

Lubbock, Leningrad and Lafayette

My last novel, *Dirt Road*, concerns two weeks in the life of a young fellow who lands in USA with his father. He is a sixteen year old musician from a small town in Scotland, on the road to recovery. His mother has died and here he is, here too is his father, and they have to get on with the living. This is a new country with all new experiences; new people, new everything. This new world is full of stories; everywhere you look, stories, on a bus, all these people, eyes staring; everywhere sounds, human sounds; breathing, sighs, groans, sobbing, screams, laughter; babies gurgling, old folks smiling - does smiling make a sound? depends who's doing the smiling.

One fundamental story is American music. Don't mistake this for "the story of American music": American music is a living breathing thing, an existential expression. From the moment the young fellow lands in Memphis Airport he begins discovering this. Still in the airport he's going up an elevator on the way down is an African American guy in a cowboy hat, an accordion case slung over his shoulder.

Wow! I'm in a foreign country!

I was reminded of years ago in Scotland, involved with the Free University Network, (F.U.N.). We organised regular talks, meetings and events of a political and cultural nature. One two-day event was particularly ambitious and featured Noam Chomsky as keynote speaker. Altogether it was a strong guest list, including the philosopher

George E Davie and featuring, among others writers and poets, Tom Raworth (England), John La Rose (Trinidad & England), Mandla Langa (South Africa) and Viktor Krivulin (Russia).

Viktor was accompanied by two companions who also translated for him. The three of them belonged to the “Klub-1981” group of writers, formed by those excluded from the tightly-controlled Writers’ Union. It was hard for them to obtain a visa and make it out the country at all. They traveled overland from Leningrad (nowadays St Petersburg) with very little money and no resources worth talking about; cigarettes were shared. They came via Berlin at the same time the Wall was being dismantled. Viktor walked with the aid of two walking sticks and weighed about 7 stone. He smoked like a chimney and drank like a demon. There was a touch of bravado in this. One night in the Scotia Bar he tested a single malt whisky somebody had bought him.

He emptied a little onto a table. This horrified the regulars. We watched it seep into the wood. Viktor drew the residue into a circle and set it alight. Some flame! Even he was impressed.

Viktor and his two companions occupied a room in my flat for the period. Their combined snoring reverberated throughout the tenement building. A couple of other visitors were trying to sleep on the floor of the next room: John La Rose and Gus John. Next morning John and Gus smiled politely gathered up their stuff and checked into a hotel.

Viktor and his friends had brought presents; a stone from the Berlin Wall and three brand new albums of classical music. One was Rachmaninov’s Vespers: Mass for Mixed Choir, Opus 37. It was the first time I had heard it.

In return I showed them to my own album collection, the vinyl. The cassettes didn’t interest them. I left them to select something in exchange. I was expecting them to grab something from my meagre

classical music sections., even more meagre jazz Instead they grabbed my three Waylon Jennings albums: Ramblin Man, This Time and Dreaming My Dreams.

I was floored!

The covers were worn and battered, and scratches on the vinyl. I had bought them in a “pre-owned” condition from a street market down the Barras. They were fucking pure gold man I prized them.

So did Viktor and his pals. They couldn't believe their luck. A jeems we have Waylon yes? Years later I got the three together on one two disk CD, but that isn't the same thing at all. I managed to surmount the churlishness: it was a pleasure to think of Waylon' music being played and loved in Leningrad. The truth is I had only come to know country music properly around 1980. It had taken me a while “to discover”. Of course it always had been there, I just failed to identify it. So-called “Country & Western” music was stigmatized as primitive sentimental shite. Its essence is blue-collar, working-class and from here the stigma derives. Within the U.K. society is so damaged by class and hierarchy it would have gone without saying that the voice of George Jones was incapable of expressing beauty (didn't he have a southern drawl, southern drawl? Yeah, goin back down stream.). The idea that he might have had one of the great voices of his generation would have been regarded as ludicrous.

He and Tammy Wynette were married for a period. She reached the top of the pop music charts with Stand by Your Man and D.I.V.O.R.C.E.. She was dismissed with contempt. Trailer-trash music for blue-collar morons. The “higher art forms” have nothing to do with such people, a form of sub-species, incapable of “the finer feelings”, let alone expressing them. My stories are rarely attacked in this way nowadays, but for a long time they were. Not only my fictional

characters: me too. My maw went to Govan High, she would have murdered them.

