

“LOG ON IN, THERE’S A BAND TONIGHT”: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE OLD TIME
MUSIC COMMUNITY DURING THE TIME OF COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Lindsey Alyse Terrell: “Log On In, There’s a Band Tonight”: Social Media And The Old Time Music Community During The Time Of Covid-19
(Under the direction of Bernard L. Herman)

This paper maps a series of relationships concerning the old time music community on Facebook during the Coronavirus era. Through this examination, it posits that the old time music community has used Facebook during the mass virtual turn not only to maintain the community but to expand it as well, arguing that it did this by both eschewing and translating its analog roots in order to adapt to the virtual turn ushered in by the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent shutdown.

For my Nana and Popa.

For Mom and Dad.

For Meghan, my kindred spirit, saddle pal, fiddle teacher, consultant, and editor.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Quarantine Happy Hour, founded by The Horsenecks.

ABOUT: Daily live happy hour music from a different person or musical household every day to keep us connected and supported during the quarantine. The scheduled performer will play an hour of live music for you starting at 5:30PM Pacific Time. Virtual tip jars will be in effect and 100% of the tips go to the performer of the day. Get the quarantini fixings out and enjoy the music!”

April 2020

“Well friends, it seems the time has come to wrap this thing up. Happily, most of us are vaccinated and not quarantined any more, and the need we had for something like this is behind us. It’s been truly incredible and got us through some of the most isolating times I can remember, thanks to the outpouring of support it got from you, our community of friends spread across the globe. We’ll be ending the Quarantine Happy Hour shows with the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes on 4th of July weekend. Thanks so much to all of the performers, guest curators, volunteers, and cheerleaders, especially W B Reed, Charmaine Slaven, Riley Calcagno and Suzanne Savel for their huge efforts and continued support, moral and technical, and to Bubbaville for generously providing the funding that allowed us to pay \$100 for each performance since April 6th 2020. I’ll let you do the math. We’ll be working on archiving all the shows somewhere and will keep you posted on that. We’re looking forward to seeing you all out in the world in person soon. Much love and gratitude from Barry & Gabrielle -The Horsenecks”¹

July 2021

I have loved old time music since childhood. The quarantine brought on by the Coronavirus pandemic gave me an opportunity to start participating in the old time music community even though I had not yet begun learning a stringed instrument. Members of the old time community frequently engage with each other by playing together, not just listening to and appreciating performances. That is something that (because of time lags) Zoom and similar platforms do not make possible. However, Facebook as a social media platform allows for community expansion in addition to maintenance. In this paper, I demonstrate that during the

¹ Macrae, Gabrielle. 2021. "Well friends, it seems the time has come to wrap this thing up. Facebook post." Facebook, June 14, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/quarantinehappyhourmusic/posts/1440293886333508/>.

mass virtual turn the old time music community has used Facebook not only to maintain the community but to expand it. I do this through the lens of myself as a deeply involved and provocative participant observer. This paper is very much a product of a particular moment in history. The pandemic period, as I explain later, epitomizes liminality. This has been a liminal moment not only for the world, but for me as well. I came to the community side of this music in early spring of 2020. I have always been full of energy for the things I love but had until now never been able to find a true home for that passionate curiosity. As COVID settled in and the world experienced a mass virtual turn, everyone had to figure out their own ways of coping; the old time music community and I were no different. Of all the creative ways people, companies, workplaces adapted to the so-called “quarantine” period, no effort is more impressive to me than Quarantine Happy Hour, a Facebook group and virtual music venue started by the Horsenecks: Gabrielle Macrae and Barry Southern.

This project looks at this transformative moment in the old time music community through the eyes of a folklorist who has realized that they are a part of the thing they are studying. Methodology was no small consideration in my thesis work. In response to my position in this community, I have adopted collaborative ethnography and autoethnography as my primary methodologies. Luke Eric Lassiter describes collaborative ethnography thusly:

Ethnography is, by definition, collaborative. In the communities in which we work, study, or practice, we cannot possibly carry out our unique craft without engaging others in the context of their real, everyday lives. Building on these collaborative relationships between the ethnographer and her or his interlocutors, we create our ethnographic texts. To be sure, we all practice collaboration in one form or another when we do ethnography.²

² Lassiter, Luke E. *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

My assertion is that the most powerful ethnographic projects are created when the ethnographer and their interlocutors are mutually engaged. If one is always hiding a piece of themselves from the community they are so deeply invested in, there cannot be a truly collaborative and thus truly powerful ethnographic project. That being said, autoethnography and reflexivity were also key methodologies for me. Deborah Reed-Danahay explains that autoethnography is “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context.”³ By observing myself and my behavior within the context of the online old time music community during a mass virtual turn, I am practicing autoethnography. I did not decide until some time into the pandemic to do my thesis work on this topic. At the time of my decision to pursue a focus on how the old time music community has creatively adapted to the circumstances of the Coronavirus pandemic, I did not realize how crucial it was for me to consciously practice autoethnography as a participant observer. It was not until some conversations with key consultant and friend Meghan Merker that I realized how central this was to my project. That was the moment I realized that whether I liked it or not, I had to practice self-narrative and consciously think about myself both as a participant and a folklorist in this social context. I was rather terrified to undertake this, as I had no desire or intention to create a narcissistic project. In the quote below, Deborah Reed-Danahay addresses the same concern.

The line between narcissism and effective ethnographic writing lies often, however, in the writing abilities of the author and in his/her ability to make use of his/her own experiences as a way to teach us about our craft itself and/or the social worlds of those “others” who are the participants in our research.⁴

³ Reed-Danahay, D. (1997b). Introduction. In: Reed-Danahay, D. (ed.) *Auto/ethnography: rewriting the self and the social*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 1–20.

⁴ Reed-Danahay, D. (2002). Turning points and textual strategies in ethnographic writing, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15:4, 421-425.

If I had undertaken this project in a way that removed my presence, I would have painted an inaccurate portrait of the topic and thus betrayed my community and my commitment to collaborative ethnography. Collaborative ethnography makes it possible for me to be present in research in a way that respects my community. This methodology best enables me to address the online old time music community and my place in it with respect, honesty, and integrity. In crucial moments of introspection, both when I was examining myself as a participant observer and as a folklorist struggling with how to write about themselves, I was practicing reflexivity: “the self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher”⁵

This thesis tracks a series of relationships during a unique moment at the crossroads of American history and music history. It argues that during the mass virtual turn ushered in by the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent shutdown, the old time music community has used Facebook not only to maintain the community but to expand it as well. The moments and features I choose to highlight in this paper describe the way a large slice of the old time music community has creatively adapted to the circumstances of the Coronavirus, but more specifically how I have perceived and navigated this phenomenon as a participant observer and provocateur. I begin this task with the vignette of the Black Voters Matter fundraiser concert held in the Quarantine Happy Hour virtual music venue and Facebook group. This event showed me how powerful and creative this community truly is. I follow this discussion with a deeper look at the early days of Quarantine Happy Hour, the era during which I recognized a community and sought to make myself a part of it. Then I describe my favorite Quarantine Happy Hour performance featuring ballad singers Donna Ray Norton and Melanie Penland, a show which is

⁵ England, Kim. (1994). Getting personal: reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *The Professional Geographer* 46, pp. 80–89.

unique among the other QHH performances and provides an opportunity to unpack the importance of voice in old time music. A discussion on the drawbacks and negative aspects of Quarantine Happy Hour and the venue's persistence in spite of those things serves to prove a widespread need for this outlet during isolating times. I also explain that other Facebook groups concerning the topic of old time music existed long before Quarantine Happy Hour and face their own set of issues which differ from those of QHH. My firsthand account of Old Time Music Shitposting shows how the modern phenomenon of memes effects the community's unspoken rules of communication. To add nuance to this idea of an "old time music community," I discuss the multiple generations who navigate the world of old time music, both online and offline, in different ways. I do this by dividing this community into three major segments: the old timers, the revivalists, and the neo-revivalists. At this point in the paper, I explore my own experience with this music and the people who love it, an experience which was slow and organic prior to Coronavirus. Once the pandemic was declared, however, social media full-on facilitated my initiation and allowed me to step into my role as a participant observer-provocateur. I explore how I initially embraced this role with gusto but realized over time that my passion as a participant had led me to oversimplifying and sugarcoating. In closing I explore how, as I moved into a formal study of this community, I found much deeper issues concerning voice and identity in traditional music and learned about organizations working to reckon with these issues.

I describe a particular turning point in the history of old time music, but I do so through the eyes of a participant observer folklorist. This thesis stands alone in focusing on such a specific, emergent moment in the history of old time music through an autoethnographic lens. However, in its standing alone, it joins in and adds something unique to a much bigger discussion about music and community. In discussing how my work fits into the broader

literature, I would be remiss not to highlight the two texts that were important in helping me think about this nexus: *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* by Thomas Turino and *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* by Ana María Ochoa Gautier. Turino discusses “the special properties of music and dance that make them fundamental resources for connecting with our own lives, our communities, and the environment,” and contextualizes those theoretical concepts using various settings, including American old time music and dance.⁶ Gautier “explores how listening has been central to the production of notions of language, music, voice,” but also how these dictate and complicate personhood and belonging.⁷ In focusing on the crossroads of sound, listening, social media, community, identity, socialization, liminality, and old time music, I position my work between Turino’s and Gautier’s.

⁶ Turino, Thomas. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

⁷ Ochoa Gautier, Ana María. *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*. Sign, Storage, Transmission. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

CHAPTER 2: BLACK VOTERS MATTER QUARANTINE HAPPY HOUR CONCERT FUNDRAISER

When one thinks of grassroots political activism, string band music, Facebook Live, and Zoom are not the first things that come to mind. A global pandemic and contentious election, however, transformed modes of advocacy. No single event has made that more apparent than the Black Voters Matter fundraiser on the Facebook virtual music venue, Quarantine Happy Hour. “Georgia On Our Minds” took place on December 6, 2020, and raised funds for getting out the vote in the Georgia runoff election, which featured Raphael Warnock running against Kelly Loeffler, and Jon Ossoff running against David Perdue.⁸ This race was significant given the fact that should Warnock and Ossoff win, it would give the Democrats fifty votes in the Senate and hence the leadership and a chance to pass bills reflecting their priorities.

