



North American Traditions Series

TRADITIONAL *Fiddle Music* OF

CAPE BRETON

VOLUME 4

MacKinnon's
Brook

STAN CHAPMAN
JOE CORMIER
JERRY HOLLAND
WILLIE KENNEDY
JOHN L. MACDONALD
DONALD MACLELLAN
THERESA MACLELLAN
BUDDY MACMASTER
DOUG MACPHEE
MORGAN MACQUARRIE
MARY MAGGIE VARNIER



Rounder 7040



Cape Mabou

Band 1. **Theresa MacLellan** w/ Marie MacLellan, piano: *Captain Norman Orr-Ewing* (Willie Ross), *Sandy Duff* - reels.

Band 2. **Donald MacLellan** w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *The Miller O'Hirn* (J. Scott Skinner), *Craigellachie Bridge* (William Marshall), *The Fir Tree* - strathspeys; *Mr. Menzies of Culdare* (Niel Gow), *Duncan on the Plainstones* (J. Scott Skinner), *General Stewart*, *Steer the Gill* - reels.

Band 3. **Joe Cormier** w/ Janine Randall, piano, Edmond Boudreau, mandolin, and Johnny Muise, clappers: *The Inverness Gathering* - march; *Col. Thornton*, *John MacNeil*, *Highland Dancer* (Peter Milne) - reels.

Band 4. **Stan Chapman** w/ Gordon MacLean, piano: *I'll Get Wedded in my Auld Claes*, *Strathlorne* (Neil Archie Beaton), *Bachelor's* - jigs.

Band 5. **John L. MacDonald** w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *Dr. Shaw's* (J. Scott Skinner), *A Duncan MacQuarrie Strathspey*, *Angus Allan and Dan J's* - strathspeys; *The Lasses of Stewarton*, *Jenny Dang the Weaver* - reels.

Band 6. **Buddy MacMaster** w/ Gordon MacLean, piano: *Bishop MacDonald's Farewell* (Donald John "The Tailor" Beaton) - marching air; *Rochiemuchus Rant* - strathspey; *The Braes of Auchtertyre*, *The Haggis* (Simon Fraser) - reels.

Band 7. **Doug MacPhee**, piano: *MacKinnon's Brook*, *Calum Breuagh* - strathspeys; *Lochiel's Away to France*, *MacKinnon's Rant*, *Elizabeth's Big Coat* - reels.

Band 8. **Jerry Holland** w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *Juanita's Jig* (Dan Hughie MacEachern, SOCAN), *A Trip to Toronto* (Donald Angus Beaton, SOCAN), *Lord Dreghorn's Quickstep* (Robert Macintosh) - jigs.

Band 9. **Theresa MacLellan** w/ Marie MacLellan, piano: *March to the Rendevous* (Alexander Walker); *Factory Smoke* - clog; *Pat Wilmot's Reel* (Johnny Wilmot), *The Pigeon on the Gate* - reels.

Band 10. **Joe Cormier** w/ Edmond Boudreau, guitar: *The Free Gardener* (Alexander Walker) - march; *The Smith's a Gallant Fireman* (with variations by J. Scott Skinner) - strathspey; *The Auld Wheel* (J. Scott Skinner), *The Earl of Seafield's Reel* (Donald Grant), *The Fairy Dance* (Nathaniel Gow) - reels.

Band 11. **John L. MacDonald** w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *John McFadyen of Melfort* (John MacColl), *Cecil MacKenzie* (Rod Campbell), *Isla Lasses* - strathspeys; *Scotsville Reel* (Piper Alex MacDonald), *Pigeon on the Gate* - reels.

Band 12. **Stan Chapman** w/ Gordon MacLean, piano: *The Maids of Arrochar* (John MacDonald Dundee) - slow air; *McLachlan's Scotch Measure*; *The Boys of Blue Hill*, *Jenny Nettles* - reels.

Band 13. **Theresa MacLellan** w/ Marie MacLellan, piano: *Sleepy Maggie/ Muhlin Dhu* - reels.

Band 14. **Donald MacLellan** w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *Whistle O'er the Lave O't*, *Sir Harry's Welcome Home* (Peter Hardie), *The Duke of Gordon's Birthday* (William Marshall) - strathspeys; *Captain Byng* (Nathaniel Gow), *Muschat's Cairn* (James Porteous), *Lady Georgina Campbell* - reels.

Band 15. **Willie Kennedy and Morgan MacQuarrie** w/ Mary Maggie Varnier, piano: *Miss Lyall* (Simon Fraser), *King George the IVth*, *King George* - strathspeys; *Tom Rae* (Dan R. MacDonald (SOCAN)), *The King's Reel*, *Miss Lyall* -reels.

“Correctness” in Cape Breton Fiddle Music:

When I first began studying Cape Breton fiddle music in the 1980's, what surprised me most was the value placed on “correctness” by the musicians themselves. My previous, limited exposure to traditional music, and my reading, had led me to assume that in all “folk” music there would be a great deal of variation, improvisation, and melodic freedom. In addition, I had been brainwashed by the old pervasive paradigm that “folk” musicians should not be musically literate because “traditional” music cannot be learned from books (and should have anonymous composers or arrangers). Only later did I realize that although traditional *music* indeed cannot be learned from books, traditional *tunes* (including those composed by real known individuals!) can be learned from any source by musicians who know how to interpret them in a traditional style. So I was initially surprised to find traditional musicians learning many of their tunes from books, as my Cape Breton fiddle teachers repeatedly referred me to written sources of the tunes they were playing. I did collect some



Colindale

tunes that were not known to be in books, since I asked specifically for them, but the vast majority of tunes obviously had a long written history -- many as old as the eighteenth century. My mentors were familiar with the various collections, mostly Scottish, and could point out which books had the best settings of which tunes.

The “best setting” usually meant the setting closest to what was played in Cape Breton. It turned out that there was a generally accepted version of each melody from which one should not stray too far, if one wanted to play “correctly.” (Playing with appropriate style is also of course part of playing “correctly” but it is hardly an issue for those who grow up in the tradition.)

In the introduction to *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs* (1951), Béla Bartók wrote: *“Some believe that the essential difference between art music and folk music is the continuous variability of folk music against the rigid stability of art music. I agree with this statement, but with a qualification: the difference is not one of contrast, but one of degree....”*

From this statement, we would expect to see in folk music a spectrum of variability. Writing about oral texts, folklorist Richard Bauman discussed this spectrum in *Verbal Art as Performance* (1984):

Although it has been argued that perhaps all verbal art is generated anew in the act of performance..., there is also ample evidence to show that rote memorization and insistence on word for word fidelity to a fixed traditional text do play a part in the performance system of certain communities.... the point is that completely novel and completely fixed texts represent the poles of an ideal continuum, and that between the poles lies the range of emergent text structures to be found in empirical performance.

Even within Celtic music, different points on that continuum can be observed. All traditional musicians personalize the tunes in their repertoire, but an Irish musician can change a tune more radically than a Cape Breton musician while still staying within the boundaries of tradition. In *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (1971), Breandán Breathnach categorizes the ornamentation of a tune into three types: embellishment (the use of grace notes, and filling in intervals), [melodic] variation, and rhythm. He explains that variation involves “a degree of instant composition. Here the group or bar is varied, perhaps only the skeleton of the phrase is being retained. Each time the part is played some grouping is varied, no performance ever being the same.” This type of variation is admired in Irish music, and musicians who have that ability, such as fiddler Michael Coleman and piper Johnny Doran, are highly regarded. However, only a few musicians have such an extensive talent for instant composition. It is more common for musicians to have worked out or learned by ear a store of small variations to phrases that they can apply seemingly spontaneously. Scottish fiddle music, which is the basis of Cape Breton fiddle music, includes melodic variation as well, but historically it was applied in a more formal manner. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many composed sets of variations to traditional and popular tunes were published. These variation sets often contain a large number of strains (sections) that grow progressively complex. If Scottish fiddlers of this period practiced “instant composition” beyond basic ornamentation, we have scant evidence of it. Instead, we do find clear indications that tune settings varied from musician to musician. Niel and Nathaniel Gow used this lack of uniformity as a selling point for their *Complete Repository* (1802) in which they write:

The original Scotch Strathspeys, Reels and Jigs, of which this collection consist, are brought forward with a view to serve as a Standard of those National



Tunes and Dances, for we cannot avoid mentioning, that in every part of Scotland where we have occasionally been, and from every observation we were able to make, have not once met with two Professional Musicians who played the Same notes of any Tune.

The Gows and their fellow collectors and arrangers did indeed create standard reference versions of the melodies they published. In contrast, Tomás Ó Canainn writes in *Traditional Music in Ireland* (1978) regarding published collections of Irish music (which were few until the late 19th and early 20th centuries):

The various collections of Irish music have never been regarded by traditional performers as a standard against which their performance is to be measured or its correctness checked. They are no more than journalistic evidence that a particular tune exists at the date of publication. No special authority is given to one version of a tune by reason of its appearance in a collection, though a comparison of collections may yield several interesting versions of one tune.



