

2 **Baggage**

Like many of my musician friends, I had classical music training as a child. When I started playing trad, it took me a while to put a finger on what made this music so appealing and so different from the musical culture I'd been trained in.

Trad Music Is Inclusive

Playing trad music is part of a community experience. People get together in homes, bars and coffee houses to learn and play together. Even the most well-known musicians are accessible. The enjoyment of the group is far more important than playing perfectly.

Trad Music Is Made for Dancing

Playing with a danceable beat is essential, even if no one is dancing. In contrast to “composed” music, traditional tunes are played over and over until the musicians (or dancers) feel like stopping.

Trad Music Is Social

In a jam session or musical get together, there's often as much conversation as playing. Politics, religion and other divisive issues can be left at the door.

Trad Music Allows for Individual Expression

Some musicians assume that classical music is superior to traditional styles, simply because of its complexity. The playing of a trad tune is subject to the performer's interpretation, and therefore requires an open, flexible, responsive relationship to

the music. Rhythm (i.e. chord) players are free to choose their own harmony for backup. They're expected to hear the basic harmony and add variations, and in a jam session, fit their harmony in with other players.

Trad Music Is a Living Tradition

The music changes. Even living composers don't claim a "definitive" version of their tune. Players share and swap information about tunes: stories about the composer, the region where they're from, regional variations, who popularized them... Playing and sharing the music becomes part of transmitting a historic and cultural tradition.

Trad Music Is an Oral Tradition

Sheet music is available, and often shared widely, but it's used as a reference. If you want to know how the tune really sounds, you won't find it in the sheet music. You have to listen to someone play it. Because people learn by ear, players tend to be great listeners as well.

When I articulated these differences, I realized I was carrying a lot of "baggage" from my classical training: assumptions about what it means to be a good musician, and even about why I play.

Today I'll consider my assumptions about what it means to be a "good" musician, and compare them to what is important in playing trad. Maybe there's some baggage I can leave behind.