiddles, stating that, ‘Brittany [Haas] has one, Michael Cleveland has one, Casey [Driessen] and Mimi Rabson, a lot of people play on these Silakowski’ (ibid). Driessen suggests that for Silakowski, ‘it’s not about fame and fortune for him, he wants to get instruments in the hands of people who are going to play them’ (ibid). For Trueman, that a violin maker as highly regarded as Jonathan Cooper, who made the five-string played by Lauren Rioux, has become interested in five-string making, represents a validation of the possibilities of the instrument:

I think Cooper has probably had a big impact on this ‘cause he's kind of set the bar real high and convinced people, convinced sceptics you know, kind of purists, that you can really make a beautiful sounding instrument that does five strings (Trueman).

5.8.1 Set-up, playability

As described above, many of the participants mentioned the importance of issues, such as physical comfort and playability. The addition of the extra string places additional demands and compromises on the set up of the instrument and, as there is no standard approach to five-string design, there are more variables encountered. Some participants
described very particular set ups, while others took what they got from the maker. This point is summed up nicely by Trueman, who stated that some musicians have a ‘give me a one string ukulele and I’ll be happy kind of personality’, whereas for many other fiddlers ‘it’s like, no I can't do it unless it's really got something special’ (*ibid*).

Trueman, speaking generally about five-string instruments states:

Of course the first thing I always do is to play the low strings to see how they sound and how they speak, and then try the high string because sometimes the low string will sound good at the expense of the high string (*ibid*).

Trueman describes his wider experiences with other five-strings that he has encountered, such as those owned by Brittany Haas, Darol Anger, and some instruments made by Jonathan Cooper. He states: ‘Every time, the first thing that I notice is how close or far away the strings are from one another. That seems to be the biggest variable’ (*ibid*). He outlines the two main approaches he has noticed, where makers ‘keep the neck small and put the strings closer together, or make the neck wide and have the strings the normal separation’ (*ibid*). Truman suggests that the former approach, of the smaller neck, is quite common, but he feels that having the strings closer together than on a four-string neck can presents some difficulties. ‘Some I’ve felt are really quite close and I find that hard’ Trueman observes, saying that ‘one of the first things is adjusting to that’ (*ibid*).

For Haas, concerning set-up, ‘a lot of it is just comfort’, and, similar to Trueman and Rioux, she states that ‘the size of the neck is so huge in that’ (*ibid*). She says that her five-string ‘feels not much bigger than a regular four-string’ and so, when comparing to other five-strings she has tried, sometimes ‘the necks are ginormous’, though she does say this may just be that they ‘feel that way to me because I’m so used to this one’ (*ibid*).

Haas shares other participants’ concerns regarding ‘the evenness of the tone that each string is making’, and stresses the importance of ‘having them all feel like they fit together on the same instrument’ (*ibid*). Also, in regards to set-up, Haas notices that ‘some people have totally different arches to their bridge’ (*ibid*). For example, when she and I compared fiddles, she was surprised at the arch on my instrument, in comparison
to her own. Haas suggests that the arch from the $g$ to the $c$ string on my instrument was bigger than she felt necessary\textsuperscript{21}. Haas describes her approach to trying out a five-string:

> I guess when I pick up a fiddle I usually play on the $c$ string first, check it out, see if that feels like it's doing it justice, like if it should actually have a $c$ string on it, and check that out and then move your way over across each string and just see what the tone of each one is and see if they feel like they are open enough (ibid).

As detailed above, there has been a significant rise in the use of five-string fiddle in recent years. This increased interest permeates all levels of violin making, from highly regarded makers, such as Jonathan Cooper, turning their attention to designing great five-strings, as discussed by Trueman, to the lower end, mass marketing of five-strings, as noted by Rioux. Furthermore, recent years have witnessed the rise in specialist five-string makers, such as John Silakowski and Barry Dudley, who have earned their reputation as primarily five-string builders.

Trueman states that a musician has to be ‘willing to try it and have it not feel familiar’ observing that ‘it’s maybe not going to sound as good in certain ways, but it might sound better in different ways’. In considering how musicians perceive the rise of the five-string instrument, Trueman reflects:

> I think that there, with violinists and fiddlers there is, there are fiddlers that are very quickly going to be dismissive of something that they don't like the sound or feel of, and then there are those who will basically be happy if you give them a shoebox with strings on it! I think for a while only the latter would be the ones who would play five strings because they weren't particularly good or they're going to be different (ibid).

Haas shares similar views, saying: ‘I feel like people either see it and think it's really cool, or are just totally not interested and they don't even want to try it! Which makes sense’ (ibid).

### 5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and discussed the data emerging from the interviews, focusing on the participant’s journey to the five-string. The discussion addresses the

\textsuperscript{21} And while this was something I had worked on, I later felt that she was right. On my instrument, although the space allowed for clean playing on the $g$, the bow angle that was required to play on the $c$ could be less.
understandings expressed by each participant concerning their own experiences and interactions with the five-string fiddle and the personal musical journeys that brought the participants to the instrument. The chapter presents a picture of a select group of elite musicians, who, in playing five-string fiddle demonstrate the instruments acculturation in America, from Hicks and Gimble in the 1960s, to, in particular in the context of this research, its popularisation in more recent years by many top contemporary fiddle players. The practitioners describe their development in music, evidencing a range of musical backgrounds. These include being self-taught, learning music through family members, formal classical studies and coming through the Suzuki system. The participants also emerge as demonstrative of various styles within the overarching sound of the American fiddle. They are concentrated on styles that include Bluegrass, Old-Time, Jazz, Swing, Classical and Contemporary, with all sharing a particular interest in improvisation. For most of the participants, the five-string is their main instrument, central to their work as a professional musician. This chapter captures the state of play regarding the five-string, reflecting on its development and intensification in the last ten years, presenting details of the instruments owned and played by the participants, and in turn elaborating on the data emerging that concerns the fiddles themselves. Understanding the thoughts and experiences of the participants concerning the five-string fiddle presents insight to the reasons behind the instrument’s popularity. The next chapter examines the use of the five-string in the practice of the participants.
CHAPTER 6

THE VOICE OF THE FIVE-STRING FIDDLE

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the use of the five-string fiddle in the context of musical practice, as described by the participants of this research. Returning to Bernard and Ryan's (2010, p.5) description of qualitative data as the researcher's reduction of 'people’s thoughts, behaviours, emotions, artefacts, and environments to sounds, words, or pictures', this chapter approaches the thoughts and behaviours in referencing the participant's musical practice. The data is presented with video examples of the participant's own musical performances, creating an overall musical picture of the five-string fiddle and its ongoing development and use in American fiddle music.

This chapter is divided into three sections, the first two of which will examine the performative aspects of the five-string fiddle emerging from the research. Firstly, a general discussion highlighting how the participants encapsulate their use of the five-string fiddle in their approaches to performance is presented. This is followed by a detailed discussion of specific techniques and approaches advanced in the research in relation to the five-string fiddle. In particular, this section examines the role of double stops, the chop, cross-tuning and improvisation in the context of the five-string, as explained by the participants. The chapter concludes with a discussion concerning the state of play regarding the five-string fiddle and how it is perceived in the wider fiddle scene in the U.S. Elaborating on the overarching experiences of the participants with the five-string, this section presents the thoughts of the musicians concerning the recent rise in the instruments popularity, and also looks to the future possibilities that are presented by the five-string fiddle, as projected by the participants.

This chapter uses direct quotation in highlighting key statements of the participants in addressing the overarching question posed at the outset of this research, namely, 'why has the past ten years witnessed the pervasive emergence of the five-string violin within contemporary North American fiddle culture?
6.2 The Five-String in Practice

Chapter 5 presented the participants’ musical journeys, from their adoption of the five-string fiddle as their instrument of choice. At the heart of the matter for any musician is the personal choice of instrument they play on. The biography of any renowned classical string soloist typically includes the details of the chosen instrument of the player and how they came to play it. There are many violins that have been named and renamed after classical soloists that have played them. The extended musical range offered by the addition of the low c string understandably presents itself as central to any discussion regarding the five-string fiddle, particularly, as to why a musician would decide to play it. What does having the c string mean to the participants? In this regard, Lauren Rioux states: ‘I would really miss my c string incredibly if I didn’t have it’ (ibid). But why is this so?

6.2.1 Extended range

Playing low register melodies and, in particular, harmony lines are described by Bobby Hicks as the initial musical inspiration for his adoption of five-string in 1963:

The band I was with in Las Vegas, Nevada, had two fiddle players, it had three to begin with, then one of them quit and they needed somebody to play two parts of harmony. I always liked the lead line to be on the high side and the harmony below it. That was the reason I actually put the fifth string on the fiddle, so I could play the harmonies below the lead, further down. That was the main reason I put it on there to start with, and then I got to using it for a lot of other things (ibid).

In discussing playing melodies on the c string, Rioux considers the extended range provided by the c string in the context of Jazz performance and instrumentation, stating:

Horn players can get below an open g string, usually the lowest range on a violin so you can transcribe all those horn solos where before you were missing a note of two because you couldn’t get down to that e or e flat (ibid).

Driessen similarly points to the musical usefulness of extended range, exemplifying one note in particular: ‘a lower d, I was always unsatisfied by having the lowest d on the instrument be the open d string’ (ibid). Driessen explains that ‘when you end a song in A, it feels so satisfying to go down and hit that low a or g on fiddle’ (ibid). However, when he compares this to the key of D, Driessen says ‘there are so many fiddle tunes in D you get … unsatisfied by the d string being the last line of defence’ (ibid). Indeed, Haas exemplifies Driessen as someone who does ‘make great use of the low strings’ (ibid), suggesting he draws on the ‘the full spectrum of the range’ in his use of the five-
string (Haas). Haas comments: ‘I like listening to other five-string fiddle players because they remind me that you can play melodies on the lower strings’ (ibid), stating that in her own case she may not ‘always go for that just naturally’ (ibid), as she feels ‘it gets lost in the sound of the band, it doesn’t cut through as much’ (ibid), as sometimes the case in ‘the cello/fiddle dynamic in Crooked Still’ (ibid). Haas elaborates that ‘because Tristian [Clarridge] plays cello like a fiddle player, he often plays in a higher register’ and so Haas states that she ‘went even higher and played on the e string a lot’, because it’s ‘easier to cut through dynamically when you are playing higher’ (ibid).

Trueman states that he finds it ‘much easier on the five-string than on the regular violin to do everything, to write solo music, to do everything as a violinist’ (ibid), which is central to what he personally wants to do musically. Amongst the musical parameters noted by Trueman is ‘this texture thing with the low string … a sound that's barely a sound’, describing it as a ‘percussiony type stuff that’s just not as accessible on the g string on a regular fiddle’ (ibid). Trueman discusses the musical opportunities presented by the c string through the lens of his own compositional work. He states: ‘there’s a number of things that I love about the extra string, but in terms of somebody who writes new tunes, I love being able to contrast the extremes’ (ibid). For Trueman, the extended range of the five-string allows him ‘to be able to have a tune that goes way up high and digs way down low’ (ibid), elaborating:

I’ve got several tunes that I've been doing recently where I can be down and just doing dark almost textural stuff on the low bottom three strings and then you go up high and just like the clouds part and the skies open (ibid).

This is something ‘that’s just compositionally not really accessible on the four-string violin’, according to Trueman, stating that ‘you can do stuff on the g string and so on, but to go one string further, it really is a whole new universe’ (ibid).

### 6.2.2 Playing backup

Rioux describes her primary use of the extended lower range on the fifth string as being ‘definitely for back up playing’ (See Video 6.1)

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22 This example shows Rioux playing five-string fiddle in an accompaniment role, drawing mainly on the c string, often double stopped with the notes on the g string, while Haas plays the melody.
in accompanying both songs and instrumental music. Regarding playing with singers, Rioux states:

> When you are backing up the human voice, you can get out of the way of the voice, because you have the range, you can get into the range of a woman's low alto register, or a man's tenor, you can get there so you can blend if you want to, or you can step out of the way (ibid).

Haas, regarding her early experiences playing on the five-string says, ‘it was just more the excitement of a different unknown thing, and the lower sounds’ (ibid). Similar to Rioux’s description above, Haas outlines that in performance now she typically uses her c string ‘a lot for more backup role kind of things’ (ibid). In exemplifying this, Haas describes that she has ‘done a lot of playing with two fiddles, and so it's nice in that setting to be able to totally get out of the way of the other fiddle who is playing melody’ (ibid) (See Video 6.2). Haas elaborates that she uses the low register of her five-string for ‘backing up other instruments too’ (ibid), suggesting that ‘you can imitate the sound of a guitar almost, like if you are doing “shuffly” stuff on the low strings’ (ibid). Driessen also speaks to the particular strengths he identifies in the five-string for back-up playing: ‘Certainly playing with other violinists you can kind of get out of the way and occupy some different range, kind of separate each other a bit’ (ibid). Driessen elaborates that: ‘With the percussive chopping stuff that I do, it's a huge part of it for me, ’cause I stay down there when I'm playing the chords and backing people up’ (ibid), (See Video 6.3). Rabson similarly points to rhythmic possibilities offered by the low string: ‘playing in the rhythm section is a lot easier with a fifth string, because it is lower’ (ibid). She describes that with the five-string, rhythmic and percussive playing ‘is a lot more comfortable’, identifying that the low string makes ‘it feel a lot like the Kontra playing’, that she used to do when playing Hungarian folk music, and she feels like she is ‘a lot more in the rhythm section’ playing the five-string (ibid) (See Video 6.4).