Jerry Holland

No one would suggest that modern Irish musicians haven't been affected by the publication of definitive collections of Irish music such as Francis O'Neill's books. It is also true that there exist fairly standard versions of tunes (many of which can be found on the internet) that are played in group sessions of Irish music these days. However, solo musicians still feel free to stray from these standard versions. Personal style is greatly valued in Cape Breton music, but it is

expressed in ways other than by creating variations of tunes. Each fiddler has preferred settings of tunes in their repertoire, but usually the settings are not far from those of others around them. Cape Breton pianist Barbara Magone explained in an email to the Cape Breton Music Mailing List in 1999:

Re: 'putting a little of yourself in the music' - my father taught me many tunes by ear (he didn't read music either). I did eventually take classical lessons and learned to read... Anyway, I remember my father always being very strict about learning the tune correctly. I think he made such an impression on me that for years I wouldn't play a tune in front of anyone unless I was absolutely sure I had it correct. It is not customary for Cape Breton musicians to put 'too much' of themselves (other/extra notes) in a tune; this is primarily what the Irish players do when they play variations of a tune (which is part of the Irish traditional music). Not so with CB music. Having said that, a phrase, grace note, or a couple of notes difference will be found among the many different Cape

Breton players though. I just think we should differentiate here between the "customary tradition" of playing variations (Irish music) and how a CB player would "personalize" a tune.

Cape Breton ear-players usually developed very good aural learning ability because of the pressure to play tunes "correctly!" Nevertheless, certain Cape Breton musicians are credited with the talent for improving tunes. Cape Breton pianist Doug MacPhee said in an interview in *Cape Breton's Magazine* in 1986 (discussing the melody of a tune, not the improvised accompaniment):

I wouldn't try to compose something myself into a tune, put something extra into a tune. Maybe a little run or something I'll throw in here or there, or a little cutting, you know. But that's not really altering the tune. Instead of a single note, I might put the three or four quick notes. Just throw that in. Maybe put a little frill. But the actual note, no, I would never take it upon myself--because I think that's another talent.

Winston Fitzgerald was one musician that Doug believes had that talent: "Winston's an exception. Actually, when he made a change, he improved the tune. Angus Chisholm could do the same thing." Allister MacGillivray's book *The Cape Breton Fiddler* (1981) contains many statements regarding correctness versus making changes in tunes.

"Dougald (Dughall Iain Ghilleasbuig) and his four musical brothers were constantly warned against modern variations in accepted traditional arrangements," and Dan J. Campbell's father told him to "play by the book." Johnny Ranald Beaton "got his correctness" from his wife, Katie Anne, who "was a note reader for piano." In seeming contrast, popular recording artist Joe MacLean remarked, "Sometimes, if you play a tune directly from a book, it might not sound that good. So, you make changes here or there, put a little flourish on it and make something of it." Well-known fiddler Donald MacLellan is also quoted on the subject:

"I've made changes in many tunes -- it's like figures of speech. There are many things you can do to improve tunes."

Since the advent of recording, the accepted version of a tune in Cape Breton is more likely to be based on the first recorded version (or another classic recording) than on exactly what appears in any one book. For a tune that does not appear in a written collection, one would expect an early recording to serve as a reference for that tune. However, there also seems to be a similar respect granted to an early, recorded



Buddy MacMaster



Lake Bras d'Or

version of a book-tune that has been “improved” or recomposed. The talent for digging a tune out of an old book and reinterpreting it to make it a good tune, bringing it to life, is in this way recognized. Some such tunes have had their modes adjusted, or passages smoothed out, or they have been changed from strathspey to reel or vice versa. If the tune is judged to be better, the authority of the book has been overruled. For dusty old book-tunes, more extensive changes are allowed than for well-known standard tunes or tunes by a living composer. In a *Cape Breton's Magazine* feature on Winston Fitzgerald (1985), Paul Cranford notes that after Winston Fitzgerald recorded his version of “Miss Gordon of Park” (aka “Miss Menzies”) “nobody would play it the way it was in the book anymore. You’d never hear it played today the way it’s in the *Marshall Collection*. Never.” In general, Cape Breton fiddlers pay little attention to the bowings and the exact ornamentation indicated in written music. Those elements are considered part of the variable stylistic component of the music. The term “bookish” is sometimes used to describe music that is dry and uninteresting -- too exact. As Dan R. MacDonald said in *The Cape Breton Fiddler*, “I use my own bowing. If you’re gonna be going by signs and by the way everything is written in the book, you’re gonna be mechanical, and I don’t want to be a mechanical player!” In strathspeys, which have dotted (uneven) rhythms, it is often acceptable to switch around the dots and flags, thereby reversing or adding snap-rhythms. However, in some cases a certain rhythm acts as a defining aspect of the tune; in those places rhythmic changes would not sound correct to the traditional player. This feature of Scottish music in which the tune is identified in part by its rhythm harkens back to the

oldest 18th-century collections, in which the exact rhythms of a strathspey were often left up to the reader except at the tune's beginning or in key spots.

In Cape Breton, one accepted and authoritative reference for the rhythm of a tune is the Gaelic puirt-a-beul song repertoire. Many popular old fiddle tunes are associated with a corresponding port-a-beul, in which the cadence of the Gaelic words matches and determines the tune's rhythm (even though in most cases the melody was composed first). In *The Cape Breton Fiddler*, Father John Angus Rankin explains that in the old days, "there'd be a minority of note readers; you'd have more people remembering the tunes by singing than by use of books." Archie Neil Chisholm emphasized, "When Mama was singing or rocking one of the kids to sleep, she never let up singing Gaelic verses or humming pieces of fiddle music. Those tunes were as correct as if they had been taken from the book." Joe Peter MacLean is the fiddler most recognized today for his working knowledge of puirt-a-beul. Note that on the Highland bagpipes, the traditional method of learning pibroch was through using vocal syllables rather than written notation. "Better as a strathspey" or "better as a reel" are two of the comments often found in the margins of old tune books that have been passed from musician to musician in Cape Breton. Tune books were precious in Cape Breton, especially before World War II (during which some Cape Breton musicians stationed overseas took the opportunity to send back books from Scotland). The invention of the photocopy machine was a great boon to musicians in Cape Breton who liked to look through books for good tunes. My husband David and I have been the recipients of many photocopies of old, rare Scottish tune collections treasured and shared by Cape Breton musicians. Therefore we have the benefit of seeing the notations made by those who have gone through the books before us. Composer's names, alternate titles, and the names of musicians associated with the tune, are among the annotations. "Good," and "Learn" are frequently seen, as well as simply "x," "+," "*", or "v". There seems to be a reluctance to permanently mark a tune as bad, although "n.g." (no good) and even "n.d.g." may occasionally be seen.



Donald MacLellan

When we lived in Toronto, David would get occasional invitations from fiddler Donald MacLellan to come over and "go through the books." Donald seemed to find this very enjoyable, even if he never learned many of the tunes that were carefully rated and discussed. Sharing one's opinion's of the tunes in the books made for good social camaraderie. Donald had a great collection of old tune books, and as we got to