The novel of mine that caused the hostility was *How Late It Was, How Late*. It tells the story of a man who spends eleven years of his life in prison. After immediate family his first love is country music. References to this abound. Country music helps him get through the nights and the days. But his life aint the stuff of mst country songs I know. It is established authority out to do him in and that happens rarely in country music: unlike blues where it may be the rule. In blues music not just the cops are personified in “the Man”, it goes more deeply than that. In blues music, as far as I can see, “the Man” is the system itself; established authority, racist state authority, racist local authority seeping in everywhere through every part of society; the cops and the unjust legal system are only and ever a part of that. Country music is different. Politics don’t feature generally except the wrong way round: in a conformist nationalism grounded on the indivisibility of America and the American people.

In the world of country music skepticism is dangerous even in principle. Such is the stereotype. Is it ever more than that? In the introduction to a live version of his *Sunday Morning Coming Down* Kris Kristofferson says, in response to a skeptical member of the audience, “Well if it sounds country that’s what it is, it’s a country song.” And then he gets on with it and gives as beautiful a rendition of the song as I ever heard. Recently I heard him sing it again, now in his eighties and suffering that horrible disease where it is almost impossible for him to take part in a proper conversation. He was a guest on the Elvis Costello show, *Spectacle* (check out Youtube). Some of those shows are really fine. Costello and the others looked a bit worried, maybe Kristofferson wouldn't make it, but he did and it was great, him

alone on acoustic guitar, waking up Sunday morning looking for his cleanest dirty shirt.

If it sounds it, it is it.

Country music can be anything at all. To that extent it is not a genre except in the most elastic way possible, at which level "country" becomes a banal classification.

Yes it's an art form, no it's not literature, no it's not sculpture, it's not dance. When is an imaginative work created by a human being not art? The practice of classification and genre requires caution. And in addition. on contemporary classification: firstly in the general approach to contemporary literature which is to consider "literary fiction" a genre. Nowadays the set of literary genres includes science fiction, children's fiction, teenage fiction, detective fiction, romance fiction, spy fiction, war fiction, wild west fiction, pornographic fiction, fantasy fiction, doctors and nurses fiction, real-life fiction - and literary fiction too.

Here we have to distinguish literature from literary fiction, maybe literary art from literary fiction. The trouble with literary fiction is that it can be anything at all, and include any genre in this - unless we invent a couple, eg. bad but well-paid writing.

We have to watch it here with definitions of literature and literary art otherwise we might end up in that old logical conundrum that seems to have foxed Bertrand Russell: if we allow literary fiction as a blanket term for all written fiction then we can refer to literary fiction as the set of written fictions, each one of which can be any fictional thing at all that takes a literary form, so long as "the any fiction thing" is written. The only set that cannot be included in that particular set is "literary fiction" within is itself, the set of literary fiction

In *Dirt Road* accordion is young Murdo's instrument of choice although he plays others. Early in the story he has to play a couple of tunes and the first couple he plays are traditional pieces from the southwest area of Newfoundland. This information is not something he knows, not necessarily. His musical background is Celtic, and the Scottish end of that. One tune he plays is *Fella from Fortune*. Fortune is a port along the southern coast of Newfoundland, on the Burin Peninsula. Here the ferry connects to the French island of St Pierre which was central to the alcohol bootlegging industry back in the days of Al Capone.

You have to pass through passport control to visit St Pierre. My wife grandfather was born there. Occasionally a wee rumour surfaces that some bootlegging still goes on. It doesn't, as far as I know, as an outsider. On my last time in Newfoundland, a long while ago, I enjoyed that 150 proof rum I tasted. In writing this scene it seemed utterly right that Murdo should play this tune. Don't ask me why. It has little to do with me although the version Murdo plays is in the style of Harry Hibbs who hailed from eastern Newfoundland and whose music draws heavily on the Irish end of the Newfie tradition.

Murdo is in his mid teens and doesn't care too much about tradition which is the mark of most young people, artists or not. Murdo takes from anywhere. Don't call it "stealing"; who cares about stealing. The charge of 'stealing' is laid against many artists, including Bob Dylan and what he took from Woody Guthrie. Shit. Woody Guthrie once asked Bill Broonzy to show him a few things. Bill Broonzy said no, but steal what you want. I see no difference between that and what Muddy Water said about Robert Johnson, "he was the kind of guy you watched to get ideas from."

Irreverence should never be mistaken for disrespect. Artists draw from tradition but no tradition is worth its salt unless 'living', and if it's living its riches are available to the rest of humanity. Who else is going to steal it? not dogs, cats or camels.

