

FROM: Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, 2010 revision by Anne Lederman, with contributions by Christina Smith (Section III: v and other info on Newfoundland).



**Fiddling:** (also known as Country, Folk, Celtic or Old Time fiddling, Old Time Music, or by cultural or regional names, eg, Scottish, Cape Breton, Ukrainian-Canadian, French-Canadian, Acadian, Newfoundland, Ottawa Valley, Down-East, Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, or Métis fiddling, among others).

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Until about 1960, fiddling was the principal medium of dance music in rural Canada. By virtue of its continuous history, dating from the 17th century, the extent of its past and current practice, and the manner in which it has mirrored the cultural development of Canada since the beginning of European habitation, it is our premier instrumental folk tradition. Although research and comparative work between older fiddle and dance traditions in various parts of the country has been somewhat sporadic, and sources are scarce on early practices in many areas, it is clear that many Scottish, Irish, English, French and American tunes which first came to Canada in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are still widespread in various forms, often modified by local practice. This early repertoire formed the basis of fiddle traditions that eventually extended throughout the country, passed along almost entirely through oral tradition with little formal teaching or musical notation involved. The tune repertoire has been continually augmented up to the present day by new immigration, original composition, and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by electronic media recordings, radio, television etc. and, increasingly in recent years, written notation. Changing performance contexts from dances to contests and concert performance have also affected many aspects of the music, as has the rise of formal instruction in recent years. However, folk fiddling, based largely on British Isles models is still an active practice in most areas of Canada. We can safely say that there are more practitioners at present than ever before in the nation's history.

## II. HISTORY

### i. The Historical Record to 1900

The earliest written record of violins in Canada that we know of comes from the Jesuit Relations of 1645: at a wedding on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November in Quebec “there were two violins for the first time,” and, at Christmas the same year “Martin Boutet played the violin.” Although reports of fiddling are rare over the next 100 years, there are many references to “veillées” and other dances and balls; it can be assumed, given the common use of the violin by the early 1600s in Europe as a folk dance instrument, that fiddlers also provided music for many of these social events in New France. The dances most often noted are minuets, but galops, branles and the Trioly (from Brittany) are also mentioned. A manuscript ca 1767 of 61 “contredanses françaises” (held in the Archives du Séminaire de Trois-Rivières) is probably the oldest written record of dances and their tunes in Canada; as far as we know it does not differ from practice in France at that time. (See Dancing: Pre-Confederation)

In the Hudson's Bay records for Moose Factory, 1749, it is noted, “having three Fidlars [sic] in the Factory, viz. Geo. Millar, Willm. Murray and James Short, our

people celebrated the Evening with Dancing and Singing, and all were very merry.” Evidence suggests that Scottish and English employees of the Hudson's Bay Company brought violins, dances and a repertoire of reels, jigs, marches and hornpipes to Canada, which seems to have been adopted and adapted by French-Canadian, Aboriginal and Métis players (the latter a mixture of Aboriginal, French and, to a lesser extent, Scottish, through intermarriage). These practices were then carried throughout much of the country by traders and adventurers. The introduction of the fiddle had an especially profound effect on many First Nations communities throughout northern Ontario, the Prairies and the northern territories, where fiddling frequently became the main form of musical expression as older Aboriginal practices were discouraged, outlawed, or simply diffused through the forcible relocation of peoples onto government-created reserves in the late 1800s.

Aboriginal (including Métis) and French-Canadian cultures were predominant throughout much of rural Canada until the early 1800s. Beginning in the late 1700s, however, immigrants of Scottish, Irish, English and German background began to arrive in number. Scottish music and dance traditions were reinforced by an influx of Gaelic-speaking Highlanders to Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island and parts of Ontario (especially Glengarry County). Irish traditions took hold particularly in Newfoundland, in the Miramichi area of New Brunswick, in the Ottawa Valley, and in many parts of Quebec. Though the cultural influence of Irish music has been profound throughout the entire country as Irish immigrants went on to settle in many rural and urban areas. Many Irish immigrants also worked in lumbering, a somewhat migrant lifestyle, allowing the traditions to spread over vast areas much as the earlier voyageurs had carried French-Canadian music. English practices are hard to separate from their more dominant Scottish and Irish cousins, but are common in 19<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts such as that of Allen Ash in Ontario. For some reason, perhaps lesser mobility, they seem not to have as wide or lasting an influence. Some tunes played in Canada have also been traced to probable German origin, eg, the “Seven-Step” (or “German Schottische”) popular on the prairies and the “Jessica Waltz” in the Ottawa Valley.

Our main sources of information on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century practice are from written memoirs, play-bills from performances, and a few surviving manuscripts held in various libraries, museums and archives throughout the country. For example, a settler's account from Quebec in the 1880s reads:

“J'avais danse toute la veillée le cotillon, la cardeuse, le brandy, le quadrille, la belle Catherine, etc.” *“Throughout the evening I danced the cotillon, the cardeuse, the brandy, the quadrille, the belle Catherine”* all names of dances (Ornstein, 1985:19).

Nellie McClung in Grey County, Ontario in the 1880s, refers to “Fisher's Hornpipe”, “Jenny Lind,” and the “Arkansas Traveler” (McClung, 1935: 202, 205), while Will Donnelly, in a transcript from court testimony attests to having played “Boney

Crossing the Alps” to scare off hostile neighbours in Lucan Township, Ontario in 1879. Tune-books compiled by Frobisher, Lagueux, Lyman, Ash and Thorne (see Manuscript Books) indicate a general 19th-century repertoire of waltzes, airs (usually song tunes), jigs, reels, hornpipes, marches and “quicksteps” (6/8 marches), most originating in the British Isles. These tunes were used for popular dances which spread from Europe to North America in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, including quadrille sets (3-6 separate dances each with their own tune), couple dances (often called “round dances”), eg. waltzes, polkas, schottisches, mazurkas and the galope, and other specialty dances, eg. the waltz-quadrille and the valse-clog (see Dancing). Many of these dances are still well-known throughout much of central and western Canada, while some seem to survive only in Quebec and the Ottawa Valley (the galope, valse-clog and longer quadrille sets, the latter also in Newfoundland).

Many US compositions also entered the repertoire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century via sheet music, tune books or aural tradition, influenced by traveling circus, minstrel and vaudeville shows, eg. “Rickett's Hornpipe,” “Durang's Hornpipe,” “Turkey in the Straw,” “Home Sweet Home,” “The Jenny Lind Polka,” “Year of Jubilo,” “Marching Through Georgia,” “Off to Charleston,” “Arkansas Traveler,” “Buffalo Gals,” “Over the Waves” and “Redwing,” to name a few of the best-known examples. The US influence is also apparent in the still common three-part quadrille set that largely supplanted the older French five and six-part quadrilles in most of Canada outside Quebec and Newfoundland. These were “called” square dances (led by someone calling out the moves to the dancers) and, unlike the older dances, did not require a specific tune. Nor did they require continuous step-dancing throughout as had been the style with the older Scottish-based dances. Other new dances, each with their own tune, probably also entered the repertoire around this time, including “The French Minuet,” “The Jersey,” “The Roberts,” “The Rye Waltz” and “The Butterfly,” all of US or European invention.

By the late 1800s, then, five broad stylistic areas of British Isles-based fiddling can be identified, although, within these, there were many distinct local repertoires and practices:

- French-Canadian in Quebec and Acadia, including Labrador and the west coast of Newfoundland
- Aboriginal/Métis in the northwest, northern Ontario and northern Quebec
- Scottish in Cape Breton, P.E.I., parts of Newfoundland and other pockets in Ontario and the west
- Anglo-Canadian – the mixture of Scottish, Irish, English, German and US tunes popular in much of English-speaking Canada
- Newfoundland

While these five traditions would continue to interact with each other and absorb new influences, each has remained somewhat distinctive until the present day.

A new wave of immigration in the 1890s established other European music and dance traditions, especially Ukrainian, on the prairies. Some Ukrainian dances and wedding traditions have been adopted at non-Ukrainian celebrations, eg, the “Presentation,” a receiving line for donations, held during the reception to the accompaniment of long medleys of polka-type tunes. Ukrainian tunes have also been absorbed into the general polka and two-step repertoire of the West. Similarly, though to a lesser extent, tunes of other European traditions were popular in certain areas, following immigration patterns, eg, Rumanian and Hungarian tunes in parts of Saskatchewan, Polish tunes around Wilno, Ontario, and Icelandic tunes in Gimli, Man. In contrast, the folk violin traditions of groups who tended to settle in urban areas—Jews, Greeks, Italians, etc.—have remained relatively separate from rural fiddle styles.

## ii. The Recording Age: 1920–1975

The advent of recording and radio in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century had a dramatic effect on older fiddling traditions. Wide dissemination and the appeal of the new media inspired great imitation, creating a somewhat artificial hierarchy between those fiddlers who were heard on radio and records and those who weren't. This led to a new class of “professional” fiddlers whose styles and repertoire tended to overshadow the more varied personal approaches of former times. In some areas where local traditions were not recorded, (much of the west and north, for example) people often abandoned them in favour of what they were hearing through the new media.

