

TUNES FROM PRESENT-DAY TUNESMITHS

by

Anne Lederman

The art of the tunesmith appears to be alive and well in Canada. The number of people writing tunes in the old forms (more or less) attests to the continued vitality of dance music traditions. For the next couple of issues we are going to feature some of the original tunes I have been sent or have stumbled across in my travels. Most of the composers presented here have written dozens of tunes (hundreds, in some cases) and of course there are many, many more people out there actively writing and playing original tunes in various styles. I will offer samples of whatever I can, and I encourage everyone to send me more.

Tunes in the Canadian tradition are not played as written, of course, and it cannot be stressed often enough that one must develop a playing style by ear *before* printed tunes are useful. How the tunes sound in the hands of any particular player will depend completely on the tradition which that player comes from. However, some general pointers:

1. Reels in Canada are played mostly with separate bows and two- or three-note slurs. French-Canadian reels, such as M. Boutot's, are the most rhythmically even (the closest to the way they are written), while other regional styles have more "swing" in them, meaning that groups of 1/16ths have a long-short-long-short feel. The faster you play, the less apparent this is, but it has a definite effect on the character of the tune.

2. Jigs lean heavily on the first note of the bar, and in some areas accent the third note in each triplet also. Groups of three 1/8th notes may be played evenly,

or



or somewhere in between. In any given tune, all of these timings are usually interspersed.

3. Waltzes are more often played as if they are in 9/8 rather than 3/4. That is, groups of two 1/8th notes are usually played as a "gapped triplet", short-long:



Roland Boutot – Boischatel, Montmorency County, Québec. Roland, a traditional music enthusiast who has contributed often to the CFMS BULLETIN, plays fiddle and mandolin. The following tune is strongly in Québécois style and is in a rather asymmetric form, not untypical for Québec. It has an introductory phrase followed by an A section of 17 beats repeated, and a B section of 27 beats, repeated. It repeats back to A, without the introduction, and ends after one A section.