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23 Haas and Rioux reverse roles, Rioux taking up the tune. Haas drops down to the low register of the five-string in providing a back up part. Haas makes extensive use of the c string, double stops, ‘shuffly’ rhythms, and delineates the beginning of the second section of the tune with a chop.

24 In this excerpt Driessen accompanies the soloing of mandolinist Chris Thile. Driessen outlines the bass and harmonic movement on the low strings, while using his trademark chop to provide rhythmic interest.

25 Here, Rabson delineates the downbeat with a chop as the double bass player solos, taking what she described as her place ‘in the rhythm section’.
6.2.4 Bringing it all together

Hicks states that ‘there's just some things that you can play with that fifth string that's an octave down, an octave below, that sounds pretty good’. For Trueman too ‘it is really nice just to be able to take the tune down an octave’ (See Video 6.5)\(^{26}\). Trueman extrapolates that ‘just being in a different fingering … improvisationally you're going to start doing different things’, and consequently ‘you'll have different open strings to work with’ (ibid). Glaser also regards the improvisational possibility of the five-string as one of the instruments most exciting features. He states that while the limits of the musical range of the ‘four-string instrument encourages improvisation in that it takes certain things off the table’, conversely ‘the five-string encourages improvisation because of the extended range in the lower area’ (ibid).

For Hicks, using the fifth-string with musical sensitivity demands taste and sometimes restraint. He observes that some five-string players ‘want to play everything they play, they want to play it on that fifth string too’ (ibid). Drawing on fifty years of five-string fiddle playing experience, Hicks suggests that ‘there's a place for that fifth string, and if you use it in the right place then it's good, and if you don’t, it's like everything gets muddled up’ (ibid). Rioux is of a similar view, stating: ‘I don’t want to use it all the time, you know, I have to say, how do I be creative without my c string?’ (ibid). This is also something mentioned by Haas in speaking about first having a c string. Haas recounts: ‘I think it took me a while to figure out how to actually use it in a way that made sense musically … not just oh I have this c string and I'm going to play on it’ (ibid). Haas exemplifies this musical approach in her role in Republic of Strings, stating: ‘There are two fiddles in that band, and Darol [Anger] was playing four-string at that time and I was playing five-string, exploring the lower register more’ (ibid), demonstrating new understandings and approaches to using the fiddle in performance that positions the five-string as making its own musical contribution based on its range.

The above presents an overview of the emerging themes regarding musical performance on the five-string fiddle. All of the participants described the musical reasons they play on five-string fiddles, and they outlined their search for ways to use the extended range musically, through performance, improvisation, composition, and increasingly, through...
accompaniment playing. The extended range presents exciting performance opportunities across the range of musical approaches discussed by the participants. The details regarding fiddle technique, improvisation, and the five-string forms the subject of the next section.

6.3 **Idiomatic Technique and Improvisational Approaches to the Five-String Fiddle**

As discussed in Chapter 3, American fiddling displays a wide variety of idiomatic fiddle techniques. Driessen says of fiddle technique: ‘It’s like an accent that I might speak with’. According to the participants, the five-string fiddle can be observed to present new opportunities for the musical re-imagining of existing techniques, and the development of others, that are particularly suited to the five-string, in the context of performance, improvisation, and composition. In many ways, it is the creative and personal interaction of these techniques with the five-string fiddle that brings together the musical sound of all the participants of this research. Chapter 3 outlined the breadth of literature regarding the wide range of idiomatic techniques in American fiddling, and techniques that are directly influenced and enhanced by the additional fifth string formed the focus of the participants’ conversation. Some participants spoke in the general sense about fiddle techniques such as glissando and vibrato, many of which are described by Driessen as ‘ingrained from Bluegrass’, so much so that fiddlers may not ‘actively think about them too much’ (*ibid*). The conversations all pointed in particular to three techniques that are directly related to, influenced and changed by the five-string fiddle. Double stops, cross-tuning, and the chop, and its related percussive playing, encapsulated by Rabson as ‘great way to play in the rhythm section’ (*ibid*), proved to be the most discussed.

Improvisation plays an important part in American fiddle music and is significant in different ways in the practice of the participants here. Looking to the practice of the participants, and their words throughout this research concerning the five-string fiddle, improvisation also presents itself as a central theme in their approach to the instrument. As pointed out in the research, there is little music composed to date that specifically exploits the five-string, and, consequently, as Rioux states, ‘having the extended range you do have more options, so you are more creative’ (*ibid*). This lack of specific
The repertoire is understandable, and points to the very recent popularisation of the five-string.

The text below relates how each individual describes and explains their thoughts concerning idiomatic techniques and improvisation, their interrelationship, and how they inform their personal approach to the five-string fiddle in practice. This section focuses on the individual applications and interpretations, detailing differing experiences and approaches across a range of techniques discussed by the interviewees. Demonstrating the stylistic cross-section of the interviewees, individual participants tended to speak in greatest detail about the approaches that most interested them, and that form a central part of their own individual sounds on the five-string fiddle.

6.3.1 Double stops

As discussed in Chapter 3, the simultaneous sounding of two strings, the double stop, is a ubiquitous sound in many American fiddle styles. Double-stops are discussed first, as they are typically constituents of both cross-tuning techniques, and the chop, and will be further referenced in discussions about those techniques. In terms of the five-string fiddle, Hicks states: ‘I don't think it would make me play any more double stops, but they are easier to play with five strings’ (*ibid*). Hicks observes that this ease of double-stop playing is due primarily to the slightly reduced string spacing on his instrument. Regarding his own use of double stops, Hicks explains: ‘I keep hunting 'till I find the harmonies that I want and it's sometimes difficult to get the left hand to do that’ (*ibid*) (See Video 6.6). Like Hicks, for Haas, the ‘strings being closer together definitely makes it easier’, and she additionally suggests that ‘the bridge angle thing, being able to play three strings just a little’ not actually at the same time, but ‘playing back and forth between them’ (*ibid*) creates a lot of additional possibilities for double stop playing on the five-string. Haas describes this as creating a ‘string pad thing’ that she mainly uses for playing back up, and for ‘getting below for a harmony’ (*ibid*). Haas states that she typically combines her double stops in the low register with rhythmic playing like ‘the three-string shuffly stuff, bouncing back and forth’ (*ibid*), noting that ‘that's easier on five-string with the spacing and the angles’ (*ibid*). Haas also describes as ‘a unison drone thing’, her double stopping of unisons, by approaching a fingered string/open

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27 While not making use of the e string here, other than to play a final note, Hicks demonstrates his use of idiomatic double stops in arranging his version of the tune *Faded Love.*
string unison from a fingered note below: ‘I got that from Alasdair [Fraser] definitely, that scrunch’ (ibid) (See video 6.7)\(^{28}\).

Driessen too notes that the strings on his five-string ‘are a little bit closer’ (ibid) together than on a standard four-string instrument. With double-stops, according to Driessen, ‘doing things like fifths are easier’ (ibid) due to the closer spacing. He also points to an advantage of the curvature of the bridge: ‘you can go from string to string a lot quicker, especially with double stops between two different sets of strings’ (ibid), though he in turn notes that ‘you have to be way more accurate, there is less room for error if you hit on a string’ (ibid). Driessen says that he has spent a lot of time practising double stops, explaining ‘any time that there was a long note, you know, a whole note or half note, whatever it was’, he would ‘make it a double stop’ (ibid). So much so, that Driessen recounts a time when he was ‘playing double stops for everything’, and having to revisit and ‘work on single note playing for a while’ (ibid). Now he concentrates on ‘trying find a nice variation or combination of single notes and double stops and using them in improvisation’, guided by asking: ‘Do I want to colour this with a double stop, do I want this to be a single note?’ (ibid) (See Video 6.8)\(^{29}\).

The double stop remains a signature sound in Old-Time and Bluegrass, on any fiddle. It is also increasingly observed as a constituent of the chop technique, as described by Haas, Dreissen, Rabson and Rioux, in terms of their use of the five-string fiddle in an accompanying role.

### 6.3.2 The chop

Chapter 3 highlighted the emergence and development of a new percussive bowing technique, known as the chop. Rabson traces the lineage of the chop and rhythm playing back to ‘mandolin players that have been chopping since they began’ (ibid). This point is also made by Haas, who describes that it is ‘mimicking the mandolin, so it’s so perfect for Bluegrass’ (ibid), acknowledging the role of Richard Green and Darol Anger

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\(^{28}\) In this example Haas occupies the accompaniment role in her trio ‘Haas, Kowert Tice’. Here Haas, demonstrates a mix of many approaches, including rich use of rhythmic double stops and chopping, as the bass takes the melody.

\(^{29}\) In this clip Driessen demonstrates his use of double stops, playing a solo in his arrangement of the song *Working On a Building*, outlining the melody and providing harmony in the low register of the five-string.
in developing the stroke, from the simple downward stroke which fiddlers ‘already had’. Having documented the development of the five-string fiddle in Chapter 2, it became apparent that many of the names most closely associated with the five-string, including those who became participants in this research, were also associated with the world of chops and grooves (Anger, 2005). Participants such as Driessen, Rabson, Haas and Rioux spoke about the technique in the context of their own work, while other non-chopping participants were still keen to contribute to the conversation regarding the technique itself, regarding how it works on the five-string, and, in some cases, why they do not use the technique themselves. Glaser and Trueman both stated that they do not use the technique, with Trueman saying that it was something he was interested in, and was working on, while Bobby Hicks said he had no interest in it at all.

In discussing the chop, Glaser states that ‘the people that do it great are amazing musicians’ (ibid). Observing that ‘Darol and Casey and Brittany have really developed on the five-string what is possible rhythmically’ (ibid), Glaser notes that he himself hasn’t ‘really got that deeply into it’, stating: ‘I have my own stuff that I am interested in and I feel like there are plenty of people deep into that world of the chop, it’s great’ (ibid). However, while not using the technique in his own performance, Glaser puts forward very well considered views relating to chopping on a five-string. Regarding the five-string and the chop, Glaser suggests that ‘there is something about the duration of the notes on a five-string that must interact positively with the chop, because those people [Anger and Driessen and Haas] really do it’ (ibid). Glaser elaborates upon the possibility that ‘there is something about the sound, the duration of the notes on the five-string is different on a regular violin’ (ibid), which makes the chop work particularly well on the five-string. Glaser suggests that, as the five-string fiddle ‘doesn’t sustain as much as a [regular] violin’ due to the hybrid nature of its design, this allows the performer ‘to play rhythmic things which decay quicker’ (ibid).

Glaser’s colleague in Berklee College of Music, Mimi Rabson, exclaimed in her interview: ‘I can’t live without my chops’ (ibid). She recounts that she was always searching for a way to participate rhythmically: ‘It seemed very organic to what I wanted to do, which was to play in the rhythm section’ (ibid). Similar enthusiasm is shared by other participants. For Haas, ‘it’s such a cool thing to take such a great space in the music, and it’s so different to any other sound that you produce on the fiddle’ (ibid). Rioux states that while Richard Greene invented it, for her ‘Darol [Anger] took it
and completely made it into something amazing and great’ (*ibid*), pointing to his work with Turtle Island String Quartet and his Republic of Strings project, of which both Rioux and Haas were members. Rabson is very excited about such on-going developments in rhythm violin playing, observing that ‘it’s nice to see so many people thinking about the violin as a rhythmic instrument as well as a melodic instrument’ (*ibid*). Rabson exemplifies the rhythmic role of the violin in Charanga, and the role of the seconda part in the Klezmer tradition, where, she states, the violinist is ‘constantly playing as part of the rhythm section, not with chops, but you are part of the rhythm section’ (*ibid*). For Rabson, there are a lot of places where that rhythm playing ‘is part of the deal’, and about the development of the chop in American fiddling, she says that it ‘is nice for that idea to be spreading out, spreading to places that it hasn’t been before’ (*ibid*). She points in particular to the music and rhythmic work of Driessen:

Casey is so amazing. He is my favourite chopper on earth, that triplet one he has got, oh my god he is unbelievable, yeah, I can’t do that, but I do what I do and that’s fine, it is almost ricochet. It is flabbergasting! (*ibid*).

Hicks (light-heartedly) states: ‘I don’t do any of that stuff, tricks are for kids I always say!’ (*ibid*), but like Rabson, he points to Driessen’s effective use of the chop: ‘Casey Driessen does that kind of stuff real good’ (*ibid*). However, Hicks says that he is unsure if Driessen necessarily ‘uses the fifth string any more than the rest of them’ (*ibid*). For Hicks ‘it’s just a rhythm thing with his bow that he does, and he could do that on any other fiddle, without a five-string’ (*ibid*).