Founded by Gabrielle Macrae and Barry Southern, Quarantine Happy Hour was also run by guest curators at different points in time. When fiddler Lisa Ornstein suggested using Quarantine Happy Hour as the venue for a concert benefiting the organization Black Voters Matter, then-curator Charmaine Slaven jumped at the opportunity. The event featured Dante and Eros Faulk, Bruce Molsky, the Sassafras Sisters, and Jake Blount, with emcee Cameron DeWhitt of music podcast “Get Up In The Cool.” Lisa Ornstein, originator of the fundraiser idea, & curator Charmaine Slaven also provided commentary throughout the event. Early in the concert, after revealing that an anonymous donor had offered to match the first \$2,000, Ornstein talks

⁸ Slaven, Charmaine. 2020. "Welcome to the Quarantine Happy Hour's presentation of Georgia on our Minds Fundraiser for Black Votes Matter! Facebook post." Facebook, December 6, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/quarantinehappyhourmusic/posts/1309695209393377/>.

about Black Voters Matter, making the distinction that they are not an electoral organization but a power-building organization aimed at effective voting. The organization's "Can't Stop, Won't Stop" campaign utilizes traditional advocacy efforts, including digital and radio advertisements. One of the organization's most notable endeavors, "The Blackest Bus in America," was instigated to mobilize barnstorming activities like registering voters and feeding communities. During this time of separation and confusion, the message was that out-of-staters should support the efforts of Black Voters Matter because they are a grassroots movement mobilized by people whose communities recognize, know, and trust them—an essential ingredient in the recipe for successful voter outreach.

Ornstein explained that hearing a speech by Wanda Mosely, Black Voters Matter's senior state director, moved her to pursue the idea of a fundraising concert. Ornstein called Slaven about using Quarantine Happy Hour as the venue and then contacted Molsky and DeWhitt. The Sassafras Sisters, brothers Dante and Eros Faulk, and Jake Blount also joined the evening's roster.

Pacific Northwest duo Dante and Eros opened the concert with a rousing set of three original tunes, noting that "this is more than just a statewide election" and referencing another theme of the evening, saying of the audience that "the void is filled with wonderful people." Within the first 45 minutes, the goal of \$2,000 was exceeded and the donation matched. An informational video on Black Voters Matter was shown, their spokesperson explaining that this work is being done by, for, and in the "dirty, rural south," and that those who believe in change have changed and will always change America. These points are significant considering the vehicle for this fundraiser was a musical tradition popularized largely by people in rural southern

Appalachia. DeWhitt then took the stage to emphasize the importance of those with privilege supporting existing efforts by trusted community members, and went on to introduce the second act of the evening, master musician Bruce Molsky. Performing live in his home in Beacon, New York, beside a postcard of Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Junior, Molsky began with a Georgia version of “Bonaparte’s Retreat,” reiterating the central theme: the Georgia election is vital to the entire nation. This tune was followed by a traditional rendition of the 1968 pop song “Abraham, Martin, and John.” Bruce then introduced an original banjo tune, “20th of January,” followed by a driving performance of “Hell Broke Loose In Georgia.” The act drew to a close with “I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free,” written by Billy Taylor for his daughter and later adopted by Nina Simone as an anthem of the civil rights movement. By popular demand, Bruce played an encore, “Sail Away Ladies,” with a change in the lyrics: “We’ll go back to Tennessee...or Georgia.”

The third act was a traditional/country trio, the Sassafras Sisters of Olympia, Washington. Sisters Ellie and Annie and friend Ruby echoed the sentiments of their fellow performers regarding the need to use one’s privilege, power, and resources to support a worthy cause. After performing “Table for One,” “Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss,” “The Long Run,” and “The Boogerman,” they ended with a haunting performance of “Long Black Veil,” poignant given the death toll of the pandemic.

Before introducing the fourth act, Jake Blount, DeWhitt announced that the donations had surpassed \$7,000. Jake is an African American multi-instrumentalist and ethnomusicologist from Providence, Rhode Island, whose 2020 album “Spider Tales” was curated around the concept of the West African trickster spider god Anansi. Paying tribute to the contributions of American Indian and African American musicians, Jake opened with Cherokee fiddler Manco Sneed’s

“Old Timey Grey Eagle.” Judy Hyman’s “Beyond This Wall” then set a tone of hope, which was continued in an acapella song written by Bessie Jones and sung to young Jake by his father.

There is more love somewhere.
There is more love somewhere.
I’m gonna keep on ‘til I find it.
There is more love somewhere.

This simple and powerful model continued for three more verses, substituting “love” with different nouns—peace, heaven, joy.

Jake highlighted that money is scarce for many of us during the pandemic but that we can contribute in other ways, as he has been doing by phone-banking. He then played “Black Tar on a Stick” followed by “And Am I Born To Die?” underscoring how we as a people have “been hung out to dry” by the legislature. Noting that it is “important to remember the tragedy of this moment as well as the things we can do to make it better” he played “Happy Hollow,” learned from the playing of part-Cherokee fiddler Marcus Martin, and ended his set with “Roustabout” from Dink Roberts, an African American musician from North Carolina. In closing, Jake reminded us to “[put] as much into Black communities as we are taking out.”

Cameron announced that the amount had skyrocketed past \$8,000, and Ornstein invoked the imagery of “a beautiful, nourishing, spirit-uplifting [stone] soup.” It was clear that Warnock and Ossoff had the support of many across the nation who, though ineligible to vote, chose to help in other ways.

CHAPTER 3: THE EARLY DAYS OF QUARANTINE HAPPY HOUR

The virtual turn ushered in by COVID-19 has not only served to maintain community, but to expand the community as well. Quarantine Happy Hour was started by The Horsenecks in April of 2020, shortly after the Coronavirus pandemic took a foothold in the United States and forced everything into a shutdown. This Portland, Oregon-based old-time music duo was looking for a way to keep the old time community, which relies so heavily on intimate connection and collaboration, connected during an unprecedented global situation...the first global event in many of our lives that seemed to leave no life untouched, no life unaffected.

This brilliant idea began as a modest Facebook group consisting of the two musicians' friends and families. Operating like a phone tree, this group expanded rapidly. Existing members were able to add new ones and so on. I myself was added to the group by Joseph Decosimo of The Bucking Mules shortly after the group's founding. Beginning in April, the venue featured single artists or musical groups every single night. Many of these first performances were done by the earliest members of the group, including Nokosee Fields, Joseph Decosimo, and the Horsenecks themselves. From the beginning, all of the performances aside from special events have occurred at 5:30pm PST/8:30pm EST. This has proven an effective model, as it has been something to count on in these otherwise uncertain times.

The comment section of the streams quickly set the tone for the venue, earning Quarantine Happy Hour the nickname of "The Pub." The reason for this nickname was that it created an interactive element which allowed folks to banter and jokingly "heckle" in addition to

sincerely complimenting (and tipping) the performers. Because the first Quarantine Happy Hour events were such small affairs, and because the majority of those first attendees knew each other and had invited each other to the group, there was a built-in intimacy that created a small-town pub environment.

“For some of us it was the only contact we had with anyone else, the only opportunity for most of us to banter with our pals,” said fiddler and QHH regular Meghan Merker. The chat being available to the musicians throughout their performances made it feel even more like an intimate pub environment. In between tunes and sips of whatever was in their glass at the time (a question often posed by the peanut gallery, as the comment section came to be called by some), performers would often check the comment section and interface with their friends and fans, thanking folks for comments but also bantering back, telling stories, and recalling memories.

Beyond fostering community, Quarantine Happy Hour served a more prosaic yet urgent purpose. Because most of the performers had been full-time touring musicians during normal times, Venmo and PayPal (aka the virtual tip jar) became sources of income. To borrow the imagery invoked by Lisa Ornstein in regards to the Black Voters Matter stream, the tip jar made the “Stone Soup” approach possible. The ability to support each other financially, even though many could only toss in a couple of bucks, made the loss of music gig revenue less devastating. The Pub alleviated some of the social isolation and financial paralysis for a particular musical industry which isn’t exactly lucrative in the most normal of times. Quarantine Happy Hour became a lifeboat in multiple ways.

Although this music is popularly associated with southern Appalachia, old time music is a global phenomenon, one in which community is at the very heart and center and always has been. It soon became clear that bantering with long-held pals was not the only opportunity the

Pub provided. The group grew quickly, welcoming new members every day and inviting them into the fold. Online friendships were forged between complete strangers who met at the Pub. Many at the time of this writing have yet to meet each other in real life due to distance and Coronavirus. QHH and other “virtual venues” have allowed people from all over the world to attend events, “visit,” and “meet” people in ways that were never possible in the days of physical venues. Barring technical difficulties and internet access issues, this format has allowed everyone to attend and be together--no matter where the musicians are broadcasting from, no matter the time zone of the folks tuning in.

Quarantine Happy Hour has been a space for the traditional music community to tap into its inherent creativity. In addition to a type of friend-group banter that is humorous in a comforting, familiar way, people have been able to play, dance, and sing along in their kitchens, living rooms, or wherever else they might be watching from. Because it is so much easier to “hear” each other when interacting as a virtual audience, spectators can discuss tune titles and origins, memories tied to performances, etc. Because these events are archived in the annals of the Facebook group, individuals who aren’t able to attend “live” can participate in these discussions afterwards.

Humor has always played a central role in the magic of Quarantine Happy Hour, but this was especially true in its beginnings, when that humor took its most niche and bizarre forms. Champion fiddler Nokosee Fields was having tooth problems, an issue which was voiced during one of his concerts. In the comments section, there began a fundraiser for Fields to have his tooth pulled. While it certainly wasn’t only the pub audience who ended up paying for the tooth removal, the pub goers developed a sense of connection around the tooth and demanded frequently to see it. While this demand was never met, Nokosee’s tooth became a Quarantine

Happy Hour legend, spawning a separate but short-lived Facebook group entitled “The Tooth Truthers.”

Another particularly intriguing occurrence in the early days of Quarantine Happy Hour were the virtual afterparties hosted by the same Nokosee Fields of tooth removal fame. Fields would silently and slowly create enthralling tableaux out of tiny objects (such as plastic king cake babies) as he played traditional music cassettes in the background. This was live-streamed in the Facebook group after some of those early concerts, and anyone who wanted to could watch. Audience members voiced connections with the items in these spontaneous reliquaries--a tiny ceramic pig became Nokosee’s infamous tooth, and so on.

Often the Pub humor centered the connection of real-world events and themes to old-time music. When fiddler Rafe Stefanini referenced President Donald Trump and the suggested drinking of bleach to kill Coronavirus, some spectators spontaneously took to the comments section and began to incorporate the word “bleach” into tune titles, including such gems as “No Bleach [Corn] on Tygart,” “Glory In The Bleaching [Meeting] House,” “Jenny Ran Away In The Bleach [Mud] In The Night,” “Sal’s Got Bleach [Mud] Between Her Toes,” “Pretty Little Girl With the Bleached [Blue] Dress On,” “Walking in My Bleach [Sleep],” “Bleach [Belles] of Lexington,” and “Bleach [Soap] in the Washpan.” There was something especially folkloristic about how these “pub jokes” came about, and they felt intimate even though they were shared by hundreds of people.

Quarantine Happy Hour has spawned many outside-of-the-Pub interactions and conversations as well. New musical partnerships have occurred, in addition to other community-building opportunities via Zoom. One particular advantage to this collaborative space/moment is

that it has created opportunities for cross-age interactions that might otherwise be impossible or unlikely in the “normal” touring and festival scenes.