The first fiddlers to make commercial recordings in Canada were from Quebec and Cape Breton. The \*Berliner Gramophone Company recorded several medleys of J. B. Roy in Montreal for its Victor label in 1917–18. \*Columbia and \*Starr followed soon after. Québécois fiddlers who recorded in the 1920s and 1930s include Roy, Romueld Gagnier, J. Alex Donato, Antonio Gauthier, José Zaffiro, Arthur-Joseph Boulay, Isidore \*Soucy, Willie \*Ringuette, Fortunat Melouin, Joseph Ovila \*LaMadeleine, Joseph \*Allard, Joseph Larocque, Albert \*LaMadeleine, Leon Robert Goulet, Jean \*Carignan (with George \*Wade and the Cornhuskers), Percy Scott, Dennis O'Hara, Tezraf Latour, John Lajoie, La famille Lajoie, Joe \*Bouchard, Sylvio Gaudreau and Bernard Morin. Some tunes recorded by these early French-Canadian fiddlers became popular in the rest of Canada under English names, eg, “Reel de Ste. Anne” (“St. Anne's Reel”) and “Reel de la tuque bleu” (“Snowshoe Reel”), both recorded by Joseph Allard. In the 1940s Albert Allard, Omer \*Dumas, Les Frères Pigeon, Tommy Duchesne, Henri Houde, Théodore Duguay, Gérald Lajoie, Edmond Pariseau, René Alain and Gérard Joyal joined the ranks of recorded fiddlers in Quebec. Many of these recordings can now be accessed online at The Virtual Gramophone, a website operated by the National Library and Archives of Canada.

Cape Breton fiddlers also began to record in 1928, beginning with Big Dan Hughie MacEachern and his Caledonian Scotch Band (led by Dan Sullivan on piano) for Columbia's Irish series in New York, followed by Colin Boyd for Brunswick, and The Inverness Serenaders (led by Alcide Aucoin from Cheticamp) and Alick (Alex) Gillis for Decca in Boston. In 1935, Bernie MacIsaac founded the Celtic label in Antigonish, Cape Breton, recording Dan J. Campbell, Angus Chisholm, Angus Allen Gillis, Hugh A. MacDonald and Dan R. MacDonald, followed by Bill Lamey and Johnny Wilmot in the 1940s, then Wilfred Gillis, Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald, John A. MacDonald, Little Jack Macdonald, Joe MacLean, Joe Murphy, Dan Joe MacInnes, Donald, Jimmie and Theresa MacLellan among others. As in the case of the early recordings of French-Canadian fiddlers, these early 78s were influential in establishing certain tunes as standards, eg, "McNabb's Hornpipe," as recorded by Fitzgerald, and "Glengarry's Dirk," as recorded by Chisholm. Several local radio shows in Cape Breton featured live fiddlers from the 1930s through to the 1960s, but gradually shifted over to playing commercial recordings.

The first group featuring fiddle music to broadcast nationally was George \*Wade and the Cornhuskers (based in Toronto) on CRBC and then the CBC in the 1930s, featuring a young Jean \*Carignan as well as several other fiddlers-- Bill, Francis, and Laury Cormier, Bill Martin, Ted Steven, and Johnny Bentley. A show from Cape Breton called "Cottar's Saturday Night" also aired in the 1930s, featuring Jimmie MacLellan. This was followed in 1944 by "Don \*Messer and His Islanders." Originally from New Brunswick, Messer moved to Charlottetown, PEI, in 1939 from where the national radio shows were broadcast. In 1959 he made the move to CBC television as Don Messer's Jubilee, from Halifax. The program became the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular show in the country (next to Hockey Night in Canada) and remained on the air until 1969 when it was abruptly cancelled, causing a storm of protest and questions in the House of Commons. Messer's influence on fiddling throughout much of the country has been profound. As a result of his wide exposure on radio, records and TV, Messer's style smoother and less ornamented than the older French and Scots-Irish, traditions, and heavily influenced by popular swing music of the 1930s and 1940s gradually became synonymous in much of English Canada with the idea of Canadian "old time fiddling." It must be noted, however, that certain areas with strong local traditions remained fairly impervious to his influence, especially Cape Breton, rural Newfoundland and French-speaking areas of the country.

Messer and the Islanders recorded their first tunes for Apex in 1942, including "The Operator's Reel," "The Belfast Jig" and "Cock of the North," followed shortly by "Big John McNeill." Other fiddlers in the Messer down-east style began to record in the late 1940s, eg, Ned \*Landry (New Brunswick), followed in the next 20 years by Ward \*Allen, Al \*Cherny, Peter Dawson, June Eikhard, Bill Guest, Ed Gyurki, Reg Hill, Jim \*Magill, Rudy Meeks, Bob Ranger, Graham \*Townsend and Eleanor Townsend (all from Ontario) Ivan Hicks and Earl Mitton (New Brunswick), Johnny Mooring and Cye

Steele (Nova Scotia), Don Randell and Ted Blanchard (Newfoundland), Victor Pasowisty (Manitoba), King \*Ganam (Saskatchewan, known especially for western swing) and many others up to the present day. The Banff, \*Rodeo, and \*London labels were particularly active in the field.

The down-east style was further popularized during this period by contests, clubs, and dances throughout the country which adopted it as their standard. The first contest in Canada may have been one held in Charlottetown in 1926. Over the next decades, contests came and went throughout the country, with certain areas such as Cape Breton and Newfoundland opting out for the most part. Quebec has maintained a continuous practice of small regional competitions and many First Nations and Métis communities encourage local style in contests, but most others are devoted to the Don Messer model--a formalized medley of waltz, jig and reel. The most long-standing events are \*The Canadian Open Old Time Fiddlers Contest in Shelburne, Ontario (started in 1949), The Maritime Old Time Fiddling Contest in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia (established in 1950), The Swift Current Old Tyme Fiddling Contest in Alberta (1965) and the Bobcaygeon (1970) and Pembroke (1975) contests. Fiddle clubs also began to be established in the late 1960s, some organized provincially with several local chapters, such as the British Columbia Old Time Fiddlers Association (founded in 1969). These clubs often hold regular jam sessions, concerts and/or dances and some organize contests.

Recording activity west of Ontario and in Newfoundland began significantly later than in the east. The influential Manitoba fiddler Andy \*DeJarlis began recording for Quality in 1956, eventually releasing at least 33 LPs. Employing the down-east model, DeJarlis adapted many older tunes from Métis repertoire, losing some of the highly asymmetric phrasing and establishing a smoother, “professional” and widely-imitated version of the Métis tradition, now commonly known as “Red River” style. Sunshine Records, established in Winnipeg in 1974, has been the leader in releasing recordings of other fiddlers in this style, including Reg Bouvette, Marcel Meilleur (who performed with DeJarlis for many years), Mel Bedard (the first to identify himself as Métis on a recording), and many others. Especially since he was the only Métis player to record for so long, DeJarlis’s influence in aboriginal communities is especially profound. In the same manner that Messer’s style came to dominate the idea of old time fiddling in the east, many in the west view DeJarlis’s approach as definitive.

The first recording of a Newfoundland dance tune (not commercially released) was The Banks of Newfoundland, commissioned in 1923 by Sir Charles Hutton from Brunswick, and performed by the Brunswick house band. As in the west, by the time Newfoundlanders began to record on Rodeo records in the mid 1950s, the down-east music (Messer-style) was already very popular, especially in more urban areas such as near American/Canadian air and naval bases (Goose Bay, Gander, Argentia, Stephenville), in St. John’s and in the larger towns in Conception Bay. Consequently

the style, accompaniment and choice of recorded repertoire are influenced by that style. Commercial recordings of Newfoundland instrumental music began in the 1956 with the Jigs and Reels of Newfoundland, the first LP release of accordionist Wilf Doyle and his Orchestra, on which his wife Christine plays the fiddle. Doyle's repertoire was a mixture of Newfoundland dance tunes and down-east tunes, accompanied by drum kit and guitar. Although some fiddle music is included on the recordings of accordionist Ray Johnson, the first complete album of fiddle music released in Newfoundland was *The Shamrocks*, in 1957, which featured fiddlers Ted Blanchard and Don Randell playing mostly Don Messer tunes, accompanied by piano. Walter MacIsaac of Corner Brook released "Musical Memories of the Codroy Valley," a selection of Scottish tunes, in 1978. The first commercially released recording which featured Newfoundland traditional dance music played on the fiddle in the traditional manner was "Rufus Guinchard, Newfoundland Fiddler" ca 1978.

The influence of US country music and bluegrass has been felt in Canadian fiddling since the 1940s, particularly in two ways: the introduction of a fiddle style that was a smooth distillation of older US folk styles (much as Messer had blended older Canadian and U.S. styles) and the addition of singers to what had been formerly an instrumental format, thus expanding the role of the fiddler from that of soloist to accompanist. Many Canadian fiddlers established themselves especially in country music and bluegrass, including Vic Mullen from Nova Scotia, Abbie Andrews, Al \*Cherny, Brian Barron, Roly LaPierre and Peter Dawson from Ontario, "Fiddling Red" (Francis) Sabiston from Manitoba, King Ganam from Saskatchewan, Fred Lang, Alfie Myhre and Frankie Rodgers in Alberta and B.C. (the latter three all known for their work with Wilf Carter). National television broadcasts include CTV's "Cross Canada Barndance" which recorded in several different cities (1961-62), CBC's "Country Hoedown" (1956-65) led by King Ganam in the early years and the Tommy Hunter Show (1965-92) featuring house fiddler Al \*Cherny. Virtually every region of the country also had local radio shows featuring fiddlers, but a history of this activity has yet to be written. The longest running of these was probably the "CKNX Barn Dance" from Wingham, Ontario which broadcast continuously from 1937-63 and attracted fiddlers and country musicians from many areas of the country with its ability to provide regular employment performing both on air and at live events in the area. Fiddlers on the Barn Dance included Rossie Mann (composer of "Black Velvet Waltz"), Clare Adlam, Clifford Ambeault ("Lucky Ambo"), Ward Allen and Al \*Cherny.