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, Driessen has evolved the chop technique extensively in his music, featuring it on his recordings and live performances, (see video 6.9)*31*, in addition to contributing to the literature concerning the technique. Driessen states: ‘I’ve had a five-string since 1995, so all of my development of the chop and playing of it has happened on that’ (*ibid*). The low register is a ‘satisfying area of this instrument to chop on’, according to the fiddler, for whom there’s a ‘satisfying thing about having those

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*30* Cuban music ensemble, described by Moore (http://0-www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ditlib.dit.ie/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2084955?q=Charanga&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) to typically consist of ‘piano, acoustic bass, a transverse wooden flute similar to the flute used in Baroque classical repertoire, two or more violins, timbales, and güiro (a gourd scraper)

*31* Driessen has evolved the chop technique extensively in his music, as paid tribute to by Glaser, Rabson, Haas and Hicks in this research. Here Driessen plays the back up part for *Footsteps in the Snow*, demonstrating his ‘triple chop’ in combination with double stop playing on the c and g strings.
low strings, to be playing chords, staying out of the way of the melodic instruments’ (*ibid*), in playing accompaniment parts. Driessen, like Haas above, draws analogies with the typical accompaniment role such as that of the guitar, describing that with chopping on the low strings, in conjunction with double stop playing, he feels like he can create ‘a real foundation’ (*ibid*). He explains that because of the low string, ‘you feel bassier, like you’re playing more bass lines, more like a guitar player’ (*ibid*). Concerning the chop on the five-string fiddle, Driessen comments: ‘having that lower foundation I think has certainly helped me’ (*ibid*). Trueman also describes the possibilities presented by the five-string for accompaniment playing. He states that, historically, violin players were ‘notorious for not knowing anything about basslines’, but now with the five-string, ‘you can play basslines, you can actually accompany’ (*ibid*).

In Driessen’s music, the chop occupies, as he states above, an accompanimental role, and this can be observed in various ways in examples of his work. In solo acoustic performance, Driessen often uses the chop to create a rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment for his singing (see video 6.10)\(^3\). Discussing the use of the five-string to back up his own singing, Driessen explains that:

> When I sing and I play at the same time, D and E tend to be good keys, and C, for me to sing in, and so those are also great for having low accompaniments on this instrument, so it's pretty satisfying for me, somehow it works with the range of singing, the keys that work well for me’ (*ibid*).

As discussed in Chapter 3, Driessen also draws on electronics to record and ‘loop’ his own accompaniment parts into complex layered musical arrangements in solo performance. In duo and ensemble instrumental performances, Driessen uses the technique to back other soloists, in the way the guitar, mandolin or banjo would have typically done in the past.

Haas and Rioux both describe the influence of Darol Anger on their use of the chop. Rioux recounts that because she ‘played with Darol for years and it's such a huge part of his sound and what he wants to produce musically for his band’ (*ibid*), she ‘had to know how to chop to be in his band’ (*ibid*). Rioux expresses curiosity as to ‘whether or not the five-string really brought the chop around more’. She feels the *Chops and Grooves* (Anger, 2005) video, discussed in Chapter 3, is also significant in the popularisation of

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\(^{3}\) This excerpt shows Driessen accompany himself singing *Working On a Building*. He uses chopping rhythms and extensive double stop playing to create a harmonically rich accompaniment part.
the technique ‘because there were people who had a c string on that’ (ibid), such as Driessen on five-string fiddle, but also Rushad Eggleston on cello. And while Rioux observes that there are ‘more people who have c strings and are performing on the national circuit, and who also chop’ (ibid), she points out that ‘Darol and Turtle Island were chopping, and Richard Greene who started the chop had been around much longer’ (ibid) than the current popularity of the five-string.

Concerning her use of the chop, Haas states: ‘My chop is always kind of shifting, depending on what kind of situation I am in’ (ibid). She notes that: ‘In Crooked Still, the chop was a big part of just the sound, almost all the time’ (ibid), explaining that ‘it’s just like a role that needed to be filled and it would get passed around between string players’ (ibid). Haas describes how when she takes a solo, then the ‘cello is chopping, and when the cello is not chopping the fiddle is chopping’ (ibid), (See Video 6.11)\(^{33}\). The percussive element of Haas’ chop typically emanates from the higher strings. She explains: ‘I kind of do chop on the higher strings, not sure why, but that has always felt good I guess’ (ibid). Haas describes how ‘this back and forth between doing the note on the low strings, and the chop on the high strings’, results in a high pitched chop, recalling that when recording with Crooked Still for the first time, ‘the engineer was like, your chop is so squeaky! He had to roll off the high end’ (ibid).

Rabson, discussing her own practice states that she increasingly hates ‘being relegated to just the melody’ (ibid). Looking to her use of her five-string in her recent Berklee solos project, Rabson states: ‘I want to be everywhere, you know, I mean it is so evocative and so much fun to be in the rhythm section’ (ibid). The piece, *Tell Me*, composed by Winston Maccow, ‘where not very much was written out’ (ibid), serves as a good example of Rabson’s use of the five-string instrument (See Video 6.12)\(^{34}\).

In summation, there is wide agreement regarding the new performance opportunities presented by the chop and participation in the rhythm section. Many of the participants pointed to Casey Driessen for his rich development of the technique, and in particular for his triple chop. This in turn evidenced a self-styled approach to the performance of

\(^{33}\) In this example of her chop taken from a Crooked Still performance, Haas creates a rhythmic chop groove while cellist Tristian Clarridge takes a solo.

\(^{34}\) Rabson performs the introduction of *Tell Me*, demonstrating increasingly rhythmic chops variations, while outlining a repeating harmonic sequence using double stops across the range of her five-string.
the technique, as demonstrated by Haas, who states ‘I guess everybody has their own chop, and why chop like Casey, ’cause he already does that so well’ (*ibid*).

The discussion regarding the chop, and the five-string fiddle pointed to the low register allowing the fiddle to take an accompaniment role, and not just play the tune. In describing how they use the low register of the five-string rhythmically and harmonically, both Haas and Driessen draw analogies with the role of the guitar in folk music. Rabson suggests that the chop allows string players to ‘still communicate’ (*ibid*), after they have played their solo and would otherwise be taking a rest, observing that this is important because ‘there is so much wonderful communication that goes on in the rhythm section’. She states that the five-string, and particularly for her, the lower strings, play an important role in ‘supporting the soloist and developing what they are doing’ (*ibid*).

The chop is not for every fiddle player, as stated by Hicks, though his music does evidence extensive use of the earlier and simpler downward percussive stroke to delineate the beat when not soloing. Glaser too, in highlighting the widespread popularity of the technique says, ‘as they say in philosophy, *via negativa*, I am inclined to not be a chop person because there are so many people that are chop people’ (*ibid*). Glaser observes a strong association between the five-string fiddle and the chop, because as he points out, so many five-string players use the technique. Rioux makes a similar observation, pointing to the increased popularity of both the five-string fiddle and also the cello amongst professional touring musicians around the Bluegrass scene as being important in the development and popularisation of the chop.

### 6.3.3 Cross tuning

Scordatura, or cross-tuning, as discussed in Chapter 3, is a popular technique used by Old-Time fiddlers. Tuning the four-string fiddle to intervals other than the standard *g d a e*, presents new melodic, harmonic and textural opportunities to the fiddler. With the additional tuning combinations presented by the extra string, the use of cross-tuning on the five-string fiddle presents itself as a very interesting prospect. Three participants stated that they draw on cross-tuning techniques. Rioux states: ‘I usually keep my five-string viola in cross A, it kind of lives in cross A’ (*ibid*), (*a e a e* on a four-string fiddle). Regarding the *c* string, Rioux states: ‘I tune the *c* string down to an a, I have a lot of a’*s*’
She describes how at first she ‘tuned it up to a c sharp’, but discovered that ‘having the third on the lower string just seemed a little wonky, it wasn’t a stable thing’ (ibid). Trueman, in particular discussed the role and impact of cross-tuning extensively, as it forms a significant part of his composition work.

Trueman describes how, historically, cross-tuning was something he ‘had done with the electric violin but also extensively with the Hardanger fiddle’, drawing influence from traditional Hardanger fiddle music where ‘there aren’t very many tunes that are in fifths, most of them are in other tunings’. For Trueman, ‘compositionally it’s just incredible’. Trueman states that when in the early stages of composing, he often uses cross-tuning as an inspiration:

One thing I do like to do is kind of make myself uncomfortable, put myself in an unfamiliar place and retuning immediately does that, and so it’s like wow! And then you can’t help but improvise, I mean you can’t help but improvise, you either put it down or you improvise and so it’s very exciting and that for me in terms of generating ideas compositionally and so on (ibid).

Speaking about the album, CrissCross (2012), made with Brittany Haas, Trueman states: ‘The whole premise was that let’s retune it and see what type of tunes we can come up with in these strange cross tunings’ (ibid). Haas describes how she and Trueman were ‘kind of just inventing cross tunings for fun, and seeing how that affected what came out’ (ibid). That recording features Trueman on Hardanger fiddle, with Haas on five-string, with Trueman moving to his five-string (5x5), towards the end of that project. In discussing the opportunities presented by the five-string fiddle and cross tuning, Trueman states: ‘with the tunings, now with five-strings, you can do the math, you have all of a sudden all these combinations’ (ibid). This is something also referred to by Haas, who agrees that, ‘there are so many ways you can tune it’ (ibid). In relation to the five-string she says that ‘with the fifth string too, you can tune it up or down, so there is a lot of range in sounds you can get from there’ (ibid) (See Video 6.13).

Trueman describes how, when composing, he may ‘need a low note here and need something high there’, but that ‘that’s not something you can do with the violin so much’ (ibid). He says that he has previously achieved this aim using artificial harmonics to open up high registers: ‘you can do these low notes and very quickly you can get

35 Demonstrating an unnamed piece, composed with Trueman, Haas cross tunes her five-string fiddle.
tunes that cover large registers very quickly via using artificial harmonics’ (*ibid*) (See Video 6.14)*36*. Now, for Trueman:

> With the five-strings all of a sudden just by the strings themselves and then combined with harmonics you can get these big registral changes, it’s just so inspiring compositionally and improvisationally (*ibid*).

Discussing his approach to cross-tuning the five-string, Trueman refers a piece he is currently composing for the fiddler Caoimhin Ó Raghallaigh and a piano trio. Trueman states that Ó Raghallaigh will be playing ‘this five-string instrument and Hardanger fiddle’ (*ibid*). The five-string to be played by Ó Raghallaigh, is, like Trueman’s instrument, a 5x5 built by Salve Håkedal, incorporating 5 sympathetic strings. Regarding the tuning, Trueman explains, that he is ‘tuning with a fifth between the top strings, then a minor sixth, and then a fifth’ (*ibid*), which he describes as a tuning he has used in compositions previously. ‘So it's f sharp, c sharp a, e for the top four strings’, according to Trueman. Concerning the low string, he states:

> I'm going back and forth between, if I do an a, then I got the a, the low a kind of in resonance with the upper a and e, and also with the c sharp, but if I do a b, it's a little bit tighter, a little bit easier to play and it's got the fifth with that low f sharp (*ibid*).

In deciding the tuning of the low string, Trueman is guided by how he intends to ‘play with natural harmonics’. He observes that ‘just changing where that string goes changes all the different relationships you can get between the natural harmonics’ (*ibid*). This, he states ‘was just not an option, not a question, before with the four-strings, but now with this the whole thing changes’ (*ibid*). He says that the final choice for the placing of the low string may influence him to change one of the upper strings again, demonstrating that the compositional decisions made in regard to the c string, in turn, present new ideas for the rest of the instrument. Trueman encapsulates: ‘So, between the register and just the added layer of combinations that you can get from the fifth string, it's just kind of awesomely inspiring’ (*ibid*).

In the context of the five-string, Trueman and Haas describe combining cross-tunings with ‘percussiony type stuff’ (Trueman) and ‘three-string shuffly stuff’ (Haas). Taking

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*36* In this excerpt, Trueman descends to the low register of the c string to play a soft and atmospheric outro for *Fead an Iolair*. 
advantage of the low fifth string presents a textural approach to the fiddle that Trueman states is ‘just not as accessible on the g string on a regular fiddle’ (ibid). The use of these techniques by the participants on the five-string fiddle, suggests a redefining of the typical role of the fiddle. With the fifth string added, in its use by Haas, Rioux, and Driessen as an accompaniment instrument in a fiddle music setting, they align the five-string fiddle with the musical function of the guitar, as discussed above. Rabson, and Driessen, too, reinvent the instrument with their use and development of it as a rhythm instrument, while Trueman demonstrates the extensive possibilities for new music in combining these approaches with cross tuning.

The discussion above demonstrates the creative and evolving approaches adopted by the participants in their use of the five-string fiddle. This points to the significance of musical creativity in approaching the five-string, leading the discussion to another central and related theme, improvisation.