In the early days of the Pub, days during which nobody knew or imagined that the pandemic could last this long, it had a more temporary feeling; as if, though an incredible thing, it was just something to get folks through for a bit. It didn’t take long for it to become obvious that the pandemic wasn’t going away. However, it takes an immense amount of work to run a music venue, so in late 2020 Gabrielle Macrae and Barry Southern of The Horsenecks took some time off and fellow musicians began to step into curatorial roles, starting with a team made up of Charmaine Slaven, WB Reid, and Riley Calcagno. The curator team has metamorphosed several times since then, creating a lineup reflecting musical genres including but also going far beyond old-time and bluegrass music.

CHAPTER 4: DONNA RAY NORTON & MELANIE PENLAND QUARANTINE HAPPY
HOUR CONCERT
MAY 21, 2020

On May 21st, 2020, Donna Ray Norton and Melanie Penland went live in Quarantine Happy Hour from Madison County, North Carolina.⁹ Using Donna Ray's Facebook account to stream the show and Melanie's smartphone to monitor the comments section, they invited the audience to join them on their porch: "Hey y'all! Come sit a spell and listen to some traditional Appalachian ballads!" and offered the requisite virtual tip jar information. Quilts draped over porch banisters set the stage and crickets chirped a primitive chorus in the background. Although the crickets sang throughout this show just as they did in the days of the earliest field recordings, so much in life has changed since then. Despite these changes and innovations, Donna Ray and Melanie, sporting Smithsonian Folklife Festival t-shirts, brought their audience into an environment which made it feel like they had invited the entire virtual audience onto the porch for a ballad sing. The kind of hospitality they evoke by their direct and easygoing communication with the audience is what draws so many to the musical tradition these ladies come from.

Throughout the show, Norton and Penland spend quite a bit of time talking about the ballad tradition in Madison County--more specifically that of the unincorporated community of

⁹ Norton, Donna Ray. 2020. "Hey y'all! Come sit a spell and listen to some traditional Appalachian ballads! Facebook post." Facebook, May 21, 2020.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/quarantinehappyhourmusic/posts/1142567542772812>.

Revere, North Carolina, also known as “Sodom” and “Sodom Laurel.” The two singers performed many recognizable ballads from the Sodom repertoire such as “Pretty Saro” and “Young Hunting” and others that touch on the requisite balladic themes of love, heartbreak, and death. At one point, Donna and Melanie hold a moment of silence for Dellie Norton, stalwart of the Sodom Laurel ballad singing tradition, and “all the ballad singers who have gone before.” Despite being a living part of a unique and special tradition within the world of folklore, they talk about the lineage of this music and their family without sounding either pedantic or pretentious. The Sodom Laurel musical tradition is old and deeply revered, its ballad singing perhaps most of all. No one can quite agree on what made this area such a fertile one for ballads, but Sodom Laurel singers Sheila Kay Adams and Doug Wallin believe it has a lot to do with family and community. “If you talk about Madison County preserving the love songs (another southern mountain term for ballads),” says Adams, “it was mainly Sodom. Because people in Sodom stayed put. My however-many-greats-back grandfather Norton got a land grant in the eighteenth century and we’ve been right there ever since. People in other communities moved around, left Madison County, came back, whatever. In Sodom, people never moved.” Singer Lee Wallin’s son Doug [gives] the same answer. “Well, I guess it’s really because there’s so many people from the old countries that settled right in here. And a lot of them stayed and didn’t move out.” Why not? “Love of family,” says Adams. “In my community, everyone was family. There wasn’t anybody else. That was it.”¹⁰

The sense of community and history is powerful and undeniable, as we watch and listen to Sheila Kay’s daughter Melanie and Dellie Norton’s granddaughter Donna sing the old songs they learned from their families. As the show progresses, the late evening sky deepens gradually

¹⁰ oldtimeparty. “Sodom, NC.” Old Time Party (blog), January 9, 2015. <https://oldtimeparty.wordpress.com/2015/01/09/sodom-nc/>.

into the darkness of night. There is something intensely moving about watching these two ballad tradition bearers close their eyes and hauntingly sing these ancient stories against the backdrop of a changing North Carolina sky, but solemnity and respect for this heritage are not the only themes of this show by far. Like most of the other Quarantine Happy Hour shows, humor and memory play a central part. Melanie and Donna Ray pass the phone back and forth, interfacing with the audience, many of whom they know. When one spectator requests a rather long, drawn-out ballad from the Sodom Laurel tradition, Norton laughingly exclaims, “I ain’t doing Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender, no way!” At another point, Penland draws upon a lifelong history of attending festivals and conventions with her mother, legendary Appalachian ballad singer and musician, Sheila Kay Adams, and shares a story of kissing western North Carolina music peer Travis Stuart behind a Coca-Cola vending machine at a festival when they were teenagers. Some of these humorous anecdotes involved old-time music elders such as Madison County native Byard Ray, Donna Ray’s grandfather. Byard had been on a music tour and ended up playing fiddle in a session with none other than the Rolling Stones. But upon being offered a tour gig with them, he refused. His granddaughter was aghast and asked him how he could possibly have said no. “I didn’t want to go on tour with them ol’ Rolling Stones!” was Byard’s reply. Donna and Melanie laughed along with commenters they had known their entire lives and commenters who they were “meeting” for the very first time.

Although this was not the first outdoor livestream Quarantine Happy Hour had proffered, this particular concert created a unique atmosphere. There was a magic to being taken deep into the mountains of western North Carolina. It seemed at once both ancient and modern. The sound of the voices, the songs and the way they are still sung in traditional style, the North Carolina mountain landscape and all its sensory stimulants, music on a porch: these things echoed of

antiquity. At the same time, though, what could be more modern than using Facebook, digital and social media, smartphones, and virtual communication during isolation? Members of the audience felt as though they could smell the scents of the North Carolina night in addition to hearing and seeing it. As those who have studied Appalachian ballad traditions and immersed themselves in early field recordings know well, there's something immensely deep and moving about this style of singing. While many other streams have featured singing, this particular installment brought a much-needed reminder to center stage: despite old time music being largely fiddle-driven, voice has always been an indispensable part of the old-time music tradition. There's no one place more qualified to communicate that than Madison County, North Carolina. For decades upon decades, this tight-knit community has percolated the traditional music of the southern Appalachians, insulating the style of this sprawling and honored family tree which includes such members as Sheila Kay Adams and her daughter Melanie Penland, fiddler Byard Ray, Dellie Norton, Morris Norton, and Lena Jean Ray, mother of Donna Ray Norton. No other geographic area comes to mind as being so well-equipped for this task.

This May 21st, 2020 concert exemplified all that has made Quarantine Happy Hour into "The Pub": humor, creativity, and narrative, paired with deep reverence for tradition, devotion to craft, and desire for connection. Perhaps better than any other "pub night," Donna Ray Norton and Melanie Penland's show communicated how tradition, a part of life so often thought of as primitive, frozen, and unchanging, can adapt to modern times while still honoring its heritage wholly. There's no dearth of young people interested in learning the old songs, but some traditional ballad singers fear for their long-term survival. This is because, according to Melanie's mother, ballad singer Sheila Kay Adams, the songs are "out of context now ... there's not a culture that nurtures and sustains them." She goes on to give us a sense of hope, however:

“You can tell there’s kind of an uncomfortable feeling there at the start [when singing to a younger audience], and then all of a sudden it’s like, ‘Oh, it’s a story,’ ... and they start paying attention to the story.”¹¹ And because the stories of long ago are, like the stories of today, largely concerned with the basics of human existence: life, love, joy, heartbreak, war, betrayal, death, relationships with the natural world, it is likely that ballads will continue to be sung long into the future, and the details of the stories they tell may well be modified, intentionally or not, to reflect the current times.

¹¹ “Sheila Kay Adams – Masters of Traditional Arts.” Accessed April 7, 2021.
http://mastersoftraditionalarts.org/artists/383?selected_facets=state_exact:North%20Carolina.

CHAPTER 5: DOWNSIDES OF QUARANTINE HAPPY HOUR

Shows and performances of all kinds face a myriad of issues. Some of these situations would be more likely to arise during live, face-to-face shows, and others are more specific to the context of a virtual concert. Quarantine Happy Hour is no stranger to any of this. Technology, content, personal differences, and post-stream “funk” complicate the Quarantine Happy Hour phenomenon.

Perhaps the most prominent issue is that of technology. When friends and musical duo Nokosee Fields and Ryan Nickerson did their first live performance in the early Pub days, this proved true to an almost humorous degree. The two were using Nickerson’s phone to do their stream and it kept overheating and powering off. Because of this, they ended up restarting their stream five times. Considering the tendency towards humor in all situations, this mishap was regarded rather lightly by the regular pub-goers, but undoubtedly was not the preferred situation for enjoying tunes and each other’s company when these activities had already been so disrupted due to quarantine.

Many of the older musicians who come from a pre-computer era are not familiar with the live streaming technology, or were not until it became their only way to safely perform and socialize. There are some who had already made this transition due to career pathways, such as Paul Brown, musician and former newscaster for National Public Radio (NPR), but many others had not. The technology needed to execute these events is often inaccessible in other ways especially when paired with the unreliable internet often found in the rural places where some of

these individuals live. As in the case of Nokosee Fields and Ryan Nickerson, many streams have been restarted multiple times due to issues with technology and the internet. They have also begun late, been postponed entirely, or deleted from the archive due to extremely poor quality. Spectators have noted in the comments that they were leaving the live show due to poor connection (either their own or the performer's) or the quality of the sound and visuals. Many times, QHH curators must also serve as technical support to both performers and spectators. Unfortunately, issues like this underscore the isolating sense of disconnect. The mass of barriers to smooth streaming makes the striving to maintain these connective activities that much more significant. As a participant observer whose first contact with this community was through its virtual side, I can say that the persistence to keep Quarantine Happy Hour going despite the literally and figuratively disconnective forces of technology proved to me how needed it was. The overall patience exhibited by the audience also proved a certain level of desperation. The audience--especially the Pub regulars--were willing to deal with these issues because they needed what Quarantine Happy Hour gave them: music and community.

Another issue is the week-to-week content discrepancy that increased as the Pub wore on. Quarantine Happy Hour began with almost entirely old time music. While there were still weeks where the schedule was primarily old time, there were also weeks where there was little to no old time music in the lineup. Attendance tended to drop during those nights. Presumably this was because many of the Quarantine Happy Hour regulars--particularly the ones who have been there since the beginning--preferred the old-time music shows. One Pub goer (who wished to remain anonymous) said this:

It was more than the difference in musical styles, though. The vibe was very different in the chat section of these "newfangled" concerts. The banter changed, the sense of connection changed, largely because many of the hardcore old time/traditional pub regulars were absent due to a lack of interest in the music. This change created a sense of

disconnect that was perhaps worse than that of the pre-pub pandemic days; we had found a regular way to feel connected during a very isolated time, and then we had lost it. Fortunately, there were still some old time pub nights, where the old crew showed up in fine fettle. But the continuity had been broken, and it made for some lonely evenings of walking by the virtual pub window, taking stock, and walking on.¹²

Having the audience be able to participate in such a visual way also brings to the surface various personal opinions and conflicts that may not be so obvious otherwise. Throughout the pandemic, people have used the comments section to express their “post-pandemic” plans. Especially as vaccination becomes more widespread and the festival season of 2021 moves closer, many individuals have voiced their intentions that these plans are starting to become reality. However, comfort levels surrounding COVID-19 fluctuate across the board, and once in a while, conversations surrounding this discomfort arise in the chat stream. This issue has also manifested itself in regards to masks and live-stream performances by groups in Quarantine Happy Hour. Some groups have performed with masks and some have not, raising questions and concerns from the audience. All the other problems could very well arise during “normal times,” but this particular issue underscores just how much this pandemic has changed the world and our perception of normalcy.