Many hybrid forms of country music developed in Canada as the US influence mixed with regional and cultural elements. French-Canadian, Inuit, Aboriginal and Ukrainian communities all developed country-style music in their own languages and incorporated their own fiddle traditions, as did Newfoundland. Especially notable was a boom in country-influenced Ukrainian material in the late 1960s and 70s as recorded by Mickey and Bunny Victor Pasowisty, Tommy Buick, the D-Drifters-5, Jim



Gregrash, Boris Nowosad, Bill Prokopchuk, The Interlake Polka Kings and even Al \*Cherny (who made one recording of Ukrainian material) among others, largely for the V and Sunshine labels in Winnipeg. A parallel wave of Ukrainian recording activity took place in Alberta at the initiative of Ken Huculak and his Heritage Records company which released over 80 discs between 1976 and 1992, featuring artists such as Metro Radomsky. In both Manitoba and Alberta, material ranged from instrumental dance music and traditional folk songs to country songs (often in Ukrainian) and comic material.

Fiddling and dancing were still a major form of rural social activity throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in much of the country. Many rural dance bands included an assortment of melody instruments besides violin – clarinets, saxophones, trumpets etc. – along with guitars, banjos, pianos and bass. Some of these bands leaned more to the popular music of the day, while some depended largely on fiddle repertoire. As the 1960s and 70s progressed however, it became clear that fewer and fewer young people were taking up the fiddle, turning more to the guitar and to newer popular forms of music based around singing – folk, country and rock and roll. It seemed that, in many areas, folk fiddling might simply fade away as its remaining practitioners aged.

### **iii. The Revival: 1975 - present**

The noticeable decline in interest among youth led to concerted action in many areas. Clubs, contests, jamborees, camps, classes, festivals and cultural organizations were formed throughout the country as the Saturday night dance which had been the mainstay of the tradition declined. In Quebec in the 1970s, folk music and fiddling became associated with the sovereigntist movement bringing renewed interest and vigour. Furthermore, a general spin-off of the 1960s revolution in music and values was that many young people, both urban and rural, began to look back to earlier folk traditions for their inspiration. This brought attention to many older players, especially those who had held on to their unique regional styles. Some traditional players made recordings for the first time, or re-released older ones, and many were asked to perform at national and international festivals. Among these are Newfoundland's Émile \*Benoit and Rufus \*Guinchard, Quebec's André Alain, Louis "Pitou" \*Boudreault, Jean \*Carignan, Jean-Louis Labbé, Aimé Gagnon, Henri Landry, Hermas Réhel, Yvon Miault, and Jules and Jean-Marie Verret, Acadians Joseph Cormier, Félix Leblanc, Gilles Losier, Arthur Muse, and Eddy Poirier; Cape Breton's Beaton Family, Arthur Muse, John Campbell, Winnie Chafe, Jerry Holland, Theresa MacLellan, and Carl Mackenzie (all recorded by U.S. label Rounder), as well as Howie MacDonald, Hugh (Buddy) MacMaster, Scotty Fitzgerald, John Donald Cameron, Wilfred Gillis, and Sandy McIntyre (the last five, and Jerry Holland, members of the Cape Breton Symphony, featured on CTV's nationally televised "The John Allen

Cameron Show”), aboriginal players such as Lee \*Cremo from Nova Scotia, James Cheechoo of Moose Factory, Teddy Boy Houle from Manitoba, John Arcand from Saskatchewan, Angus Beaulieu and Richard Lafferty of the Northwest Territories.

This new “folk revival” movement has helped to support many musicians and ensembles devoted to older folk styles, allowing them to make a career of learning from traditional singers, fiddlers and other instrumentalists and recasting the music for the concert stage. A significant aspect of this time period was the advance in recording technology, leading to a general move away from larger recording companies towards independent production and distribution--vinyl albums in the 1970s and 80s, soon replaced by cassettes and CDs. This allowed musicians to earn significantly more from the sale of their recordings than had been the case in earlier years. Several artist-run companies have formed to produce and/or distribute larger catalogues of recordings and, often, tune books as well, eg, Pigeon Inlet Productions (Newfoundland), Cranford Productions (Cape Breton), Islander Records (Prince Edward Island), Le Tamanoir, Patrimoine and Trente souz zéro in Quebec, Falcon Productions and Borealis Records in Ontario, and Festival Distribution in B.C.. Several U.S. labels with a traditional music mandate also took an interest in Canadian fiddlers, eg, Folkways, Shanachie, Rounder, Philo and Green Linnet.

During the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day, virtually every area of the country produced ensembles rooted in their own regional traditions, some leaning more towards acoustic sounds, some towards the electronic instrumentation of rock bands, and some combining folk and classical styles. Many of these groups include original composition as well as traditional material, and most combine vocal with instrumental repertoire.

A partial list of revival-era groups with significant “celtic-Canadian” (ie, British Isles based) fiddle content follows (fiddlers names are in brackets):

#### Newfoundland:

- Figgy Duff (Kelly Russell)
- The Breakwater Boys (Rufus Guinchard)
- Jim Payne and Kelly Russell (Kelly Russell)
- The Punters (Patrick Moran)
- The Wonderful Grand Band (Kelly Russell and Jamie Snider)
- Christina Smith and Jean Hewson (Christina Smith)
- Frank Maher and the Mahers Bahers (Christina Smith)
- The Plankerdown Band (Kelly Russell)

#### Nova Scotia/Cape Breton:

- The Jarvis Benoit Quartet (Jarvis Benoit)
- The Rankin Family (John Morris Rankin, Howie MacDonald)

Slainte Mbach (Lisa Gallant, Ryan and Boyd MacNeill)  
The Barra MacNeills (Kyle, Seumas, Lucy, Stewart and Boyd MacNeill)  
Brakin' Tradition (Cyril MacPhee, Ray Légère)  
Beolach (Wendy MacIsaac and Mairi Rankin)

Prince Edward Island:

Barachois (Albert and Helene Arsenault)

Quebec:

Barde (Chris MacRaghallaigh and Elliot Selick)  
Éritage, (Jean-Pierre Joyal)  
La \*bottine souriante (Pierre LaPorte, Lisa Ornstein, Guy Bouchard,  
Martin Racine, Michel Bordeleau, David Boulanger)  
Rève du diable (Gervais Lessard, Claude, Pierre Laporte and Daniel  
Lemieux)  
Dent-de-lion (Claude Methé, Liette Ramon),  
Le vent du nord (Olivier Demers)  
Manigance (Claude Methé)  
Enterloupe (Claude Methé)  
Les Frères Brunet (André Brunet)  
Genticorum (Pascal Gemme)

Ontario:

Stringband, (Ben Mink, Calvin Cairns, Terry King)  
Muddy York (Anne Lederman)  
Tamarack (Jeff Bird, Shelley Coopersmith)  
Tanglefoot (Joe Grant, Sandra Swannell)  
Leahy (Donnell, Doug and Angus Leahy)  
Pierre Schryer Band (Pierre Schryer)  
The Dawnbreakers (Geoff Summers)  
Fiddlesong (Anne Lederman)  
The Brian Pickell Band (Shane Cook, Mark Sullivan)  
Quagmyre (Jon Pilazke)

Manitoba:

C-Weed (Clint Dutiaume)

Alberta:

Scatter the Mud (Fiona Coll)

B.C.:

Pied Pumpkin (Shari Ulrich)  
Mad Pudding (Cam Wilson)

Eastern European traditions in Canada have inspired similar “re-inventions” (perhaps a more accurate term) involving folk fiddling. Well-known klezmer bands include The Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band (fiddler Anne Lederman) and Beyond the Pale (Aleksandar Gajic and Bogdan Djukic) in Ontario and Finjan in Manitoba (Victor

Schultz). The Romaniacs in Saskatchewan (fiddler Calvin Cairns) incorporated several cultural traditions into their repertoire. Rushnychok, from Montreal were the first of several new Ukrainian groups, and helped start a wave of Ukrainian fusion music known as “zabava” (Ukrainian for “dance party”). Other groups in this genre include Burya from Toronto, and several Alberta bands such as the Kubasonics, Millennia, Kalabai and UB. There are also several annual Ukrainian Festivals throughout Canada.

A new wave of Irish traditional music has been especially influential in Canada since the 1970s, partly through the efforts of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Eireann, a traditional Irish music society which has established branches in many parts of North America. There are many groups largely devoted to Irish style throughout the country, especially in Newfoundland, eg, The Irish Rovers, Tickle Harbour and The Irish Descendants. A particularly influential musician in Toronto, piper Chris Langan, has inspired a yearly gathering of Irish musicians, and a tune collection of his repertoire, *Move Your Fingers: The Life and Music of Chris Langan* (Cranford Publications, 2002).