6.4   Improvisation and the Five-String Fiddle

Chapter 3 discussed the importance of improvisation across many American fiddle styles, and Trueman affirms that ‘in the context of American contemporary fiddle playing improvisation is very significant’ (ibid). As Rabson points out, improvisation itself is of course not ‘a new idea’, but with the five-string instrument, she is always ‘going to try something new with it’ (ibid). Rabson explains how she is set on making the five-string ‘part of the piece’, rather than using it just to play ‘a piece in its original form’ (ibid), capturing the sense of excitement regarding the possibilities of the five-string. This musical decision making in the moment on the five-string is described by Trueman thus:

You can be playing the melody and then, oh maybe I'll just pick up the bassline, or a low inner voice, and do that for a bit and then go back to the melody, I love that (ibid).

For Driessen, playing the five-string inherently involves improvisation ‘as there’s really not music written for it’ (ibid). The participants demonstrate a range of understandings of and use of improvisation, from the ‘soloing type of improvising’ (ibid), seen in the work of Driessen and Hicks for example, to the more subtle concepts discussed by other participants, described by Trueman as ‘just the what you do with tunes, where you are not taking solos but you're just playing the tune with somebody and doing stuff with it’. 
These approaches are illuminated in the context of American fiddling by Rioux, who notes that ‘it depends on the style of music you are playing in the American tradition’ (ibid). She states that Old-Time musicians typically ‘play the melody and have variations’ (See Video 6.15)\(^{37}\), while in Bluegrass, improvisation is ‘really important, you know, you’re supposed to take a solo, and obviously in Jazz it would be absolutely necessary’ (ibid). Driessen similarly states that compared to his Bluegrass heritage, he doesn’t put Old-Time ‘in the same category regarding improvisation’, suggesting that in Old-Time ‘the improv comes in the inflections and the ornamentation, or the bowings as opposed to improvisation with the solos’ (ibid).

Trueman discusses the use of such improvisation in his own work, distinguishing his approach to that of the person who takes an improvised solo. While Rabson exemplifies both approaches in performance, she, like Trueman, sees improvisation as much more than taking a solo. She states: ‘What we call Jazz improvisation, improvising over a vertical harmonic idea, that's unusual, I think most of the time in most of the world people are embellishing a melodic line’ (ibid). Trueman, regarding the recording CrissCross (2012), states that ‘there’s no soloing’, yet he says that ‘there's a lot of improvisation in that record and there are moments where somebody is clearly improvising’ (ibid). He describes it as improvisation ‘in a kind of Old-Time way’:

\begin{quote}
Maybe I'll take it down an octave here, and leave out a few notes, there's a couple of harmony pads that I know so if I start on this note I'll end up doing something different, I won't necessarily know where it's going to go, but I'll just be trying to come with something to do there (ibid).
\end{quote}

For Trueman, on the five-string fiddle, ‘you got to change, you do different stuff”. He states that playing in the low register ‘can be inspiring improvisationally’ because by ‘just being in a different fingering, improvisationally you're going to start doing different things and you'll have different open strings to work with’ (ibid). Trueman states that, for him, taking an improvised solo, and improvising a melody are different things:

\begin{quote}
It feels different to me, if I'm in a moment, this is a spot where I'm improvising a melody, I have a window to improvise a melody, it feels different to me than “ok it's my turn to take a solo” (ibid).
\end{quote}

\(^{37}\) This duo performance of the Oopik Waltz by Rioux and Haas demonstrates their individual variations on the melody.
Haas agrees, suggesting that ‘the extra string encourages a more improvisational approach’ \( (ibid) \). She says that the \( c \) string ‘expands the range a little bit, so there are more places to go’ \( (ibid) \). About her own performance, Haas states: ‘In just playing a tune I don’t often get all the way down there, because of the way tunes are laid out in the range’ \( (ibid) \). Haas describes how improvisation creates the ‘freedom to express yourself’, but states about her own work: ‘I always like doing it based on the melody, and never going totally away from it’, although she comments that the Bluegrass solo approach ‘can also be fun, and sometimes that’s what the moment calls for’ \( (ibid) \). Haas says that, having played the five-string for so long, she is ‘so comfortable with it, it feels natural to go down there’ \( (ibid) \), when she is improvising on the melody.

Trueman explains how when improvising while playing Old-Time tunes or ‘even Irish tunes a little’ the five-string fiddle allows the tune to be further developed and improvised upon, by ‘just being able to take a tune down an octave’ \( (ibid) \). He compares that with how on the four-string, ‘invariably you’re stuck’. Trueman explains the improvisational nature of transposing down the octave:

\[
I'll \text{ go down the octave and it'll sort of go back and forth between playing the tune and doing just sort of bass notes, there's this wonderful space between the bassline and playing the melody that's just not really accessible on the four-string instrument that's really accessible on the five-string \( (ibid) \).}
\]

Haas makes a similar point. She says that in Old-Time fiddling it is very common to play the tune down an octave, and ‘it might even be just one note or something that you wouldn't be able to grab without the \( c \) string’ but on the four-string, ‘that would force you to go back up and switch back to the high octave, so even just having that down there is really nice’ \( (ibid) \).

Rabson observes that she is always looking for opportunities to improvise, stating: ‘I want to be able to put my own voice on whatever I am playing, my, Mimi’s voice on whatever I am playing’ \( (ibid) \). For Rabson, her ‘whole orientation about music involves a unique personality in each performance that exceeds just the notes on the page, and dynamics and such’ \( (ibid) \). Rabson attributes this to her concerns about playing material exactly the same each time: ‘you don't do that in Baroque music, or in Renaissance music, you fill runs here, ornamentation there’ \( (ibid) \). She suggests that the thinking involved in playing five-string immediately creates this space in performance for her. In
discussing his work with his Trollstilt project, Trueman also compares his approach to improvisation to that of improvisation in early music, describing how they improvise ‘in kind of a Baroque style in a sense’ (ibid), explaining that ‘there’s a kind of ornamenting of a set structure that will vary from performance to performance’ (ibid). This makes improvisation very important in that setting according to Trueman, who says: ‘The bulk of it, it's the tune that we play, and I will ornament things differently’ (ibid).

Glaser states that for him improvisation has ‘become more and more important as time has gone’, saying: ‘It’s something that I work on very much now’ (ibid). As discussed in previous chapters, Glaser is one of the main contributors to the literature concerning improvisation in American fiddling. He explains his overarching approach thus:

My focus as an improviser, and what I stress with my students is really the ability to hear small bits of music, that is, to make up a variation on a phrase, and to hear the next interval, instead of playing with your brain (ibid).

Rabson states that she is currently concentrating on improvisation around ‘development of the melodic idea, like a classical composer’, and through improvisation is ‘trying to develop a large vocabulary of variation of the melody’ (ibid). Glaser says that his teaching in Berklee College of Music has, at times, been ‘very brain oriented’, commenting on how he has taught that way for many years, he states: ‘I now am coming back to something that I think is even more important, which is playing by ear and really trying to hear what you are about to play’ (ibid). He summarises this approach as ‘the ability to take a melody and vary it without using your intellect but instead using your internal ear’ (ibid). Glaser suggests, that, in improvisation, ‘limits are good things’. He says that ‘the limits of the four-string encourage improvisation in that it takes certain things off the table’, but ‘conversely the five-string encourages improvisation because of the extended range in the lower area’ (ibid). For Glaser, in the context of improvisation, ‘even having those four or five extra notes in the low end makes a huge difference’ (ibid) in the musical choices made (See Video 6.16)\(^{38}\).

\(^{38}\) Glaser described how he mainly uses his five-string fiddle for Jazz, and here he trades four bar solos over a swing tune on the Silakowski five-string owned by Berklee College of Music. In this example he makes good use of the low register to provide guide tones to the other soloist and to bring his improvised phrases to an end.
Rioux extends the discussion regarding improvisation and the five-string in the context of musical accompaniment, stating that ‘all of a sudden you have that c string, you're curious, it's like what other possibilities do you have?’ (ibid). She explains: ‘I think the reason that I like to play back up is that that's when I become the most creative’ (ibid). For Rioux, the accompaniment role, where ‘the spotlight is not on’, means that she doesn't have to ‘worry about being flashy or completely brilliant in the soloing category’ (ibid). Consequently, according to Rioux, she can be ‘really creative and come up with lots of different interesting back up, and make the soloist feel supported’ (ibid). Rioux states that ‘you don't ever know what the soloist is going to be doing’, and therefore the improvised accompaniment ‘can help guide and shape the solo’ (ibid). According to Rioux, these improvisations concern both harmony and rhythm. She says that while she knows what the chords should be, she ‘might alter the chord structure’ in the moment, because, as she states, she has ‘more options in range with the five-string’ (ibid).

According to Driessen, improvisation is central to his music, elaborating that ‘if you have a five-string, it requires you to apply everything that you know to it, which is kind of improvisational anyway’ (ibid). He says that in some of his work ‘there is stuff that is certainly worked out’, typically concerning structural issues. He further explains: ‘I'm going to play the melody here, I'm going to play the bridge here, here's the B section and I really want to stick to the melody there’ (ibid). Driessen says that even though he is going to play the melody exactly, he is ‘always trying to change something, and not trying to adhere to every little detail every time’ (ibid). Rabson outlines a similar perspective: ‘It’s hard for me to think of any piece of music where I'm not always constantly adding a new idea here or there, even if it's a trill, a new fingering or an extra slur, or something that's off the page’ (ibid). She describes how this presents problems for her doing ‘straight classical gigs, where you are supposed to play it just like it is on the page, same bowing and everything’, as she is ‘always thinking wouldn't this be fun, if we did it like this, he meant to write a trill here don't you think’ (ibid).

For Driessen, soloing is an important part of his ‘Bluegrass and Jazz world’ (ibid) (See Video 6.17). He describes how he thinks about the chords a lot when learning a new

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39 This performance of the Bill Monroe tune *Jerusalem Ridge* Driessen improvises a solo on the form of the tune. He demonstrates the full range of idiomatic technique in addressing the harmonic changes of the tune.
tune that he is going to improvise on, and says that ‘if you’ve got a fifth string you’re
going to use it, so you’re going to work on your chords that go down on the c string’
(ibid). He states: ‘I’m trying to get familiar on the instrument with how to work my way
around these different chords, and find interesting ways to create melodies, and make it
sound fluent between the changes’ (ibid). According to Driessen, he spends ‘more time
with the scales and options for different ways to play, as opposed to learning specific
licks’, stating that he doesn’t ‘memorise those types of things … like here’s a ii-v-i lick,
or here’s something that I play over this type of chord’ (ibid). He is of the view that with
the five-string, ‘it seems like improvisational music is the place that lends itself to that
mind-set because there isn't all this written music for it, you are required to figure out
ways to incorporate it’ (ibid).

Reflecting on the previous section regarding musical practice and technique, and
considering the views of the participants regarding improvisation and the five-string,
presents many insights into understanding the rise of the five-string fiddle in American
music. In the hands of the participants, the five-string fiddle has evolved a strong and
exciting musical identity, drawing on long existing idiomatic sounds, techniques and
approaches to performance, intersecting with existing and emerging repertoire, and
improvisation, in finding a central place in the contemporary American fiddle culture.
The position of the instrument can perhaps be looked at through understanding the
music it has inspired. The repertoire of the five-string fiddle player can be said to be the
idiomatic musical material that exists for the standard fiddle, further evolved by the
techniques discussed above in the context of the additional improvisational and
compositional possibilities presented by the five-string fiddle.

6.5 Understanding the Five-string’s Journey

Chapters 5 and 6 have presented the data which emerged regarding the musical
development of the instrument and the personal journeys of musicians involved. This
final section looks at the observations of the participants regarding the more general
state of play concerning the five-string fiddle. It also looks beyond their personal
musical use of the instrument, to consider what other factors have influenced the
popularisation of the five-string in recent years, and what some of the future possibilities of the five-string fiddle may be.

6.5.1 The rise of five-string fiddle

The participants all agree that the five-string fiddle has now established itself as a recognisable feature of American fiddle music. Glaser states that five-string fiddles ‘are really superb, they are superb for Jazz, and obviously they are superb for fiddle music because they have become so popular’. Trueman believes that the five-string is now ‘quite common’, suggesting that ‘if you're in an Old-Time session you wouldn't even notice somebody's playing a five-string’ (ibid). Noting the recent surge in popularity of the instrument, he observes: ‘It's really kind of even in the last five to on the outside ten years’ (ibid). Rioux draws similar conclusions regarding how the five-string has become integrated and understood, suggesting that in recent years it has become ‘a lot more common’ (ibid). Glaser and Hicks also speak of the increasingly widespread uptake of the five-string fiddle. According to Hicks, ‘there's a lot of the Bluegrass players that play them now’, a theme that is addressed by Glaser, who suggests that the five-string ‘has really established itself as the axe in Bluegrass especially, you know, and it's really become the axe for improvisers’ (ibid).