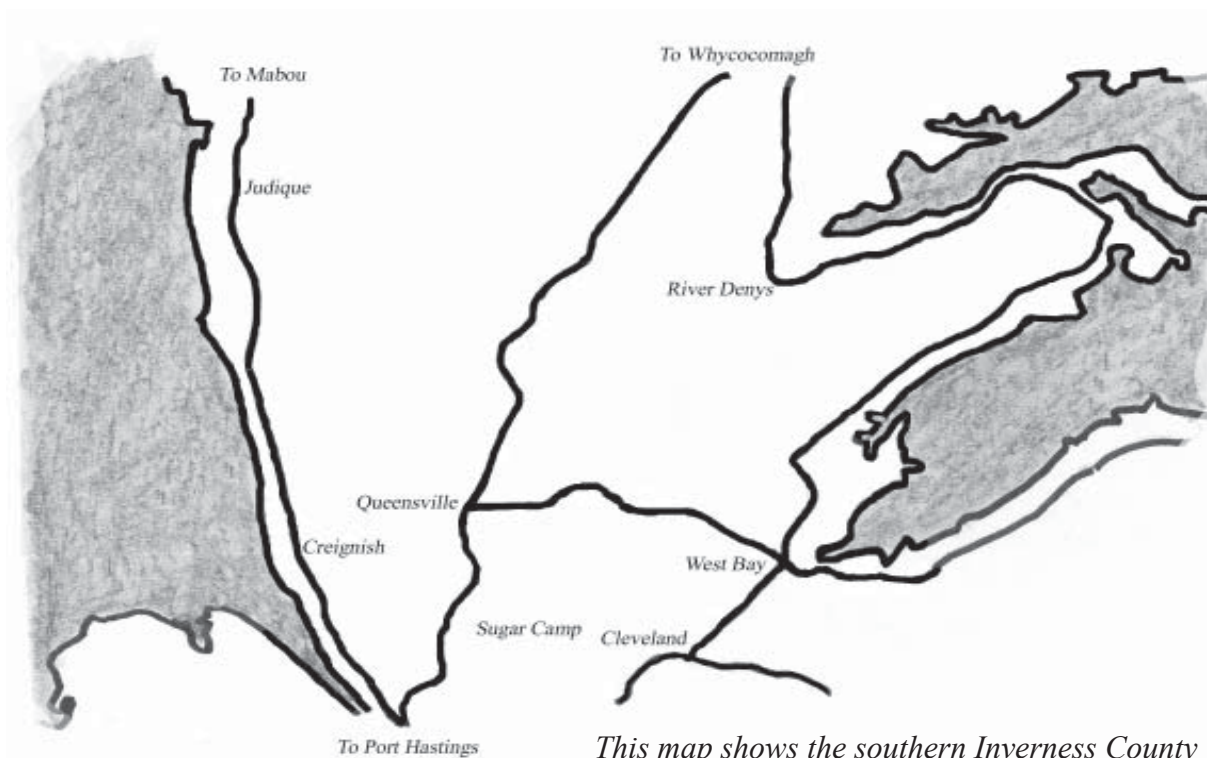
*Strathlorne*

know him better, we were allowed to borrow them. Some of them may have been owned previously by Cape Breton's most prolific fiddler-composer Dan R. MacDonald, or perhaps he had gone through Donald's books on one of his extended visits. A couple of the books had tunes written out by Dan R. taped inside them and a few of the tunes had passages marked with improvements (Dan R. being familiar with different settings of tunes and having the acknowledged expertise to make appropriate changes).

Musical literacy and a familiarity with the great Scottish collections seem to have been valued by Donald and Dan R's generation in particular. They had greater access to music books than previous generations, and many of them chose to learn to read music even years after they had originally learned to play. Their generation was the first to make sound recordings, so they were especially eager to learn more tunes, especially tunes that were not known to other players. Ear-players could learn tunes directly from the new recordings, and the ability to hear them repeatedly made "correctness" quite achievable. This became more important as fewer people spoke Gaelic and everyday familiarity with *puirt-a-beul* was lost. Today's generation may take note-reading for granted, since they are more likely to have learned music formally. Yet there is also some influence from the Irish tradition, which places more value on aural transmission of tunes and personalized variations than fidelity to a written source. Group sessions similar to those held by Irish musicians are even becoming a part of Cape Breton music now. Sound recordings are ubiquitous. It will be interesting to see whether "correctness" remains a strong value in Cape Breton music in the future, and upon what it will be based.

With thanks to David Greenberg for his editorial expertise.

--Kate Dunlay



This map shows the southern Inverness County region which was home to the MacLellans, Buddy MacMaster and Alex Francis MacKay (Gordon MacLean presently lives in Sugar Camp as well).

Conclusion to this series of CDs:

Our four anthologies of Scottish fiddle music have surveyed the “old-style fiddle music” extant in modern day Cape Breton to the degree that Morgan MacQuarrie and I could manage within the severe limitations of time and resources under which we worked. Performance styles on the island are rapidly adapting to more internationalized norms and the classic recordings of the great artists from earlier eras are largely out of print and hard to obtain. We hope that our collection, despite its imperfections, will provide its listeners with some preliminary sense of the wide range of individualized stylings that once characterized the remarkable traditional music of Cape Breton Island. Although the term “old-style fiddle music” supplies a rough yet useful marker that sets much of the music heard here apart from the performance manners that now prevail amongst the (generally) younger players on the island, we do not claim to have thereby delineated the contours of some unaltered “Celtic heritage” reaching back to the Highland emigrés who brought Scottish culture to the island in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such historical claims have been certainly been advanced on behalf of Cape Breton’s present day music but we would prefer to limit our own speculations to more verifiable issues. In our own research experience, the violin music native to a particular locality sometimes shifts rather dramatically over short intervals of time, through the influence of some spe-

cific charismatic performer or, sometimes, simply under the influence of some enthusiast's theoretical conception of where the "rightness" of the music lies (many aspects of "folk culture," in the United States and elsewhere, have shaped, to an extent not always recognized, by somebody's conviction that "in the past, things must have been so," despite any firm musicological basis for that appraisal). Back in the Scottish homeland, it is fairly clear that a complex medley of social and religious shifts has radically altered violin performance over the span of the last two hundred years, with most available recorded performances displaying strong influences of classical technique and the rigid performance requirements of the modern Scottish country dance groups. Many Cape Bretoners believe that their quite distinctive stylings closely resemble the way their pioneer forebears would have played, sometimes opining that the Highland Clearances had left Scotland entirely bereft of traditional style players. Such a precipitous, dinosaur-like extinction is unlikely, but it is a shame that Scotland's great twentieth century folk music collectors didn't record the last lays of their back country fiddlers more assiduously, for the historical discontinuities between homeland and Cape Breton could not have always been as extreme as they now seem. A possible indicator of the contrary hypothesis--that some radical reshaping of performance style



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occurred within Cape Breton proper during the nineteenth century--lies in the fact that the Scottish heritage fiddlers who lived in the nearby Antigonish region upon the Nova Scotian mainland have always, insofar as early recorded evidence reveals, performed in a manner closer to a standard Scottish country dance group of the late 1920s. In truth, we really don't know what occurred musically within nineteenth century Cape Breton: it will require a very careful sifting of historical facts before such questions of long term conservation and innovation can be properly addressed.

What we *can* objectively determine, I believe, is that, until recent years, performance styles within Cape Breton have remained remarkably consistent over the span of the twentieth century. In fact, our own collecting work underscores this observation, for a fair number of performances on these CDs strike me as quite comparable to the approaches available upon the oldest historical recordings available. This is not to say that innovators with distinct stylistic mannerisms have not emerged within the frame of the twentieth century--Angus Chisholm and Winston Fitzgerald come immediately to mind--, but these originals do have not seem to have radically disturbed a stylistic equilibrium that cheerfully embraced a wide range of more old-fashioned

approaches as well. Indeed, Fitzgerald was a great champion of Little Mary MacDonald, who was one of the most intrepid practitioners of the venerable music of the Mabou Coal Mines region.

This stability is remarkable given that fiddle music elsewhere in Canada was altered dramatically over a span of thirty years or so by radio and television performers such as Don Messer, who homogenized the country's wide spectrum of local styles in very much the manner that bluegrass and the Grand Old Opry forged a common repertory and style across the American scene in the 1950's (the Messer reshaping seems to have been even more thorough going in its effects than its American counterpart). Expatriate musicians such as Toronto's John MacDonald have spoken of the pressure to adopt the Messer style and repertory if he were to enjoy any hope of an audience at all (which is not to say that John didn't enjoy playing such music, although he always privately preferred the Scottish music of his youth).

It strikes me that much of the credit for Cape Breton's retention of its traditional stylings can be credited to two groups. First of all, there have always been a large population of non-playing "appreciators of violin music" whose devotion to both music and to Scottish heritage generally have played a large role in sustaining the local culture (in other communities I have studied, good fiddle players are often warmly appreciated by their non-playing peers, but never with a degree of devotion comparable to that found in Cape Breton). Secondly, the large numbers of reluctant economic emigrés who would usually return to the island for lengthy summer vacations often demanded to hear the "good old Scottish tunes." I believe that the conservative inclinations of these two groups help explain why a traditionally contoured instrumental music sustained itself better within Cape Breton than virtually anywhere else in the Western world.

To be sure, this sustaining devotion comes at a certain price for the performer, for this same audience contains a sizable supply of ferocious critics, who will excoriate the hapless performer who makes a little flub or executes some non-canonical pass through the melody at hand. Often I have heard Cape Breton fiddle players speak of some friend or relative, "You know, he doesn't know a note of music, but he knows those damned tunes better than I do and will immediately tell me about it when I screw up." Such close scrutiny certainly encourages the Island's remarkable attention to "correctness" that Kate Dunlay describes in the opening essay she has kindly contributed to this set.



Theresa MacLellan

Worries about making some humiliating mistake have led many of Cape Breton's best performers to become reluctant to record any samples of their music, even on a cheap cassette recorder at an innocent house party ("If I do that, it'll be all over the island in a week," I'll be told). In fact, a significant source of the delays in finishing up these compilations trace to the need to persuade our performers that such scruples should be relaxed, if only for the sake of future generations who will be interested in understanding Cape Breton's traditional music within its true historical contours. So let it be stipulated everywhere in these anthologies: despite our best efforts, most of the recordings on these discs were executed under less than ideal conditions and scarcely represent their performers at peak form (recording is a nervous-making activity, no matter how one arranges it).