Throughout this period, the old-time style of Don Messer also found new life in an ever-increasing number of associations and contests throughout the country which especially inspired young people to become involved again. Beginning in 1990, winners of regional fiddle contests were invited to compete in a new event, The Grand Masters, held in Ottawa, whose winners include Pierre Schryer (Thunder Bay, Ontario), Louis Schryer (Ottawa, Ontario), Patti Kusturok (Lorette, Manitoba), April Verch (Ottawa Valley), Scott Woods (Fergus, Ontario), Shane Cook (Dorchester, Ontario), Mark Sullivan (Bowmanville, Ontario), Chuck Joyce (London, Ontario), André Brunet (L'Epiphanie, Quebec – the first to win in Quebec style) and Julie Fitzgerald (Bancroft, Ontario). Most of these fiddlers have their own show bands.

Bluegrass music also experienced a wave of popularity in the 1970s and 80s with many musicians and bands able to support themselves through a circuit of weekly club engagements, festivals and recordings. Popular bluegrass bands through this period featuring fiddle include: The Dixie Flyers (fiddlers Gordon Stobbe, John P. Allen and Peter Robertson) The Humber River Valley Boys (Don Thurston), Whisky Jack (Graham Townsend, Conrad Kipping and Randy Morrison) and Big Redd Ford (J. P. Allen), all from Ontario, Crooked Stovepipe (Don Randell and Ted Blanchard) from Newfoundland, The Bluegrass 4 (Eddy Poirier) and Ladies Choice (Gordon Stobbe) from Halifax. Gordon Stobbe also produced and hosted a weekly bluegrass-based show from Halifax called “Up Home Tonight” from 1982–89, featuring many local fiddlers. Although bluegrass no longer enjoys the professional circuit it did at that time, there are still many bluegrass associations which organize jam sessions, festivals and contests throughout the country, and many new bands, both urban and rural.

In 1995, a new fiddle phenomenon came to public attention – a young Cape Bretoner

named Ashley MacIsaac. His CD, “Hi, How Are You Today,” is the largest-selling Canadian fiddle recording of all time (over 300,000 copies). Essentially traditional Cape Breton melodies backed by a band of bass, drums, electric guitar and keyboards (also featuring the Gaelic vocals of Mary Jane Lamond), Ashley had the promotional weight of work with Paul Simon and contemporary composer Philip Glass as a boost. Suddenly, traditional Cape Breton fiddling was on the world map, paving the way for artists such as Leahy and Natalie MacMaster over the next decade, whose sales have also reached platinum status (100,000 copies). La bottine souriante of Quebec have enjoyed similar national and international success with their innovative use of horn arrangements with traditional-style melodies, songs and footwork.

Theatrical stage shows focused on fiddle and step-dance traditions have also become especially popular in recent years, two of them achieving international touring success and inspiring other groups of young players: Barrage, formed in Calgary in the early 1990s, features a rotating cast of fiddlers performing highly arranged pieces with elaborate choreography, while more recently, Bowfire has featured virtuosos players in several styles of Canadian folk and country fiddling as well as jazz and classical music of various cultures.

#### **iv. Composition and New Directions**

The first published collection of new Canadian fiddle tunes seems to have been *The Cape Breton Collection of Scottish Melodies* by fiddler Gordon MacQuarrie in 1940. As a corollary to recording and broadcasting success from the 1930s on, many groups and performers also began to publish tune collections, starting with the Cornhuskers Series released originally by Thomas Burt & Company from 1933 on, then by Harry Jarman. In the 1950s and 60s, BMI Canada Ltd. published collections by Ward Allen, Adrien Avon, King Ganam, Bob Scott, Andy deJarlis, and later, Graham Townsend. De Jarlis, Allen and Townsend have enjoyed the widest dissemination of many tunes over time and distance while certain individual compositions of other fiddlers have spread widely, eg, “Black Velvet Waltz” (composed by Ontario’s Rossie Mann), “Lord Alexander Reel” (Abbie Andrews), “Teardrop Waltz” (Reg Bouvette), “The Backwoodsman” (Marcel Meilleur, recorded by Don Messer), “Whitefish in the Rapids” (Rene Cote) among others. More recently, tunes of Brian Hébert (Ottawa Valley) and Calvin Vollrath in Alberta have been especially influential in the contest network of old-time style.

Each stylistic area has its best-known composers, eg, Newfoundland’s Emile Benoit and Rufus Guinchard, Dan. R. MacDonald and John Campbell Cape Breton, Louis Boudreault and Joe Bouchard in Quebec, Rona \*MacMillan and René Coté in the Ottawa Valley, Marcel Meilleur and Reg Bouvette in Manitoba. In more recent years, many revival musicians have become especially well-known as composers, such as

Claude Methé and Pascal Gemme from Quebec, Brian Pickell, and Oliver Schroer in Ontario, Richard Wood in P.E.I., Jerry Holland, Brenda Stubbert and Paul Cranford in Cape Breton, Gordon Stobbe in Nova Scotia, Dave Panting and Christina Smith in Newfoundland, Daniel Lapp and Zav Rokeby-Thomas in B.C. Many composers follow traditional forms while creating innovative melodies and harmonic structures, while others explore new directions in composition influenced by rock, jazz or other world traditions. Many players now move freely between cultural styles and/or create their own hybrids.

A relatively recent trend is the arrangement of fiddle material for guest appearances by prominent folk fiddlers with symphony orchestras. This began with Andre Gagnon's *Petit Concerto pour Carignan et Orchestre* in 1975, followed by Donald Patriquin's *Fête Carignan* in 1981, both written to feature Quebec fiddling virtuoso Jean Carignan. Nova Scotia's Scott Macmillan has been the most active composer/arranger of traditional material, not only incorporating Irish and Scottish tunes into his *Celtic Mass for The Sea* (1991), but arranging numerous pieces for fiddlers Buddy MacMaster, Natalie MacMaster, Ashley MacIsaac, J.P. Cormier and Johnny Comeau, and bands Barachois and Rawlins Cross. Jim Hiscott in Manitoba has composed pieces based on Métis tunes, featuring both fiddle and button accordion. Other fiddlers and groups who have worked with orchestras include Pierre Schryer (arrangements by Jeff Christmas and Joe Phillips), Haines and Leighton (arrangements by Tom Leighton) Shane Cook (arrangements by David Warrack, Bill Bridges and Scott Macmillan) and Anne Lederman (arrangements by Martin Van de Ven).

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, fiddling in Canada seems to be at an interesting crossroads, with one foot on the path of the old and the other on the new. Opportunities to learn traditional styles and repertoire are more widespread than ever before with an increasingly mobile population and a large group of professional fiddlers who perform and teach widely. This has encouraged an amateur revival of traditional fiddling, supported by camps, classes and lessons, publishing and recording activity. Dancing is also undergoing a revival with classes and social dances in both urban and rural settings, helping to maintain the older fiddling that animates it. However, fiddling is also being driven in new directions by many factors: the multitude of cultural influences, the increased musical training and technical abilities of many players, and, especially, the dominant context of concert performance. Performing for listening audiences rather than dancers is encouraging highly arranged versions of traditional music, more original material (ranging from strictly traditional style to pieces which abandon it entirely), and greatly extended forms. Which of these new directions will have the staying power to be passed on to future generations remains to be seen.

### III. STYLE AND REPERTOIRE

- i. French-Canadian
- ii. Aboriginal (Inuit, First Nations, Métis)
- iii. Scottish (Cape Breton, P.E.I. mainly)
- iv. Anglo-Canadian (Old Time, Down-east)
- v. Newfoundland
- vi. Ukrainian/Eastern European
- vii. Irish

Each of these styles could be further subdivided into more localized styles, and it should be noted that many fiddlers prefer to regard themselves in terms of a much smaller area or culture, eg, Ottawa Valley, Chicoutimi, Gwitchin etc. Styles frequently co-mingle in any given area, producing many distinctive regional expressions. In larger cities, eg, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, there are also many other folk fiddle traditions, eg, Jewish, Italian, Macedonian etc., but these have largely stayed within urban boundaries and are outside the scope of this article.

It is the associated dance traditions which are frequently the key to understanding the history, style, rhythms and repertoire of specific styles of traditional fiddling. In areas where the dance tradition is still active, the fiddling tends to remain more regionally distinctive, whereas in situations where fiddling has become more of a listening experience, the boundaries are increasingly blurred. In every style/area, repertoire, as currently played, is a combination of older material, often evolved into unique local versions, song tunes adapted for dancing, newer locally composed tunes and tunes which have been learned from recordings and other media.

Each area is presented according to the following outline:

- a. Repertoire: dances, rhythms, keys, tunings, tunes.
- b. Style: technical aspects of playing, ornamentation, etc., especially things that are unique to the style/area.
- c. Accompaniment and other instruments.