The majority of the audience is full of gratitude and enthusiasm for each stream regardless of these issues, and perhaps the most tangible and powerful downside is the sense of loss as the show ends and the performers abruptly log off of the livestream. Although people may keep commenting and interacting post-livestream, we can perceive a distinction between digital distances and physical distances in that moment. I myself live in a region where old time musicians are never far away, but this community I’ve begun to be a part of feels so much more distant when we are not “in the Pub” together. Because this virtual venue brings so much

¹² Anonymous, email message to the author, July 1, 2021.

connectivity during this time of isolation, a sense of melancholy lingers when the door slams shut. A year into the Quarantine Happy Hour experience, this is still quite jarring. One mitigating element of the Pub's early days was a few precious afterparties hosted by Nokosee Fields. While not everyone from that night's audience hung around to be a part of these, they provided a kind of ease and comfort as those who clung the most tightly to Quarantine Happy Hour transitioned from pub life back into "real life." That difficult transition brings to mind a song from the late 1800s called "After the Ball," recorded by a few old time bands in the 1920s. Although written well over one hundred years before Quarantine Happy Hour was founded, the lyrics to the chorus resonate with this sense of abrupt and melancholic disconnection:

After the ball is over,
After the break of dawn,
After the dancers' leaving
After the stars are gone
Many a heart is aching
If you could read them all
Many the hopes that have vanished
After the ball.¹³

¹³ "“After the Ball”: Lyrics from the Biggest Hit of the 1890s.” Accessed July 9, 2021.
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5761/>.

CHAPTER 6: THE ONLINE OLD TIME MUSIC COMMUNITY

Quarantine Happy Hour is most certainly not the only bounded space within the online old time music community. Facebook alone provides the space for many different subgroups to arise. Two prominent groups are Dedicated to Old Time Music and Traditional Music Today. While these groups were both born out of a love for old time music, they have grown into two very different spaces. Although TMT has grown to encompass a focus on all traditional music and DTOTM has stuck with old time music, the place one might notice this difference more clearly is not in the topical focus but in the Facebook group rules. While it is true that plenty of in-person clubs and groups also have rules and regulations, they are not always as tangible and visually prominent as they are with Facebook groups. With many Facebook groups, you must agree to the rules before you can be admitted as a member, and even when you become a member they are still visually prominent. Although Dedicated to Old Time Music does not require this action, their group description makes the general feeling clear:

This group is for players and lovers of Old Time Music played in the tradition of the pre-bluegrass folk music of the Appalachian Mountains. This group is intended to provide a forum for sharing and discussing tunes, playing techniques, information about festivals, fiddlers conventions and other events. The primary rules for this group are that all posts and comments are courteous and respectful, intended for the entire group, relevant to this style of Old Time Music, and remain on topic to the group's purpose and the original post.¹⁴

¹⁴ Brown, Jeff. 2021. "This group is for players and lovers of Old Time Music played in the tradition of the pre-bluegrass folk music of the Appalachian Mountains. Facebook post." Facebook, June 3, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/550142088336429/posts/4746503818700214/>.

This description positions the group in stark contrast with Traditional Music Today. TMT requires that potential members read and agree to a numbered list of group rules and answer two freeform questions. This group's description, much like DTOTM's, defines the values and boundaries of the space:

This group's goal is to be a safe (or safer) space to talk about traditional music, culture, and our lives as members of it. We live the values that represent Traditional Music Today. We are intersectional anti-racist and feminist. We don't tolerate harassment of marginalized groups. We are an inclusive, diverse, intergenerational group that includes marginalized people (women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, etc.) and allies. We are people who sing, play music, and dance — and we're tired of discrimination getting in the way of our awesome community. We're a work in progress, as is this description. To join the group, we ask that you accept the group rules and answer two questions to make sure we all share a basic starting point of understanding.

Question 1: Please answer the questions below. If writing is difficult, you can respond by video or audio private message to the mods instead. Do you agree to follow the group rules? (scroll down to see them)

Question 2: What is privilege? We're looking for your understanding of how different identity groups are treated unequally in today's society. For an explanation, watch this video: <https://youtu.be/qeYpvV3eRhY>

Question 3: What do you think a safe/safer/brave space is? If you haven't heard these terms or you're not sure what they mean, here's a video that explains it: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=kRqKLS4sQW0>¹⁵

These questions allow potential members the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the values and concepts which form the foundation of the code of the group. While it is easy for someone to breeze over a list of group rules and just click "I agree" so they may be admitted, it is slightly more challenging to put your conception of big ideas into words simply to be added as a member of a Facebook group--especially if you have to go and watch a YouTube video first. Not only does this process allow admins and moderators to see if there's likely to be a problem based on this member's views and opinions, it also allows them to see whether someone is willing to put in the effort to be a part of their community in the first place.

¹⁵ Traditional Music Today. Facebook group description & rules. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/tradmusictoday/about>.

If both of these spaces are bounded and to some degree insular, Quarantine Happy Hour is a mediated phenomenon. “The Pub” is international. It negotiates time zones, language differences, genre and style preferences, personality types, and more. Just like these other groups, QHH coheres around a love of music. In contrast to these other groups, though, Quarantine Happy Hour was born out of the circumstances of COVID-19. However, just because Quarantine Happy Hour is a different kind of Facebook group does not make it a lawless wasteland. Although it does not boast a list of rules, questions for potential members, or anything of the sort, QHH brings to mind French sociologist Pierre Bordieu’s theory of distinction. Those in possession of the elaborated code are best positioned to perform acts of distinction. The social and cultural capital one possesses affects the way they move through and perceive shitposts and memes. “Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.”¹⁶ Because members understand implicitly what the expectations are within the QHH space and they do not have to be spelled out, the group operates on the notion of tradition, which Bernard Herman defined as the cultural process of making sense.

It would be a mistake to think of the old time music community as a unified practice. Brought into sharp relief by the differences between Dedicated to Old Time Music and Traditional Music Today, the memberships of the different niche groups are as diverse as the number of groups created on Facebook or any platform to represent them. As a participant observer and human being, I of course have my own opinions and stances that align more with some groups than others. Despite popular belief, folklorists, anthropologists and the like are not

¹⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre. Introduction. “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.” Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984.

always completely objective. However, I still follow the developments and conversations in groups I don't personally align with as much. I do this because I believe it is important for me as someone who is both a member of the broader community and studying it to keep abreast of the scene. For example, conversations that happened in spring 2021 reflected current international debates. These debates are epitomized by a series of confrontations about music and identity politics. One example is an archival image of an all-male square dance which was posted in Dedicated to Old Time Music. Although the poster made no political or social commentary in the original caption of the post, the post was taken down, presumably because the group's moderators saw the potential for the comments section of this post to become unruly. This action sparked a broader discussion in the group about what kinds of posts and discussions are allowed. Because the general rule in Dedicated to Old Time Music is to avoid politics, this also means it avoids commentary on the sometimes unsavory historical and present-day context of American old time music. Although I do not personally believe this is a responsible choice, I also believe that all of the online forums involved in this community have something to offer and teach us.

CHAPTER 7: MEMES IN THE ONLINE OLD TIME MUSIC COMMUNITY

Old Time Music Shitposting (OTMSP) was started on January 6, 2020 by Zach Patrick. This happened before the World Health Organization declared the Coronavirus outbreak pandemic status. He could not have known how the community would unfold over the coming months and what an opportunity it created for old time musicians and fans. I was added to the Old Time Music Shitposting group on Facebook in early 2020, before Quarantine Happy Hour was founded. By the time I joined and became active, the group was already well-established and active on a daily basis. I was instantly attracted to the creativity of the memes. I never explicitly saw this as an opportunity to flex my folklorist muscles, but as I grew to be a part of the “inner circle” of shitposters, I found myself--in retrospect--with a different kind of opportunity to be a participant observer.

One might not think at first that the Lord of the Rings series by J.R.R. Tolkien and old time music would cross over in any way, much less humorously. However, my earliest forays into building old time community around myself came in the form of meme-ing this crossover. Taking images pulled from the internet, audio tracks from Instagram’s story-building feature, and tune titles whenever inspiration struck me, I created short memes, some animated and some stills. “We’re Going to Hunt The Buffalo” from Jake Blount and Tatiana Hargreaves’ duet album became “We’re Going to Hunt the Ring.” “Pretty Saro” became “Pretty Sauron,” for which I pulled some Sauron fan art from DeviantArt, placed some rather feminine animated emojis on it, and overlaid Gaither Carlton’s version of the tune. I did something similar with “Tater Patch,”

referencing Samwise Gamgee's "Po-Tay-Toes" comment to Gollum, and "Shortnin' Bread," referencing Tolkien's Elvish lembas bread.

Thus, I was first exposed to the more humorous side of old time music by way of a specific platform within the online community. Memes have become a language all their own, with different types meaning different things and some communicating a message entirely without words. Niche is a word that comes to mind when discussing meme creation and interpretation. To understand many meme formats or templates of any kind, you have to be "in the know." However, as one might expect, specific communities create an even more exclusive understanding, as we've seen before in the context of Dedicated to Old Time Music and Traditional Music Today. Old Time Music Shitposting is a prime example of a "speech community" as described by Dell Hymes in *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*.¹⁷ This brings us back to the idea of Bordieu's theory of distinction. The social and cultural capitals one possesses affects the way they move through and perceive shitposts and memes. While not every member of the Facebook group is going to have the same exact sense of humor and react to any given post in the same exact way, the inner circle of individuals who maintain commonality of old time social and cultural capital will probably react in a way that's in keeping with an unspoken standard.

¹⁷ OTMSP also resonates with Basil Bernstein's idea of restricted and elaborated codes. There are few terms which are broadly understood ("restricted code") and all kinds of terms which are only understood by a small group ("elaborated code").