Rioux and Trueman both note a relationship between the ongoing rise in popularity of the five-string and its use by professional fiddle players. Rioux suggests that ‘more and more people who are on the national or international circuit are playing five-strings’ (ibid), adding to the increasing profile of the instrument. From the opposite perspective, Trueman believes that the five-string fiddle is less common with ‘the fiddlers who are out just fiddling as amateurs’ (ibid), stating: ‘My sense is that people ask now, of the serious fiddle players who don't play five string, well, why don't you play five string?’ (ibid), encapsulating his sense of the increasing pervasiveness of the five-string in the professional world. Rioux points to other professional fiddlers, such as Michael Cleveland and Kimber Ludiker, adding that professional players who play on five-string fiddles ‘are starting to tour more internationally now’, further illustrating the relationship she sees between professional fiddlers and the development of five-string. Driessen suggests: ‘It seems to be just kind of exploding’, and ‘it's not just in the U.S,
it’s cultures around the world, you know in terms of the chopping and the five-string’ (ibid).

Rabson, in her role as Professor in Berklee College of Music, is conscious of the significant interest and discussion that has emerged around the five-string in the education sphere. She states that in the Berklee string department they ‘talk about it all the time’ (ibid). According to Rabson, when she began teaching at Berklee College of Music, ‘Casey Driessen was the only one who had a five-string’. Rabson estimates that now ‘maybe 20% of students come in with a five-string instrument’ (ibid), noting that ‘some of them are electric, like the Mark Woods five, six and seven-string’. Rabson states that she has had three students who ‘before they graduated, bought a Silakowski’ (ibid), demonstrating the increasing uptake of the instrument amongst up and coming musicians studying in Berklee College of Music, and intent on a career as a professional musician on the instrument. For Trueman, the five-string demonstrates ‘the potential to be really liberating’, believing that ‘that's really important’ for music making, and for music education. Trueman describes that many musicians enjoy taking a ‘we could also do this, we could do that’, approach, in examining the musical possibilities, and he feels that ‘the five-string is actually suggestive of that, and that's part of the excitement about it’ (ibid).

Haas illustrates the increased interest around the five-string, describing the curiosity she regularly encounters regarding her instrument:

I get a lot of people asking me where you can get a five-string from, who do you recommend as a builder in this price range, who should I go to get a fiddle. I think even more and more all the time people are wanting them and wanting to know where they come from and are trying to figure out what the best ones are, and what's good for them (ibid).

Haas suggests that the construction and availability of five-strings has increased dramatically since she acquired her instruments: ‘I remember when I got this, a lot of people were just talking about just having four-strings converted, but that is totally different’ (ibid). Rioux also draws attention to recent developments in violin making, saying that ‘five-strings are being marketed more, in cheap lines too’ (ibid). She considers that:
Five-strings are going to be marketed to string teachers at schools so they don't have to keep picking up different instruments when they're in the classroom, they can have one instrument and demonstrate violin, viola and cello (ibid).

Haas similarly describes possible advantages for violin and viola doublers, suggesting ‘if you wanted both of those things and you wanted the ease of traveling with one instrument then it totally makes sense to have a five-string’ (ibid).

6.5.2 Looking to the future

The participants, primarily through their musical practice, and also through their reflections in the course of this research, have demonstrated that the five-string fiddle has established itself as central to their work. In turn, the five-string fiddle has forged a strong position in the contemporary fiddle scene. Trueman believes that this is hinged on the contemporary scene not being ‘burdened by some notion of how things are supposed to go’, a sentiment that ‘goes hand in hand with the five-string’ (ibid).

Looking to the future, and acknowledging the possibilities presented by the instrument, Rabson states: ‘I hope that composers in every style of music will put their minds to a five-string instrument’ (ibid). Driessen too feels that the future will show the five-string becoming more culturally widespread, and ‘see some written music for it by people that are composers of somewhat classical areas’ (ibid). Glaser probes ideas about the instrument in the classical world, and suggests that it would be interesting to hear a classical player ‘play complicated repertoire on a five-string, knowing that there wasn't anything written for the low notes’, or to ‘play some Bach or something on it, see what it feels like to play classical music on a five-string’ (ibid).

As someone who writes his own music, Driessen states that he is actively composing ‘melodies down there’, and developing a repertoire that requires a five-string. Consequently, if people are going to learn his music, and ‘play it as it's written, they'll have a five-string instrument in order to play those types of things’ (ibid). Haas makes similar projections regarding music that will be specific to the range of the five-string. She is particularly interested in the possibilities presented by the instrument in the solo setting in looking to how the use of the instrument will develop. In this regard, Haas recognises the stature of the instrument, ‘the fiddle being the instrument that it is, tried and true’ (ibid). Haas notes that ‘the fiddle tunes that already exist are so important to
the way the fiddle has evolved’. She describes how ‘it sounds so great to play on the a and e strings’, on four and five-string fiddles, but she feels that fiddle music could be developed more in the low register ‘in more solo settings’, using the five-string (ibid). Rioux makes a similar point regarding the repertoire and the influence of the low notes on the future path. She observes that ‘a lot of the people who are at the forefront right now are using five-string, and so, those low notes are out there’. She suggests that ‘since people are getting five-strings because they are hearing and seeing us play it, it [the five-string] will probably shape the future a lot’ (ibid). In this regard, Rioux believes that the five-string forms a natural place in the evolution of American fiddle music, as ‘people who have five-strings now have one foot in tradition and one foot in progress’ (ibid). She states that because of this ‘the people who are at the forefront of the scene can contribute to the future knowledge’, while ‘knowing this is not necessarily how it was done originally, but this is how we are doing it now’ (ibid).

The participants are in full agreement that the five-string fiddle is here to stay, and there is an overarching sense of possibility attached to it. Driessen considers that the five-string ‘will just continue, and we're at the beginning of something really cool’, while Haas hopes that ‘everyone keeps wanting them, they are so fun’ (ibid).

Offering some final words on the topic, Hicks reflects, having played five-string for fifty years:

I think it's becoming a part of the sound of American fiddling. I don't know what the future will bring for the five-string fiddle, but I don't think it will ever stop, I think it will keep going now (ibid).

The five-string violin professor, Rabson, states: ‘… and I'm looking forward to a really well made six-string instrument, where the sixth string really speaks beautifully, I haven't seen one yet but I'm ready for it’ (ibid).

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has primarily described the participants’ use of the five-string fiddle in their own musical practice. As artist level professional practitioners, the participants contribute richly to the discussion, presenting a detailed picture of the five-string fiddle in their musical lives. An overarching theme of possibility and inspiration is apparent in
the words and music of all the musicians, and a strong statement emerges that the five-string fiddle has become established and understood in American fiddle music, and with this, the future presented by the five-string fiddle is rich in possibility.

Many of the participants discussed how the five-string has inspired them to reimagine the musical role of the fiddle itself, and in doing so, reimagine their music also. This presents a feeling of reinvention, and rediscovery, that is perhaps most apparent in the five-string fiddle’s evolving and perhaps defining role in accompaniment and rhythm section playing, using the chop and the other techniques discussed in this chapter. The same sense of possibility is equally encapsulated in the participants’ comments regarding arranging and composition, performance, solo and ensemble playing, improvisation and education, all aspects of musical life.

From simply playing melodies transposed down an octave, giving familiar ideas a new space to occupy, to improvising sections of solos and writing music that specifically calls on the c string, the five-string emerges in this chapter as clearly representing a new voice and choice to the creative contemporary fiddle player, as evidenced in the work of those participating in this research. The additional string also offers previously unavailable textural and timbral possibilities, which are further exploited and developed by those participants who apply cross-tuning techniques to the five-string, and used in composition, improvisation, and accompaniment and rhythmic situations.

Improvisation is illuminated in the research as being very important in the development of the five-string fiddle. As many of the participants point out, there is very little music written specifically for the five-string, and so there is a sense of discovery that can only be traversed through the musical curiosity embodied in an improvisatory approach to an instrument with such pre-attached musical stature.

This research examines what it is about the five-string fiddle that presents it as such a powerful musical option to the participants of this research. Chapters 5 and 6 have presented the data emerging from this research in that regard. Such understandings in turn inform the musical possibilities presented by the five-string fiddle to the wider world. And this wider, yet personal, context will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 7
THE VOICE OF THE FIVE-STRING FIDDLER/RESEARCHER

7.1 Introduction

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the initial inspiration for this research lay firmly in my own musical curiosity and ambitions regarding the five-string fiddle. My interest in this research was first ignited upon seeing and hearing a five-string fiddle, in the hands of Casey Driessen, teaching *Chops and Grooves* in a masterclass DVD. My reaction at that time was 'Wow…What is that?...How is he doing that?’ Such fundamental questions ultimately fuelled this enquiry, though little did I know then the significance my initial encounter with Casey's five-string would prove to have. As my work developed, I found myself crossing paths again with Casey, and also with many other incredible fiddlers, including those who became participants of this research. This engagement occurred both in my formal role as researcher, but also in my consistent interaction with the music and fiddle playing of the participants, and with developments around the five-string fiddle. Throughout the research, I was endeavouring to further develop my own musical practice. I, too, was playing on a five-string fiddle, drawing influence from the practice of the participants and how they had approached the instrument in their music making.

As described in Chapter 4, I immersed myself in social research methods in finding the best way of addressing my research questions; however, I was also convinced that my own practice should form some additional perspective for the study. How had my interaction with a group of elite fiddler players, who, through their work had activated a phenomenal surge of interest in a new version of one of the world's most renowned musical instruments, have consequences for my musical life? Having collected and presented the findings of my research through the focus of qualitative research, I felt that incorporating a reflection on the impacts of the research journey, for my own music, would serve to complete the circle. Doing so, also, prompts another way in which to consider the words and music of the participants, on the five-string fiddle itself. This chapter discusses this work within the overarching context of the research conclusions.
7.2 The Research: A Personal Context

My primary motivations in music have always been a pre-occupation with harmonic and rhythmic parameters, interests that have not always been as compatible with my main musical instrument, the fiddle as I may have wished. While playing fiddle tunes, and improvising solos, forms a significant part of what I do, I have always gravitated naturally to what could be described as a musically supporting role, motivated by my interest in arranging, in harmony and chordal structure, and, also, by my love for any music that really ‘grooves’. Thus, it is perhaps understandable, that as my relationship with music and fiddle playing developed, I became less concerned with playing the tune, the exact melody or the pre-described line. This developed naturally towards activating interests in composition, song writing and improvisation, and in developing my skills on guitar, an instrument that facilitated the musical contribution I wanted to make. Thankfully, this has proved to be worthwhile, presenting me with many professional opportunities. Yet, if asked, I instinctively replied, ‘I play the fiddle’.

On a trip to America, to Boston in 2007, I took a visit to Berklee College of Music. I wandered out of the College, further up Bolyston St, to the Berklee bookshop, happy to buy a wealth of texts used on the various courses in music composition, Jazz improvisation and arranging. This material remains a large part of my continued learning. On that same trip, I picked up some fiddle DVDs. One in particular, called Chops and Grooves caught my attention, discussed in Chapter 3. It featured the fiddle player Darol Anger, whose music I was somewhat familiar with, and two other musicians, with the cover stating: ‘Produce exciting grooves that you'll be able to use to accompany musical genres from Bluegrass to Celtic, swing to ska, Latin to rock and funk’ (2005). It was a couple of months later, back in Dublin, before I put on the disc and had a look. Little did I know then, of the impact this viewing would have on me; I had never heard string instruments groove like this. Finally, I thought, if I can get this chop thing together, then there may be a way to reinvigorate my music on the fiddle. Getting the chop thing together proved, and continues to be, no mean feat. I soon discovered I was not the only one taking that journey; the role of string instruments in acoustic music was changing dramatically with the advent of these new sounds.

If that was a big moment, there was more to come. Half way through the film, Darol asked the ‘other’ fiddle player to talk about his chop. The other fiddle player was Casey...
Driessen, and his chop was mind blowing. I hit rewind many times that day, and since. Driessen's chop, to my ears, comprised all the constituents of the rhythm section of the funkiest band imaginable, bass lines, bass drum, snare and high-hats; it was all there. And, there was something in particular about the sound of his fiddle which really caught my interest - it had five strings.

Reflecting on this now, I feel right in describing this as my eureka moment. I knew what I wanted to do with the fiddle, and I knew I wanted a five-string fiddle to do it with. I had heard of five-string electric fiddles before; however, electric instruments had never really captured my interest. However, on hearing the amazing sounds, which Casey Driessen pulled from his well-worn instrument, my search began immediately for an acoustic five-string fiddle. Before long, I had a cheap Chinese-made five-string in my hands, and despite it not being much tonally, it became my main instrument almost immediately. I investigated makers and commissioned a handmade five-string fiddle from American instrument maker Barry Dudley and got to work.

### 7.3 Examples of Practice

In developing this research, my own attitudes and approaches to music making have been significantly developed across a range of musical styles, yet hopefully unified by my personalised approach to my instrument. The five-string fiddle has proved a very positive musical force for me. With it I have found new ways to participate musically, and evolve my musical ambitions and motivations, which, I can say for certain, I would not have found on the four-string, or as it is known to most, the fiddle.