#### **i. French-Canadian** (Quebec, Acadia and other pockets of settlement)

a. Repertoire: The older repertoire in Quebec is closely tied to social dancing, a detailed study of which is beyond this entry. Louis Boudreault of Chicoutimi and others refer to such “grandes danses” as “Le brandy,” “Le reel à quatre,” “La belle Catherine,” “Le triomphe,” “La cardeuse,” “Le reel à neuf,” “Le casse-reel,” “Le talencourt,” “Le moneymusk,” “Le moustigris,” “Les foins,” “La frégate” and “La

plongeuse,” all of which probably date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and many of which have been forgotten. Each of these dances tended to be associated with one particular melody in a particular region, though versions varied from player to player. In the past, social dancing generally featured step-dancing throughout. Many dances, such as “Le brandy” and “Le reel à quatre” are based on Scottish dances, as is the step-dance tradition (La gigue). Later dances include “sets carrés” (called square dances) as well as “dances rondes” (couple, or “round” dances), for which any number of tunes might be used in a specific rhythm.

The repertoire that has survived consists largely of reels in simple time (even subdivision of the basic beat into two and four notes), with some “six-huit” (compound time, ie, the beat subdivides in three), waltzes, hornpipes, galops (simple time) and two triple rhythms which seem to survive only in Quebec in their pure form. The first of these is often called “6/4” or “slip reel” (in English) and is mainly associated with two tunes/dances: “Le brandy” and “La grande gigue simple,” the latter used for solo step-dancing. This rhythm was more common in England and Scotland in the past, although no direct antecedent of these two particular tunes has been found. The second is a fast 3/8 rhythm, associated especially with the repertoire of Louis “Pitou” Boudreault from Chicoutimi which corresponds to an older form of slip jig in simple triple time, from which it is possibly derived (unlike the contemporary form of slip jig which is in compound triple time). Waltzes are also commonly played in simple triple time unlike most English-speaking areas of the country where they are usually “swung” (compound triple time). Interestingly, in spite of the Scottish origins of much French-Canadian playing, strathspeys do not seem to have caught on in either French or Aboriginal areas of Canada, pointing possibly to the outlying Scottish and Orkney Islands as the original immigrant influence, where strathspeys are not common, (Young men from these areas are known to have worked for the Hudson’s Bay company in large numbers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century throughout Quebec and the north-west.)

While tunes, generally, follow the two-section, 32-bar structure of British Isles repertoire (AABB), a major rhythmic feature of older French-Canadian style is the irregularity of phrase length, and, therefore, time signature, yielding what are now commonly referred to as “crooked” tunes. Interestingly, the Shetland Islands, with their strong Scandinavian connections, are the one area of Scotland known for asymmetric phrasing: other possible influences are both the French chanson tradition and Aboriginal singing traditions, both of which feature asymmetric phrase lengths. Certain tunes in the repertoire of Louis Boudreault of Chicoutimi alternate strains in duple time with strains in triple time, eg, “La gigue à ma marraine Alfreda” and “Le reel de la pêche aux caplans.”

The Scottish origins of much French-Canadian fiddling also contributed several altered tunings to the repertoire, eg, A-D-A-E for tunes in D major, A-E-A-E and A-



E-A-C# for tunes in A major. The latter is used especially for one tune, “Le reel du pendu” (“Hangman's Reel”), which also has Scottish connections. The Acadian tune, “Le caraquet,” is typically played with the D string removed so that an octave drone may be achieved with the bottom string tuned to A, a technique also employed by some Quebecois players to imitate bagpipes. There is a strong tendency towards major keys, especially D, G and A in the older repertoire, although certain players were known for playing in flat keys (especially Bb), such as Xavier Dallaire of Chicoutimi.

Because tune versions tend to be quite different from player to player, and because of the idiosyncratic phrase lengths, there is less standardization of tune versions than in many other styles. This encourages a high degree of consciousness of the source player of a particular version amongst younger players.

b. Style: Older French-Canadian music is based largely on Scottish style, with single-note bow strokes or two-note-slurs and a fairly even rhythm on jigs and reels. However, more recent players often incorporate some of the longer slurs of Irish style which is a strong influence in certain areas. Similarly, ornamentation can cover a wide range, from virtually none to fairly complex Irish and Scottish techniques. French-Canadian players are known especially for a strong bow attack, often achieved by playing more in the centre of the bow than towards the tip, as well as a certain “lift” in the bow, in which the bow strokes are often somewhat *détaché*.

French-Canadian fiddlers (*violoneux*, *violoneuses*) are known especially for their clogging patterns, created while seated by alternating their feet on the floor in either of the following rhythms for reels.

RH RT LT RH RT LT      RH LH RT LT RH LH RT LT

R - Right    L - Left  
H - Heel    T - Toe

NOTE: Feet could be reversed,  
with left on the beat

The former occurs mainly in Quebec, while the latter turns up in all areas with French influence. Some players also clog for waltzes.

c. Accompaniment and Other Instruments: Early fiddlers often played to the accompaniment of only their own clogging and/or the rhythm of the dancers' feet, although the jaw harp (*guimbarde*), bones, spoons and tambour (small frame drum) have also been used for rhythmic accompaniment. Piano was, until recently, the most popular instrument for harmonic backing, now sometimes replaced or joined by guitar. Some pianists, eg, Yvon Breault of Quebec City and Gilles Losier of Montreal, have developed a rich, chromatic accompaniment style. Button accordion is also an important melody instrument and many tunes are adapted to the fiddle directly from the playing of accordionists. Tunes are also played on harmonica and, in lieu of any melody instrument, sung (called “reel à bouche” or “mouth music”)

**ii Aboriginal:** First Nations, Inuit, Métis (Prairies, northern Ontario and Quebec, Northwest Territories, the Yukon)

Fiddling was introduced to many parts of the northwest by French-Canadian traders (voyageurs), and therefore, older forms of aboriginal tradition are often closely related to French-Canadian style. However, the isolation of the many of the communities from further French influence since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the other significant cultural influences which have come into play, eg, direct Scottish connections, Ukrainian (on the prairies), American, and especially, Aboriginal culture itself, warrant the tradition being considered separate and unique.

a. Repertoire: Older repertoire is almost completely jigs, reels, simpler two-step type tunes in basic duple time, waltzes and specialty dance tunes. More recently, foxtrots have become increasingly popular.

The two best-known older tunes and dances in the northwest are based on “Le brandy” and “La grande gigue simple” of Quebec (the two 6/4 tunes mentioned Section III:i French-Canadian), called “Drops of Brandy” (the original Scottish name for the dance) and “The Red River Jig.” They are both in “reel” time (simple duple) and are generally more irregular in Aboriginal tradition than in Quebec. The “Drops of Brandy” dance, as in Quebec, is a version of the old Scottish line dance, done with all couples in one long set (as opposed to Scottish practice where a specific number of couples is generally the norm).

The name “Red River Jig” is a direct translation from the French, “La gigue de la Rivière Rouge” (literally, “The Red River Step-dance”) and does not refer to a 6/8 jig. Solo step-dancing is usually called “jigging” in Aboriginal communities and is considered the central dance practice of the entire Aboriginal fiddle tradition. In the past, there was a time in every social dance evening devoted to it. In most communities, jigging in couples is the norm: in some one couple at a time takes a turn, while in others, everyone is on the floor at once in an endurance contest to see who can last the longest. More formal jigging contests are also held, in which contestants generally perform three “fancy” steps alternating with a basic “time” step. It should also be noted that certain communities in Ontario use other tunes for jigging instead of the Red River Jig, eg, on Manitoulin Island, “Orange Blossom Special” is popular, and in Mattawa the favoured tune is “Ste. Anne’s Reel.”

Other fur trade era dances (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) common to both French-Canadian and Aboriginal tradition include “La Double Gigue” or “Double Jig,” also called the “Reel à quatre” or the “Reel of Four” (usually done to versions of “Fisher’s Hornpipe” or “Lord MacDonald’s Reel”), “The Broom Dance,” “The Sword Dance,” also known as the “Belt Dance,” “Sash Dance” or “Handkerchief Dance,” depending on what is used to make the cross formation on the floor (usually to versions of the Scottish

“Keel Row”) and “The Reel of Eight” (often “Whisky Before Breakfast”). Dances common in Aboriginal communities but not in Quebec seem to be “The Duck Dance” (done with 3 couples), “The Handkerchief Dance” (different than above, this one done with 3 people holding on to the ends of two sashes, sometimes made elaborately just for this purpose) and “The Rabbit Dance,” in which the lead couple breaks off and one partner chases the other through and around the lines of dancers. As in Quebec, all of these dances are associated with particular tunes in particular areas, although the tune often varies from community to community. While some of these tunes are easily traced, others seem to be unique to certain areas or players. Interestingly, one of the main melodies commonly used for the “Rabbit Dance” turns up in a 6/8 version in Manitoba and a 2/4 version in the repertoire of Gwitchin fiddler Bill Stevens of Alaska (the Gwitchin tradition extends through parts of NWT, Yukon and Alaska), an indication that tunes can change relatively easily from compound time (triplet subdivision of the beat, ie, jigs) to simple time (even subdivision in two or four, ie, reels).



- as played by Eldon Campbell, Kinosota, Manitoba, from CD Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Manitoba, Falcon Productions, FP 387.

- as played by Bill Stevens, Alaska, from CD Gwich'in Athabaskan Fiddle Music.

Three part quadrille sets are also common in many communities, generally called “first change,” “second change” and “breakdown” for which the tunes are not specific. Older players often had groups of three tunes in the same key for quadrille sets, which some players called “three sisters” (an allusion to Aboriginal tradition in which legends of three sisters are common).