Murdo plays another tune; this one from the west coast of Newfoundland. West coast musicians have a distinctive Scottish and French influence, not French in general but French-Acadian, the tradition associated with the Canadian Maritimes. Acadian music - better known as "Cajun" - is crucial to the Dirt Road novel. The album I was listening to is by Minnie White, recorded when she was around eighty years old. In her music we hear jigs, square-dances, waltzes and polka, not only French and Scottish but Irish, Mi'kmaq, English, Welsh and Viking.

There have been Scots and French people going back three centuries in this part of the Maritimes. Basque, Bretagne, Viking and Celtic fishermen have been around there for much longer. According to rumour there are French-speaking people on isolated dwellings who nothing of electricity, that telephones have been invented, nor that Napoleon's France sold Louisiana to the USA.

Acadia included land from Maine, USA north into the Maritimes; Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and the west coast of Newfoundland. Following the British defeats of the French, a couple of hundred years ago the Acadians were dispossessed. They had to move and many traveled south, settling in west Louisiana.

This is the origin of the Cajun people in this part of the world. Their culture brought that old Bretagne-French style, mixed with some of that Scottish and Irish tradition. They laced it with country, bluegrass and swing, New Orleans-style, producing the definitive cajun sound. But

zydeco was in there too, from the start. The Creole people were already along west Louisiana, touching on the east Texas border.

During the annual international festival in Lafayette bands arrive from all over the world, many of which are accordion-based. Cajun and zydeco are the home sounds. In the Dirt Road story Murdo Macarthur sets his heart on attending the music festival. He knows nothing about it but gets invited to play there by an elderly musician he meets, a woman by the name of “Queen Monzee-ay”. I didn’t base her character on the great zydeco musician, Queen Ida but I make use of her music in the story. For the character herself I was thinking more on Nina Simone and her carriage, her deportment; how she walked, talked and conducted herself. Me and my wife Marie had the good fortune to be in the audience when Nina did a night at Glasgow's Royal Theatre very many years ago. I based that end of Queen Monzee-ay's walk-on stage from how Nina did it that evening. Scary, with that beautiful sense of fun

The name “Monzee-ay” is a phonetic spelling of a French-sounding name: “Menzies”, a common surname in the English-speaking world, especially in Scotland where the polite pronunciation is ‘Mingus’ and the street pronunciation “‘Menzays’”. In an earlier draft of the story I had a scene built around that ambiguity in reference to Charlie Mingus. “Mingus” is a phonetic transcription of that polite pronunciation. Here in Scotland Charlie Mingus would have his name written down as “Menzies”. In southwest Louisiana Charlie Mingus could have been known as Charlie Monzee-ay. It is more likely he would have been more like the Glaswegian "Menzays"- Charlie Menzees (consider Clifton Chenier).

It’s an interesting area, and controversial where race issues arise. I once asked an audience

to guess what I had in common with the musician Dizzie Gillespie. Neither he nor myself spoke Gàidhlig, but it was part of our cultural heritage. In my case my grandmother, in Dizzie Gillespie's case who knows, but I read someplace one of his ancestors spoke Gàidhlig. "He spoke to his long-time collaborator, Willie Ruff, a bassist and French horn player, about how his parents told of the black slaves who spoke Gàidhlig, the tongue of their masters."

Not only the masters would have spoken Gàidhlig. As long ago as three hundred years ago Scottish Gaels arrived on the eastern seaboard, in Virginia, and very many were indentured workers. These were seafaring people. Unlike most (but not all) African slaves they were legally entitled to buy their way to freedom. African slaves worked on the docks alongside them and picked up the local language, which was Gàidhlig, the first foreign language many African and African-American slaves would have learned. Dizzie Gillespie was born in South Carolina, schooled in North Carolina. There's plenty work been done on this and plenty still to do.

The elderly zydeco musician in the story of mine is playing music when Murdo first meets with her. Notice this is Highway 61! No sir, this aint no home of no Zydeco music! The town where Murdo plays for the first time there in Mississippi is not another name for Clarksdale. I was thinking of a smaller place, between Yazoo City and Clarksdale. This is all blues territory. The names we expect to hear are Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Skip James, Charley Patton, Big Joe Williams, Son House, John Lee Hooker, Robert Johnson, and so on. The song I had in mind is Last Dance Waltz by Boozoo Chavis. He was not the first zydeco musician I heard; I just liked him more. The first I heard him was on a vinyl album I bought back in 1971, a straight blues anthology,

where he was said to play “zodico”. I had never heard of “zodico”. But neither had I heard of “cajun”, not as far as I knew. Little did I know I had been listening to both since the 1960s.

