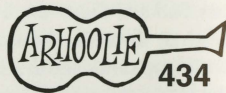


# Masters of the Folk Violin



## Brendan Mulvihill

*with Donna Long & Jesse Smith*

1. Kean O'Hara; Colonel O'Hara; The Flag-on Reel; Dublin Lasses (all traditional) (1)
2. Boys of the Lough; Mary Walker; McFadden's; Dylan's (all traditional) (2)
3. Paddy Taylor's Jig; Chapel Bell; Within a Mile of Dublin (all traditional) (1)

## Claude Williams

*with John Stewart & Rob Thomas*

4. These Foolish Things Remind Me of You (Strachey & Linck) (2)
5. You've Got To See Your Mama Every Night (P. D.) (1)
6. Smooth Sailing (P. D.) (2)

## Kenny Baker

*with Josh Graves, John Stewart, & Rob Thomas*

7. Springtime (Bob Osborne) (3)
8. Starlight Waltz (P D.) (1)
9. Sweet Bunch of Daisies (P D.) (3)
10. Bobby Van's Hornpipe (Kenny Baker) (3)
11. John Barleycorn (Kenny Baker) (3)

## Natalie MacMaster violin and step dancing, *with Tracey Dares*

12. St Patrick's Jig; Jerry's Beaver Hat; The Chorus Jig; An Irish Jig (all traditional) (1)

13. James Scott Skinner's Welcome to Inverness (A. Grant); The Marchioness of Huntley (trad.); Sandy Cameron's (trad.); Devil in the Kitchen (W. Ross); MacLaine of Loch Buie (trad.); Mrs. Beatie Wallace (D. R. MacDonald); Old King's Reel (trad.); John MacNeil's (P. Milne) (1)

## Michael Doucet

*with David Doucet, Mitchell Reed, Josh Graves, & Rob Thomas*

14. L'Ouragon (The Hurricane) (Doucet) (2)
15. Manage à Trois Reels (McGee/Courville/Doucet) (1)
16. "Doc's" Two-Step (Orin "Doc" Guidry) (1)
17. Valse à Jonglemont (Juggling Waltz) (Varise Connor/Doucet) (1)
18. Chanky-Chank Francais (Doucet) (1)

*Total Time: 71:47*

### Location and date of the recordings:

- (1) Grand Opera House, Wilmington, DE, 11/17/94
- (2) Tawes Theatre, Univ. of Maryland, College Park, MD, 11/21/94
- (3) Humbolt State University, Arcata, CA, 11/2/89

Tour director: Joe Wilson (NCTA)

Tour Managers: Chris Williams & Claudia Telliho

Recorded live by Pete Reiniger & Dean Languell

Edited and mixed by Pete Reiniger & Chris Williams

Cover photo by Joe Wilson

Produced by Chris Strachwitz & Joe Wilson

Cover by Elizabeth Weil

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# MASTERS OF THE FOLK VIOLIN

Michael Doucet • Claude Williams • Natalie MacMaster • Kenny Baker • Brendan Mulvihill





# Masters of the Folk Violin

Let's get the first question out of the way. You can call it violin or fiddle, there's not a bit of difference. These names have been used interchangeably by folk and classical performers for more than three centuries.

Violin types and prototypes had existed for centuries in a bewildering variety of shapes and sizes before Antonius Stradivari (1644-1737) and his fellows in Cremona, Italy, turned their hands to the business of making fiddles. The instruments they made were of such high standard that many claim that they have not been equaled by modern makers.

A folklore concerned with Stradivari has been growing for over a century. There is what almost amounts to a cottage industry of persons attempting to discover the supposed secrets of the wily Italian who made no two violins exactly alike.

One branch of this enterprising effort tends to be campus-based and tended by learned professionals of chemistry and physics. Ma-

jor new theories emerge every four years, almost without fail. The secret has been found in the varnish, the action of this or that on the wood fibers, in the displacements, or in Antonio boiling the wood. The respectable press is interested in this branch. Keep an eye on the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and public television. They are almost certain to report about the secrets of old Antonio in a year or two.

But there are other branches: little old men in garrets measuring old violins with calipers and cooking up new varnish. And near every wall where there's a row of old violins there stands a fellow with a different theory about Strad secrets and maybe, just maybe, a real one hanging up there.

There's even a Cajun branch of the Strad fraternity. Eunice, Louisiana, accordion maker and violin friend Marc Savoy has a sign in his window that salutes them. It says, "In his lifetime Stradivari made 496 violins, 3000 of which are owned by Cajuns!"