The following section contextualises each of the musical examples presented and discusses them in terms of my use of the five-string fiddle. The examples were never intended to demonstrate any single, or list of techniques or musical approaches, but, they aim, in combination, to offer some reflection on my work over the past years, illustrating how I have used the five-string fiddle, and how I will use it in the future. This work represents a cross section sample of the influence of my research that has naturally permeated both consciously and unconsciously into my music making, encompassing the sounds and techniques that I have adopted and personalised since I
moved to playing the five-string fiddle, in search of my own musical voice on the instrument.

In presenting these personal examples of practice, I felt it appropriate to work the way I most often work, and so try to mirror the naturally occurring performance contexts, across a range of musical styles. In this spirit, I just played music, with a small cross section of the people I often play with, without overthinking, or even much pre-planning. We just did what we always do; we just played. The production values are intentionally uncomplicated; one video camera with built in audio recorder, which I set up myself, in addition to using close miking where possible, to ensure some flexibility later when mixing the sound levels. Example 7.4 was filmed by a cameraman using two cameras, due to the larger amount of musicians involved. Ultimately, each example is what it is, a musical performance, one that could and would have been different each time it happened, but that simply serves to illustrate a snapshot of where the research, and the five-string fiddle has brought me to in the past few years. I don’t present music notation in discussing the examples, as they are not intended for deep musical analysis, rather, they are another way to consider the research findings.

7.3.1 *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps* (Five-string fiddle and guitar)

I first heard this beautiful traditional tune played by the fiddler Martin Hayes on his recording, *Under the Moon* (1995), and I learned to play it at that time. Over the years, as I moved away from playing tunes, I forgot about it; however, while recently searching for some tunes to teach students, I encountered it again. In addition to teaching it, I began to play it in regular performances with the guitarist Eamon Brady, quickly identifying the same beauty in it that I had many years earlier.

The typical and long established setting of an Irish fiddle tune such as *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps*, would see the fiddle play the melody repeatedly through its binary form. While in the contemporary setting, the advent of increasingly sophisticated accompaniment techniques from instruments like piano, guitar and bouzouki, could be heard supplying rhythmic and harmonic support as the soloist plays.
The melody is strong, and it certainly needs no refinement, yet it is full of possibility. For me, there is an inherent flexibility in most fiddle tunes, and, over time, the openness that this melody suggests resulted in my approaching it more and more through the perspective of my own musical sensibilities, and, in particular, addressing the harmonic possibilities presented by melody on the fiddle. This happened naturally, and over time, and is typical of what happens with tunes and songs as I develop my own playing and understanding of them. I have increasingly found myself drawing on the five-string fiddle to create meaningful accompaniment parts, pushing me to exercise my own musical ideas regarding parameters that may otherwise be left to the accompanist, such as harmonic and rhythmic choices.

In this performance, (See Video 7.1) rather than playing the melody supported by guitar backing only, the arrangement is structured around alternating the soloist and accompanist roles. This approach was widely discussed by the participants in Chapter 6. Haas, Rioux, Trueman and Driessen, in particular, all describe how they often move between these roles, and all point to the five-string fiddle as being central to creating the musical space for this to work. They discussed being able to get out of the way of the melody, and supporting the melody player while having a creative input with chord, rhythmic and even textural choices. Creating musical textures with double stops, drones, and pulsing rhythms patterns all contribute to a rich opportunity for the five-string fiddle to advance in an accompaniment setting, as evidenced in the practice of the participants.

In this arrangement, the tune is played three times in total. The fiddle plays the melody the first time, the guitar plays it the second time, with the fiddle as accompanist. The third time around, the melody is transposed down an octave on the fiddle, exploiting the low range of the c string of the five-string, where the fiddle again takes a back-up role, before taking the B section melody to finish. In Chapter 6, Trueman and Haas spoke about melodic transposition being a fundamental way in which to explore the extended range offered by the five-string fiddle. For Trueman, transposition to the low register of the fiddle, in turn, brings about improvisation, as the familiar finger patterns of the tune are displaced and new open strings become available. Transposition on the five-string immediately creates a new perspective, and, in this example, presents new ways to approach the melody.
Bonaparte Crossing the Alps proves to inspire a rich palette for the sounds and musical range of the five-string fiddle. I feel that the instrument easily and naturally assumes the role of musical accompaniment that is heard in the second and third iteration of the tune in this performance. In thinking about possible harmonic approaches for the five-string, I endeavor to consider it from the perspective of the instrument itself, rather than the perspective of knowing what perhaps a guitar or piano player might do. I am guided by what is available on my instrument to present the melody in a new way, that is playable on the instrument, and that speaks to my own musical and stylistic tastes, an aspiration that I hope is demonstrated in both the harmonic and melodic choices made in the performance of this beautiful fiddle tune.

7.3.2 I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man (Five-string fiddle, vocal/ukulele)
As stated above, I have always loved music that grooves. Chapter 3 outlined the term, and also highlighted how the concept has permeated the work of Driessen and Haas, amongst others. In this example, (See Video 7.2) played with David Geraghty on vocals and ukulele, we interpret one of our favourite songs, Prince’s classic, I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man (1987). David, of the renowned band, BellX1, is one of many contemporary artists I have been fortunate enough to work with in recent years, in conjunction with the research that was developing. I played my five-string fiddle on his record Join Me in the Pines (2014) and performed live with him, during which time we discovered our mutual admiration for this song. As I was reflecting on how best to look at my own playing in the context of the research, the song, and David, came immediately to mind. I felt that David, as a record producer, had used the five-string fiddle parts I had played, the range, the timbre, very musically on his record, he understood the sound and contribution I wanted to make on the instrument.

But Prince? On the fiddle? The original version of I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man is just full of groove and musicality; it was one of my favourite songs when I first got into music as a teenager. I played it in my first band, and it features a guitar solo that makes everyone want to play electric guitar! I had learned the solo (badly!) on electric guitar first time around, but purposely didn’t revisit the original in advance of this recording. I wasn’t sure there would even be a solo section. But when we played it for the first time, and got to the solo section, a version of it just came out. Having discussed improvisation in such detail throughout the research, I have to state that the
solo I played here is very influenced by the original solo from the Prince recording. Even in terms of tone, I feel I gravitated towards an edgy, harmonic sound, not unlike the electric guitar.

Playing with singers is something I love to do, and have done a lot of, in the recording studio and live performance context. The fiddle is similar in musical range to many singers, and while the c string may only offer seven additional notes, they are, as Glaser remarked, in Chapter 6, a very important addition. Many of the participants spoke of the usefulness of additional range of the five-string in playing with singers, and looking to the work of Haas, Driessen and Rioux, for example, it is something they also do regularly, as discussed in the earlier chapters. Reflecting on my own work in this context, I feel, similarly, that the five-string fiddle is particularly well suited for playing with singers across a broad range of styles. It is not only the low notes of the c string in isolation I feel that make this the case, though they are of course very powerful. There is also something significant for me about playing notes on the g string, knowing there are even lower notes available to the left of the fingerboard, additional textures and timbres that can be brought into play in the moment. I identify with Rioux in this respect, when she describes, in Chapter 6, the improvisational elements to her back up play. The five-strings additional resonances, and new possibilities for double stop playing are very well suited to encouraging harmonic thinking, an approach not always associated with playing fiddle.

In *I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man*, I draw inspiration from the words and practice of the participants, playing in the rhythm section, playing with singers, and improvising and taking a solo. Watching and listening back to the recording I can reflect that all the backup parts were improvised. It is a subtle type of improvisation, similar in spirit to that described in Chapter 6 by Haas and Trueman. The aim is to enhance the harmonic movement, contribute, but not over power, rhythmically, and, in particular, keep in mind that, with songs, it is all, ultimately, about presenting the vocal melody in the best possible light.
7.3.3 *The Musical Priest (Five-string fiddle, uilleann pipes)*

Similarly to American music, the fiddle is central to the sound of traditional Irish music. I have played music for many years with the uilleann piper Brian Ó hUiginn, and, like most Irish fiddlers, I typically played the melody in unison with the pipes when we played tunes together. However, as stated above, I personally have always been very interested in wider aspects of music, and had naturally gravitated towards playing guitar or piano in the traditional music setting, looking to find musically satisfying ways to participate, particularly in accompanying and recontextualising the melody. Examples of this include taking that role for Brian’s MMus Recital in the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, and on his album *Tionchar* (2010).

Brian’s music is also very rhythmically driven, and over the years he has played many tunes while I have practised using the five-string fiddle in the accompanying role. In this example, I draw on the chop bowing technique that emerged as very significant in discussions with, and in the practice of many of the participants in the research. This performance of the three-part reel, *The Musical Priest* (See Video 7.3), elaborates the role of the fiddle in such settings, in particular regarding how the five-string fiddle can contribute harmonically and rhythmically, and in my case, how I can occupy that space on my main instrument, the fiddle.

The accompaniment of traditional Irish dance tunes has an evolving history. The music itself is essentially melodic, but often with clear harmonic implications inherent in the tune. Harmony, though, is not an essential part of the tradition in the same way it is in American music, for example. Since the early recordings of fiddler Michael Coleman in the 1920s, there were various approaches towards providing harmonic and rhythmic backing to dance music, using piano, guitar and bouzouki in particular. Backing styles have included relatively simple vamping styles, to more modally open sounding approaches on guitar, with some incorporating influence from Jazz, Rock and Classical music. What is clear though is that much of this harmonic development has drawn positively on external stylistic influence. Exemplifying this, the guitar is now a staple of any session, yet it is a relatively new addition to the sound of traditional Irish Music.

The possibilities presented by the five-string fiddle for back-up play are illuminated by many of the participants of this research. The extended lower range, as discussed above,
creates rich new harmonic possibilities, which in the context of the typical melodic range of most fiddle tunes, can be situated below the melody, a point made by Haas. The research has also highlighted the emergence of the chop in American fiddle music, and its use by many of the participants on five-string fiddle. During the research I have developed my own use of the chop, and in this example, taken the role I would have previously played on guitar, creating a rhythmic and harmonic setting for The Musical Priest. My approach involves a mixture of double stop playing, and chop rhythms, evoking a fairly static A minor sound for the first part of the tune. The second section in C major is very well suited to demonstrating the possibilities, the double stops outlining the i-ii-v harmonic sequence that the melody suggests. In the third section, I suggest a D minor sound, substituting for the A minor, to create some harmonic variation.

In essence, this example is inspired by the rhythmic potential of the five-string fiddle. The chop is an on-going learning curve and I will continue to develop my use of the five-string fiddle rhythmically and harmonically. As stated above, I traced my interest in playing five-string and conducting this research through first hearing Casey Driessen chop on his five-string, and recognising immediately that this was a sound and a musical contribution I wanted to make.

7.3.4 Fandango (Five-string fiddle in ensemble)

The violin/fiddle has made many notable appearances in rock and pop music. One of my early inspirations in playing music was the sound of the fiddle on records by The Waterboys, and Van Morrison, amongst many others. Listening and playing along with such recordings encouraged me to follow a similar path as the fiddle players that contributed so organically to songs known and loved by many. Immersing myself in this world also introduced me to improvisation, and to arranging and composition, and to my love of pop songs and playing with singers.

In recent years, I have had the opportunity to play with many established rock/pop acts, performing live and in the recording studio, and the five-string fiddle has contributed greatly to these experiences. The extended range of five-string has proved to be very useful in such contexts, for similar reasons that are outlined by many participants in Chapter 6. The low range is particularly suited to playing with singers and other melodic instruments, as discussed above regarding video 7.3. It can avoid the musical
register of the main melody line; yet it still contributes melodically, harmonically and texturally. This attribute of the five-string was discussed by many of the interviewees, such as Rioux, Haas, and Driessen regarding their use of the low range of the c string in a group situation. In my experience in playing the five-string, I have consistently found it to be extremely well suited to such musical contexts, and I identify strongly with the research outcomes discussed in Chapter 6.

The extended range is also very useful in layering full string arrangements in the recording studio, an approach that has become an important part of my studio session work, combining my playing with my interest in arranging. These studio projects in turn, often lead to live performance, where the layered recording must be simplified and rearranged again. This is exemplified in my work with the successful Irish band Hamsandwich, who are central to video example 7.4. Having been involved in the recording of the band’s album *Stories from the Surface* (2015), including the song *Fandango* featured here, this example shows the five-string at work in a larger group format. The original recording featured many layered fiddle parts, all played by myself using the five-string. This acoustic version of *Fandango* (See Video 7.4) features two violins, trumpet and piano/percussion, in addition to the core members of the band.

Chapters 5 and 6 pointed to a feeling amongst the participants that the five-string fiddle encouraged new ways of musical participation for the fiddle, and the fiddle player. Example 7.4 serves as an opportunity to reflect on this theme in the context of my own musical participation. Making music with other people, and participating in a bigger musical experience has always been important to me. In this example, the strings assume a background role, as they typically do in this context. The first notes heard on this recording from the strings are played on my c string, which is used to create a low c drone over the opening section. It’s a textural approach, something that the band have associated with the five-string; ‘Oh can you do that drone thing here’.