Older players made use of the same altered tunings as in Quebec (A E A E, A E A C#, A D A E), as well as one other--a low D tuning in which the G

string is dropped to an octave below the D string, and the E also dropped to D, giving us D D A E (possibly from U.S. influence). Tunes in the first two A tunings above were commonly called “devil” tunes in Manitoba, where there are various stories circulating about how the devil might appear if you played them, with possibly disastrous consequences. (Similar stories also circulate in Quebec.) There is a well-known “Devil’s Waltz” in A E A C# tuning as well as versions of the Québécois “Hangman’s Reel,” usually called “Devil’s Reel.” It should also be noted that the tendency towards major keys is even more pronounced than in Quebec, with minor tunes having completely disappeared in many areas.

Greater aboriginal influence helps explain the higher degree of asymmetry in phrasing and tune structure in much of the old repertoire than is generally found in Quebec. Other possibly Aboriginal characteristics include extended beginnings and endings, the tendency for tunes to start with their high parts and descend (a characteristic also noted by Alan Jabbour in reference to possible Aboriginal influence in the U.S.) and the placing of rattlesnake rattles or other buzzing objects inside fiddles. Another somewhat Aboriginal cultural trait is the strong sense of ownership attached to particular versions of tunes, and the value placed on having one’s own unique versions (although this is known to occur in other fiddle traditions as well).

At present, the old repertoire of dances and tunes survives as a social tradition in fewer and fewer areas. In some areas, especially the NWT and the Yukon, foxtrots and two-steps, largely adapted from popular Country and Western tunes, have begun to dominate the repertoire. In other areas, Andy DeJarlis’s “Red River” style (see Section II: History) has come to be thought of as definitive of Métis fiddling. Two recorded collections have helped to re-ignite interest in older styles: Falcon Productions “Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Manitoba” (1986, re-released on CD in 2000) and The Gabriel Dumont Institute’s “Drops of Brandy” (2002). Some of the old repertoire is revived and maintained through adult and youth performance dance groups which have become popular in recent years, often associated with Métis cultural organizations. There is also an annual festival (Fiddle Fest) devoted to Métis music and dance traditions held near Batoche, Saskatchewan.

b. Style: Much like French-Canadian and Scottish style, older fiddlers make use of generally short bow strokes with not much slurring, as well as the now-fading “double-stringing” technique of using open string drones. On waltzes, many older players are notable for the “spaces” they leave between notes (bow comes off the string between notes). Players often held the fiddle quite vertically, some resting the side of the fiddle on their forearm with their chin on the other side.



Like Québécois players, many Aboriginal fiddlers also “clog” with both feet along with their playing, although they do not tend to use the second, more filled-in rhythm (see Section III:I). Some do this not only to reels but to jigs as well as follows:



c. Accompaniment and Other Instruments: In some areas, accompaniment by another fiddler was once common in the form of steady rhythmic chords, a version of the melody an octave lower, or some combination of the two. (Since playing in octaves was also a feature of older Cape Breton style, it is likely derived from older Scottish practice.) Latterly, however, guitar is the most common accompaniment and, for larger events or recordings, bass and sometimes drums were used to emulate the down-east sound. Reg Bouvette of Manitoba was noted for his use of bluegrass-style banjo. Piano accompaniment was not common in this tradition in the past, as pianos were not widely available in the more isolated communities of the north-west. Accordion and harmonica also turn up occasionally.

**iii Scottish** (Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island, some in Newfoundland, and extending into the northeastern U.S.)

a. Repertoire: Scottish fiddling in Canada draws on a large 18th- and 19th-century Scottish repertoire of slow airs, strathspeys, marches, jigs, reels, and hornpipes augmented in Canada by many new compositions. Strathspeys and many of the marches are played in 12/8 in Canada, though generally written in 4/4. Strathspeys have a different rhythmic emphasis than marches, generally marked by a steady foot beat on every beat of the bar whereas marches use a more relaxed feel of two accents in a bar. Hornpipes are also sometimes in this relaxed 12/8 rhythm, but currently are more commonly played with even 1/8<sup>th</sup> notes, much as reels.

Many tunes are taken straight from the bagpipe repertoire, using its range of nine notes as written, from G up to A (although bagpipes are currently tuned higher, so

that A sounds between Bb and B on the bagpipes). The ornamentation of the bagpipes has, historically, been a major influence on the fiddle style. The Gaelic language is also considered to be related to the rhythmic feel of the music, as reflected in the colloquial phrase “Gaelic in the bow.”

Unlike other Canadian traditions, Scottish printed tune collections from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier are a major source of repertoire. Players often take great liberties with these tunes in practice, and most still learn by ear rather than by reading, but the collections are central to local ideas of what the tradition is. Two especially influential older collections – the Skye Collection (first published in 1879) and the Simon Fraser Collections (1816) have been republished by Cranford Publications in Cape Breton. Many newer tune collections have also been published, including those by such well-known composers as Dan R. MacDonald, Jerry Holland, Kinnon Beaton, Brenda Stubbert and Paul Cranford, and players such as Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald and John Campbell.

Dancing is still an active past-time both in Cape Breton and P.E.I. and in expatriate communities in Toronto. Many older Highland dances from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as four-hand reels (two couples) and eight hand reels (four couples) are no longer done, having been replaced by quadrille sets (squares) in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This probably increased the demand for jigs in the repertoire (which are used for certain squares) so many seem to have been borrowed from Irish tradition or composed. Strathspeys are now reserved for step-dancing, for which sets of strathspeys going into reels are generally played. The hard shoe step-dance tradition traces directly back to highland Scotland, where it has since been lost, making Cape Breton an important source for the continuation and revival of the practice. Other common rhythmic sets for listening include slow air/strathspey(s)/reels and march/strathspey(s)/reels, with hornpipes sometimes substituting for reels. These sets are generally centered on one tonic pitch with possible changes of mode. Some tunes also change mode internally, and a few change tonic, but generally only to the related major up a minor third (in the case of tunes starting in minor) or down a minor third (for tunes starting in major). Medleys might then continue on the new tonic. Though not as common as in other parts of the country, there are a few waltzes and polkas for couple dancing.

There is a much greater range of keys and modes in Scottish style than in virtually any other Canadian practice, with tunes in major, mixolydian, and dorian on tonics G, A, C, D and E, major and mixolydian tunes on F and Bb, and dorian on F#. Altered tunings, sometimes called “scordatura” were also popular at one time, but the practice is fading. The most common of these is the “high bass” tuning of A – E – A – E, but A – D – A – E was also used in the past. “High-bass” tuning allowed players to play many tunes in octaves and make greater use of “double-stringing,” both with open strings sounding against the melody and with fingered drones, a common practice.

b. Style: The violin hold often consists of the scroll raised higher than shoulder level, with left hand near or touching the neck. Often only two or three fingers hold the bow. Bow strokes tend to be short and executed in the upper half. There is a tendency in the older style to aim for down-bows on the beat in strathspeys and reels with two-note slurs used mainly to change direction when needed. These are often executed as “stop-slurs,” mostly up-bow, in which the two notes each have their own attack so that they are virtually indistinguishable from a change of direction. Other exceptions to the “one bow/one-note” principle are various kinds of “pushed” two or three-note slurs for rhythmic effect, sometimes called “whip bows,” “loop bows” or “up-driven” bows. Notes in reels and jigs are fairly even, with rhythmic accents either (or both) “on-beat” and “off-beat,” depending on the player and the tune. Other common bow techniques in strathspeys and reels are “cuts” or “crushed” bow strokes (also called “trebles” or “triplets”) in which a note is broken into three or four rapid notes, usually on the same pitch. A special technique on strathspeys, often called “cutting up” the tune, involves a continuous breaking up of longer notes into two or three repeated notes. These can be combined with various kinds of slurs for a rich tapestry of rhythmic effects.

Fingered ornaments (often called “gracings”) are complex in this tradition, involving single and double grace notes above or below the melody notes, and occasionally three-note runs. They are usually on the beat and accented. Vibrato is used for effect on specific notes, but not continuously. Fourth finger unisons with open strings are a hallmark of the style. Two other unique melodic features are: “wild notes” generally a 4<sup>th</sup> finger note in place of a 3<sup>rd</sup> finger note, creating a somewhat dissonant effect, and what is sometimes called “back-string substitution” (Dunlay and Greenberg, 1996: 22) in which the tonic note (usually in the key of A) is played an octave lower. Like the step-dancing, many of these bow and finger techniques probably came from 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish practice, but were abandoned there.

c. Accompaniment and Other Instruments: While in the past, fiddling was largely accompanied only with a second fiddle, feet, spoons or tapped knitting needles, the pump-organ organ gained popularity around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was replaced by the piano by ca 1930. Unlike other areas of the country, the piano frequently supplies melody, counter-melody or harmony as well as complex chordal rhythmic accompaniment. Some pianists, eg, Doug MacPhee, have developed a solo style; others, such as Maybelle Chisholm, have developed new rhythmic techniques that have greatly influenced younger pianists. Bagpipes, harmonica, button accordion and guitar also play melody, and “jigging” (singing) fiddle tunes was also once more common, employing either nonsense syllables or Gaelic words, the latter style known as “puirt a beul.”