Boozoo Chavis was the first zydeco musician I ever heard. I still have that 1971 album. In 2001 I was teaching at UT Austin, Texas. Me and my wife Marie went with friends on a weekend visit to the Lafayette International Music festival in Louisiana. While there we also went to the Saturday night meeting at the Evangeline racetrack where Boozoo trained his ‘quarter’ horses. While we were down there in Lafayette the man himself was in doing a gig back in Austin, at Waterloo Park. Some irony. Worse was to follow: during that visit to Austin old Boozoo collapsed and died.

It was his music starts the ball rolling for the young musician in my novel, a nice waltz with that good sense of swing, appropriate to somebody reared in the Scottish tradition where dance is crucial.

Zydeco and cajun music have much in common yet are rooted in a different French tradition. Zydeco derives from the Creole tradition, always updated, always contemporary; the rhythms, musical heritage and cultural influences of Africa, as well as France. The slavetrade didn’t sit well with French ideals of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* and Creole people of African origin, unlike those under the flag of the British or Americans, could find a route to freedom. They were allowed to gain property, allowed to save money, and allowed to buy their freedom eventually. The Spanish ruled this area at one stage, right down through what is now Tejas, Texas, into Mexico; at one point the King of Spain emancipated many of the African. One of the great heroes of the Creole people was a woman by the name of Marie Coincoin and I make a play on her name with Queen Monzee-ay's friend Aunt Edna

whom the Spanish-speaking conjunto musician refers to as Miss Kwankwan.

These things don't need to be noticed in a novel but they are important for the writer. It helps give the story substance and that is a strong support in the writing.

Traditional cajun has learned from zydeco to move with the times, to be a music that young people can enjoy and to which they might contribute the verve and strengths of their own generation. This contemporary approach is symbolised for myself in the style of zydeco played by the late Beau Joque & his Zydeco Hi-Rollers, a zydeco influenced by jazz, swing and blues, by rock, conjunto and funk. Musicians such as Beau Joque are criticised by some traditionalists for moving too far, but music is alive, music is a living thing.

I mentioned that the last gig Bozoo Chavis did was at Waterloo Park in Austin when I was away in Lafayette. I should say here that I saw one of Waylon Jennings' last gigs at the same venue which is not too far from the Chili Parlor which Guy Clark sang about in Dublin Blues. By then the diabetes was affecting Waylon so badly that he had to be carried onto the stage on a chair and was able only to strum his guitar. I was there with a friend, a local man, who was as fond of Waylon as I was. We didn't stay till the end, it was difficult. We headed to the Dog and Duck bar for a beer. A big fence surrounds Waterloo Park. Half a dozen guys were sitting together on the sidewalk with their backs to it. They were sharing drinks and sharing smokes, enjoying the gig for free. That would have pleased ol' Waylon. Six months later he was dead.

In Lubbock in the mid 1950s nine hundred miles from Lafayette, Waylon Jennings recorded a version of the Cajun standard, Jolé Blonde. It is available on Youtube. This was before he "learned to sing through his nose". That West Texas quality in his voice is reminiscent of the

traditional Irish tenor; hear it in the sound of the Flatlanders: Jimmy Dale Gilmore, Butch Hancock and Joe Ely. Waylon was in his teens on Jolé Blonde and takes lead vocal; Buddy Holly is on rhythm guitar and is King Curtis playing sax.

Once the elitist stigma on Country music and so-called working class culture is eradicated exciting work awaits the musicologists, linguists, cultural historians, and the rest of us with an interest in the politics of language, and the politics of immigration. Jennings, Willie Nelson and Hank Williams are of Welsh origin rather than Irish or Scottish. These finer points matter for those interested in language forms literary and oral, as well as cultural origins. There are two primary 'Gàidhligs': 'P' and 'Q'. The older form is 'P' Gàidhlig and associated with Wales, Brittany, Southern England and the Pictish people of Scotland. 'Q' Gàidhlig is later and forms the basis of the Irish and Scottish Gàidhlig. In the earlier part of 18th Century the majority language of the entire country was Scots Gàidhlig, from the Highlands and Islands of the west coast, right to the English border.