Despite the background nature of the fiddle in this example, there is always a rich sense of musical satisfaction for me in contributing to performances like this. I described above, how playing along with records while learning the fiddle inspired me greatly, and having the opportunity to do it for real on a regular basis is a true privilege. Since
moving to the five-string fiddle, I have had the pleasure of performing and recording with many artists and feel the instrument itself has been central to that privilege.

7.4 Conclusions in Action

I have drawn rich influence and inspiration from the practice of the participants throughout this research in terms of the technical and stylistic approaches they demonstrate in playing the five-string fiddle. Equally, I have learned considerably from their overarching approach to music making and their journey toward a musical life, of which the five-string fiddle has played a significant part. The research has identified a sense of musical possibility that I very much identify with and aspire to. With the five-string fiddle, I have evolved an already present passionate interest in the fiddle, fiddle music, and in my own practice, that has been sustained and enhanced throughout this research, and which I am certain will evolve with me in the years ahead. The examples discussed above have allowed me to reflect on my own journey as a fiddle player, in the context of my role as a researcher. This involves identifying and absorbing the various musical concepts and techniques emerging in the research findings, as innovated and discussed by some of the greatest fiddle players in American music, and on my own five-string fiddle, and looking at how they could become an integral part of the music I want to make, and the musician I want to be now and in the future.

The examples resonate naturally with the research findings as a whole, yet also aspire to reflect my own personal musical voice and evoke how that has developed with the five-string fiddle. In approaching these four musical contexts, I have looked and listened again to the words and music of the participants. In my own journey on the five-string fiddle, I identify similar reasons, motivations and musical ambitions on the instrument that emerge in the over-arching research. My own experiences and understandings have allowed me to reflect on the meaning in research outcomes, and so, to address the research questions with a more personal insight.

Why has the five-string fiddle become so popular in recent years? In my own experience, the instrument inspires a rich reimagining of the fiddle and the fiddler, their musical roles and contexts, and the musical contribution they makes. The five-string presents new creative musical possibilities in wide-ranging rhythmic and harmonic situations, and inspires a freedom for those who seek it, from the expectations of
musical traditions and instrumental conventions. The world of the five-string presents a new way to look at, understand, and most importantly, play the fiddle.
CHAPTER 8
RESEARCH SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction
This research was undertaken to examine why the five-string fiddle has become so increasingly popular in the past ten years. In doing so, the work interacted with a diverse sampling of artist level fiddlers, and their musical practice. All are professional musicians, and many of the participants also work in academic settings. These musicians emerged in the early research stages as very strong examples, from various backgrounds, which together represent a rich sampling of the sound of the contemporary American fiddle, and in particular, the five-string fiddle. There are three musical journeys that permeate the research; that of the participants musical journey on the five-string fiddle, the journey of the five-string itself, and also my own personal journey, both as a researcher and a fiddle player on the five-string. These perspectives are explored in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

While the five-string fiddle has been present in the work of American fiddle masters Johnny Gimble and Bobby Hicks since the 1960s, the past ten years in particular have evidenced the five-string fiddle becoming the instrument of choice for some of America’s top musicians, including the artist level participants of this research. This development is significant for American fiddle music and the inherent possibilities for the fiddle, and also in the context of the musical and cultural stature of the fiddle/violin itself. The rise of the five-string, as explored by this research, also evokes the creative possibilities the instrument presents to all musicians who seek new ways to develop their musical practice on the fiddle.

This final chapter summarises the research findings, includes some personal reflections on the research process, and considers possible areas of related study, all in bringing the work to conclusion.

8.2 Summarising the Outcomes
The outcomes of this research, firstly, establish the definitive emergence of the five-string fiddle, and substantiate that the five-string has now become an accepted and recognised part of the mainstream instrumentation in American vernacular music such
as Bluegrass and Old-Time, and many other contemporary styles. The research identifies that some of the most respected, and influential fiddlers in the contemporary American fiddle scene are now performing on five-string instruments.

The history of the instrument, known to some as the violin, and to some as the fiddle, as discussed in Chapter 1, shows it to have remained relatively physically unchanged since it first emerged in the sixteenth century. During this time, it has both inspired and been inspired by a myriad of musical styles and traditions, occupying a central role in many, including American vernacular music. As described throughout the early chapters, the fiddle has been extensively written for, and comprehensively written about. It has attracted universal recognition, and now, this research has illuminated how the fiddle has established a further musical voice. The research establishes new understandings concerning the cultural and musical position of the five-string fiddle after ten years of significant development, and presents the first in-depth contribution to literature regarding the instrument’s development and impact to date.

The research draws heavily on the reflections of the participants in presenting its findings, but as also discussed throughout the research, the impact of the five-string fiddle is as equally apparent in the musical practice of the participants. From these perspectives the research identifies the musical reasons that continue to inspire the instrument’s ascent, such as its increased use in musical accompaniment, improvisation, arranging and composition. As discussed in Chapter 6, the musical practice of the participants thoroughly encapsulates such musical possibility, and the impact of the five-string is richly demonstrated in their work. The research demonstrates how the five-string fiddle presents new musical possibilities for many players, including of course the participants, but also for many others, including myself, as outlined in Chapter 7.

Concurrently, the high profile impact of the musical, creative, and technical approaches to the instrument evidenced in the practice of the participants has served to further promote interest and development around the five-string fiddle. This emerges for example, in how many participants described their personal journey to the five-string, first seeing and hearing it in the hands of another fiddler, and being immediately inspired to have one. I personally identify deeply with this inspiration. In Chapter 7 I
describe first seeing Casey Driessen using his five-string fiddle, and being completely amazed by the musical sound he was making. This moment of inspiration has remained central to my musical journey on the five-string, and in my journey through this research.

Throughout this research the musical impact of the five-string fiddle has been found pivotal to reimagined musical roles for the instrument itself. This is perhaps most appreciable through the five-strings close association with groove based rhythmic and harmonic accompaniment playing styles, and the chop bowing technique. Participants such as Driessen, Haas, Rioux and Rabson have all actively evolved a rhythmic, harmonic and back-up role for the fiddle, each in their own individual way, which they all confirm draws in particular on the extended musical range and timbre of the five-string instrument. The popularisation of such groove based styles, as discussed by Brittany Haas for example, in the context of her work with the highly acclaimed band Crooked Still, have in turn drawn wider attention to the five-string fiddle and furthered interest in it. Beyond the five-string fiddle, the chop is fast becoming a ubiquitous sound in contemporary American fiddle music. However, this research does observe a close association between the recent developments around the chop and many fiddlers who play the five-string. This is perhaps particularly inspired by Driessen’s high profile foregrounding of the technique so compellingly in recent years, as pointed to by many of the other participants in the discussions in Chapters 5 and 6.

The particular musical suitability of the five-string fiddle for harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment is highlighted by the research as presenting significant reason as to why musicians such as the participants are so attracted to the instrument. The musical practice of Trueman, Rioux, Haas, Rabson and Driessen all demonstrates the sound of the five-string in various ways in this musical setting.

The findings also point to the five-string being particularly attractive to improvising musicians. This can be seen through the virtuosic improvised solo encountered in Bluegrass and Jazz, as discussed and practiced by Driessen, Hicks, and Glaser, and equally in the more subtle melodic, harmonic, rhythmic and textural improvisations described by Trueman, Rioux, Rabson and Haas, exemplified in their work. The additional string, by its very being, is inherently suggestive of both the opportunity and
necessity for improvisation, as the existing repertoire is understandably so perfectly entwined with the musical range and history of the four-string. Improvisation is an important musical ingredient that runs through most American fiddle music at various levels. The additional melodic range, and rhythmic and harmonic possibility presented by the five-string is widely described as being improvisationally inspirational by the participants of the research, presenting further understandings regarding the increased take up of the five-string.

The musical possibilities presented by the five-string fiddle are also found to have impacted on the ever evolving fiddle repertoire. This emerges in particular in terms of new musical compositions, but also in terms of new arrangements, and in again, the context of new musical roles for the fiddle. Participants such as Trueman, Rabson and Driessen all discussed the use of the five-string in a compositional setting. In addition to lower melodic range, and the extended the musical range of the fiddle tune itself, parameters such as harmonic rhythm, texture, and timbre, are all considered by the participants to form a significant part of the evolving voice of the five-string fiddle from a compositional perspective. These sounds are cultivated drawing on the extended low range of the five-string, in conjunction with the range of idiomatic techniques, giving new and further life to the sound of the American fiddle.

Reflecting on the musical impact of the five-string fiddle in the context of the outcomes of this exploration, the research finds that with the five-string, a new type of fiddle player has become apparent, embracing the emergence of new roles and possibilities for the fiddle and fiddle music. In the voice of the five-string fiddle we hear everything that the fiddle is known and loved for, and more. Like all fiddlers, the five-string fiddler can play the tune or solo, but also can, and wants to accompany the tune or song, providing the rhythmic and harmonic context, and making fiddle music groove in ways we have never before.

**8.3 Implications of the Research**

The research has been concerned with questions of how and why concerning the five-string fiddle phenomenon; the emanating outcomes are discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 and are summarised above. In collating and discussing the research findings, some interesting ‘bigger picture’ observations and implications emerge, that in turn present a
way of further framing the five-string fiddle in the overarching musical context of the American vernacular, and musical practice.

The research encounters a wide diversity of musical backgrounds and styles, journeys, and musical approaches to the five-string fiddle. This suggests that the five-string fiddle’s own journey through American fiddling has been far reaching, and that the instrument has attracted widespread interest, and it is recognised as significant in the context and ongoing development of the diversity of American musical styles. Regarding the implications of this research, the work demonstrates the broader musical potential of the five-string fiddle and suggests that the instrument presents wide ranging musical possibilities for practitioners, outside of the stylistic or geographical focus of this research.

There is a deep-rooted sense of change, reinvention and innovation that permeates all of the discussion presented in this research. Interacting with the participants, and engaging with their musical practice, an overarching culture of musical openness is consistently encountered. The participants are all passionately motivated by musical progress and change. They pioneer new musical ideas in a world that concurrently draws richly on tradition. This tradition includes the music itself, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2; comprising an eclectic mix of cultural and social influences, drawing on European and African lineage. Yet it is of course distinctly American music, as described in Chapter 3 in the context of the idiomatic sound of the American fiddle. The participants also confront the tradition and cultural stature of the violin. They demonstrate that this instrument, the fiddle, still has the ability to surprise, and to change, to inspire musical, and indeed physical reinvention. The musical work of the participants evidences rich innovation. This can be observed across their musical practice, and also in their wider contributions to the fiddle world, such as writings and in teaching. Particularly in the reimagining of the musical role of the fiddle itself, including the elaborating of new techniques, through use of improvisation and composition, the participants have demonstrated the powerful possibilities presented by the five-string fiddle for their work.

The five-string can be heard voicing a myriad of musical sounds and styles. Whether playing traditional fiddle music melodies, pop songs, contemporary improvisations, or
taking the role of musical accompanist, the five-string fiddle confronts the very traditions it is such a central part of. In the same way that it is acceptable, and even desirable for the fiddle to gain an extra string, it is equally normal to do so much more on the instrument than would have been heard in the past, such as playing the drums and bass, all at the same time. There is open-mindedness that surrounds the world of the five-string fiddle, a sense that is very evident in the words and practice of the participants, and indicative of the musical journey of the instrument to date.

I have approached my own practice on the five-string fiddle aspiring to similar musical openness. I have drawn inspiration from my immersion in this sense of reinvention and possibility surrounding the five-string throughout the course of the research. My own examples of practice presented in Chapter 7 attend to demonstrating that these possibilities hold a wider significance and that they are musically flexible, and that the five-string fiddle can be elaborated in a range of musical settings. This research suggests that the five-string fiddle can present a comparable sense of musical possibility to other musical styles, cultures and players, and similarly it can inspire new stylistic developments, as the research has shown it to have done in it’s journey so far through American music.

Also at the heart of the five-string fiddle’s development is how it has become central in inspiring new ways of musical participation for the fiddle player. As stated many times throughout this research, the fiddle’s central role in American and other music, such as Irish music, has seen it for the most part play the tune. It does this brilliantly; the music has evolved in conjunction with the fiddle and those who play the tunes on it. The five-string fiddle is equally suited to playing the tune, and this is something that all the participants do on the instrument. The research shows how many of the participants have stretched the possibilities of the fiddle, drawing on the extended range of the c string. From the self-contained duo playing of Haas and Rioux, and Haas and Trueman, that encompass a wide variety of harmonic, rhythmic, and textural approaches in providing support to the soloist, to the contemporary rhythm section inspired playing of Rabson, to the tour de force rhythmic playing of Driessen, the five-string fiddle can be seen to be particularly suited to having a new role in musical accompaniment. This reinforces the wider possibilities of the instrument for many styles of instrumental and song based music, a theme I draw much inspiration from personally in my day-to-day
musical work, and explored in particular in my video examples 7.1 and 7.3, as discussed Chapter 7.