**iv. Anglo-Canadian**, also called “Old Time” or “Down-east” fiddling. (Maritimes, Ontario and the west).

a. Repertoire: Down-east fiddling is a distillation of older Anglo-Irish, Scottish, and German traditions, mixed with American swing and country influences. As the dominant style in much of English-speaking Canada, it is associated with a rural tradition of social dancing consisting largely of square dances, couple dances (polkas, schottisches, waltzes, two-steps, foxtrots/rags) and several specialty dances with their own tunes, eg, the “Heel Toe Polka,” “The Jersey,” “The Rye Waltz,” “Varsovienna,” “The French Minuet,” “The Roberts,” and “The Seven-Step.” Some are known only regionally, such as “The Butterfly” in the west (also done in Quebec). Square dances are generally done in sets of three: first change (usually jigs), second change (usually two-steps) and breakdown (reels) for which any number of tunes may be used.

Currently, the tune repertoire is influenced more by competitions than by dance playing. Competitions usually require a medley of waltz (32 bars), jig (48 bars, ie, AABBA or ABBAB) and reel (96 bars, 3X through a standard tune). Step-dance competitions also use fiddle accompaniment in a similar medley but with a clog (hornpipe) substituted for the waltz. Fiddle contests often also have classes for harmony duet performances and novelty performances, eg, step-dancing and fiddling simultaneously, acrobatics and tricks (bowing behind one’s back, under the knee or over the head) or unusual bows (a hockey stick, baseball bat, etc).

In this style, fiddles remain in standard tuning. Influenced by Scottish tradition, the range of keys is wide – up to 3 flats and 4 sharps, but becoming increasingly major, with only a few older dorian and mixolydian tunes.

b. Style: Currently, players in this style are more likely to be classically trained than those from other traditions, although playing by ear and having an “old time feel” is still prized. Bowing is smooth and full, often with a bit of “lilt” (notes slightly uneven) and an understated “off-beat” accent on jigs, reels and waltzes to give a good dance rhythm. Slurs used to be mainly short (2 or 3 notes) but this has been changing in recent years with influence from other traditions, notably American competition styles. U.S. influence has also encouraged the use of the “double shuffle” syncopated rhythm. Ornamentation is minimal, restricted generally to single grace notes, occasional triplets and 2 note runs up or down into melody notes. Vibrato is now prized on waltzes but is avoided on faster dance tunes. Waltzes feature a great deal of melodic variation, embellishment and double-stopping.

c. Accompaniment and Other Instruments: Piano is preferred for dancing, contests and sessions, although guitar and mandolin are gaining in popularity. Older recordings often feature bass and drums, based on the Don Messer model, but currently, these are out of favour.



## v. Newfoundland

In comparison with the rest of Canada, rural Newfoundland has a markedly different style of dance music. Causal factors for this include the ethnicity of settlers (almost exclusively English and Irish), the time of settlement (starting 1610 but with the greatest influx within a couple of decades each side of 1800), the relatively late arrival of electricity to many rural areas (late 1960s), the increasing use of button accordion for dance music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the survival of local dance traditions in remote outports until the government-supported resettlement program in the late 1960s.

a) Repertoire: Although there are some regional differences in nomenclature, tempi and repertoire, there is a commonality of musical style across most of the Island of Newfoundland and southern coastal Labrador. With the exception of the Codroy Valley (Cape Breton/ Scottish style) and Port au Port/St. Georges area (Acadian style) Newfoundlanders had no tradition of listening to local instrumental dance music for its own sake, or for the sake of the virtuosity of the player. While it was acceptable to listen to recordings or broadcasts of instrumental music, until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the local dance music repertoire was used almost exclusively for dancing.

Dances were not “called” in Newfoundland, but were learned through the oral tradition. Group dances included 18th century country dances, cotillions and reels as well as 19<sup>th</sup> century five and six part quadrilles, which were referred to variously as the square dance, the set, or the Lancers. Country Dances and reels, which were danced in facing lines (longways sets) or in circles, often had a dedicated tune (for example, “Haste to the Wedding,” “Kitty’s Rambles,” “Speed the Plough,” “The Kitty Jones Reel”) while the favourite tunes for cotillions or quadrilles, which were in square formation, would be different in each community. Step-dancing, which was done continuously in the square dance and also as a solo performance, was almost exclusively the prerogative of men and was often highly, if informally, competitive. Music for the dance was usually provided by a single musician, who was referred to as the “fiddler,” whether he or she played the fiddle, the accordion, the harmonica, or even sang the tunes (the latter called “gob music” or “chin music”).

Newfoundland has many tunes in common with other places in the British Isles diaspora, but they generally appear under alternate names, and often are played in a different metre. For example, “Cock of the North” is called “Auntie Mary”; “Miss MacLeod” is “Round Old Ruby’s Garden.” Tunes were, and are, often identified and named by a (frequently ribald) rhyming couplet or stanza, which was often unique to the community. The rhyme served the dual purpose of reminding the fiddler of the melody, and aiding the rhythmically inexperienced dancer to keep time with the beat of the tune. The binary AABB form of the British Isles – two phrases usually in a question/answer formula with cadential motives often common to both A and B

parts is standard. The preponderance of tunes are “singles,” in which the beat divides into two (simple duple metre, usually transcribed in 2/4) and “doubles,” in which the beat divides in three (compound metre, transcribed in 6/8). There is a smaller proportion of tunes in which the beat divides evenly into 4; these are variously called “triple” or “triple” in some areas, and “step-dance tunes” or “the double” (after a particular step-dance called “The Double”) in others. Of these tunes, which are transcribed in 1/6<sup>th</sup> notes in a 4/4 time signature, the majority exhibit the cadential pattern of the hornpipe (three consecutive longer notes). Rural Newfoundland has relatively few tunes that would classify as modern reels. Single and double tunes were used for the dances, except for the “close-in” part of the square dance, which was danced to a hornpipe in some places. Waltzing was not commonly done in rural areas until the 1940s, when it took hold in communities near American and Canadian naval and air bases. Consequently, waltz tunes are either recently composed, are borrowed from the down-east tradition, or are 3/4 time song melodies, eg, “Now I’m Sixty Four” or “The Star of Logy Bay,” and so have only an A part.

The most frequently chosen keys are G, D or A majors. “High bass” tuning (AEAE) was occasionally used in the past, but fiddlers now almost invariably use standard tuning (although the instrument might be tuned lower than standard pitch).

b. Style: Music is performed with all beats receiving equal emphasis, and no secondary stresses; phrases consist of a series of equally important beats. Open string drones are much used, and the music is sparingly ornamented with grace notes and upper finger “cuts.” The music has a strong steady beat which is divided evenly, and not lilted or swung. Phrase lengths are commonly asymmetric (“crooked”). This may be a result of several factors, such as the oral transmission of both dances and tunes, the complete lack of published sources until the 1980s and the demands placed upon the music by the dance style. In addition, song performance style may have influenced the tunes, as well as the practice (common up to the 1950s) of having individual musicians, and not ensembles, provide accompaniment for dance. An aesthetic that did not highly value symmetry may have facilitated this development (a value which Newfoundland shares with other areas of Canada, notably French and Aboriginal communities.)

As most dance fiddlers in Newfoundland were completely self-taught, there is a great variety in the manner of holding the instrument and bow. The fiddle might be held on the left shoulder against the chest or upper arm, or in the case of Rufus Guinchard, on the right shoulder. Most older players put the neck of the fiddle against the skin between thumb and index finger and kept it there, occasionally with the aid of rosin. The left wrist sometimes supported the instrument. The bow could be held anywhere from the frog to the middle. Playing techniques are, likewise, unusual. James Acreman, of St. Anthony, uses the middle, ring and pinky fingers and declines

to use the first finger at all; Garland Decker (also a self-taught instrument builder) used the same finger for adjacent notes.

c. Accompaniment and Other Instruments: A discussion of fiddle music in Newfoundland of necessity includes the button accordion. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when service organizations such as the Society of United Fishermen and the Masons began to build halls in rural areas, the practice of dancing, which had hitherto been done in kitchens, twine stores and on bridges, moved into these larger venues. There being no method of amplifying the sound of the fiddle without electricity, the accordion, principally because of its louder volume, began to gain ascendancy as the instrument of choice for hall dances. Accordions were also sturdier and easier to repair: safety pins could double as button springs, and a leaky bellows temporarily patched with bread dough. Up until the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, fiddles were difficult to find and to maintain. As a boy, Rufus Guinchard used “frankgum” (congealed resin from the spruce tree) for rosin and heavy cotton thread for strings. In Lord’s Cove, Burin Peninsula, Jack Fitzpatrick’s first bow was the edge sawed from a barrel stave, strung with hair from the pony’s tail.

Newfoundland dance music was traditionally unaccompanied except by feet. Guitars first began to be used in Newfoundland under the influence of Country and Down-east music in the 1950s. However, since the mid-1970s, when the traditional music revival began to make it acceptable to listen to local dance tunes, the music has been accompanied by a myriad of instruments which are commonly found also in bluegrass and Irish music, eg, guitar, bass, mandolin, bodhran, bouzouki, and banjo.