A specific manifestation of this elaborated code is a meme I created and posted to the Facebook group on June 18th, 2020 (see above).¹⁸ It pictures Cameron DeWhitt's head poorly edited onto old time music YouTuber Tom Collins' body. In order to understand the humor of this meme, it helps to know that Cameron DeWhitt is a young old time banjoist who hosts the podcast Get Up In the Cool, founded the banjo instructional series Pitchfork Banjo, and most often plays two-finger style. Tom Collins is also an old time banjo player and teacher; he founded and hosts the two popular instructional series Banjo Blitz! and Banjo Quest. Because both of these men have such public faces in the old time music community and there are so many ways to compare and contrast them, they are "easy targets" or subject matter for such a specific speech community. Other features of this meme include a screenshot of a pewter banjo coffee scoop, "I LOVE THE SCOOP" written on his shirt, "#ScoopLyfe!!!" written in the corner (both in Comic Sans MS, a notoriously bad font and popular choice of meme-rs everywhere), and an image of a banjo zoomed-in on the frailing scoop on his right arm. In my experience with Old Time Music Shitposting (and shitposting/meme groups in general), in most cases the more poorly edited a meme is, the funnier it is deemed to be. Additionally, unless you were part of the included, you

¹⁸ Terrell, Lindsey. 2020. Cameron DeWhitt/Tom Collins Crossover Meme. June 18, 2020.

would probably know about a frailing scoop but would not know about Cameron DeWhitt's half-joking hatred of playing over the frailing scoop instead of the banjo head. In fact, Cameron responded with a meme of his own. In this one (see below), Cameron repeated a line he has used before: "Won't somebody please think of the goats?"¹⁹ Standing alone, this meme would make no sense at all, especially to an outsider. But when inserted into the context of my meme in the speech community of Old Time Music Shitposting, it makes perfect sense to those in the know. The line of thinking is that since goat skins are used for banjo heads, and if you don't play over the head, the goat died for nothing.



If Dell Hymes would consider the posting of a particular meme within this community a “speech situation,” the reactions and conversations that ensue are “speech events.” I created a speech situation by posting the Cameron DeWhitt/Tom Collins scoop meme, and the fifty-two comments (of which I posted eighteen) that ensued were a speech event that further demonstrated the insider nature of the way this group communicates (see example below).

¹⁹ DeWhitt, Cameron. 2020. Won't somebody please think of the goats. June 18, 2020.



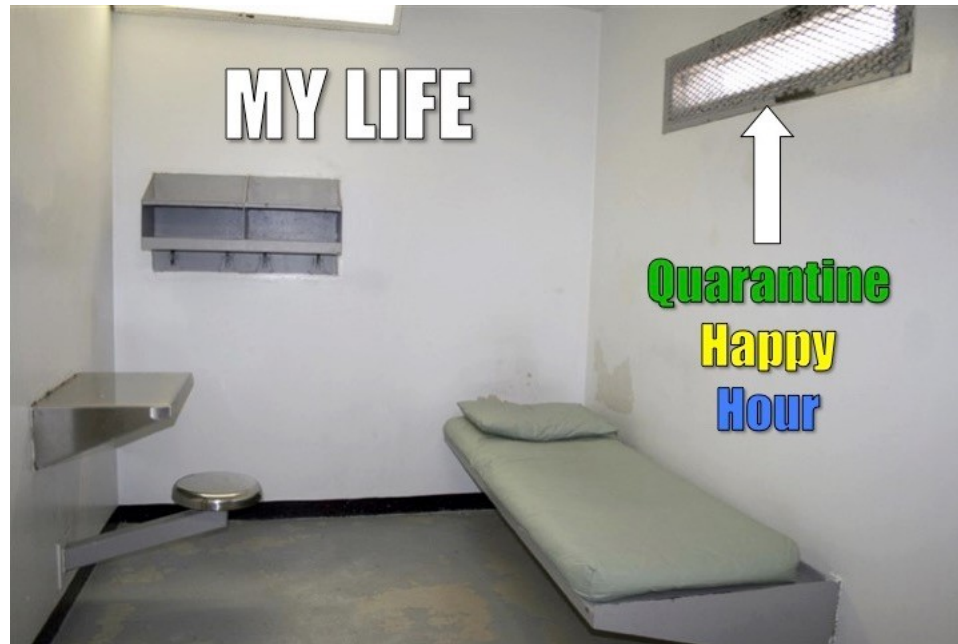
As you can see in the above excerpt from the comments section, although only three people are communicating, you can tell they are also interfacing with others by the number of “reactions” to those comments.²⁰ With a laughing, shocked, or thumbs-up emoticon, those following the thread can participate without actively being a part of the conversation. The more active voices in the conversation may also continue the meme’s theme by choosing to comment a gif (a short, looped moving image file), as the above screenshot. Spelling and punctuation choices are another building block of the code. One typically leaves out most if not all punctuation, and sometimes letters are capitalized and/or separated to communicate emphasis. Although these small acts are

²⁰ Screenshot of comments section on Terrell, Lindsey. 2020. Cameron DeWhitt/Tom Collins Crossover Meme. June 18, 2020.

much more subtle than the memes themselves, they are an important part of OTMSP's elaborated code.

As of May 2021, the Old Time Music Shitposting Facebook group boasts 969 members. This is a tiny number compared to the nearly 20,000 members of the Quarantine Happy Hour Facebook group. Although The Pub has expanded not only in number but in focus and content far beyond its old time roots, this has not deterred OTMSP. QHH has received its fair share of both positive and negative (but always humorous) memory. Below is a meme created by active OTMSP member "Fuzzy Dunlop," (who has requested to be cited as this alias).²¹ It depicts a small, sparse jail cell (labeled "MY LIFE") with one thin, rectangular window showcasing sunlight (labeled "Quarantine Happy Hour"). This imagery is certainly humorous in its exaggeration, but it is unknown whether Fuzzy was honoring or making fun of die-hard QHH-ers in the creation of this meme. Either way, it is a powerful commentary on the role Quarantine Happy Hour has played in people's lives during the COVID era. Perhaps it is also a lesson in how people use memes to relay complex feelings about a topic in a simple, visual way.

²¹ Dunlop, Fuzzy. 2020. My Life/Quarantine Happy Hour Jail Cell Meme. July 4, 2020.



CHAPTER 8: ITERATIONS OF THE OLD TIME MUSIC COMMUNITY

Uncertainty has defined the time of COVID, and the beginning emergence from the pandemic in the summer of 2021 is no exception. As of summer 2021, reactions to the pandemic have entered a liminal space between pandemic and recovery. For the old time music community, this is happening right at the beginning of what would normally be festival season. As we look towards this particular annual phenomenon, global concerns and feelings of uncertainty surrounding the pandemic manifest themselves in this community. Very few people are expressing complete COVID denial, a phenomenon wherein individuals refuse to acknowledge that Coronavirus is real and not some engineered social experiment. Nor are they encouraging the full-blown opening of festivals, and the number of individuals on the side of keeping everything completely shut down number few.

People with whom I have discussed this with are sitting in an interstitial space. The Appalachian String Band Festival, more commonly known as “Clifftop,” announced the cancellation of its 2021 event in mid-May. At the time of writing this, a limited number of early-summer festivals have active plans to proceed. To my knowledge, this includes the 49th Annual Mount Airy Bluegrass & Old-Time Fiddlers Convention and the Rockbridge Mountain Music & Dance Festival. Later summer and fall festivals have yet to be announced, but it is likely they will move forward with programming. As a community of music-lovers, having this to anticipate is a far cry from where we were this time last year. As Fuzzy Dunlop’s meme above relays, for a

long while Quarantine Happy Hour has been the primary place to gain a sense of togetherness and “festival”.²²

The uncertainty occasioned by the pandemic reflects a particular moment of liminality. The moment that gave rise to Quarantine Happy Hour sits in the space between the pre-pandemic world and post-pandemic world. “Originally referring to the ubiquitous rites of passage as a category of cultural experience, liminality captures in-between situations and conditions characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty about the continuity of tradition and future outcomes.”²³ Because liminality in ethnography and anthropology is understood as the state between two recognizable iterations of being, it concerns itself with identity and status. Much like a wedding ceremony or other rite of passage wherein lies a process of becoming something different and new, this lens of understanding imagines old time music as a living organism. It operates in the pre-pandemic world in a certain way. We are certain of this order of operations. I am writing about and studying this community from the liminal moment in which Quarantine Happy Hour thrives. While we can add the accumulated sum of what we know now to our perceptual set in predicting the future, the musical community of old time has no idea what will happen next. Despite the creativity and adaptability involved in music-making, most of what we have known up until now is ritual. We can think of rituals as many small behaviors. These range from where you camp to how you ask to join a jam, all of which are socially performative.²⁴

²² Here I employ “festival” as a descriptive noun. Festival is different from celebrate/celebrating. It conjures images of activity, engagement, togetherness and deep connection with one another, usually in honor and recognition of a common focal point.

²³ Horvath, Agnes, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, Introduction: Liminality and Cultures of Change (International Political Anthropology 2009).

²⁴ This statement rests on the definition of ritual as many small behaviors, not necessarily popular or stereotypical hyper-formal conceptions of ritual.

However, ritual and in-person performance should not be conflated. While they are inextricably bound together, they are two separate parts of how individuals navigate the broader space of old time community. Performance makes the significance of those rituals visible. Those little rituals serve to both build and break down connections. Prior to the pandemic that brought Quarantine Happy Hour into the world, the old time music community thrived in an environment that stood against everything the Coronavirus has wrought on the world. In its most social form, it existed most strongly in rituals that fostered community and group identity. It included togetherness and physical touch, knee-to-knee jam sessions and square dances. Festivals both large and small brought people together around a love of traditional music and dance, and passion for connecting with others based on that shared love. The concepts that have allowed the community to thrive socially are deeply shared. They dissolve generational and other barriers in a way that no other musical genre seems to pull off. Because Coronavirus has largely prevented the coming together and sharing of memories in person, community members of all ages have taken to sharing pictures and other audiovisual material online. Although that has become a ritual all its own during this unique moment, the common sentiment is that this form of reminiscing will never take the place of in-person activities. While as a newbie I deeply enjoyed seeing any audiovisual documentation I could find, be it professionally or unprofessionally produced, I was invested in the context. After a year of observing this community online, I had my ideas of what ritual might mean to them but wanted to know for sure. I posed the following question as a public status update on my personal Facebook account:²⁵

Old time music peeps:

What would you say are your small rituals/behaviors--or ones you have observed--when operating in a very social setting with other old time music people?

²⁵ Terrell, Lindsey. 2021. "Old time music peeps: What would you say are your small rituals/behaviors--or ones you have observed--when operating in a very social setting with other old time music people? Facebook post." Facebook, June 28, 2021.

This could be in a small or large jam setting, festivals, performances, whatever. It could be things you do consciously or unconsciously. Just answer however you feel makes sense.

It's for science. AKA folklore. Thanks in advance!

The answers varied. It was rewarding to glean more insight on the rituals and behaviors I had anticipated, such as knee-to-knee jams.

... Knee to knee music playing is so intimate and subtle and variable that the one thing I can think of that really matters is listening carefully. Both when you're playing and when you're talking.