In 1604 King James the VI of Scotland became King James the 1st of the United Kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland. His immediate aim was to nullify the opposition. He and his court did this in different ways. One potential danger was the Celtic people of the west, from West Cork up through the east coast of Ireland, through the west coast of Scotland north through the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland. King James planted a settlement of non-Celtic people in the Island of Lewis to combat the danger but the locals, led by Clan Macleod, threw them out. Soon after this King James succeeded by a different strategy. He lent U.K. support to a most powerful rival, Clan Mckenzie. The Mackenzies usurped the rebellious Macleods and professed loyalty to King James.

Ten years later the same king and his court planted a much larger settlement in the north of Ireland. The large majority were from the Lowlands of Scotland. Later the same century and on through the 18th Century many of these people were on the move again. Their descendants are known in the USA as the Scots-Irish. Alongside their cousins from Scotland, tens of thousands of whom were being cleared from the land, they were given little choice but to emigrate. They crossed the ocean to America, which at that time included Canada.

In my novel *Dirt Road* the central character is named Murdo, after my great-great-great grandfather, Murdo Mackenzie who was born in 1771 on the Island of Lewis, in the township Orinsay, in the Parish of Lochs. These entire people were evicted to make way firstly for sheep-rearing, secondly to create a deer park that might provide recreational killing for wealthy hunters. Between 1818 and 1824 he managed to obtain by allotment croft 46 in the wee town of Baile Ailein, My cousins lived on the croft until very recently. One might translate “Baile Ailein” as Balallan in Scots-English. In English-English we could call it “Allentown”: this is the name I gave the small town in Mississippi where young Murdo and his father arrive, after taking the wrong bus from Memphis Airport.

A hundred years later islanders were still being evicted from the Parish of Lochs area in Lewis. Old Murdo’s grandson Roderick was one of six men imprisoned in Edinburgh in 1888 for their part in a campaign to draw attention to the land scandal. His other grandson was my great-grandfather who with his wife and kids were made squatters on land lived on by the family for several hundred years. My grandmother was the only one of her direct family not to emigrate. Her siblings finished up in Seattle where her two sisters were founder members of the Scots-Gàidhlig Society back in the 1920s. One was married to Angus

Macarthur. These Macarthurs and their offspring are all the way down the west coast nowadays, from Vancouver through San Diego.

In the album performed together by Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson and Ricky Scaggs each makes the Scottish connection. One number they do together is *The Storm is on the Ocean*. In the liner-notes Ricky Scaggs makes the point that although A. P. Carter claimed the song its lyrics are straight from the Scottish ballad tradition, which is associated with the east coast and lowlands. Like Johnnie Cash the Carter family share Scottish roots. In this song the sense of movement is in the very title, and suggests a Gàidhlig origin. The ocean is always itself and is always there. The storm too is always itself: never static and always somewhere. For now it is on the ocean; tomorrow it is someplace else. In Gàidhlig culture the idea of possession differs in like manner. Ownership is never static, and never permanent. If the young Macleod owns a silver stallion the form it takes is “the silver stallion is with the young Macleod.” That is this week, next week the horse may be with someone else.

In my story Murdo’s uncle gets a Saturday off work and they go to an event, reminiscent of a Highland Gathering, heading north along the Georgia border on the road to Chattanooga; mountain territory, where two hundred years ago the first Chief of the Cherokee Nation was John Ross, son of a Scottish father and a Cherokee mother.

He soon connects with a finger-pickin’ Alabama-born guitarist, hailing from a different southern experience. This guy revels in his between song comments on the Civil War., attacking the anti-Catholicism of that old Scottish and Scots-Irish tradition that can degenerate into the worst reactionary forms. He is upfront anti-racist, anti-sectarian, who can play Son House, Hop Wilson and Elmore James, as well as Merle Travis and Willie Nelson, and lets nobody

forget the inscription on Woody Guthrie's guitar – “this machine kills fascists.” He knows intimately an alternative southern tradition, found in the songs of Hazel Dickens, Bill Broonzy, Odetta, Jimmie Rodgers and others; this is a tradition of struggle, not only in the natural world the struggle to survive, but as against exploitation by landowners, mining companies and other capitalist interests.

Southern culture is as complex as any. Murdo also hears a bluegrass track by Bill Monroe, as central to American music as Victoria Spivey, Professor Longhair or Lydia Mendoza, each in their own way a tradition-bearer. Monroe's ancestors hailed from the island of Lewis.