With the demise of traditional dancing, the older style of fiddling almost vanished. Most fiddlers maturing in the 1950s embraced Irish and Down-east tunes learned from recordings and the radio. Even after the traditional music revival in the mid-1970s, many musicians, particularly in the St. John’s area, continue to favour Irish music and play Irish style. However, with the increasing availability of Newfoundland tunes on CD and in publications, appreciation for local tunes has increased, and the music is making a resurgence, although the manner of playing is now much more Irish. Fiddle and accordion are also being taught in school music programs across the province.

## **vi. Ukrainian**

a. Repertoire: Ukrainian fiddling draws largely on a repertoire of two-steps and polkas (often very fast duple time tunes), waltzes, and song melodies, some from Europe and many composed in Canada. Many of the older dances have their own tunes, eg, the kozachok, kolomyika, hutsulka, mazurka, arkan, chaban, and holub. As in the Aboriginal tradition, revival dance groups help the tradition to survive.

Ukrainian tunes are often based on modes other than those used in British Isles-based fiddling. The harmonic minor scale and modes derived from it are especially common. Tunes often have internal key changes and multiple sections as opposed to the two-part forms of most British Isles-based fiddling.

b. Style: The older style incorporates eastern European glissandos and grace notes. As in other styles, older fiddlers tend to use more ornamentation and variation than younger players. Some of the tempos are extremely rapid and long passages of fast notes are executed with short separate bows.

c. Accompaniment and Other Instruments: Early ensembles consisted of tsymbaly, violin and a small drum, following Old World models of “Trioiste muzyky” (trio music). However, other instruments were gradually incorporated into dance bands, including saxophone, guitar, banjo, accordion, bass and drums.

## **vii. Irish**

Currently, most larger urban centers in the country have thriving Irish music and dance activity because of more recent immigration (past 50 years or so). Although “ceilidhs” (dances) are common in some cities, much Irish playing happens in pub sessions. These urban practices are highly influenced by well-known touring players and groups from Ireland and America, and repertoire and playing style is often drawn directly from influential recordings, with the obvious disadvantage of fewer opportunities for personal interaction and cultural immersion. While large and influential overall, this activity remains relatively separate from the older rural Scottish-based Canadian traditions, though some of the most common tunes are gradually infiltrating. As the main aim in contemporary practice is to emulate recorded Irish players of the past 50 years or so, it will not be dealt with in depth here, but we will look briefly at the older influence of Irish tradition in the country.

a. Repertoire: Many well-known jigs throughout the country seem to derive from Irish sources eg, “Swallowtail,” “Rakes of Kildare,” “Father O’Flynn’s,” “Shannon Bells,” “Off She Goes,” “Irishman’s Heart to the Ladies,” etc.. Some reels, polkas, waltzes and hornpipes (clogs) are also Irish in origin. However, some of this repertoire may have come into Canada from English and Scottish sources, as well as through the influence of widely circulated American publications such as *Ryan’s Mammoth Collection* (and *1001 Fiddle Tunes*). Fairly specialized Irish rhythms such as the slip jig, did not take hold in rural Canada, though there is some speculation that a few of them may have transformed into duple time tunes in French and aboriginal areas, eg, Louis Boudreault’s “Gigue à Tommy” (possibly derived from “Foxhunter’s Jig”) and “Drops of Brandy” (see Sections i and ii).

b. Style: Many aspects of Irish style are quite different than the older Scottish-based Canadian styles – bowing, ornamentation, tonal quality, rhythmic feel etc. Certain influential players of the past have consciously incorporated these into their work, notably Jean Carignan in Quebec, but, in most areas, what is thought of as Irish bowing and ornamentation simply did not seem to “take” in Canada (though playing styles even in Ireland were probably simpler in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the most part). In some areas, notably Ontario, contests have especially frowned on Irish-style playing (long slurs through the beat, rolls etc.) considering it not to be Canadian. This has changed in recent years however, as many younger, highly respected players are learning Irish style in addition to their old-time base.

#### IV: PUBLICATIONS, RESEARCH and COLLECTIONS

Most available books on Canadian Fiddling are biographies of particular players: these include Don Messer (Sellick, 1969), Rufus Guinchard (Russell, 1982) Emile Benoit (Quigley, 1995), King Ganam (Fahlman, 1995), Andy de Jarlis (Watson, 2002) and Marcel Meilleur (Meilleur, 2003). Some are memoirs written by fiddlers themselves (Meilleur, 2003) or by fans (Watson, 2002), while others include analysis of the fiddler’s work by scholars (Quigley, 1995). There are a few larger collections of biographical portraits of the fiddlers of a certain area, eg, MacGillivray’s *The Cape Breton Fiddler* (1981), Newlove’s *Fiddlers of the Canadian West* (ca 1975), and *Fiddling in New Brunswick* (Copeland, 2006), the most thorough work to date on the history, groups and players of a particular region.

Most other published works are tune collections, some with excellent historical and stylistic overviews, eg, *Danse ce Soir* (Hart and Sandell 2001), *Traditional Celtic Violin Music of Cape Breton* (Dunlay and Greenburg, 1996), *The Fiddle Music of Prince Edward Island* (Perlman, 1996) and *Drops of Brandy* (Dorian-Paquin and Smith, 1996). Newer composed repertoire is collected in Ed Whitcomb’s two volumes, *Canadian Fiddle Music*, with a useful general overview of fiddle styles and composers throughout the country (1990, 2001). The Canadian Museum of Civilization has also published three books in their Mercury Series dealing with fiddling: *La musique traditionnelle pour violon: Jean Carignan* (Begin, 1981), *Folk Fiddling: A Sampling* (Gibbons 1981) and *As it Comes: Folk Fiddling in Prince George, British Columbia* (Gibbons, 1982), as well as two which deal with fiddle traditions peripherally – *Folk Music of Canada’s Oldest Polish Community* (Glofcheskie, 1980) and *The Swedish Community at Eriksdale* (Houser, 1976).

Overall, published works which examine a particular regional/cultural style of Canadian fiddling as a whole are rare. Mishler’s *The Crooked Stovepipe* (1986) on Gwitchin tradition comes closest, even though largely based on Alaskan experience. (Gwitchin culture extends across Alaska, Yukon and the North West Territories.)

Several important field collections of traditional fiddling are housed in the Archives of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, as well as interviews with fiddlers, photos and videotapes of music and dance performances. Most early manuscripts of fiddle tunes are in The National Library which also runs the Virtual Gramophone project, providing early recordings online, ([www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/gramophone/index-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/gramophone/index-e.html)), especially of Quebec material. The University of Alberta sponsors a Virtual Museum of Canadian Traditional Music ([www.fwalive.ualberta.ca/mvtmc](http://www.fwalive.ualberta.ca/mvtmc)), including the Northern Alberta Fiddle Project and the Ukrainian Music Project, and The Gabriel Dumont Institute runs the virtual Métis Museum ([www.metismuseum.ca](http://www.metismuseum.ca)) which includes several interviews with fiddlers. Other regional museums hold important local collections, but currently there is no central listing of these resources. Another useful online resource is [www.backtothesugarcamp.com](http://www.backtothesugarcamp.com) which has posted the liner notes of hundreds of early Canadian fiddle recordings.

Several Universities throughout the country support graduate research on folk traditions through departments of Music/Ethnomusicology or Folklore, especially Memorial University in Newfoundland and Université Laval in Quebec, and all of these house their own field collections. To date there have been 20-30 theses at a Masters and PhD level written on aspects of fiddle traditions in Canada. Of these, almost half relate to Cape Breton. Some are regional or stylistic studies detailing history, development and repertoire, eg, Osborne's work in Newfoundland (2003) Hornby's in P.E.I. (1982), Doherty (1996), Dunlay (1986), Graham (2004) and Thompson (2003) in Cape Breton, Ennis (1986) and Trew (2000) in the Ottawa Valley, Lederman (1986) on Aboriginal practice in western Manitoba and Cherwick's (1999) on Ukrainian music in the west.

Several are studies of the repertoire and performance practice of particular fiddlers: Jean Carignan (Begin, 1979), Louis Boudreault (Ornstein 1985), Emile Benoit (Quigley 1987), Dan R. MacDonald (McGann 2003) and Ashley MacIsaac (MacDonald 2006). Quigley's and McGann's work looks particularly at the compositional process of their subjects. There is one discographic work (McKinnon, 1989) and one study of learning and teaching practices (Garrison, 1985) both related to Cape Breton practice. Johnson's work looks particularly at changing notions of the idea of "tradition" in Ontario fiddle contests (2006), a theme also explored in MacDonald's work on Ashley MacIsaac (2006).

There are also many cultural organizations devoted to preserving, documenting and teaching particular regional styles who have contributed greatly to our current knowledge, eg., Centre Mnémo in Quebec and the Franco-Ontarian Folklore Centre in Sudbury, Ontario, among others. The Canadian Society for Musical Traditions publishes a regular bulletin, with one issue devoted to fiddling (Lederman, ed. 1985) and several other articles over the years.

*c. Anne Lederman/Christina Smith*



## LIST OF PHOTO CREDITS

- Page 1: Grandy Fagnan, Camperville Manitoba, taken by Bill Henry
- Page 21: Emile Spence, Eddystone, Manitoba, taken by Anne Lederman  
Fred Mckay, Camperville, Manitoba, taken by Bill Henry
- Page 31: Frontier Fiddlers, Pine Creek, Manitoba, taken by Anne Lederman

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