Marc's sign is a reminder of a useless

statistic from Interpol, the international police. Guess whose name has been forged most often. You got it! Old Antonio signed all 3000 of those fine instruments Marc's buddies and tens of thousands of others claim to own. Is imitation still the height of flattery even after it veers off into forgery?

The shape, sound and mystery of the violin is a major challenge to fine woodworkers everywhere. Yet no other instrument is made by so many. Major cities have dozens of violin makers and even a small rural county is likely to have one or two. One of our favorites is the old-timer near the crossroads of Shouns, Tennessee, who has made over a hundred and never sold one.

And how good are these violins being made in every part of the country? There are fine players who will tell you that the real secret of all this activity is that the best violins ever made are being made right now—here in the United States.

Moreover, there are some distinctive American violins, instruments developed by native peoples who saw the European violin and decided to make their own. These include the one-string Apache violin and the two-string instrument built by the Eskimos.

## FIDDLING IN THE NEW WORLD

The fiddle was new and exciting when European emigrants brought it to North America during the late 1600s and early 1700s. It was replacing the hornpipe, tabor, and harp at country dances and other rural social gatherings in the old country.

Part of the excitement resulted from improvement to the instrument and its availability. As early as the 1730s "Cremona" violins were awarded as prizes at country fiddling contests in Virginia. The *Virginia Gazette* contains many advertisements that provide a glimpse of fiddling two and a half centuries ago.

A 1736 advertisement tells that among various contests at a forthcoming celebration in Hanover County will be a violin competition in which twenty players will contend for a violin.

Black slaves and white indentured servants did much of the performing at Virginia dances, and *Gazette* advertisements for runaways sometimes mention that the escapee is a fiddler. In other advertisements, Virginians seeking to buy slaves and indentured servants specified that in addition to the usual qualifications they



wanted a musician.

Among fiddlers in the colonies was Josiah Franklin, a candlemaker who came to Boston from England in 1683. His famous son Benjamin recalled that he was "... skilled a little in music and had a clear pleasing voice, so that when he played Psalm tunes on his violin and sang withal as he sometimes did in an evening after the business of the day was over, it was extremely agreeable to hear."

Another early fiddler was map maker and plantation owner Peter Jefferson, born in Virginia in 1708. His son became the third president of the United States and its first well-known fiddler.

Thomas Jefferson loved all music, but especially that of the violin. By age 14 he was copying his favorite country fiddle tunes in notebooks, sometimes adding lyrics. His voluminous correspondence and record keeping make it clear that fiddling was very important to him. There were years that he practiced three hours every day.

Among fiddlers Jefferson met as a young man was Patrick Henry. They were later bitter political enemies, but Jefferson told Henry's biographer that they spent two

weeks playing the fiddle and dancing with other revelers after their first meeting in 1760.

There's a huge trove of Jefferson family music at the University of Virginia. It reflects broad-ranging tastes, classical, popular, and folk, and its well-worn condition is evidence that Jefferson and his family loved and used it constantly. There are items from Bach, Handel, and Purcell, but there are also well-thumbed copies of "Black-Eyed Susan," "Crazy Jane," "The Cuckoo" (with lyrics), "The Farmer's Description of London," "Lovely Nancy," and scores of others that give evidence of a family interest in country tunes.

A glimpse of the violin in the life of another frontier family is provided in a description written by Virginia Pierce Bedford (1791-1882). Born in the Shenandoah Valley, Mrs. Bedford is describing her family when it was resident in Missouri and before moves to Colorado and California.

"Papa's violin was among our treasured possessions. It was a battered relic but a sweet tone resided in it. His grandfather had brought it from Ireland to Pennsylvania and his father had fetched it to Augusta County

before the War for Independence.

"It brought trade to Papa's mill and store and got him elected to offices that advanced his business. He called the violin 'her' or 'My Old Toll-Getter' for the percentage of the corn and small grain that he kept when it was brought to his mill for the grinding. We might also have called her 'An Old Husband-Getter' for my sisters and I met our husbands while they were guests at dances at our home.

"...there were, then as now, some church ministers, narrow men, who ranted against the playing of the violin and all social gatherings that included dancing. But such opposition is grounded in gross ignorance and envy and we believed most firmly that such persons deserved our pity."

The violin is a most demanding instrument. It rewards those who spend much time with it. It has the power to engross, to mesmerize. It will take all time invested in it. And for those who do not love it as much as we, it has seemed a powerful incentive for the wasting of time. It has been the 'Devil's Box' for many generations of hellfire and brimstone preachers.

And my fiddling uncle had a term for all

who expressed such judgments. He called them "a goddamn bunch of tin-eared Jeremiahs."