Another side effect of "correctness" has been the gradual repression of the non-standard "folk arrangements" of old tunes that were apparently more common within older generations (to an extent that is now hard to estimate). Our interviews have taught us that musically literate dependence upon the cheaper Scottish tune books (the *Kerr's Collections*, Scott Skinner's *Scottish Violinist*, Cole's *Thousand Fiddle Tunes* (after 1940)) has been common practice upon the island throughout the entire twentieth century, with a few privileged players enjoying a jealously guarded access to some of the more expensive nineteenth century homeland compilations (*Athole*, *Skye*, *Fraser's*). After World War Two, influential musicians such as Dan R. MacDoanald and Joe MacLean began to investigate a richer trove of Old Country materials and this influx dramatically expanded the prevailing Cape Breton repertoire in ways that are also difficult to gauge (Donald MacLellan's autobiographical notes to Rounder CD 7044 provide a vivid portrait of this postwar enlightenment). But this infusion of fresh written authority undoubtedly suppressed as "incorrect" some of the surviving "folk" arrangements, except in a few cases where the prestige of a specific performer allowed a non-canonical "Cape Breton setting" of the "Christy Campbell" class to survive. In more recent years, scholars such as Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg have managed to convince Cape Breton's musicians of the value of the old homemade arrangements.



This suffusion of Old Country manuscripts has also provided Cape Bretoners with a means for pinning names on many of their tunes. Cape Breton fiddlers generally know more melodies numerically than their American counterparts, but can

supply them with far fewer titles (even when a tune is expressly learned from a book, its title is often soon forgotten). Some of this lack of titles is due to the fact that the older tunes traditionally bore Gaelic names which became forgotten as the language fell from use (if a tune instead descended from a composer such as William Marshall, its assigned title would have honored some long-deceased patron whose name would be hard to recall in any case). In a dance hall context, this absence of names didn't matter, but recordings demand titles and nowadays devoted band of experts such as John Donald Cameron and Paul Cranford studiously extract appropriate titles from the old books as the occasions of publication demand. Indeed, few of the titles provided on these anthologies would have been known to the artists themselves beforehand--they have been graciously supplied by Paul Cranford. From a folkloric point of view, this widespread titular amnesia is regrettable, for both title and associated doggerel often provide significant clues to a tune's historical declination (I am one of those who suspect that the "book names" in early collections such as the Gow's may represent replacements for now forgotten folk originals). Although scholars such as Jim Watson have recently attempted to record as much of the old Gaelic heritage connected with Cape Breton's fiddle music as possible, it is a pity that more along this line wasn't attempted in an earlier period when Gaelic language data was more abundant (of all the musicians upon our set of records, only Joe Peter MacLean on volume three remembers a significant portion of this lore).

Given the Cape Breton fiddler's fidelity to the published Scottish settings, it is surprising that they evidence an almost complete indifference to the manners of performance one finds in the old country. Joe Cormier, for example, knows the entirety of Scott Skinner's *Scottish Violinist* nearly by heart, yet had never heard the composer himself until I played him some of Skinner's cylinder recordings. Joe was greatly surprised by the manner in which Skinner attacked his tunes but Joe was not troubled in the least by the fact that he did not play those tunes in a remotely comparable manner. In the same vein, Donald MacLellan provided his own blunt assessment of Skinner's style: "I found it kind of weird, you know." To be sure, Skinner's recordings can seem strangely mannered even by Scottish standards, but even a more orthodox player such as Hector MacAndrew will have been greatly admired by Buddy MacMaster and Theresa



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Morrison, yet neither shows any inclination to imitate MacAndrew's style (except possibly in the execution of slow airs). The late Ron Gonnella (a classically trained player who became a disciple of MacAndrew's) lived in Canada for a period in the 1970's and became well known within the Cape Breton community. In this case (contrary to the normal pattern indicated above), a number of local music authorities did extol Gonnella as a model for "true Scottish playing," this admiration altered Cape Breton performance norms very little, except for the case of Winnie Chafe and a few others. To the contrary, Stan Chapman, despite his solid classical training, is a great devotee of the "old-style" bow techniques of a Donald Angus Beaton and his instruction has no doubt helped keep the music of his many students within more traditional contours than they might otherwise have adopted.

Turning to organizational matters, this final CD is dedicated less to a local region than our earlier volumes (which were scarcely rigorously drawn themselves). As much as anything, the music on this record reflects Cape Breton's cosmopolitan engagement with the wider musical world in terms of both the emigré performers who have carried the island's music to faraway cities (Donald MacLellan, John



Sydney

MacDonald, Joe Cormier, Morgan MacQuarrie) and those "outsiders" who have managed to claim this music as their own (Jerry Holland, Stan Chapman). Alongside these artists, the significant ambassadorial contributions of Buddy MacMaster should be cited, for Buddy has carried Cape Breton music all over the world, in a self-conscious effort to acquaint the outside world with Cape Breton's special flavor of Scottish music. Buddy's musical interchanges have paid off well for Inverness

County, for much of the general improvement its economy has witnessed within the past twenty years can be directly correlated with the increased tourism associated with the outside world's increasing appreciation of the island's unique cultural legacy.

In concluding this series, Morgan and I again thank all of the performers and hospitable Cape Breton families who have helped us in our recording efforts. Once again I apologize for the long delay in bringing the series to a conclusion. We again thank Paul Cranford for his help with the titles and Kate Dunlay for her opening essay (interested readers should look for the fine tune collections that Paul and Kate



Mabou Harbour

have assembled, many of which are available from www.cranfordpub.com). We would especially like to thank Gordon and Hazel MacLean for their special contributions throughout, for much of this collection could not have been compiled without their continuous assistance.

On a personal note, I want to acknowledge the special contributions that Morgan MacQuarrie and his wonderful family have made to our entire range of Cape Breton projects (many of which are listed at our website www.rounder.com/rounder/nat). An “outsider” such as myself could have never persuaded our artists to submit to the agonies of the microphone, but Morgan’s jolly camaraderie and encouragement washed over many of these barriers. As noted in the introduction to volume three, a distressing number of artists within these these sets have now passed away. We miss them all but we especially wish to dedicate this final volume to the memory of Donald MacLellan whose undying music reveals the expressive depths of which great Scottish music is capable.

--Mark Wilson



The tunes and their performers:

Theresa MacLellan

Band 1. **Theresa MacLellan** w/ Marie MacLellan, piano: *Captain Norman Orr-Ewing* (Willie Ross), *Sandy Duff* - reels (MW, Sydney, NS, 6/13/77).

Theresa, Marie, and Donald (see the next cut) are the children of one of Cape Breton's most celebrated fiddlers, Big Ranald MacLellan of Riverside ("big" because he was reportedly close to seven feet tall). Ranald, who died in 1935, seems to have left no recordings behind but the beauty of his playing is still vividly remembered by those old enough to have heard him (such as Alex Francis MacKay at whose father's farm Ranald was a frequent visitor). His wife sometimes accompanied Ranald on the parlor organ and it was on that instrument that Marie MacLellan first learned to chord behind a fiddle tune (she didn't own a piano until she moved to Sydney after the war). Their older brother, Joseph ("Baby Joe"), was also a well-known fiddler but he died of tuberculosis a year before his father--Donald remembered visiting his brother in the sanitarium not long before his death when he played beautifully.

Theresa was quite young when her father and Joe died and Donald had left home to work in Sydney. Nonetheless, bribed by Donald with the promise of a watch, Theresa took up the fiddle at age eight or so and soon she and Marie were bicycling to play local country dances, where Marie accompanied Theresa's violin on the Hawaiian guitar. After World War II, Marie moved to Sydney to work as a nurse while Theresa stayed at the family home where she drove a school bus for many years. In Sydney, Marie quickly became in great demand as a pianist and she appeared on many of the great Celtic recordings from the 1950's. Earlier in the 'Forties, Donald and Bill Lamey (see Rounder CD 7032) had run a popular radio show

and, in league with Dan R. MacDonald and Joe MacLean, began to exploit the “new” fiddle books that were just then becoming imported from Scotland. In doing so, this group pioneered many of the characteristic fiddle arrangements that are still widely played in Cape Breton today (a good example is John MacDonald’s treatment of “Dr. Shaw” below, which much resembles the classic recording that Bill Lamey and Joe MacLean made of the tune). In the late ‘Forties Donald moved to Toronto to seek better employment, but he regularly returned to the family home in Cleveland in the summers where he set up a trailer. On these visits home, Donald would sometimes make a few recordings for the little Celtic label which was then run by Bernie MacIsaac of the Celtic Music Shop in Antigonish (MacIsaac was a key figure in the early days of Cape Breton recording). Donald would often visit there to buy tune books and fiddle parts. On one of these visits *circa* 1956 Bernie suggested that Donald might wish to record with his sisters as “The MacLellan Trio.” The resulting records and LP became very popular and the MacLellans were thereafter regarded as a family group within Cape Breton, although only Marie and Theresa played together on a truly regular basis (they ran a popular dance for many years in the firehouse at Big Pond, on the eastern shore of Lake Bras d’Or). In fact, as can be readily witnessed from the selections provided here, Donald and Theresa played in rather different styles, with Theresa favoring a “bagpipey sound” that utilizes broad bow strokes, virtually continuous double stopping and extensive trills in the left hand (overall, her sense of integrated control is as impressive as any I’ve ever witnessed). Donald, in contrast, was one of the last great masters of old-style Cape Breton bow technique, creating in the process a truly individualistic approach to phrasing that has never been equaled. Marie once remarked that she thought that Donald’s playing resembled her father’s “old-time Scottish” approach quite closely while Theresa’s style reminded her more of Baby Joe’s sweeter touch.