I like to make it really clear when I am deeply familiar with a particular tune and it's various sources, or if I kind of know it, and am doing my best to pick up what others are putting out.²⁶

However, it was the answers I had not necessarily expected that were the most rewarding. One person explained "I rosin my bow—whether it needs it or not. I think it fills in time that might otherwise feel socially awkward and helps me settle in."²⁷ This ritual demonstrates a social anxiety that comes with navigating this community. There were also answers that suggest a darker side to this world. One commenter acknowledged that while the "the playing, singing, and dancing itself has a solemn, ritualistic aspect ... musical ability serves as a source of social capital, cheapens relationships, and facilitates abuse within the old-time music community, or any music scene for that matter."²⁸ On a lighter note, several of the answers were clearly meant

²⁶ Wyatt, Clarke. 2021. "Seriously though, knee to knee music playing is so...Facebook comment." Facebook, June 28, 2021.

²⁷ Richardson, Cyndy. 2021. "I rosin my bow—whether it needs it or not. Facebook comment." Facebook, June 28, 2021.

²⁸ Dunlop, Fuzzy. 2021. "The playing, singing, and dancing itself has a solemn, ritualistic aspect...Facebook comment." Facebook, June 28, 2021.

to be humorous but actually did work to affirm my expectations of the group's social rituals ("Consuming medium to large quantities of alcohol. I think this may be somewhat traditional.")²⁹

It is important to note that my perception of the old time community as it exists outside of the online sphere is a fairly recent phenomenon. There is a bigger context, and what is happening online is not always indicative of what is happening out in the world. In this online world, you see glimpses of how people are navigating this world. Some people have no online presence whatsoever. Some people do but are not social at all. My own vision of this community has largely been influenced by the values of those who came to this music during the folk revival of the 1970s. I conceptualize the folk revivalists as a bridge between the two worlds: the old players (often cited by current players as sources for tunes) and the modern-day community. I discussed this with key consultant Meghan Merker, who is of this generation and deeply experienced the historical moment in which the "old-timers" and the revivalists mixed.

"The first group obviously is the old-timers. They grew up in the music. It wasn't something that they picked up as young adults. They told stories about wanting music so badly that they would as tiny children drag their parents' instruments out of their cases or off-the-wall and try to find some creative way of holding them so that they could make some sounds. They wanted it badly. They were born into a world of deep and abiding silence. Broken only by the music. The music was made in their own intimate communities. I'm talking about a time before there was even radio, a time before there was any recorded music to listen to. A time that was the last silent time in the world. As this generation grew to adulthood, and then old age, they watched the world change dramatically. From silence and homemade music to a few visionary folklorists with huge and unwieldy "recording machines," to radio to commercially recorded music to television (like Pete Seeger's Rainbow Quest TV show that featured traditional mountain music). But as time passed, they saw community music and dance begin to wither. Their generation never faltered, but their children and grandchildren often had no interest in the music. The kids were enthralled by flashy sounds like bluegrass and country western and worse. Many of the younger generation left home to move to the big cities where things were "happening". Cue "How you gonna keep them down on the farm after they've seen

²⁹ Zinn, Andrew. 2021. "Consuming medium to large quantities of alcohol. Facebook comment." Facebook, June 28, 2021.

Gay Paree”. And it seemed to the old timers that the music that they loved, which had been part of their culture forever, might not survive.”³⁰

Although there was a certain amount of revivalist activity in New York City in the late 30s and 1940s, it failed to gain traction as far as visiting and learning directly from the old timers in the South. There are a few notable exceptions to this, one being musician and folklorist Margot Mayo, who traveled and made field recordings in Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee in the mid-1940s with banjo player Stu Jamieson. In Tennessee, they recorded the African American stringband Gribble, Lusk and York, some of the earliest field recordings of Black players in the south. And in Kentucky, they recorded Margot’s cousin Rufus Crisp, a five-string banjo player with an unusual and compelling style. It has been said of Margot Mayo that she was “the Source ” one inevitably arrived at when tracing back the various Northern roots of the old time music revival. Whether or not this is true overall, there is certainly a direct and fascinating line from Margot Mayo to the well-known and immensely influential revivalist string band, the New Lost City Ramblers. After hearing the recordings of Rufus Crisp, a young aspiring banjo player named Woody Wachtell visited Crisp with Mayo in the late 1940s. He learned to play the banjo at Mr. Crisp’s knee, determined to absorb as much of his unique banjo style as possible. A few years later, in the early 1950s, Woody in turn inspired and taught a young John Cohen to play the banjo. In 1958, John, along with Mike Seeger and Tom Paley, founded the New Lost City Ramblers. The NLCR proved to be a powerful influence on up-and-coming young musicians of the sixties to the present day.

The revival began a resurgence of interest, mostly among young northerners, in the old music of the South. Merker notes that was especially important because at that time many of the old players were afraid that their music was going to pass with them.

³⁰ Meghan Merker, text message to author, June 29, 2021.

“Very few of their children had any interest in playing traditional music. Some, like Tommy Jarrell’s son Benny, preferred to turn their considerable musical talents to the more flashy newer bluegrass music. Many had no interest in playing music other than what came over the radio. Certainly very few of their grandchildren, our generation, had any interest in the music of their grandparents. It was at the eleventh hour of this situation that the northern youngsters showed up, in love with the music, wanting it more than anything else.”³¹

The pilgrimages made by these young northerners to their southern musical elders, and the relationships that developed between them, were of profound importance. A pilgrimage began with a visit, but became much more. These visits were life-changing for both generations. They were much more than a chance to learn a tune, more than a chance to record the music.

“Of course there were epic fails, when a lack of crosscultural respect and an inability to communicate made for a painful situation. These unfortunate occasions became legends in the lexicon. But there were many revivalists, hungry for the music and for the culture, who spent solid time in communities where they became accepted, trusted, and loved.”³²

Many stayed in the South, for months, years, sometimes for lifetimes. They immersed themselves in the music and the culture and became part of the lives not only of the musicians but of the other members of the community. Some of them, including Peter Hoover, Tom Carter, and Blanton Owen, made serious field recordings of their friends and mentors. The lives of younger and older musicians were enriched and expanded by these relationships. And the (usually reel to reel) recordings eventually made their way onto a few LPs and precious cassette tapes which were copied unto the hundredth generation and passionately memorized and shared in a sort of underground old time music revolution.

“Remember that this was the pre-digital era. We had our ears, we had our cassettes, and we had our variable speed Superscope tape machines. We had a handful of vinyl, and gradually we had cassettes custom made by Joe Bussard from his immense collection of old commercially recorded 78 RPM records. Most important of all, we had the visits, and we had each other. Those of us who came to the music in the 70s and 80s did not and could not understand that we would be the last generation to spend time with and be mentored by these elder “musicianers”, who generously brought us into their lives and in

³¹ Meghan Merker, text message to author, June 30, 2021.

³² Ibid.

doing so linked us powerfully to another, older time. Their time, a time of silence that had given birth to this music and kept it alive. In that silence it was possible to listen, and to hear deeply.”³³

Music is inextricably intertwined with the culture and time to which it belongs. By the 90s almost all of these “missing link” musicians were gone. But the number of young people playing old time music continued to grow.

Concomitant with this growth in numbers was the growing number of festivals, not only in the South, where the neo-revivalists (including in some cases children of the original revivalists) could meet and play and continue to foster the sense of community that has always been such an integral part of old time music. During this time there was also an increase in availability of recorded music. Vinyl and cassettes were followed by CDs, which were state of the art until digital technology burst onto the scene. Along with digital recording techniques and massive availability of recordings, the internet was born. Social media came soon after. All of this made it possible to hear and collect and share recordings more easily than ever before. It also enabled certain public and private institutions to make their large collections of old time music recordings accessible online. Several revivalist collectors got together and created the Field Recorders Collective with the idea of making their recordings available to the general public. As the Internet continued to develop, many non-institutional tune resources sprang up, such as Larry Warren’s source tune database, Slippery Hill. Before long there were several younger old time musicians making their living by touring, often worldwide, and teaching at traditional music camps. “The old timers, for whom music had never been a day job, could never have imagined this scenario,” Merker explains.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Prior to the advent of the pandemic, there were very few livestreamed old time music concerts to be found on the internet. Once Coronavirus laid its veil of liminality over the world, internet livestreams suddenly became a crucial way for unemployed musicians to make a living while unable to travel or perform their accustomed live gigs, while providing a sense of continued connection between musicians, and between musicians and their audiences and community. These concerts often included chat sections, which provided the Pub-like atmosphere that Quarantine Happy Hour became famous for. The native ingenuity, creativity, and generosity of this widespread community made it possible not only to stay connected with and to reconnect with old friends, but to “meet” and banter with and support new friends all over the globe. I feel immensely lucky to be a new friend to hundreds of people.

Being “Lindsey From the Internet,” a concept I explore in the following section, has led me to develop close relationships with people who engage with the community in all sorts of ways. However, because of my intense enthusiasm and hunger for this music and all that comes along with it, I have related to the aforementioned revivalists on a different level. As hard as it has been to admit, understanding the significance of my own role has become key to understanding the transformation of this community during the virtual turn. Insight from Merker was instrumental in this epiphany:

“I know it’s hard to talk about yourself, but you pretty much have to. You’re going to have to do that in order to support the [thesis] statement. And the fact is that your presence, as I and many others have pointed out to you, galvanized this community into feeling like a community again. And this is so crucial to the whole [thesis] statement! The old time community had become in certain ways too big and unwieldy, and fraught with various kinds of disconnect and in-fighting and in-jokes and turf wars. None of these things were possible once the community was only able to commune digitally. So the reinvention of the old time community began with Quarantine Happy Hour, and your participation as a new adopted member of the community, with no history, coming to this music with the wholehearted love and enthusiasm and wild passion that we all had for it

when we were your age and learning it together...when we came together as a MUCH smaller community some forty or so years ago...is/was SO IMPORTANT.”³⁵

³⁵ Meghan Merker, text message to author, June 17, 2021.

CHAPTER 9: MY ROLE AND PLACE IN THE STORY

It is not every day you're given a fiddle and a rattlesnake rattle (originally belonging to one of your ultimate musical heroes) to put inside of it. However, in a testament to the relationship I had built with members of the folk revivalist generation in particular, the community came together to get me everything I needed to act on my love of fiddle music. Meghan Merker, one of my dearest friends and key consultant for this project, knew that I needed a more solid fiddle with which to begin learning. After posting on Facebook and procuring me a fiddle and bow which I myself went to pick up, Merker also sent me a rattlesnake rattle given to her by my own ultimate fiddle hero, Benton Flippen. This rattle, having originally rested in one of Flippen's earliest fiddles, was promptly placed in the fiddle I had received from Benton's bandmates Paul Brown and Terri McMurray just a few months earlier.