(Joe Wilson)

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### ***THE FIDDLERS:***

***Brendan Mulvihill*** is a native of Ballgoughlin, at the crossroads of the counties Limerick, Kerry and Cork, and an all-Ireland champion whose playing combines extraordinary technical virtuosity with a sweeping range of expressiveness—a fiery inventiveness tempered with subtlety and complexity. Mulvihill and his family immigrated to the Bronx in 1965 and Brendan has resided in the Washington, D.C. area since the mid-70s. The son of an old-style Limerick fiddle master and teacher, the late Martin Mulvihill, Brendan possesses possibly the most prodigious storehouse of Irish tunes on either side of the Atlantic. He is accompanied by brilliant pianist Donna Long, also the product of a family tradition—but a jazz and classical one in California. Donna's son, 17-year-old Jesse Smith, has been Brendan's student for 5 years and joins his teacher for an arresting set of jigs at #2.



**Claude Williams**, along with Stuff Smith and Joe Venuti, is one of the inventors of jazz violin. Born in Muskogee, Oklahoma in 1908, his career took off in the 1920s in black dance halls and on the vaudeville circuits of the Midwest and South. He played with Andy Kirk's Clouds of Joy, Alphonso Trent's Orchestra and was in Count Basie's original recording band. He was part of the Kansas City jazz scene throughout the 1930s. He later worked with several local and nationally known R & B bands in the 40s and early 50s. Since that time, he has often teamed with pianist Jay McShann and appeared at concerts and jazz festivals. Claude was 86 at the time of these performances. He first performed "You Gotta See Your Mama" in a black stringband in 1918, working the plank sidewalks of Muskogee, Okla. He is joined here by two excellent young jazzmen: bassist Rob Thomas is a noted multi-instrumentalist who lives in New York City; talented guitarist John Stewart lives in Portland, Ore.

**Kenny Baker** is a native of Jenkins, Kentucky, and a former coal miner. Both his father and grandfather were old-time fiddlers but Baker also lists more modern play-

ers like bluegrass pioneer Chubby Wise and jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli as influences. In the 1950s Baker was a member of country artist Don Gibson's band and later worked with Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys for 24 years. In the process he redefined bluegrass fiddling and is today one of the most respected and influential players in that style. Kenny is joined here by his partner, Josh Graves, the Dobro guitarist who saved that instrument from oblivion while a member of the legendary Flatt and Scruggs bluegrass band during the 1950s and 60s. David Doucet-guitar; John Stewart-bass. On Josh's "Starlite Waltz," Stewart is on guitar, Rob Thomas on bass.

**Natalie MacMaster** is a brilliant young fiddler from Troy, Nova Scotia. She plays in the beautiful and complex Cape Breton style—a style that harkens back to the area's first Scottish settlers. Natalie began playing at the age of 9, absorbing the music from her uncle Buddy MacMaster, a legendary Cape Breton fiddler. For two years, Natalie studied with renowned local fiddler Stan Chapman and has since appeared at the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of Ameri-

can Folklife, Expo '86, The National Folk Festival, the Folk Masters at the Barns of Wolf Trap series and at festivals throughout the U.S. and Canada. Natalie performs continuously at dances back home and is accompanied on this recording by Tracey Dares, a wonderfully talented young Cape Bretoner whose skills are a match even for this prodigious fiddler.

**Michael Doucet**, from Lafayette, La., is the fiddler, primary vocalist, and leader of **BeauSoleil**, a Cajun band that preserves and extends the passionate music of French Louisiana. In studying the various musical styles of his home region, Michael reached back to the roots of white Cajun and black Creole music by apprenticing himself to fiddlers Dennis McGee and Canray Fontenot. In addition to his work with the modern-sounding BeauSoleil, Michael is also one third of the very traditionally-oriented Savoy-Doucet band along with Marc and Ann Savoy. Here Michael is accompanied by

his brother, David Doucet, a brilliant acoustic guitarist and singer, and his partner in BeauSoleil. The excellent old style "seconding" fiddle is by Mitchell Reed, a young Cajun performer from Lafayette, La. Rob Thomas is on bass for the last 3 cuts, Josh Graves joins for "Chanky-Chank."

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*Accompanists:*

**Josh Graves** - Dobro  
**David Doucet** - Guitar  
**John Stewart** - Guitar/Bass  
**Rob Thomas** - Bass  
**Mitchell Reed** - Violin  
**Jesse Smith** - Violin  
**Donna Long** - Piano  
**Tracey Dares** - Piano

MASTERS OF THE FOLK VIOLIN has toured in the United States five times under the auspices of the National Council for the Traditional Arts, (NCTA) 1320 Fenwick Avenue, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

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