Theresa and Marie MacLellan, 1976

Sadly, Donald passed away in 2002 and Marie died the next year, but Theresa still represents an active participant in the island’s dizzying schedule of summer and fall music festivals. On this CD we feature several unissued cuts from the 1976-7 sessions that eventuated in Theresa and Marie’s LP for Rounder *A Trip to Mabou Ridge* (we hosted a final session with the sisters in 2005 but Marie was too ill by this point to perform at her best). In 1976 Bill Nowlin and I recorded a live dance at the

Big Pond firehouse which we hope to release soon, as it really captures the ambience of a dance in that era.

Band 2. Donald MacLellan w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *The Miller O'Hirn* (J. Scott Skinner), *Craigellachie Bridge* (Wm. Marshall), *The Fir Tree* - strathspeys; *Mr. Menzies of Culdare* (Niel Gow), *Duncan on the Plainstones* (J. Scott Skinner), *General Stewart*, *Steer the Gill* - reels (MW, Mississauga, Ont, 11/11/01).

Of the many sterling musicians I have met over the years, few impressed me as much, both in terms of musical expressiveness and intellectual depth, as Donald MacLellan and I feel that I learned as much about the avenues of traditional music from talking to Donald as from anyone. Fortunately, he left behind a very full autobiography which can be found in the booklet to his full Rounder CD *The Dusky Meadow* (CD 7044). Since Donald tells his own story in a far more vivid way manner I could possibly achieve, I refer the interested reader to those notes (Joe Cormier, Buddy MacMaster, Jerry Holland and John L. MacDonald all have splendid autobiographical notes in their Rounder CDs as well, so I shall briefer about their biographical matters as well).

Insofar as we confidently identify the contours of an older Inverness County



Donald MacLellan

performance style, Donald's very complex playing epitomizes many of the fundamental characteristics, including extremely well-articulated passages of bow cutting (although Donald indicates that his father could do this in both bow directions which he could never master) and the frequent use of both spiccato and complete bow detachment for melodic emphasis (Theresa Morrison on our volume three is one of the few

living players in Cape Breton who also perform in this elaborate and highly developed manner, although the final effects seem quite different from Donald's). Donald was also rightly celebrated for the utterly distinctive and idiosyncratic manner in which he broke a tune into phrases. As Doug MacPhee once observed, "You need to

practice with Donald quite a bit so that you get used to all those squirrely little things he puts in there.”

Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg studied intently with Donald when they all lived in Toronto and a most trenchant analysis of classic Cape Breton technique can be found within their treatment of Donald's stylings in their great book, *Traditional Violin Music of Cape Breton*.

Band 3. **Joe Cormier** w/ Janine Randall, piano, Edmond Boudreau, mandolin, and Johnny Muise, clappers: *The Inverness Gathering* - march; *Col. Thornton, John MacNeil, Highland Dancer* (P. Milne) - reels (MW, Paul MacDonald and F. Ferrell, Boston, Mass, 11/19/95).

Sometime in 1972 a friend played me one of Winston Fitzgerald's classic LPs and shortly thereafter I assisted Frank Ferrell in recording the Waltham, Massachusetts fiddler Gerry Robichaud for Voyager Records. I asked Gerry if he knew of Fitzgerald and he replied, “Sure; there's a fellow that plays just like him down at the French Club.” And that was how I first met Joe, who proved every bit as great as



*Gerry Robichaud, Joe Cormier,
and Edmond Boudreau*

Gerry had promised (although possessing his own inimitable style, instantly recognizable through its strong rhythmic contours). Soon we were working together on Joe's first LP which was also Rounder's first foray into Canadian music (Joe has three further recordings on Rounder, as well as issues on several other labels, including a recent collaboration with his popular nephew, J.P. Cormier). In the liner notes to an expanded recent reissue of Joe's classic *The Dances Down Home* (Rounder 11593), his brother Sam paints an evocative portrait of their family life back in French speaking Cheticamp, just north of the heartland of Scottish fiddling in Inverness County. The NEA has designated Joe as a National Folk Heritage artist, the only Cape Bretoner to be so honored.

Joe and his regular accompanist Edmond Boudreau both migrated to Boston from Cheticamp around 1960 and took jobs in the electronic industries along Rt. 128 (before that, Joe had run a hardware store for a spell in Sydney, where he ran a radio show and played many dances). For many years after they came to Massachusetts,

Edmond, Joe and Gerry Robichaud played at the Franco-American Victory Club (“the French Club” mentioned above) in the heart of Waltham, although, sadly, square dances have been recently suspended at this great cultural institution.



Johnny Muise

Years before Joe and Edmond came to Boston, another Cheticamper, Alcide Aucoin, had come south for work. There Alcide joined forces with the Margaree expatriate Alex Gillis (“Alick” on the record labels) to form “The Inverness Serenaders.” Recommended to Decca Records by O’Byrne Dewitt’s Music Store, in the early 1930s the ensemble recorded some of the earliest and greatest Cape Breton 78’s (together and in smaller groupings, including the very first recordings of Angus Chisholm). The Serenaders also broadcast a long running show on radio station WYFX whose opening theme was “The Inverness Gathering.” In fact, the present selection represents a self-conscious effort on our part to recreate the ambience of the Serenader’s early recordings. The late Johnny Muise,

who plays the clappers here, was a nephew of the Betty Mallett who played piano on the old records and Janine Randall, who performs that function for us, is Johnny’s daughter. She is now an important figure within contemporary Cape Breton musical instruction. Edmond Boudreau normally plays bass or guitar for Joe, but here he takes up the mandolin in emulation of the banjo’s part on the old records. Johnny’s clappers were carved from hard ebony and very loud and Paul MacDonald, who ran the tape machine on this occasion, had a heck of a time keeping the ensemble in balance (I should also add that it is entirely possible that Gerry Robichaud is playing with the ensemble as well, for they played a number of groups together at this session). The last tune, which was composed in the mid nineteenth century by Scott Skinner’s mentor Peter Milne, has become widely popular in modern fiddle circles as “Big John McNeil” through Don Messer’s influence. One of its earliest recordings (executed, as Joe does, along its originally composed contours) was, in fact, by the Inverness Serenaders.

Band 4. Stan Chapman w/ Gordon MacLean, piano: *I’ll Get Wedded in my Auld Claes*, *Strathlorne* (Neil Archie Beaton), *Bachelor’s* - jigs (Paul MacDonald, St Ann’s, August, 2006).

Stan was born November 28, 1946 in New Glasgow on the Nova Scotian mainland. Of pioneer stock, his father was one of the four or five children (out of a family of fifteen) that took up the violin. The family played what Stan called “mainland style fiddle”: some Joseph Allard, some Don Messer and a number of very interesting

John McNeil's Reel. P. MILNE.

tunes learned from an itinerant peddler named Calis Cormier (“Cale Cormy” he was called) just after the turn of the century, where Cormier was probably about sixty years old (Stan’s uncle Fred recorded a number of these for Burt Feintuch which we plan to issue eventually). In 1966 Aubrey Chapman began playing fiddle three or four times a week with the Royal Swingsters, who were a celebrated Nova Scotian dance band that remained active well into the 1970s. Stan first learned to chord a ukelele for his dad when he was four or five and a grandfather gave him a 3/4 violin soon thereafter. He took formal instruction in classical violin from the late Vera Campbell while learning many fiddle tunes by ear, a skill that he regards as indispensable to good fiddling: “I have become a great adherent of ear training and always tell my students, ‘Make sure that you listen to as many good fiddlers as you can and get out and play with other people as well.’” He started listening to the Scottish radio programs broadcast from CJFX in Antigonish, often driving to the top of Fraser’s Mountain to pick up the signal. He recalls how his father had been thrilled in years previous by the radio broadcasts of Tena Campbell, John Y. Gillis, and Angus Chisholm, reflecting the gradual manner in which the Cape Breton stylings affected Canadian folk culture as a whole.

Stan went to teacher’s college in Truro in the early ‘Seventies and was asked if he’d like to go to Cheticamp for his apprentice teaching. “Will I be able to meet Arthur Muise?” he asked, naming one of the region’s celebrated fiddlers. Not only did Stan meet Arthur, he also become well acquainted with Donnie LeBlanc, another Cheticamper who played first class Scottish fiddle. Stan then taught school for six years on the mainland in Pictou County and began to give private lessons. In 1975 he began giving fiddle lessons in Antigonish and later moved there to teach general music in the high school. Antigonish and Guysborough counties have long been home to their own distinctive flavor of Scottish music, as represented by such well known recording artists as Colin J. Boyd, Wilfred Gillis and Hugh A. MacDonald (Hugh A., whom I was fortunate to interview in the 1976, was the grandfather of

Troy and Kendra MacGillivray who are prominent Nova Scotian musicians of today). As I observe above, the Antigonish mode of playing employed a smoother bow and sounded closer to Scottish country dance norms than the Cape Breton styles of playing. They also played more polkas and round dances and Winston Fitzgerald once told me that he introduced many of these into the Cape Breton repertory after learning them from Hugh A., either in person or from his many Celtic 78s (the Celtic Music Shop, from which most of these early recordings emanated, was headquartered in Antigonish). However, because of increasing commerce between Antigonish and Cape Breton proper, this once sharply defined regional style seems to have largely disappeared.