When young Murdo Macarthur arrives in Lafayette during their International Festival of Music he meets with the music of cajun legend, Dewey Balfa. The first song he encounters is not regular cajun, instead it is Je me suis marille which I chose in an attempt to get close to the old French-Bretagne roots of the Acadian tradition, without drawing attention to itself.

Me and Marie, my wife, had a major experience in Brittany once on the first vacation we ever had without our children, in 1978 or 79. We were walking through a quiet little town one very peaceful early evening and we heard the sound of music from an upper apartment. The song was French, or sounded French, but very familiar. We stopped and listened. Then it dawned on us we were listening to Leonard Cohen. It was the chorus of his Patriot Song which he performs in French!

The experience of hearing Dewey Balfa singing for the first time may not be as memorable for Murdo, but who knows. This is the young fellow's first morning in Lafayette. Last night he had nowhere to sleep and now here he is in the heart of the deep south, not some ‘good ol boy’ style racist myth. This part of the south is rooted in the cajun and older French-Creole tradition, from before the 1813 purchase.

According to one side of the family lore the Balfas were originally Scottish, a long long time ago, and ‘Balfa’ is said here to be a phonetic transcription for the name Balfour. Of course “Balfour” - like “Menziess” was originally French anyway!

In Lafayette accordion is central to the International Music Festival. Musicians appear from all over the world - even south Texas! For the conjunto band led by the character Diego Narciso, and here I was thinking of Esteban Jordan and Flaco Jimenez. This German and Czech influenced music is sometimes dismissed as “oompash oompah”. Willie Nelson and his sister Bobbie played in such a band as kids. But this band Murdo hears are vibrant, playing a style of music popular throughout most parts of Texas, and across ‘the Valley’ into Mexico and back out through Tijuana to Monterey, as far north as Sacramento. I was thinking of the sound that Los Tigres del Nortes bring and named the four Conjunto musicians Esteban [for Esteban Jordan], Roberto [for Roberto Pulido], Vicente [for Vicente Fernandez] and Santiago [for Santiago Jimenez]. Flaco would have been a giveaway! I call Diego, after myself, James, and Narciso after another of the conjunto greats, Narciso Martinez.

One of the last songs alluded to in the novel is another composition by Queen Ida: 1-10 Express. The I-10 is the longest road in the United States, it links Jacksonville, Florida to Los Angeles, California. The second longest road in the United States is the 1-35, from Laredo on the Mexican border all the way north to Duluth, Minnesota. These roads intersect in one town and one town only: San Antonio, where the siege at the Alamo Mission took place. It is also the home of the supreme accordion-playing Jimenez family, Santiago, Flaco and Santiago Junior.

When Flaco was twelve years old he told his dad that playing the accordion was all he wanted to do with his life, he knew this already

and therefore had to leave school. His dad said, Okay you can leave but you must take your music as seriously as anything ever you do.

The young fellow in my story does exactly that but his father isn't as progressive as Santiago senior.

I was in San Antonio with Kenny Glenaan, the director of Dirt Road to Lafayette. We were there to meet with Flaco who we wanted for the part of Diego, the conjunto musician. Flaco's old friend and comrade, Freddy Fender had died not long before. Fortunately they had managed to cut the Dos Amigos album. We met Flaco in his home and he was showing us stuff then we discussed a bit about the Dirt Road script. He had read a little bit of it and knew the basic story. At one point he turned to me and frowned, then said: You're the father!

For some reason this meant the character had to become Diego. Probably because it brought me closer to the music which I've known and loved for a while. It is hard not to if you spend time in Texas. And it is dance, dance, we wanna dance man. At the Highland Gathering event in North Alabama a ceilidh is scheduled and Murdo looks forward to it. This is what he does back home, he plays music, dance music. That evening in North Alabama he hears jigs, reels, waltzes, strathspeys; what some might describe as Scotch Musak: made for dancing.

All accordion music is made for dancing. What can be more important? Me and Marie were given a sharp reminder of this in Threadgill's Armadillo World Headquarters at a gig featuring the Gourds, another of my favourite bands. About the second song into the concert some folk started dancing at the front, regardless of the seated audience and altogether interfering with their view of the band. It got kind of heated. People began harumphing and grunting and more harumphing until some of the seated audience most very irritated

indeed, began dragging their chairs to the front, occupying the front area and interrupting the dancers and pushing them out the way.

Then the Gourds finished the song. They paused before the next and very politely they asked the audience on chairs who had highjacked the front area, with the greatest respect, to please return their chairs to whence they came, and let the people dance . . .

Damn right.