To understand how I got to this point, one must go back in time. My journey to my current place in the old time music community happened as a giant snowball might. It snows, the snow builds up flake by flake over time, then all of a sudden, circumstances scoop you up, form you, and send you rolling. I had a musical childhood--took piano lessons, toyed briefly with bass guitar, grew up in church, and came from a musical family. My father has always loved bluegrass music. I can still remember screaming in the car as a child because I didn't want to listen to Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder while the family traversed western North Carolina's Blue Ridge Parkway. I cannot remember precisely when I first heard old time music. Still, I do know that at some point during the Sunday lineup of our local public radio station

(WNCW, broadcasting from Spindale, North Carolina), its bluegrass segment (called “Going Across the Mountain”) was interrupted by three glorious hours of old time mountain music called “This Old Porch,” and I loved it then as I do now. However, the moment I consciously knew in my young heart that I loved this music was when my father showed me “Songcatcher.” This 2000 film directed by Maggie Greenwald changed my life. Although I had no idea at the time, it featured legends that I would come to know and love, such as Hazel Dickens, Bobby McMillon, Sheila Kay Adams, and Iris DeMent. In particular, my younger self’s heartstrings were plucked beyond repair by Iris DeMent’s performance of the traditional ballad/love song “Pretty Saro.” This song would stick with me over the years, despite my putting traditional mountain music on the back burner in favor of 60s and 70s rock music for much of my young adulthood.

I was an undergraduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill when I discovered Rhiannon Giddens & The Carolina Chocolate Drops and Anna & Elizabeth and fell in love. Pretty Saro came back into my life in the spring of 2016, my last semester as an undergrad. I took a course called “Southern Culture, Southern Style”. As a part of this course, we had to partner with another student on a presentation. Another music-minded student named Wesley Roten and I worked together and titled our project “Song Collecting and the Search for the Southern Sound.” Even early on, I had an eye toward tune variations, so I spotlighted two versions of Pretty Saro-- that of Elizabeth LaPrelle and Cas Wallin (as collected by Alan Lomax). Fast forward four years to the spring of 2020. Coronavirus happened. My life would never be the same.

I was added to the Quarantine Happy Hour Facebook group in its earliest days by Joseph Decosimo, a friend, colleague, and former teaching assistant. It took a while, but I got brave about making comments and talking to all these strangers...and strangers they were because at

this point I knew relatively little about the old time music community beyond listening to a handful of artists. At some point I joined “Old Time Music Shitposting” (OTMSP), a meme group dedicated to making fun of the music, artists, and community we love and love to hate. I created a fifty-five hour long Spotify playlist of different tune variations which I shared around the virtual circles. For this personal project, I compiled a reference list of common tune titles and attempted to find as many versions as possible of each tune on Spotify and added them to a playlist which I titled “Songs for Saro,” after my personal favorite tune. This project is ongoing, but some of the most prolific songs and tunes so far are “Barbara Allen,” “Back Step Cindy,” and “Darling Corey.” I hosted several old time socials on Zoom, including a party (complete with party hats) celebrating the 100th Quarantine Happy Hour concert where the likes of Paul Brown, Terri McMurray, Kelsey Sutton, and others shared memories and stories. Before my quarantine life got busier, I shared a series of late night old time YouTube video finds at one o’clock in the morning with Dedicated to Old Time Music, the largest Facebook group centered around this genre; something that turned out to be popular. When community member Yates Webb posted that he was hosting a Zoom trivia night, I got together a small team of OTMSP members and joined in.

A combination of these activities brought me into this community and provided me with the platform from which I have observed what I am writing about. It was invigorating to find myself in the middle of something amazing happening right before my eyes and being, on some level, a facilitator of it. I am fully aware that this position has allowed me to take on the role of participant observer, and this is reflected in comments I have received from community members. Meghan Merker writes:

“According to many, many people, you have with your spirit and enthusiasm galvanized this community into various actions, and brought us together again. Made us feel like a community. Made us remember what it felt like to be discovering this music. You have also kept us connected and informed with your social media skills and your far-cast net.”³⁶

I started two different Facebook groups of my own--OTAF (“Old Time As Fuck”) Pets and Old Time Music Pen Pals. In a Facebook comment referencing the latter, Adam Smith, washtub bass player and active member of the online old time community, wrote “I’m convinced Lindsey Terrell is a Tulpa that the Old Time scene has manifested through communal thought energy to remind ourselves of the excitement that this music brought out in us when we started, as we’re unable to share it as we normally do.”³⁷ I have also tried my best to further the Quarantine Happy Hour cause, naming myself the “unofficial tip jar publicist” and often being one of the most prolific sharers of these streams, considering it my sworn duty to keep people informed of that night’s offerings. When I ordered The Horsenecks’ newest album, “Started Out to Town,” directly from their website, they included a free Horsenecks t-shirt and a note that thanked me for “being a gold-star QHH-er for so long.” It was coming in as a stranger from the outside into the virtual side (which offers so much intimacy yet so much separation) that put me in the unique position I am currently in. As of this writing, I am the Social Media Content Manager for the Floyd Country Store and its Handmade Music arm, which includes the Handmade Music School and County Sales Music. This position allows me to continue and now get paid for the type of work I’ve been doing for the past year: spreading a love of old time music as passionately as I can. However, recently I had the opportunity to bridge the gap from the virtual and remote into

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Smith, Andrew. 2020. “I’m convinced Lindsey Terrell is a Tulpa...Facebook comment.” Facebook, July 27, 2020.

the tangible and intimate on a bigger scale than that of the few short visits I had made with new friends during the course of the pandemic.

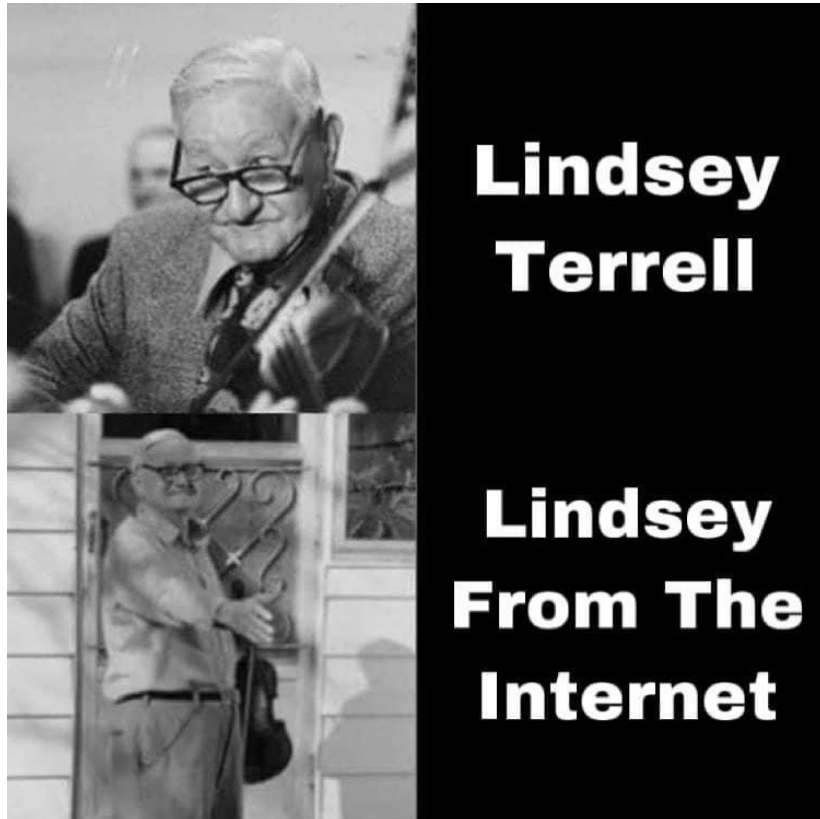
The Mt. Airy Blue Grass and Old Time Fiddlers Convention, affectionately known as Mt. Airy, took place in early June 2021. I decided to attend to see what my first festival would be like given the fact that I'd gone about things backwards. I became part of the community online before I became a part of the community in person. The latter happened slowly, meeting people here and there as I went along my journey but I was craving something more. Although fully vaccinated, I still had qualms about going because of the Coronavirus, I had spent many hours watching videos posted by people like Craig Evans, Dave Wells, and other festival documentarians and felt that it was time for me to experience the magic they captured in person. After traveling to Floyd, Virginia to assist with the Floyd Country Store luthier showcase event featuring luthiery legends Shay Garriock, Mac Traynham, and Jackson Cunningham (all of whom I was meeting in person for the first time), I set out for Surry County, North Carolina. It seemed fitting that I go straight from one hub of old time music to another. The relationship between these regions is strong but that is not to say they are inseparable. When I asked consultant Meghan Merker why I might have felt such a strong sense of significance when transitioning from Floyd, Virginia to Mt. Airy, North Carolina within an hour, she said this:

“Tommy [Jarrell], of Mount Airy, and Luther [Davis], of Galax, lived so near to each other...but they had never met. When I asked them why they had never met they both agreed that it was the mountains. In those days when they were young, they couldn't cross the mountains. Or at least not without a huge amount of difficulty. So the two cultures were separated by a mountain range, basically. And they are very different cultures. I felt that even then ... Luther embodied an almost puritanical part of southwestern Virginia. While Tommy embodied the more wild and wooly North Carolina lineage. Tommy kept a quart jar of shine in his bedroom closet. Luther didn't drink. And if you listen to their music side by side, you will see immediately what I mean. Because obviously the music of a culture embodies that culture.”³⁸

³⁸ Meghan Merker, text message to author, June 25, 2021.

Merker's description of the eerie feeling I carried that day resonates with me far beyond a sense of geography. As I anticipated and prepared for this busy and important day, I wondered how all of this music, social connection, and cultural context that I had previously largely only enjoyed online would play out. Just as Luther Davis and Tommy Jarrell shared so much but had never met yet eventually came together as time wore on and barriers became increasingly surmountable, I was finally getting to transition into a more tangibly connected existence.

My particular experience of the Mt. Airy Fiddlers Convention was akin to navigating through a bizarre and enlightening fieldwork experience. At all times I was both the consultant and the fieldworker. I was seeing what it was like for a being existing almost exclusively on the internet in most peoples' eyes to come alive and socialize in the flesh. At the time of writing this, I was only beginning to learn old time fiddle and could not participate in the festival by competing or jamming so I was restricted to listening to and seeing those things happening as well as socializing. Luckily, I had dear friend Rachel Dunaway, one of the few friends I had spent time with in person, as my "festival buddy." She and a few others helped me have a positive first festival experience.



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In a testament to the novelty of my particular experience, I lost count of the number of times I was referred to as “Lindsey From The Internet.” Whether it was coming from a Facebook friend I was meeting for the first time or from a friend who was introducing me to someone I was probably Facebook friends with, “Lindsey From The Internet” became my nickname and if the above meme is any indication it will stick with me for some time. To those unfamiliar with the Pub, a moniker like “Lindsey From The Internet” may indicate distance, but those who have seen me banter with relative strangers in the comments section know better. Running jokes and memes I helped perpetuate online before meeting anyone were referenced face-to-face. At Mt.