The participants work at the highest musical levels and are widely regarded as being amongst the finest musicians around. Therefore, like any professional musician, they would of course want and need to play on the very best instruments possible. In the case of this group of fiddle players, the research indicates that they that they do just that; their fiddles happen to have an extra string. In their hands the five-string fiddle has well and truly arrived. The impact of the instrument to date suggests that the fiddle, fiddle players, and fiddle music, are all open to change, and reinvention, and that the five-string has been so inspirational to such developments in American vernacular in recent years suggests exciting implications for many fiddle players around the world.

8.4 Reflecting on the Methodology

As discussed in Chapter 4, the research draws primarily on a social research methodology, centered on the interview for data gathering, along with historical analysis. The musical practice of the participants; the sound of the American fiddle, is also addressed throughout the work. Examples of practice are drawn upon in both setting the scene in the early chapters, and particularly in illuminating the research data in Chapters 5 and 6. The five-string fiddle is additionally considered in the context of the research findings through my own researcher practice, as described in Chapter 7. A selection of musical examples of participant and researcher practice are included with the thesis submission, demonstrating the sound of the five-string fiddle in a way that music notation, or indeed words could never truly communicate.

Reflecting on the methodological approach undertaken, the consistent engagement with the fiddle music of the participants, and the sound of the five-string fiddle, all while under the context of social research, I am very satisfied with richness and insights achieved. In this work, the thoughts and experiences of the participants are explored regarding a wide range of topics concerning the research questions, and five-string fiddle. These include details of a personal, cultural and of course, musical nature, regarding the popularisation of the five-string fiddle and what the five-string means for them, together with its contribution to their musical life. The findings emerging from the interviews are presented and discussed, and illustrated through related video
examples of the participants practice in Chapters 5 and 6. This use of video contributes significantly, I feel, to the picture created by the research, demonstrating the five-string fiddle in the hands of many of its greatest exponents to date.

The use of technology and the Internet played an important part in the research. Listening, looking, and reflecting formed a significant part of the early research, and was particularly informative to Chapter 2, in allowing the would-be participants to emerge in the most natural way, through their music. The widespread visibility of the five-string in the recorded literature that surrounds the participants, such as on iTunes, and on YouTube meant the practice of the participants, and the sound of the five-string fiddle was always central to the work. This is similarly true concerning the overarching history and diversity of American vernacular music itself, which is widely archived and available online. In addition to primarily informing the research itself, the sound of American vernacular, and the American fiddle in all its voices continues to surprise and inspire me, as it has done throughout the process.

The use of Skype in interviewing some of the participants proved to be very satisfactory, and I would suggest it as being a very viable and reliable research tool. Reflecting on the online interview process and the literature discussed in Chapter 4 concerning 'Voice over Internet Protocol' (VoIP) technology in research, I can speak very positively about my personal experience. In analysing my work I identified similar levels of richness emerging across all interviews, whether they were undertaken in person or online.

I also reflect positively on the contribution made by the CAQ-DAS Transana, which I used extensively during the data analysis process. Transana allowed me to navigate the interview data from many perspectives, to distill and code the emerging themes, and to listen and understand the words of the participants, and find answers to the research questions.

Coming to the research as a practicing musician I drew, and continue to draw inspiration from all aspects of the work. The social research methodology created the space and context for me to consider knowledge itself, my understandings of the world, and to recognise my role as researcher in contributing new knowledge. My consistent
engagement with the musical practice of the participants inspired my own development of the five-string fiddle, across a range of professional musical outlets, such as performance and recording. On reflection I feel that these interactions, social research, listening, and playing created a knowledge loop that sustained and guided my work as five-string fiddle researcher.

8.5 Possible Future Research
With this study completed, I feel there now exists other possible avenues of research regarding the five-string fiddle that can in the future contribute further to the understandings collated here. I incorporated my own musical practice in this research in aiming to best understand and present the data emerging from the participants who were central to this project. There are, I would suggest, further opportunities to examine the five-string instrument through a practice-led perspective. This could, for example, involve the development and analysis of a particular repertoire or composition portfolio, or a study of a particular aspect of technique, such as scordatura or the chop.

The other area of future research I would identify relates to the physical instrument itself. Chapter 6 discussed the particular five-string fiddles used by the participants, and analyzed the physical aspects of the instruments. Violin making is itself a keenly researched area, as described in Chapter 1. Considering the relatively recent advent of the five-string, and with various makers taking different design approaches, a study into the acoustic and design realm would merit further research.

8.6 Concluding Remarks
From a personal perspective, as a fiddler myself, the world of the five-string fiddle and the people who play it so brilliantly, proved to be an extremely satisfying area of research. It has been a very rewarding experience. The journey saw me interact with some of the finest fiddle exponents in the world, and in their company I endeavored to be a collaborative and constructive enquirer. I aimed, and hope to have represented the voice of the participants faithfully and incisively in addressing the research subject as richly as possible.

By contributing so openly and meaningfully to this research, the participants have clarified and enriched the contemporary position and understandings of the five-string fiddle. This work situates the five-string fiddle as being now firmly established in
American fiddle culture, and holding rich possibilities for many fiddlers, including myself. After ten years of rapid evolution, the five-string fiddle has truly taken hold. This research has sought to understand this rise in popularity of the five-string, the journey that has brought some of America’s top musicians to the five-string, and has aimed to illuminate the wider possibilities the five-string fiddle may hold for musicians who aspire to forge similarly innovative paths with their practice.

The research process also offered an opportunity to reflect on my own musical practice, motivations and aspirations, and this too was represented in a small way in the work. As I conclude this study I am more excited about music and the fiddle than I have ever been before, a passion I did not think could be stretched any further. This research, the participants, the music, and the instrument, the five-string fiddle, have all inspired me greatly. As I stated above, the participants of this research are all the very best at what they do. This research has inspired me in aiming to reach a similar level of expertise, aspiring to be the best I can be both academically and musically, in the world of the musician, the world of the five-string fiddle player.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: Interview guide

Can we begin with an insight to your background in music, when did you begin to play the fiddle?

This opening question intends introduce the interviewee and establish a brief life history, follow up questions include:

- Can you tell me about your first lessons?
- Who was your teacher and what style of music were you initially introduced to?
- Did you work from musical notation from early on, or was there an emphasis on aural transmission?
- When were you first introduced to, or did you become aware of improvisation?

Was there a particular tradition or style that you emerged into as your playing developed?

This topic seeks to establish some terms of idiomatic reference and to contextualise the musical styles and traditions of the participant within American vernacular music. These points could be elaborated upon by talking about a particular tune. Follow up questions would include:

- How would you define (for example) Old-Time music?
- What is the role of the fiddle in that style?
- Have you noticed any change or developments in the role of the fiddle in Old-Time music?
- Who are the main exponents of this style?
What genre do describe yourself as playing within now?

Here, the research attempts to identify the interviewee's current thinking and positioning regarding genre and style.

Following up:

- What are the main attributes of the style?
- What is the role of the fiddle in the style?
- Who are the figures you look to for inspiration in this style?
- What are the milestone recordings of this style, and what is it about them that makes them so?
- What is the role of improvisation within this style?

How significant is improvisation within your own playing and within contemporary American fiddle playing?

Here we reflect on improvisation and the thoughts of the interviewee on improvisation within their music and in the wider field. Further questions seek to establish particular details regarding the fiddle and its interaction with improvisation.

- When did you begin to improvise?
- What styles of American fiddle music would you associate with improvisation?
- What are the particular stylistic techniques you use in performance?
- Who do you look to as the most influential improvising fiddlers?

When and where did you first encounter the five-string fiddle?

This question addresses the interviewee’s initial interaction with the five-string instrument. It is hoped to distil some definitive historical information regarding the instrument.
○ Who introduced the concept to American fiddle culture?

○ Was it performer or luthier driven?

○ What musical reasons were in play?

○ Who do you think of when people talk about five-string fiddle?

○ Why did you first consider moving to a five-string instrument?

○ Is it now your main instrument?

Here, we explore the decision to play five-string, was it a slow change over, or a more immediate change.

○ What was the adjustment period?

○ Is there now an adjustment period if playing on a standard four-string instrument?

What are the musical parameters you find to be particularly facilitated in performing on a five-string?

This shooting off point attends to performance techniques specific to the violin, and how they are manifested on the five-string instrument. The typically closer string spacing for example appears to encourage double stop playing, as does the reduced bowing angles of the bridge in accommodating the extra string.

Are there particular performance or technical difficulties that you have encountered on the five-string instrument?

As above, the addition of the fifth string brings into play set up issues such as tighter string spacing at the nut and bridge and also the bridge curve, there may also be some intonation issues derived from tempered tuning with the resonance of the c string.
How has the five-string instrument contributed to continued developments in chop style bow strokes now appearing extensively in new acoustic music in America and have you incorporated this technique into your work?

Expert exponents such as Darol Anger, Casey Driessen and Crooked Still have all exemplified the rhythmic potential of the violin family, and are all primarily five-string players. Is there a mutually beneficial shared horizon of development in both the techniques and the instrument itself in evidence here? The chop technique is a relatively new stylistic phenomenon and its practice will be examined here.

Does the extended range of the five-string facilitate or encouragement a more improvisational approach to performance, comparing it to the traditional four-string instrument?

With improvisation being central to contemporary American fiddle playing, and in turn many of the leading improvising fiddlers performing on five-string fiddles this question explores is a possible intrinsic relationship between the two.

What attributes do you look for in a five-string, and what instrument do you play on?

This question seeks to establish qualitative issues relating to the instrument, such as body size, finger spacing, bridge curve and response and tonal quality preferences, while also attempting to catalogue the most active makers of five-string instruments. Additional information would include string type preference, and considerations on bow choice, with the five-string in mind.

What are the possibilities for the five-string violin in the education sphere?

The emergent picture appears to be a players moving to five-string for stylistic reasons, however there may be inherent practical advantages for those who teach both violin
and viola, or alternatively it may be that the instrument is in fact singularly unsuccessful as either violin or viola.

What does the future hold for the five-string, and the music that is played on the instrument? In your experience how significant is the rise in the use of the five-string?

Matt Glaser says 'Now nonclassical violin playing, or what I often call improvisation and groove-based string playing, has spawned an explosion in the string world' (McKeough, 2002), while Anger speculates on five-string violins 'it seems the idea has caught on and is likely here to stay. People who play five-string instruments seem to love them and don’t want to go back' (2008, p.1), this question explores the longer term possibilities for the five-string and it's place within American fiddle culture.
Appendix B: Information for Participants

Patrick Daly
Conservatory of Music and Drama,
Dublin Institute of Technology,
Rathmines Road,
Dublin 6.
Ireland

Dear [INSERT NAME],

My name is Patrick Daly; I am a Ph.D. researcher in DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, based in Dublin, Ireland. My research is titled ‘Five string violin and the improvised vernacular’

My research examines the pervasive emergence of the five string violin within contemporary North American fiddle culture, with a view to exploring the evolution and impact of the instrument to date and the possibilities it attaches to performance and technique innovation and to improvisation. The work to date has involved surveying amongst other things the literature and audio/video recordings of relevance to North American fiddle music, with a particular interest in use of improvisation, extended technique and the adoption of the five-string fiddle by artist level performers in recent years. The next stage will involve interviews with five leading performers in the field with a view to informing the research on latest developments in American fiddle culture. Reflecting on the audio/video survey and reviewing articles regarding contemporary American fiddle performance strongly suggests that your insights to recent developments in and around the new acoustic idiom and in particular concerning the emergence of the five-string fiddle would prove invaluable to the work. In this regard I am writing to ask if you would agree to be interviewed as part of the research.

The semi-structured interviews would ideally take place using Skype, perhaps with fiddles at hand to illuminate the interview with practical examples and insights, in essence an illustrated musical encounter. I would be very grateful if you would agree to my recording the interview for transcription purposes.

Should you have any questions or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Daly
# Appendix C: Consent Form

**Researcher's Name:** Patrick Daly  
**Title:** Mr.  
**Faculty/School/Department:** DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama/Gradcam

**Title of Study:** "Five string violin and the improvised vernacular"

## To be completed by the Interviewee

### 2.1 Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?  
YES/NO

### 2.2 Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?  
YES/NO

### 2.3 Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?  
YES/NO

### 2.4 Have you received enough information about this study and any associated health and safety implications if applicable?  
YES/NO

### 3.5 Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study?  
YES/NO  
**at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing without affecting your future relationship with the Institute**

### 3.6 Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published?  
YES/NO

### 3.7 Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher?  
YES/NO

**Signed** ____________________________  
**Date** ____________

**Name in Block Letters** ____________________________

**Signature of Researcher** ____________________________  
**Date** ____________

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**Please note:**

For persons under 18 years of age the consent of the parents or guardians must be obtained or an explanation given to the Research Ethics Committee and the assent of the child/young person should be obtained to the degree possible dependent on the age of the child/young person. Please complete the Consent Form (section 4) for Research Involving 'Less Powerful' Subjects or Those Under 18 Yrs.

In some studies, witnessed consent may be appropriate.

The researcher concerned must sign the consent form after having explained the project to the subject and after having answered his/her questions about the project.