In 1985 Stan began holding classes in Cape Breton fiddling after school and the students in those classes practically define the modern Cape Breton revival as we know it today: Natalie MacMaster, Jackie Dunn, Kendra MacGillivray, Ashley and Wendy MacIsaac, Stephanie Wills, and many others (all of whom will warmly sing Stan's praises at the drop of a hat). In 1991 he decided that it would be helpful if he taught larger groups of elementary grade students after school. He retired from formal teaching in 2005 but remains an active participant in musical festivities all over the island.

One of the many characteristics that made Stan's instruction so important is that he has always paid very close attention to the elaborate bow techniques of Donald Angus Beaton, Theresa and Donald MacLellan, and other "old style" fiddlers of that school (he also cites Margaret and Cameron Chisholm, Arthur Muise, Willie Kennedy, and the late Kenneth Joseph MacDonald as particular favorites). I believe that Stan's gentle and nuanced guidance helps explain why contemporary Cape Breton fiddling, influenced as it is by Scottish and Irish revivalist groups, still retains an appreciable percentage of traditional ornamentation within its approach to a tune.

Of the current set, Stan comments, "I learned the first jig from a house tape of Joe MacLean. I don't know the composer but apparently it's in a book (Williamson, *English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish Fiddle Tunes*)."

He acquired "The Bachelor's Jig" from Joe MacLean's classic 1956 recording; Doug MacPhee believes that this jig was named in honor of New Waterford's Duncan MacQuarrie. The middle tune was composed by Neil Archie Beaton.



Stan Chapman

Band 5. **John L. MacDonald** w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *Dr. Shaw's* (J. Scott Skinner), *A Duncan MacQuarrie Strathspey*, *Angus Allan and Dan J's* - strathspeys; *The Lassies of Stewarton*, *Jenny Dang the Weaver* - reels (MW, Whitby, Ont, 11/13/01).

John was raised on Foot Cape Road in the deepest heart of Inverness County Scottish culture (his family's farm lay very near to that of the legendary violinist Sandy MacLean). He left Cape Breton at an early age in search of employment and eventually settled in a Toronto suburb where he worked for a grocery distributor. For many years, he ran a popular series of local dances with both Bill MacDonald and Sandy MacIntyre. As noted above, John sometimes performed in Don Messer style but in his Cape Breton stylings he always clung close to the classic Inverness County style of his youth, where the drive is ferocious and the cuttings hard and well marked. As remarked above, "Dr Shaw's" is a Skinner composition from *The Harp and Claymore* that had been popularized on the radio by Donald MacLellan, Bill Lamey and Joe MacLean. John follows this opening with a classic Inverness County set, whose



John L. MacDonald

original titles (for the strathspeys) have become lost in the historical mists. They will have acquired their current titles in recognition of some of the great players of the past who were known to have played those tunes. For years and years, aficionados have avidly traded home recordings of these great masters and an "ear player" like John would have relied upon these heavily to flesh

out his repertory. Below Doug MacPhee talks a bit about Duncan MacQuarrie, who was one of his closest friends, and Angus Allan Gillis and Dan J. Campbell were a great Inverness County fiddle team whose dances John often attended as a young boy. They also made some of the classic 78s from which many Cape Breton fiddlers learned their first tunes. Dan J. ("Danny") was the father of John Campbell whose 1976 Rounder recording has been recently reissued in our series.

John was generally known as "Nel" back in Cape Breton, but he hated the nickname and so we did not use it on the full CD (Rounder 7051, *Formerly of Foot Cape Road*) that he recorded at the same time as our two selections. heard here. John passed away in 2005 but he left behind an evocative autobiographical statement in his full CD. These recordings, as well as those of Donald MacLellan, would have not



been possible except for the generous personal contributions of Doug MacPhee. Doug will generally vary his accompaniments according to the wishes of the fiddler, many of whom prefer a chordal accompaniment only. But John liked the glorious, old-style sound heard here, where the piano and fiddle speak to each other in a complex and engaging duet.

Doug MacPhee and John L. MacDonald

Band 6. **Buddy MacMaster** w/ Gordon MacLean, piano: *Bishop MacDonald's Farewell* (Donald John "The Tailor" Beaton) - marching air; *Rochiemuchus Rant* - strathspey; *The Braes of Auchtertyre*, *The Haggis* (Simon Fraser) - reels (MW and Burt Feintuch, Sugar Camp, NS, 5/20/02).

It is scarcely credible that these booklet notes might have fallen into the hands of anyone unfamiliar with the great Buddy MacMaster, who has served for many years as Cape Breton's genial and dignified emissary to the outside world, having performed at countless festivals and concerts everywhere. Along with his niece, the celebrated Natalie MacMaster, Buddy is probably the best known of all Cape Breton violinists and Buddy's light and refined playing, as well as that of the late Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald, had an enormous shaping influence upon every island fiddler who came to maturity after 1950. Sheldon MacInnes has recently published a fine book about Buddy and further biographical detail can be found in the booklet notes to his *Judique Flier* CD as well as Rounder's own *Cape Breton Tradition* issue (CD 7052). On the latter record, Buddy is beautifully accompanied by his daughter Mary Elizabeth MacInnis and, as the session was winding down, Buddy played a few tunes with Gordon MacLean, who had served as our host for the recording date. We have always been intrigued by the great contributions that accompanists make to the ambience of a fiddle recording and, in fact, Buddy's *Judique Flier* CD had been dedicated to establishing that very proposition, for it features Buddy in conjunction with a wide sampling of the island's most distinguished players. However, Gordon MacLean did not appear on that CD and, as we heard Gordon



Buddy MacMaster

and Buddy play together for fun, it struck my coproducer Burt Feintuch and myself that their combined sound very much resembled the great Celtic recordings of the 1930s. Indeed, this affinity proved no accident, for Gordon later told us that he had much admired the playing of Bess Siddall, the Englishwoman from Antigonish who had played the piano on many of those records. It is for this reason that many of Cape Breton's greatest old-style violinists prefer Gordon's gentler accompaniment style. It is also the reason why we have featured two solos by Gordon, one on piano and one on parlor organ, upon the other volumes in this anthology. In this selection, Buddy and Gordon join together in a medley of classic contours, spurred by my request for "an old-fashioned Scottish set."



Kenloch

Band 7. **Doug MacPhee**, piano: *MacKinnon's Brook*, *Calum Breuagh* - strathspeys; *Lochiel's Away to France*, *MacKinnon's Rant*, *Elizabeth's Big Coat* - reels (MW, New Waterford, NS, 6/14/76).

Performing a solo in a quite different, but equally traditional, style we meet the redoubtable Doug MacPhee, widely regarded as the most skilled of Cape Breton's many fine pianists. The present medley represents Cape Breton tradition at its most venerable and in this passage Doug, whom I regard as the island's most articulate witness to its musical past, describes the background from which these tunes have arisen:

My mother's father was Dougall MacIntyre who was born in Cape Mabou and my grandmother was Sarah MacDonald and she was from Glengarry, a small place between Port Hood and Mabou. There were about eight or ten in my grandfather's family but he was the only fiddler. He was one of the greatest in his day, I've been told. He was a good stepdancer as well and his younger brother Archie was considered one of the master stepdancers in his day. When the mines opened up in Inverness at the turn of

the century, many from Mabou and area flocked there and Cape Mabou became just a place for sheep--there was no one living there anymore. In fact, in 1904 when the town of Inverness was incorporated, they had a first of July picnic and I have a picture of my grandfather and Joe Smith playing for that occasion. Well, Inverness went pretty good for awhile but then they eventually began running out of coal and so some new mines started up on this side of the island in Glace Bay, Sydney Mines, and New Waterford, where they dug the mines five or six miles out under the ocean. There were quite a few mines in New Waterford alone: No. 12, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 and they all stayed open up to the 'Forties. So

people from Inverness County began congregating here from 1909 or so: my grandfather Dougal MacIntyre and his fiddle buddies, Jack MacNeil and Duncan MacQuarrie came here to work in the mines. There were a lot of other mines opened in Sydney Mines, Reserve, and Glace Bay and the bulk of the people from Iona, Boisdale, French Vale, and Mira people



Doug MacPhee

flocked to those mines. However, the majority of the Invernessers came to New Waterford, which is why find so many Macs, Beatons, Campbells, and Gillises around here--they're all former Inverness people. And that's where we get the music from, for in the old days in Inverness county every other family had at least one outstanding fiddler. I think that their dedication to the music came from Scotland: they had all come from some certain area in Scotland such as Moidart, Glencoe, etc. and they stuck together when they came here. What they used to call the "kitchen player" was some fellow or girl that never went out much and just played at home, but in those days they were as good as many of the players of today making recordings.