³⁹ This meme was created by Old Time Music Shitposting member Rachel Dunaway. It is based on a popular meme template wherein rapper Drake is in the top frame disgusted by something, then in the bottom frame seemingly pleased by the alternative. This particular version replaces rapper Drake with Surry County fiddler Tommy Jarrell. This version of the template was originally created by OTMSP member Fuzzy Dunlop.

Airy, everything that had kept me moving forward during the previous year-and-a-half came to life before my eyes. Seeing my rather unique journey into this community culminate in this way caused me to reflect on other differences in my story and others’.

Just as my particular perception of how community manifests itself among old time musicians is not indicative of the whole group, my personal preferences within this music is not its most popular or common. I have come to this music through its least familiar element, that of voice. As evidenced by my favorite Quarantine Happy Hour stream and love for “Songcatcher,” Bruce Molsky, Elizabeth LaPrelle, Rhiannon Giddens, and Jean Ritchie, the only aspect of this music that holds greater attraction for me than the fiddle is the voice. Perhaps that is because the fiddle is the instrument most similar to the voice, but either way, voice carries a special kind of weight. Voice as employed in song and lyric makes the untellable tellable; singing brings emotion to words that is absent when words are simply spoken. One need go no further than listening to the work of Alice Gerrard. One half of the famous duo Hazel and Alice, Gerrard’s voice is timeless and deeply moving. Although Gerrard is a talented instrumentalist, her solo a cappella performance of “Little Bessie” at the Augusta Heritage Center’s 2016 Vocal Week epitomizes what I value so much about voice in this music.⁴⁰ Gerrard, standing alone on the stage with no instrument but her vocal chords, explains the story behind the song and then begins to sing. Hearing that first phrase (Hug me closer, closer, Mother) sung so plaintively, one might believe Gerrard herself was the dying little girl in the song. This is the power of voice in traditional music. It conveys the pain, pleasure, joy, and sorrow that comes directly from our identities and souls.

⁴⁰ Little Bessie - Alice Gerrard at Augusta Vocal Week 2016. Accessed July 9, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lo84eP7FlwA>.

CHAPTER 10: IDENTITY AND THE VIRTUAL TURN

When I speak of voice, I do not speak of voice only as a feature of traditional music. Voice means representation and a seat at the table. It concerns itself with dignity and mutual respect. Prior to the creation of a liminal space between pandemic and recovery, there was a liminal space around identity as it is located in voice. The virtual turn in which Quarantine Happy Hour emerged represents a kind of opening of the old time music world during a time of global strife; not only from the Coronavirus but also from socioeconomic conflicts. The lynching of George Floyd and ensuing protests, Black Lives Matter, election season, and more came together with the pandemic to bring to bear powerful questions about identity and association. It is not to say that these questions were not being asked prior to the advent of COVID-19, but with these questions as with so many other things, the tense situation and virtual turn introduced by the virus made them much more visible.

A powerful example of this played out in late March 2021 with Abigail Washburn, banjo player and vocalist of the all-female string band Uncle Earl. Washburn is well-known for her relationship with Chinese language and culture as well as her work to connect Chinese and American traditional music. However, scrutiny of Uncle Earl for their “Streak O’Lean, Streak O’Fat” music video which featured Chinese stereotypes and kung-fu movie aesthetics led to scrutiny of Washburn herself, who eventually issued an apology for several self-proclaimed “racist acts.” These acts included the “Streak O’Lean, Streak O’Fat” music video, posting a picture of herself with a black wig with the caption “I am the Chinese teacher,” and a sketch she used to perform in the early days of touring with husband and musical partner Bela Fleck which

many felt perpetuated negative Asian stereotypes.⁴¹ This apology was issued via a Facebook post on her public artist page on March 23, 2021, just a week after a shooter killed eight people in an Atlanta spa, six of whom were Asian women. It included a promise to donate to Red Canary Song, an American grassroots coalition that advocates for the rights of Asian and migrant massage parlor workers.

Voice is an essential part of making this community work for all people. It is a crucial part of understanding the history of this music but is also a crucial part of building the future of this music. Initiatives like Decolonizing the Music Room and The Rhapsody Project, among others, are doing powerful work in this regard. According to their home page, the work of Decolonizing the Music Room:

“means centering BBIA (Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian) voices, knowledge, and experiences to challenge the historical dominance of white Western European and American music, narratives, and practices that has resulted in minimization and erasure throughout our field. There is no end point of being "decolonized," only constant learning, reflecting and growing.”⁴²

The Rhapsody project, based in Seattle, Washington, operates on a similar understanding.

“The Rhapsody Project teaches American roots music through programs that promote empathy, equity, and the exploration of personal and cultural heritage. We envision a world where each person seizes their power as a culture bearer”⁴³

These groups are made up of dedicated musicians and activists who recognize that the ongoing nationwide battle for social justice and equity is inextricable from the past, present, and future of American roots music. They understand the importance of voice.

⁴¹ Washburn, Abigail. 2021. "Statement of Apology. Facebook post." Facebook, March 23, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/abigailwashburn/posts/279502936948898>.

⁴² “Decolonizing The Music Room - Home.” Decolonizing the Music Room. Accessed July 9, 2021. <https://decolonizingthemusicroom.com/>.

⁴³ “The Rhapsody Project - Facebook.” Accessed July 8, 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/therhapsodyproject/>.

The virtual turn of the old time music community in all of its iterations (including Quarantine Happy Hour) was operated within the context of much larger social and political upheaval. The virtual turn was more than a response to the pandemic brought on by social distancing restrictions. It was a way to navigate the anxieties of the current historical moment, whether it was police lynchings, the incited siege of the United States Capitol, or uneven rollout of vaccines. These are all topics that appeared either directly or indirectly in the overall story of this phenomenon. Similar stories are bound to make their way into this musical community's future, whether those conversations are welcome or not.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

To reiterate, this thesis argues that during the mass virtual turn ushered in by the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent shutdown, the old time music community used Facebook not only to maintain the community but to expand it as well. This paper has traced this phenomenon through its most notable features and moments as seen through the eyes of a true-hearted participant observer. These features and moments are ones that indelibly help define the way a large slice of the old time music community has creatively adapted to the circumstances of the Coronavirus, but more specifically how I as a relative stranger to this group have perceived and navigated this phenomenon. The Black Voters Matter fundraiser in the Quarantine Happy Hour group exhibited to this newcomer the immense power and reach of a small community when the members are of one mind. The early days of Quarantine Happy Hour were assuredly one of the most unique phenomena in modern music history. Those earliest days presented not only an opportunity for established members of the community to bond and stay connected, but also for shy newcomers like me to find an easier “in” to the community, whether we consciously sought it or not. Donna Ray Norton and Melanie Penland’s Quarantine Happy Hour livestream concert in May 2020 showed a side of traditional music that is not as often showcased in the broader scene, whether through television, radio, or digital music sales. It also showcased the part of traditional music that drew me in before any other and to this day is my favorite part. The drawbacks and negative aspects of Quarantine Happy Hour and the venue’s persistence in spite of those things prove a collective need for this initiative and willingness to make it work despite challenges and barriers. The different Facebook groups concerning the topic of old time music existed long before

Quarantine Happy Hour. Dedicated to Old Time Music and Traditional Music Today may not host livestreams like QHH did, but they face their own set of issues which primarily concern social and political discourse. Another Facebook group within this community, Old Time Music Shitposting was started in early January 2020. COVID-19 certainly existed by this point but had not yet created the liminal moment which gave rise to Quarantine Happy Hour. That being said, OTMSP was not created with the mission to keep folks connected during social distancing periods but ended up serving this purpose for a select few community members who share an elaborated code. These various Facebook groups--including ones I was not able to discuss in this paper--create a complex sort of Venn diagram in their representation of the online old time music community and the ways those specific community members use those groups.

When I first began consciously operating as a participant observer in this online space, I assumed that the way the community behaved online wholly reflected how they behaved in-person and how the community had always behaved long before the internet existed. However, this is not necessarily true. The aforementioned community is made up of multiple generations who navigate the world of old time music, both online and offline, in different ways. One can think of these generations in three parts: the old timers, the revivalists, and the neo-revivalists. Although they are three distinct groups, they share musical connections and lineages that transcend the forces of time, place, and death. My understanding of and love for this music and the group identity that surrounds it comes from a particular kind of bond I have formed with the revivalist generation. They are the bridge between the old timers and the neo-revivalists, some of whom are their children. They carried this music into the digital age by centering social connection before social media existed. The majority of people in the revivalist generation were not raised by or around old time musicians and came to this music out of sheer passion and love.

This is what we share. Although I was raised around bluegrass and gospel music, I found my way to old time music in a similar way. My introductions to this music came through radio, live performances, and folklore fieldwork, but once Coronavirus hit, social media full-on facilitated my initiation. I joined the aforementioned Facebook groups, I stepped out of my comfort zone and participated in the comments and the banter because I knew I had found my people even though I did not know them yet. I did my best to prove myself and my love for this scene by throwing all my energy into making sure these musicians felt seen, loved, and supported. I was propelled forward by pure passion. However, this particular kind of initiation does not come without its more concerning elements. As I became more entrenched and particularly as I donned my participant observer hat and decided to study this virtual turn phenomenon formally, I realized that my blind love had led me to oversimplifying and sugarcoating. I began to see the messy parts as they manifested themselves in online forums. I learned some ugly truths about what it means when community forms around something that's not Top 40s music. One cannot be invested in any kind of traditional music in the United States and not think about voice and identity. Whether that means you believe we should talk about it and reconcile or ignore it completely, it lies at the center of modern traditional music discourse, just as it lies at the center of national sociopolitical discourse. When the national news is so dominated by the latter, be it in the context of mass shootings, police lynchings, or crucial elections, it is difficult to ignore the former and indeed irresponsible to do so.

This thesis, completed on the eve of the closure of Quarantine Happy Hour in early July 2021, has mapped a series of relationships during a unique moment in American history and music history. Through this examination it has proven that the old time music community has used Facebook during the mass virtual turn not only to maintain the community but to expand it

as well. It did this by both eschewing and translating its analog roots in order to adapt to the virtual turn ushered in by the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent shutdown. I, as a participant observer and self-proclaimed member of this scene, am living proof of that expansion. Seeing as so much of this research and experience for me has concerned liminality and different iterations of community, I have to ask myself where does this research go from here? This was a unique moment but it will not be the only moment that we see changes and negotiations come about. Early to mid 2020 saw a moment wherein the old time music community had to adapt to new ways of making, sharing, and bonding over this music. Seeing how that phenomenon played out is what inspired this paper. I have documented one part of a two-part process. The second part is only now beginning to unfold. Future research will look at how this online community takes what they have learned during the darkest days of the pandemic and folds it into their collective and individual futures. Individuals will have to confront tensions around voice and identity that have permeated old time and traditional music for so long. Newcomers will find their own mechanisms for entering the community and I will continue to engage with this music and its people.

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