Today some of the Cape Bretoners make quite a thing over what they call "Mabou Coal Mines music" and I suppose, that, per capita, more music came out of that specific area than from any other part of Inverness County. Certainly, the Beatons were a great musical family and they originally came from the Mabou Coal Mines area: MacKinnon's Brook and down that way.

However, the music that they played was basically the same all over Inverness County: Dan J. Campbell from Glenora Falls, Angus Allan Gillis from Margaree, the Smith family from Broadcove--they all played basically the same way, although each one had their own individual touch. There was a Gaelic flavor in their music that was so thick that you could cut it with a knife. All of these players spoke Gaelic fluently and the old-timers always said that the Gaelic and the music go together. When Johnny Wilmot would describe Mary MacDoanald's playing, he'd say, "She plays like she speaks." I don't know for sure, but I've always had the theory that when the first settlers came over, they didn't have many instruments but carried the tunes over as mouth music. Being resourceful people, they soon made violins for themselves, but they acquired their phrasing from the mouth music.

Two of the great Gaelic fiddlers that lived in this region were Duncan MacQuarrie and Mary MacDonald. Duncan was a gentle likeable bachelor with a wonderful sense of humor and known for his quick wit. He was loved by young and old and he was a sweet player with marvelous timing. And Mary was the queen of the bow, at least to my liking. She was originally a Beaton: Donald Angus' father was her uncle and Danny Beaton was a first cousin to Mary as well as Donald Angus. Johnny Wilmot said that Danny was the best fiddler he had ever heard in his life.

Now my mother was the piano player for the entire gang here in New Waterford and Sunday afternoon was always the time to have a little session. You'd go to Mass in the morning, have your dinner, and then gather at somebody's home, especially in the winter months. Johnny Wilmot and his wife used to drive over and pick up Mom and go to Johnny MacDougall's house here in town. Now I've always been interested in music as far back as I can remember. I can go back to when I was five years old, listening to those great players. At that age I didn't know the names of the tunes but I had no problem recognizing my favorite tunes and players. And Mary MacDonald was certainly at the top of the list. Whenever I'd see her reaching for her violin, oh boy, I'd start running for the rocking chair to watch her play. There was a particular session here in town--I guess I was about ten at the time--that I'll go to my grave remembering. There were about eight or ten of the local fiddlers from here, all taking their turns to my mother's piano accompaniment--she was really in her heyday then. About seven o'clock that evening, a car pulled up and a group came in and who was with them but Mary MacDonald? I remember her getting her fiddle out--she was a small, stately woman and I can still see her tuning with my mother sitting at the piano, leaning up against the high part of the piano. Then Mary started to play "The Devil in the Kitchen" and my mother was answering her back, playing the melody out.

When Mary would come in strong, my mother would give enough pedal to balance the accompaniment perfectly and, when Mary would ease off, so would my mother, all with this incredible sense of timing, as if you were listening to a single instrument. I had never heard anything like it--there were chills running from the bottom of my feet to the top of my skull. At that age I didn't know what I should do--laugh, cry or freeze--I felt like I wasn't in control of myself. Just ten years old to feel like that. The two of them really put the chills to me!

Callam Brougach. Very Old.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Callam Brougach." The score is written for piano and is divided into four systems. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The music is in common time (C) and features a complex, rhythmic melody in the treble staff, often with slurs and accents. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment. The piece is marked "Very Old." and concludes with a double bar line. Below the fourth system, the text "Gows Beauties Part 2!" is written.

Gows Beauties Part 2!

As a kid, you don't realize such things at the time, but I was listening to one of the piano masters--my own mother, Margaret. When she was a young girl, she had gone totally blind for three years, although she gained about 1% of her eyesight later on. My grandfather had saved up to buy a piano and the first thing she learned on the piano was a song. Well, he came from work that night and said, "Did you learn anything?" and my mother played him that song. And he got angry: "Well, I didn't buy this g.d.. piano for you to be playing songs"--he was a fiddler and he expected fiddle music! My mother would laugh and tell that story often afterwards. She had no one to teach her--she learned herself and she learned her own way of doing things. She used to hum

the tunes when she was blind and practice by working her fingers at the end of a table. There was a chap named Eddie Penny who used to come down to their home who had studied with Don Messer. He wasn't really what you'd call a fiddler, for he was classically trained, but he'd be teaching my mother lots of the semi-classical stuff in the Skinner "Scottish Violinist" book. She played many of those tunes for years. She had a rich, sweet tone. I remember one time she was playing at a house party with Joe MacLean. There were a group of people there and Joe was really into the tunes and it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. It sounded so wonderful that Joe got choked up right in the middle of the reels and stopped. He threw his arms around my mother and said, "I've never played with the like."

People often say to me, "Well, you play so many fiddle tunes and you accent them like the fiddler, aren't you sorry that you didn't play the fiddle?" But, make no mistake, the piano is the instrument insofar as I am concerned. I have always loved the fiddle, but, even as a little kid, my attention would always shift to how the piano was complementing the fiddle. However, I was kind of shy about going to the piano myself, so I didn't start until I was twelve and a half. I started working on a jig and my mother heard me playing and she showed me how to finish the tune. And so I began gradually learning one tune after another. When I was learning to chord, I'd take the bus over to Johnny Wilmot's home in Bridgeport on Friday and stay the weekend. Then they'd drive me back on Sunday evening for school. Johnny thought of himself as an Irish fiddler, but he was terrific at Scottish music as well and my mother had always been his favorite piano player. Johnny wrote down a scale and bought me a book for grownup beginners and that's how I started reading music. Later on I took a few lessons here and there and also went through the U.S. School of Music course. However, I learned as much or more through sitting on the piano bench with people like Winston Fitzgerald, opening up Skinner's book and going through it. Winston would be reading the notes and I'd follow along with him.



The main influences on my playing were my mother, Lila

MacIsaac in Boston who had been Sandy MacLean's piano player, and Mary MacDonald's daughter, Mary Jessie MacDonald. So there's a bit of all those

Jerry Holland and Doug MacPhee

influences incorporated into my style, along with some of my own ideas. And early on I aimed for the sky: I decided that if I'm going to play the piano, I want to be the very best that I can be. I wanted to be a good solo piano player - I wanted to be able to play all the tunes that the fiddlers played and tried to get all of those little accidentals in there on the piano as well. On a strathspey I can do the cuttings with just one finger, but on the reels I learned a trick from two accordion players, John Carmichael from Scotland whom I met when I was playing on the Ceilidh television show and Jimmy Kelly from Boston. On a four note cut, you start with the thumb, then the ring finger and then you come backwards, middle and first finger, all in one motion. If it's a three note cut, you leave out the thumb. I believe that I was the first person to do that in Cape Breton, but John Morris Rankin picked it up from me and then lots of the younger players learned from him.

The present cut is an unissued out take from Doug's 1977 Rounder recording, which beautifully illustrates a classic "Mary MacDonald" tune grouping. Doug eventually made five LPs, from which he has recently issued a wonderful CD sampling (write Doug at 681 Sharpes

Lane, New Waterford, NS B1H 4H1). I have been nagging him for years to make a fresh recording, but to no avail, although we have called upon his accompanist capacities in a number of our recent issues. For his immeasurable contributions to Nova Scotian culture, Doug has recently been awarded the Order of Canada, as has Buddy MacMaster.



Mabou Harbour

Band 8. **Jerry Holland** w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *Juanita's Jig* (Dan Hughie MacEachern, SOCAN), *A Trip to Toronto* (Donald Angus Beaton, SOCAN), *Lord Dreghorn's Quickstep* (Robert Macintosh) - jigs (MW, New Waterford, NS, 5/14/03).

If Buddy MacMaster and Winston Fitzgerald represented the chief stylistic influences upon the developing fiddlers of the 1950s and 1960s, Jerry Holland served as a parallel model for the huge group of younger fiddlers who now constitute Cape Breton's remarkable modern fiddle revival (an excellent survey of this movement, parallel to our own, can be found on *The Heart of Cape Breton*, SF 40491). Raised



Jerry Holland

in Brockton, Massachusetts by a Canadian father who knew and admired the many great Cape Breton players then resident in Boston, Jerry's manifest talents were encouraged by Bill Lamey, Angus Chisholm, and Jerry's personal hero, Winston Fitzgerald. Moving to Cape Breton in 1975, Jerry and a group of like-minded younger musicians (Hilda Chiasson and Dave MacIsaac) pioneered a swift and fleet ensemble style that continues to be closely copied by most groups who record today. However, Jerry is a player of great variety and widely ranging tastes and also enjoys playing in a traditional setting such as this, where Doug provides a nicely articulated moving line between the melody, in contrast to the more "folky" chordal patterns favored today. Their recent full CD, *Parlor Music* (Rounder 7052), provides more sets of this same type within an informal setting. More representative examples of Jerry's exquisite technique can be heard on his many other CDs, most of which are available directly from his own website www.jerryholland.com. He is also fabled as a skilled and patient fiddle instructor and has authored two wonderful tune collections (Jerry is one of today's most able composers in a Scottish vein and his best melodies are commonly played the world over). He has been recently fighting an aggressive cancer with the same cheer and optimism that characterizes his approach to life in general and we hope for his swift recovery.

Band 9. **Theresa MacLellan** w/ Marie MacLellan, piano: *March to the Rendevous* (Alexander Walker); *Factory Smoke* - clog; *Pat Wilmot's Reel* (Johnny Wilmot), *The Pigeon on the Gate* - reels (MW and Bill Nowlin, Sydney, NS, 6/10/76).

One of the dilemmas that often arises in recording Cape Breton music is that one can often record two great medleys that feature a common tune: which one should be issued? "Factory Smoke Clog" appeared on Theresa and Marie's old Rounder LP, but not the rest of this set, which is presented for the first time.



Joe Cormier

Band 10. **Joe Cormier** w/ Edmond Boudreau, guitar: *The Free Gardener* (Alexander Walker) - march; *The Smith's a Gallant Fireman* (with variations by J. Scott Skinner) - strathspey; *The Auld Wheel* (J. Scott Skinner), *The Earl of Seafield's Reel* (Donald Grant), *The Fairy Dance* (Nathaniel Gow) - reels (MW, Paul MacDonald and Frank Ferrell, Boston, Mass, 11/19/75).

Although rarely recorded, guitar accompaniments were more the norm in Joe's youth when pianos were harder to come by. In the hands of a skilled musician like Edmond, the results can be charming, as in this impromptu selection nicely illustrates.

Band 11. **John L. MacDonald** w/ Doug MacPhee, piano: *John McFadyen of Melfort* (John MacColl), *Cecil MacKenzie* (Rod Campbell), *Isla Lasses* - strathspeys; *Scotsville Reel* (Piper Alex MacDonald), *Pigeon on the Gate* - reels (MW, Whitby,

Ont, 11/13/01).

John starts his set with a classic pipe tune transferred to fiddle, followed by a brace of popular tunes, only one of which (“Cecil Campbell”) is modern in vintage. John liked to keep up with the newer tunes and was constantly expanding his repertoire, but Doug (who always rehearsed with John before I arrived in town) encouraged an emphasis on the classic older sets.

Band 12. Stan Chapman w/ Gordon MacLean, piano: *The Maids of Arrochar* (John MacDonald Dundee) - slow air; *McLachlan's Scotch Measure*; *The Boys of Blue Hill*, *Jenny Nettles* - reels (Paul MacDonald, St. Ann's, NS, August, 2006).

Stan wasn't satisfied with his performances on the day Morgan and I recorded him, so we asked Paul MacDonald to rerecord a few selections (Paul also did a superb job in remastering these sets). Gordon MacLean plays “Boys of Blue Hill” (book name: “The Beaux of Oak Hill”) on the parlor organ on volume three.

Band 13. Theresa MacLellan with Marie MacLellan, piano: *Sleepy Maggie*, *Muhlin Dhu* - reels (Sydney, 6/13/77).

Again a somewhat different mixture of tunes than appeared on their old LP. I can't hear a set of ancient, lonesome reels such as this without tears coming to my eyes. “Muhlin Dhu” is most commonly set in A minor but Donald and Theresa enjoyed playing it in B minor as well. Jim Watson of the Highland Village Museum tells of a Gaelic ghost story that goes with this tune, where a traveler is transfixed by mysterious music stemming from a “black mill” (which is what “muhlin dhu” means) beside the roadside.



Lake Bras d'Or

Band 14. Donald MacLellan w/Doug MacPhee, piano: *Whistle O'er the Lave O't*, *Sir Harry's Welcome Home* (Peter Hardie), *The Duke of Gordon's Birthday* (Wm. Marshall) - strathspeys; *Captain Byng* (Nathaniel Gow), *Muschat's Cairn* (James Porteous), *Lady Georgina Campbell* - reels (MW, Mississauga, Ont 11/11/01).

Because of his earlier recording experiences, Donald was initially somewhat reluctant to record for us but the recommendations of the late Annabelle MacMillan (in whose basement these selections were recorded) and Doug MacPhee paved the way to several remarkable sessions of evocative music. All of the selections on *The Dusky Meadow* derived from our second recording date, whereas the two selections included here came from an earlier session. For this reason, many of the tunes in the

present medley reappear in different combinations upon his full CD. It is interesting to compare the different moods Donald that evokes through selecting the tunes *ad libitum* in differing orders.

Band 15. Willie Kennedy and Morgan MacQuarrie w/ Mary Maggie Varnier, piano: *Miss Lyall* (Simon Fraser), *King George the IVth*, *King George* - strathspeys; *Tom Rae* (Dan R. MacDonald (SOCAN)), *The King's Reel*, *Miss Lyall* - reels (MW, Inverness, NS, 5/13/03).

Willie and Morgan have already released their own solo records (Rounder 7043 and 7041) as well as appearing prominently upon volume two of this anthology. Willie has often spoken warmly of the pleasures of hearing Mary Maggie play with Angus Allan Gillis and Dan J. Gillis at the old Kenloch dance hall in the 1940's, as well as during the summer when he partnered himself with Angus Allan in the same



Morgan MacQuarrie, Mary Varnier, Willie Kennedy

locale. One fine afternoon after volume two was released we all trooped over to Mary Maggie's little house in Inverness where we held this impromptu session. The piano stylings typical of Mary Maggie's era virtually represent a lost art today. Since most of these performers were self-taught without preexistent role models, their performance manners were quite individualistic, consist-

ing generally of a fairly simple left hand accompaniment in combination with a highly expressive, rippling right hand playing the full melody of the tune (other great performers in this style were Lila MacIssac, Lila Hashem, and Margaret MacPhee). As Doug MacPhee discusses in the note above, piano accompaniments have subsequently passed through several further developmental stages in Cape Breton. A generation or two younger, the great Mary Jesse MacDonald, Doug MacPhee, and Boston's Eddie Irwin pioneered an articulated form of "walking" bass line, allied to that utilized in swing music, again set against a highly developed right hand virtuosity. In the late 1950's, influenced by Jerry Lee Lewis (!), Margaree's Maybelle Chisholm Doyle developed a rollicking style characterized by sharply accented rhythms; it is descendants of Maybelle's pioneering approach that now represent the accompaniment norms within contemporary musical circles. But the glories of the older styles plainly deserve attention as well, which is why Morgan and I have highlighted such playing in these anthologies along with the older style fiddling itself.

It helps to understand, in listening to an old-fashioned set such as this, that the tune requirements for a typical Cape Breton square dance shifted rather dramatically in the 1920's and 30's. Angus Allan Gillis told me that in his earlier years, a typical dance set consisted of a "Scotch Four," centered upon a brace of strathspeys followed by several reels, just as our group performs here. He greatly relished playing for such sets and lamented their passing. In the Depression, these arrangements were gradually replaced by a preference for "quadrilles": not the formal nineteenth century dance, but a set of three dances arranged around fairly conventional universal square dance patterns. In Cape Breton (the situation was re-



versed in the States), the first two sets of these figures needs to be in jig time, creating a great functional appetite for tunes of this time signature that had not existed heretofore (Cape Breton players often relied upon Irish sources to amplify their fund of jigs). In more recent times, dancers upon the island have stopping framing themselves into true squares under the eye of a supervising caller and instead form themselves into large, loose chains without guidance. Such cycles often take a long time to complete, requiring great stamina and a large library of tunes on the part of the attending musicians (melodies are now commonly switched after a single repetition, although I am told that tunes were repeated more often in older days when sets did not last so long). Today old-fashioned "dancing strathspeys" have retained their social functionality largely as accompaniment for solo step-dancing, although occasionally "Scottish Fours" will be revived for a concert exhibition. Of all of all the musicians in our anthology, only Donald MacLellan and Theresa Morrison report playing for a Scottish Four in their active heyday.



We were fortunate to have caught Mary Maggie at a favorable moment, because she became bedridden soon thereafter. This treatment of a classic Inverness County set was entirely impromptu and, in fact, needed to be abruptly faded when Willie launched into some stratospheric exploration of tunes unfamiliar to Morgan. Mary Maggie had many funny stories from her dance hall days, such as the time that Angus Allan missed the spittoon and struck the keyboard instead with the amber (Mary was, fortunately, away from the piano). And she would tell of the funny Gaelic stories that grew so long that the fiddlers practically forgot to play for the audience. Above all else, there was always the choking dust, kicked up in the hot summer's air by the step dancers.

In Mary Maggie's memory, we therefore hope that this evocative last medley will conjure up some image of an evening inside Kenloch's dusty dance hall long ago.

--Mark Wilson (2008)



Lake Ainslie

Credits:

Produced by Morgan MacQuarrie and Mark Wilson

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Photography and design by Mark Wilson

Dedicated to the memory of Donald MacLellan

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